

Participatory Gender-Oriented Study of the Information Needs of the Youth in a Rural Community in South-Eastern Nigeria

Williams E. Nwagwu

*Africa Regional Centre for Information Science
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
willieezi@yahoo.com*

Abstract

An adequate understanding of the information needs of the youth is crucial in planning programmes that address their socio-economic wellbeing. This study investigated the information needs of the youth in Uzoagba, a rural community in South-Eastern Nigeria. Data were collected from the youth through focus group discussions involving 220 participants, and a questionnaire survey involving 250 respondents. One female, one male and one mixed-gender focus groups for each of three age categories, 7-12 years, 13-19 years, and 20-30 years, were used to generate information on the information needs of the youth. The questionnaire which consisted of closed and open questions was used to collect data on demographic characteristics, information needs and current sources of information of the respondents. Two categories of the youth could be identified. The first comprised those aged 12 years or less who desired information concerning their education, health/HIV/AIDS and income. The second group comprised those older than 12 years whose needs concerned income/employment and education. The youth wanted to develop their personal capacities through education in order to integrate themselves into productive activities in the community. The expressed need for information about how to participate in income-

generating activities relates to the youth's desire to contribute resources to their family and community. It is recommended that governments should provide appropriate forums for the youth to articulate their information, educational and social needs as input into policies and programmes that affect them.

Keywords

Information needs, youth, gender, rural areas, Nigeria

Introduction

This study documents a participatory gender-sensitive assessment of the information needs of the youth in Uzoagba, a rural community in old Owerri senatorial zone in South-eastern Nigeria. The assessment was part of a larger study which focused on the impact of the practice of *Di Nwanna*, a traditional marriage rite observed in the community and its neighbours, on the reproductive health of adolescent girls (Nwagwu, 2006). The findings of the larger study showed that girls suffered all the disadvantages – unwanted pregnancy, risks of death through childbirth and abortion, risks of contracting HIV/AIDS and other STIs, arising from the practice. The key concern about the health and social well-being of young people is the extent to which they have access to resources, including information, that promote their development. Access to information and communication services is now seen as a universal right, and the United Nations is advocating for a global initiative for such access (UNDP, 2000). Clearly, an adequate deployment of these services should be based on appropriate understanding of the information and learning needs of various categories of people in the communities, taking into cognisance the possible

differences that might be caused by variations in socio-demographic characteristics.

There exists a vast literature on gender equity in human society and the need to address the problems (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999; Guijt and Shah, 1999). A wide consensus of opinions suggests that the best way to address unfair gender relations and promote equity relevant to the day-to-day lives of people is to create spaces for males and females to engage in meaningful exchange of ideas and knowledge (UNESCO, 2002). This opinion is in consonance with that of Females's Network Support Programme of the Association for Progressive Communication which has devised a Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM), a guide that is expected to assist project managers to synthesise gender concepts and incorporate them in projects, from design to implementation (GEM, 2005). There is some evidence that the adoption of gender concepts has made some progress in Nigeria after the Beijing conference in 1990, but the opinions of the youth, particularly from the perspective of gender, are yet to be incorporated in many projects, and research in this area is almost absent.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) has made calls for children and young people to participate in the debates and decisions made concerning their well-being, their education and their communities. These calls are necessitated partly by a growing recognition of children's rights to express themselves, to participate and be heard in general. In developing policy to support and facilitate young people's participation, key issues remain unresolved. Should initiatives be directed at children and teenagers, encouraging their civic interests and participatory skills before they are old? In line with these observations, this paper is intended to provide insight into the information and learning needs and activities of male and female youth in the community, as well as what the youth consider necessary to improve their personal efficacies in the community. Community in this study is conceptualised as a complex social system rather than a homogenous group of people in order to obtain a detailed understanding of the range of information needs of the subjects (Kertzner and Fricke, 1997).

The information needs of the youth, particularly in the rural areas of Nigeria, have scarcely been

investigated by researchers. Furthermore, government projects and even studies hardly ever include the opinions of the rural youth in the definition of their research questions. Rather, they consult NGOs, government agencies and local organisations, while discussions with the youth who are directly concerned are only used to validate projects after implementation. This implies that programme planning and other activities that affect the welfare of the rural youth have been carried out without adequate understanding of their priorities. Yet, the youth are the future of the society. If organising human society would mean preparing the youth for future roles, then planning authorities should integrate information priorities of the youth in the national and community development plans and programmes. Otherwise, the configuration of the future society will be incongruent with the development stature of the youth who ought to be managers of that society.

In every sphere of human life, listening and incorporating the opinions of customers is critical to the design of products and services. In the same way, it is very important to give children and young people an active involvement on how policies and services are developed, in order to ensure that the policies and services genuinely meet their needs. Children are the leaders of tomorrow, and their early engagement in public and community life is required for creating and promoting citizenship and social inclusion. In many developing countries, the inputs of the youth in national policies are left out and the youth are not persuaded that they count and can contribute. It can be speculated that good participation opportunities produce more confident and resilient young people. Promoting citizenship should be a part of the government's education agenda. Local governments, NGOs and government agencies that have a local presence can support projects that play part in developing the youth participation skills (Children and Young People's Unit, 2001).

Methodology

This study adopted a participatory approach to appraise the information and learning needs of the youth using focus group discussion strategy, a qualitative research technique. Rather than defining a very specific age range within which one must fall

to be considered as youth in this study, the focus was on the unmarried males and females between seven and 30 years. This study defined the youth this way because the findings from the larger study showed that the tradition of *Di Nwanna* was most indulged in by the unmarried. For a clear understanding of the situation, the youth were categorised into three age groups: 7-12 years, 13-19 years, and 20-30 years. Although the 7-12 age group is not usually included in the category of the youth, but treated rather as children, it was deemed important to consider the information needs of this age group because they were most adversely affected by vulnerability to malnutrition, infectious diseases and negative peer influences, as was found in the *Di Nwanna* survey.

The second age category defines those who are generally known as adolescents, while the older group 20-30 consists of persons who are actually adults. The overall well being of the youth is shaped by many factors which range from the social, economic, cultural and political conditions of the wider society, to those that characterise the living situation of an individual adolescent. Based on inferences from the result of the larger project and our interactions with various categories of people in the community, it was anticipated that educational opportunities, HIV and diseases, employment and poverty, and income generation activities, would dominate issues in the minds of the youth. But the extent of manifestation, relationship and variation of these variables among the various gender and age groups, as well as how the youth meet the information requirements associated with these issues need to be established.

In addition to the focus group discussion, a brief questionnaire which included both closed and open-ended questions was designed to collect information for further validation of the findings of the focus groups. Finally, throughout the research process, the issues raised were informally and formally discussed with the participants, facilitators and experts in order to ensure that they addressed the objectives stated. This triangulation is believed to be particularly necessary when using predominantly qualitative methods which often allow for subjectivity (Babbie and Mouton, 1998).

Focus Groups

Focus group discussions (FGD) entail engaging people in a discussion, listening to them and then learning from them (Morgan, 1998). They provide a forum where participants can share experiences, ideas, attitudes, and together explore a particular topic that concerns them from several viewpoints. When correctly facilitated, FGD encourages learning as participants come to see the same issue from different perspectives (Babbie and Mouton, 1998).

Three types of FGDs were constituted – one female group, one male group and one mixed group – for each of the three age categories. This approach facilitated obtaining different responses to questions and different conclusions on issues from the different gender groups, as well as gender interactions within the mixed group, following a common focus group plan. Twenty-four FGDs were held. The female and male age groups consisted of six participants respectively in each FGD, while the mixed gender group (which consisted of participants in the male and female groups) consisted of 10 participants for each age group. Each FGD focused on the perceived information needs of the youth within the specified age and gender groups. Each group had two trained facilitators, one to facilitate in the group and the other to take detailed notes of the discussions.

Questionnaire Design and Administration

After synthesising the information obtained from the FGD, a questionnaire consisting of a mix of closed and open questions covering those aspects of the information needs of the youth in the community which could not be established through the FGD was administered to all the respondent groups that cut across those involved in the FGD. The questionnaire provided basic demographic information about the respondents: age, education level, employment status, information needs and current sources of information. The project coordinator administered the questionnaire personally.

Sampling

In the focus groups, the youth were recruited to participate in the study based primarily on their willingness to do so. For the younger age groups, the

headmasters and principals of schools in the community were informed about the project, and were asked to select participants in the specified age categories to be invited. For the other age categories, people who visited the *Di Nwanna* Project Office at Uzoagba and expressed interest in the project, as well as those from whom data were collected in the *Di Nwanna* survey were invited to participate. On each of the eight days during which the FGD were conducted, additional participants were also invited to join in cases where numbers were still low. Participants were invited for each of the gender and age groups for both the questionnaire survey and the FGD. Altogether, 220 participants took part in 24 FGD sessions, while 250 participated in the questionnaire survey.

Five facilitators were selected and trained, with focus on preventing one person from dominating the discussions, encouraging those who are reluctant to participate, ensuring that everyone has a turn to talk within the required time frame, and keeping the group focused on the specific topic at hand (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

Findings

The findings from the focus groups are presented for each of the three age groups. Altogether, the 24 FGD sessions were spread over a period of eight days and a total of three sessions involving one age and gender group at a time were held per day. Thereafter, the data from the questionnaire survey were collated and analysed using basic statistics to clarify and help maximise the triangulation.

Findings from the FGD

The FGD participants were distributed across the three age categories as follows: under 12 years (64 participants, all between 10-12 years and comprising 68% female, 32% male); 13-19 years (94 participants, 62% female, 38% male); and 20-30 years (62 participants, 52% female, 48% male).

Information Needs of the 7-12 years Group

All the respondents below 12 years of age reported that their greatest expressed information need is pregnancy-related. The information sources available to them included family (43%) and friends (21%),

schools (20%), TV (9%) and churches (5%). A very few mentioned computers (1%), and none mentioned the Internet.

There was an interesting difference between the gender groups, with the boys group listing information needs that were very different from the girls and the mixed groups. The female groups were concerned with such issues as HIV/AIDS (32%), careers (19%), children's rights (18%), school information (13%), health (13%) and education (4%). Some of the girls stated:

'I am afraid of HIV/AIDS because I do not know whether they are telling us the truth.'

'People have died in this village due to HIV/AIDS and I am afraid.'

'I want to know more about this world, so that I can be knowledgeable.'

'I want to know what is happening in the world, in Africa and in Nigeria, and to know about other countries and their problems, the problems we are facing in our school.'

The youngest boys group (aged less 12 years or less) identified school subjects (60%), computers (32%) and sports (29%), whereas their older counterparts, aged 13-19 years, reported requiring information about higher education (67%), how to make money (42%), employment after education (39%), and the future (39%).

Each FGD participant was asked whether he or she had ever used a computer. Only 12.5% of the participants in the 12 years or less FGDs had used a computer; while 23% and 32% of the 13-19 years and 20-30 years groups had done so. Thus one can say that majority of the respondents had not used computer previously. Regarding the purpose for which computers have been used, responses varied widely, but some common themes emerged. For the under 12 years and the 13-19 years groups, typing and games were common uses, and similarly for the 20-30 age group. In each of the age categories, only one or two participants mentioned having used computers for communication purposes.

The 12 years and under groups were asked whether they thought boys and girls used computers

differently. Some interesting responses emerged from the discussions with examples of how computers are used the same and differently being given.

'Girls use the computers for typing; boys will use it for business matters.'

'Boys and girls want different careers so they want to use it for different reasons.'

'Girls will type, boys will use it to play – puzzles and love letters.'

Information Needs of the 13-19 Years Age Group

Within all the three groups of this age group, there was a consensus that computers are important and that computers can help with learning, even though they neither had access nor were they computer literate. Computers were seen as important for communication, studying, finding information on the Internet, "to know what is happening in the world", and learning basic skills like reading, and for entertainment. The discussion about topics to learn provided a wealth of information and a wide variety of responses. Since this was expected when designing the research, ranking exercises were included in the design of the FGD so that a prioritised list of information needs could be found. For the boys' only group, income and discipline at school were ranked the most important issues they were currently facing. For the girls' only group, older males dating younger girls and teenage pregnancy were noted as most important.

For the mixed gender group, education, income, poverty and unemployment, poor health facilities, sexual abuse/teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS/STD were priorities. Having identified and ranked current issues, each of the groups was asked whether they have the information they think they need and where they can get it. There was a general consensus in all the groups that quite a lot of information is available from various sources, including the media, promotional materials, parents, teachers, books, clinic and church. Interesting in this report is the discussion around what information is not available that

participants feel that they need. Unfortunately, both the girls' only and the boys' only groups did not seem to fully understand these questions. However, the girls' only group did note a need for medical expertise and information about AIDS and early sexual initiation, while the boys want information about how to become economically comfortable. For the mixed gender group, their opinions seem to reflect issues around education and income.

The main issues for the 13-19 years age group seem to be: how to be successful in life, self-esteem and confidence, being financially secured, how to stay healthy, personal safety and security. When asked whether boys and girls would face the same issues, there were some differences across the groups and the need to openly address gender issues came through very strongly. In the girls' only group in particular there was a lot of anger expressed, largely in response to the high incidence of sexual assault. Some of the responses were:

Boys like crime, they like material things.

Boys won't like abuse to be over, because they commit sexual abuse, 90% of them.

Boys like to hit their girlfriends to prove power.

No, boys won't like punishment at school because they like to control the teachers.

In general, the boys' only group thought that most of the issues were faced by both genders. This included AIDS, unemployment and pollution. However, specific issues were noted as being especially problematic for females. For example: *'poverty is mainly faced by females because they have to struggle to care for their children'; 'homelessness affects both, but females face homelessness especially badly.'* The mixed gender group had an interesting discussion about their needs, and the list of needs was almost the same for both genders. However, there was also an opinion that pregnancy affects females and only impacts a little on the men, and that males run away from most of their responsibilities.

Information Needs of the 20-30 Age Group

This group recognised the importance of computers and their roles in learning. The reasons for considering computers as crucial ranged from employment and communication to education. Some other interesting responses included that computers would help “open your mind”, “make you think and give you ideas” and “give you a better skill”. These three examples of responses provide some evidence of the willingness of the respondents to engage with issues relating to the computer. The enthusiasm notwithstanding, only 3.7% of the members of this group had any computer literacy, while about 2.2% had ever used the computers on their own. About 2.1% had Internet literacy, although none of them had any regular access. Ironically a relatively higher number of them (4.7%) reported having used information obtained from the Internet or having used the Internet to send messages to their relations who are not at home (4.5%). Those who have used the Internet travelled to Owerri Township, about 10 kilometres from the village. According to them, the distance is not even as much a problem as that of getting to Owerri to find out that there is no power supply, or the Internet café is filled up with people, or that there is no connectivity. One of the participants who always pass the night in the city each time he required Internet access also reported also being discouraged by the unwillingness of the café operators to give him the desired assistance, because of his very low computer literacy level.

The discussions around learning needs and problems generated various responses from the various groups. For the females group, poverty, lack of housing and education were noted as most important. For the males group, unemployment, crime, education, poverty and income-generating activities were seen as most important. For the mixed group, issues seen to be of high importance included HIV/AIDS, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, illiteracy,

lack of educational facilities and inadequate income-generating activities. Ranking these issues more broadly, the main issues for this age group are unemployment (poverty, income, job and career information), education (and illiteracy), and health/HIV/AIDS. When asked whether the same issues are likely to be faced by males and females, it was found that the females group has the strongest opinion with respect to gender issues. Responses from this group included: “females are most affected by unemployment”, “males are more relaxed when they are unemployed than females.” Both the males group and the mixed gender group felt that the same issues were faced by males and females.

Personal Information Needs

Beyond the group responses, the study also investigated the perception of the individuals regarding their personal information needs. To address this, the participants were given a slip of paper and were asked to anonymously record their most important personal needs. The responses were classified as: employment related, rape, abuse, life skills (includes sex related information but not abuse and rape), education, environment, housing, infrastructure and services, computer access and training, lack of unity among the youth, crime, lack of information generally, and teenage pregnancy (Figure 1).

Other needs include information concerning HIV/AIDS, funding for education, community development, and school attendance. However, income and HIV/AIDS are the major issues that bother the youth the most, followed by education and crime. Respondents also showed some concern about how to develop their communities, as well as employment matters. Issues that appear to be of least importance by general rating include rape and abuse, probably because this would be an issue of concern to females mainly.

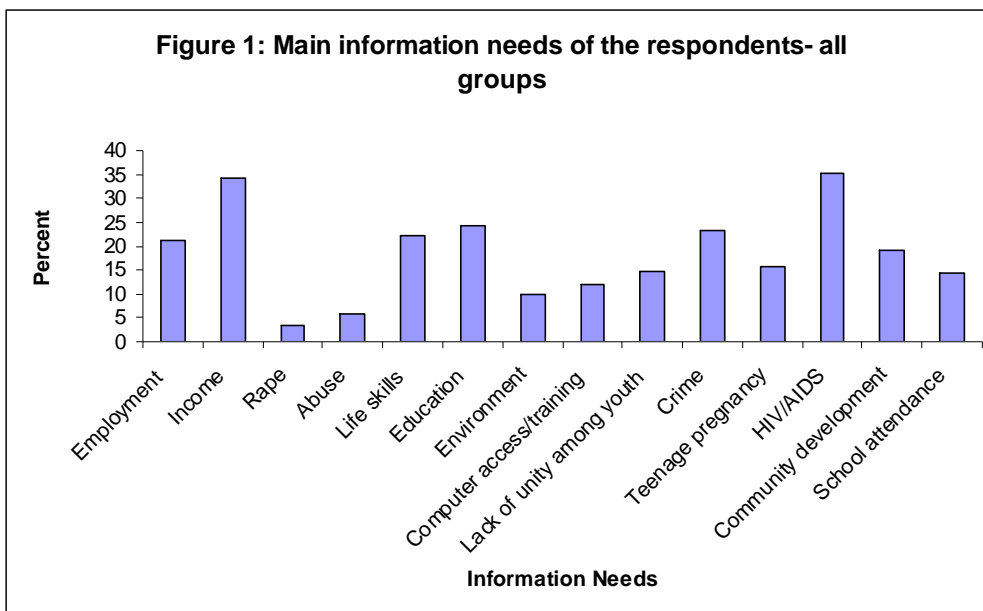


Figure 2 shows some gender disparities in the perception of individual information needs. Education, HIV/AIDS, life skills, abuse and teenage pregnancy are the four most crucial information needs of females, while issues about community development and unity among the youth bother them the least. Other issues that featured very prominently in the information needs of the females include school attendance, marriage and violence. For the males, how to earn income tops the list of their needs

followed by employment, education and life skills. Others are HIV/AIDS, computer access and training, community development and environment. A few issues featured exclusively in the information needs of the girls such as teenage pregnancy, school attendance, violence and rape. On the other hand, some issues such as community development and unity among the youth featured exclusively in the boys' information needs, but not in the girls.

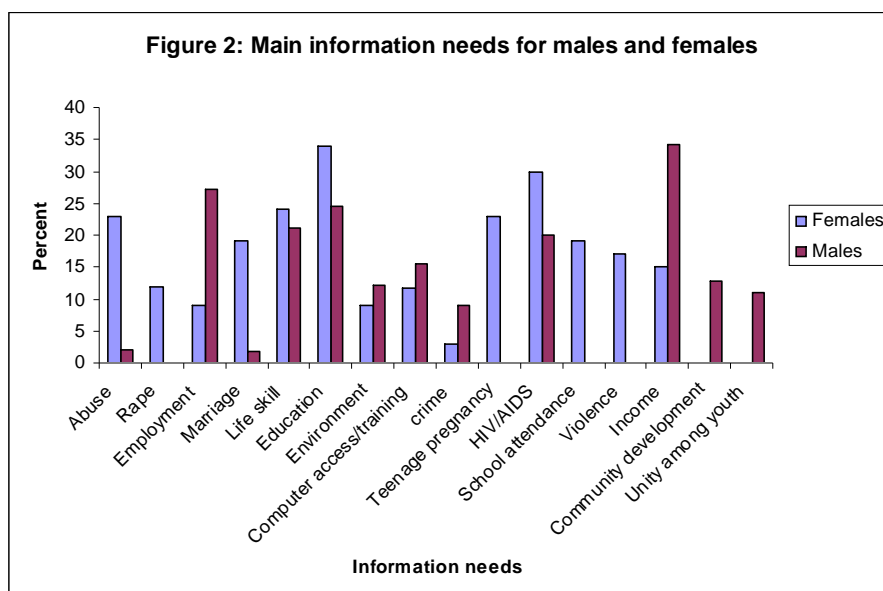
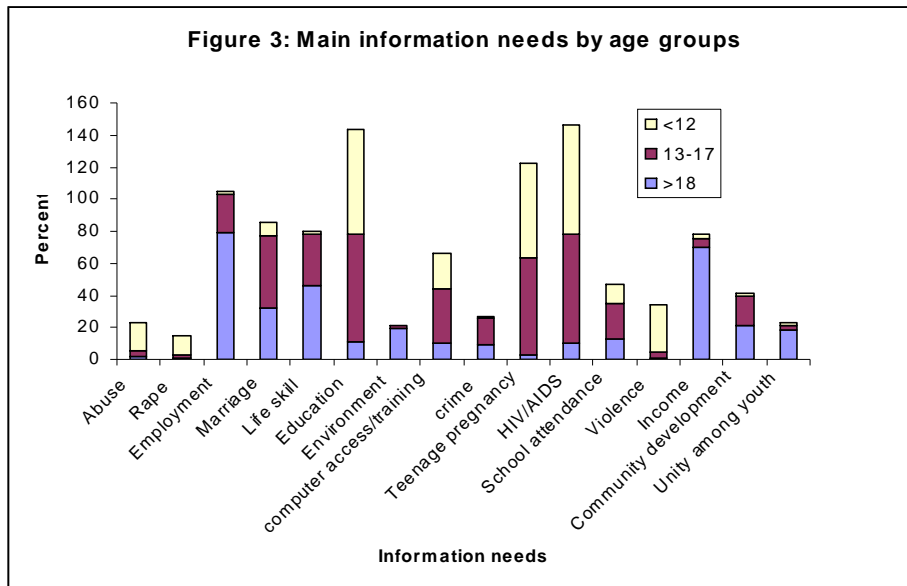


Figure 3 shows the age category distribution of the responses of the youth. There is evidence of variation in the information needs of the youth in the different age groups probably more than could be visualised in the gender categorisation. Employment is the most crucial information need of those aged above 18 years old age, followed by income and life skills. Issues such as unity among the youth and rape, as well as abuse and teenage pregnancy, are at the bottom of their information needs. For those aged between 13 and 17 years, HIV/AIDS ranks first in the information needs, followed by education and marriage. Information pertaining to rape, environment and unity among the youth constitute their least needs. Finally, for those youth less than twelve years of age, HIV/AIDS and education, as well as teenage

school, 1.2% have had tertiary education, and 27.5% did not indicate their educational status. Of the whole sample, only 3.8% reported that they have used a computer previously. When these figures were disaggregated, the result remains similar for gender, although males seemed to have a slightly higher percentage in the tertiary education category (66.7%) compared to 60% for females. For the sample as a whole, 43.2% are unemployed, 6.2% had full-time employment, 14.8% had part-time employment, 6.5% were self employed and 19.3% fell into the ‘other’ category which included volunteer work and students.

Most important Information Needed

The respondents were further asked to rank a provided list of information according to their



pregnancy and school attendance, rank as the leading issues on which the youth need information, while information on the environment, crime and community development were least needed.

Findings from the Questionnaire Survey

Characteristics of the Respondents

Altogether, 250 copies of the questionnaire were completed. When the data in the questionnaire were analysed, it was found that 20.4% of the respondents were secondary school students, 55.9% were not in

importance to them. More than 70% of them reported that they wanted information on education. More importance was attached to socio-cultural news (19.1% of all respondents) than local news (8.7%), although local news was slightly more important to them than national news (6.7%) and much more than government news (2.7%). Much more important to them than the preceding information is information about employment (31.5%), health care (19.1%) and prices of goods (16.8%). A comparison of males and females shows that higher proportions of males (75.2% and 24.6%) than females (69.1% and 0.9%) wanted educational information and national news respectively. Furthermore, males reported needing

information about employment (43.0%) more than females (19.2%). By contrast, females seemed to be more interested in information on healthcare (21.2%) and prices of goods (22.9%) than the males (1.4%) and (2.9%) respectively.

Respondents were asked in an open-ended question if they thought computers were important and why they thought so. All respondents noted the importance of computers, for various reasons, including job searching, information, education, enhancement of efficiency and communication.

Most important Sources of Information

Table 1 shows that television is considered both by the whole sample and the gender groups as the most important source of information, although females appear to consider the source more important than males. Radio and newspapers are the next important sources of information to all the groups, but they serve males more than females. Pamphlets, friends/relatives and community meetings follow but males seem to consider pamphlets as an important source more than females, while females see their friends and relatives, as well as community meetings as more important sources of information. None of the

Table 1: Important information sources

<i>Information source</i>	<i>Whole Sample %</i>	<i>Males %</i>	<i>Females %</i>
Radio	32.3	34.5	28.9
Television	43.6	46.5	49.9
Newspaper	22.1	21.1	11.1
Pamphlets/Magazine	18.4	19.1	17.1
Clinical health	5.9	4.9	11.1
Place of worship	5.2	4.6	6.3
School teacher	2.9	3.6	9.7
Community meeting	12.9	17.1	23.2
Friends/relatives	16.2	18.8	32.2
Workplace	0.9	2.1	0.1
Cinema	0.2	0.3	0.2
Exhibition	2.1	1.9	2.4
Adult education	1.9	2.1	1.3
Political leaders	1.2	0.9	0.0

respondents mentioned computers or the Internet as a source.

Discussion

The objective of this paper is to assess the information and learning needs of male and female youth in Uzoagba community in order to generate information that could assist in planning. Having examined the different information and learning priorities of the youth across age and gender groups, it is feasible to tease out the information priorities of the groups.

Table 2 summarises the main types of information needs of the surveyed youth. The needs may be classified as follows. For those aged 12 years or less, information concerning education, health/HIV/AIDS and rights/abuse dominated the needs. However, for those older than 12 years, the main information needs pertained to income/employment (job searching, career information, and entrepreneurship); health (HIV/AIDS, general well-being); education (school-related information, access to further and higher education, information about educational opportunities, information about funding for education, educational counselling) and life skills (decision making, safe sex, how to keep healthy, how

Table 2: Summary of information needs by age groups

12 years and below	
FGD	Individual opinion
1. Education	1. Health, HIV/AIDS
2. Health, HIV/AIDS	2. Pregnancy
3. Rights, abuse	3. Education
13-19 years	
FGD	Individual opinion
1. Income/Employment	1. Employment
2. Education	2. Life skills
3. Life skills	3. Education
	4. Computer training
20-30 years	
FGD	Individual opinion
1. Employment	1. Employment
2. Education	/Income
3. Health, HIV/AIDS	2 Community development

to look after and protect self, how to be successful and how to be financially capable). Information concerning employment/income was most prominent, and information concerning education appeared to be important to all age categories.

The details of the results presented earlier in this paper indicate that differences in information needs were greater across the different age groups than between the gender groups. But the need for gender-related discussions was evident specifically in the 13-19 year age group where the girls expressed strong negative feelings towards males. Gender differences were also found with respect to employment status, with females showing much higher levels of unemployment than males.

Some questions need to be addressed in this discussion. Why is information concerning education important to all age and gender groups? Why does education, health/HIV/AIDS and sexual abuse constitute major issues for the youth aged 12 years or less? Why is employment- and income-related information a major need for those youth more than 12 years old? The fact that education is a stronghold of modern development (Ahmed and Nwagwu, 2006), and that it influences earning in the formal sector (Juma, 2003; Okuwa, 2005) is a common knowledge among the young and the old. Incidentally, educational opportunities are not easily accessible to those who need them in many rural communities, while those who have access study under sub-standard and difficult conditions.

The additional focus of the under-12 years age group on HIV/AIDS and sexual abuse and pregnancy is an indicator of likelihood of insufficiency of HIV/AIDS and sexuality awareness promotion activities in the community. UNAIDS (2006) revealed that reports from various international organisations involved in HIV/AIDS work in Nigeria indicated that there was insufficient data to describe current prevalence rates of HIV among young people aged 15-24 years. Nwagwu (2007) has also highlighted the insufficiency of infrastructure for disseminating information about HIV/AIDS in the rural communities in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Like in most rural communities in Nigeria, the surveyed youth in all the different age and gender categories, whether schooling or otherwise, see themselves as people who ought to participate in the

generation of income required to run both their individual and social lives. They are concerned with livelihoods – capabilities, assets, activities – which people need to be economically successful. Acute family-level poverty must be one of the main reasons why the youth desire information on employment and income-related activities rather than focusing on their education. Such activities may however affect their education either positively (by providing sources of funding for the schooling) or negatively (by distracting their attention from schooling). In the context of the usual provisions of the Child Right declarations and statutes that ban work by young and schooling children, one may ponder whether the concern of the schooling youth themselves with employment and income-related matters should be encouraged or discouraged. Further studies will also be required to unearth how these findings relate to other observed areas of need of the youth. For instance, how does the youth participation in income generation relate to commercial sex work and HIV/AIDS trends in the communities?

Conclusion and Recommendations

The methodology and findings of this study have clearly highlighted the need for governments and development planners to adequately understand the socio-economic circumstances and desires and needs of the youth of different age categories in order to plan and implement programmes for them effectively. The opinions, needs and preferences of children and young people, particularly in rural areas where most Nigerians live, should be studied when decisions are being taken about children's own lives and where services for or used by children are being developed, implemented or evaluated. Such understanding may also be gained from studies of their information needs, in order to plan programmes for the youth.

Strategies that could be adopted in enrolling the youth in decisions about issues that affect them can be suggested. First, ad hoc and routine suggestion schemes and ways for children and young people to offer compliments and complaints should be created in the rural areas through rural community infrastructures, which are linked with appropriate government agencies. Periodic formal surveys or FGDs, such as the one used in this study, could also be adopted to find out the opinions of the youth about

national policies, current services or gaps in service. Children's opinions and input could also be obtained through the creative use of drama or music, games and youth-friendly activities and non-traditional forms of communication. It will also be very helpful to involve young people directly in providing services such as involving them in peer led education activities. Young people could also be asked to produce information for other young people; design ways to communicate better with their peers, use information technology and other new media; provide 'mentor' advice and help to their fellows and to take part in development and recruitment of staff who execute activities that affect their wellbeing.

Acknowledgement

The author is very grateful to the MacArthur Foundation (Funds for Leadership Development) Abuja, Nigeria which provided funding during 2005/2007 for the *Di Nwanna and the Reproductive Health of the Girl Child in Owerri Project* (GSS 0483064000GSS) from which this paper was extracted.

References

- Ahmed, A. and Nwagwu, W. (2006). Challenges and Opportunities of E-Learning Networks in Africa. *Development*, 49(2), 86–92.
- Babbie, E. and Mouton, J. (2001). *The Practice of Social Research. South African Edition*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Children and Young People's Unit (2001). *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Association for Progressive Females (2005). *Gender Evaluation Methodology for Internet and ICTs, (GEM). A Learning Tool for Change and Empowerment*. Sipat : Association for Progressive Females Networking Support Programme.
- Guijt, I. and Shah, M.K. (1999) (eds). *The Myth of Community. Gender Issues in Participatory Development*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Juma, M.N. (2003). "The African Virtual University. Challenges and Prospects". In M. Beebe, B.O; Oyeyinka; K. M., Kouakpou and M. Rao *AfricaDotEdu. IT Opportunities and Higher Education in Africa*. New Delhi: Tata McGraw Hill.
- Kertzner, I.D. and Frocke, T. (1997). Towards Anthropological Demography. In Kertzner, I.D and Fricke, T. Eds. *Anthropological Demography*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- March, C; Smyth, I. and Mukhopadhyay, M. (1999). *A Guide to Gender-analysis Frameworks*. Oxford: Oxfam.
- Morgan, D. L. (1998). *The Focus Group Guidebook: Focus group kit 1*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Nwagwu, W. (2006). 'Di Nwanna' and the Reproductive Health of the Girl Child in Imo State, Nigeria. *Final Report Part One* (04 83064 000 GSS). Abuja: MacArthur Foundation.
- Nwagwu, W.E. and Oshiname, R. (2009). Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Nurses at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, Nigeria. *African Journal of Library Information and Archival Studies Vol. 19(1)*, 25-38.
- Okuwa, O. (2005). Investment in Secondary Education in Nigeria: Rate of Return Analysis. Paper Presented during *Research for Results in Education, Global Conference on Education Research in Developing and Transition Countries* Prague, Czech Republic, 31 March – 2 April 2005.
- United Nations Development Project, (2008). *Human Development Reports, 2007/2008*. Available http://www.hdrstats.undp.org/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_NGA.html, retrieved June 6 2007.
- United Nations Educational and Scientific Cooperation and Organisation, (2002). *Developing Open Learning Communities for Gender Equity with the Support of ICTs*. Concept Note. *UNESCO Cross-cutting Project, 1.2.1.2* (July 2002). Washington: UNDP.

United Nations Children's Fund, (1989). *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Geneva: UN.

United Nations Development Programme (2000). *Report of the Meeting of the High-level Panel of Experts on Information and Communication Technology*, (April 2002) New York. Retrieved March 3, 2005, from www.undp.org/info2/new/n-ccosoc.html.

***Dr. Williams E. Nwagwu** is a lecturer at the Africa Regional Centre for Information Science (ARCIS), University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He holds a PhD in Information Science. His research interests are in

informetrics, science communication, health information systems, and user information behaviour.

