INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF WOMEN WITH NO FORMAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF NG'OMBE TOWNSHIP IN LUSAKA, ZAMBIA

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Abstract— **This study focused at exploring the information needs and seeking behavior of women with no formal education in Lusaka, Zambia. The specific objectives of the study included the kinds of activities participants were involved in for daily living, information needs, information sources and challenges they faced to meet their information needs. The study was qualitative in nature and a case study design was adopted for the study. Twenty-five women purposively selected participated in the study. A structure interview guide was used to solicit information from the respondents. Findings of the study revealed that participants were involved in a number of activities for daily living including small-scale businesses, knitting, gardening, taking care of the family, design and tailoring, employed (e.g. as maids, chefs and cleaners) and hair dressing. Participants needed information on health (i.e. hypertension, diabetes, care for children, HIV/AIDS, cancer, nutrition, family planning, conception and sanitation); finance (i.e. credit, savings, budgeting, insurance and pensions); education (child's school, child's performance, sponsorship,); politics (participating in politics, voting, rights); family welfare (child marriages, GVB,); personal security; employment; and entrepreneurship. The study revealed that participants looked for information from a variety of interpersonal sources including community clubs/groups, church, friends, relatives, police posts, television and radio. The study results showed that participants faced challenges such as language barrier, poverty, ignorance, limited time, distance, limited skills, inadequate information centers and intimidation to effectively meet their information needs. Provision of information in local languages, introduction of literacy programmes and establishment of information centers were some of the suggested solutions made by participants to effectively meet their information needs.**

Keywords— *information needs; women's needs; information seeking behavior; information sources*

I.   INTRODUCTION

It is a common belief that we live in an information society. Meeting our needs, from the most basic to the most sophisticated is information-dependent. In a complex and highly structured world, the need for information is felt at all levels of society, regardless of an individual's location, social status or intellectual achievement. Information is the major ingredient in any development effort as well as for individual growth and survival. The progress of modern societies and individuals depends a great deal upon provision of the right kind of information, in the right form and at the right time. It forms an important element in decision making and resolving uncertainty as it builds awareness of resources and practical strategies to improve life time experiences [1]. Accordingly, global efforts to attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) depend highly on information. In itself, information is useless unless it meets the requirements of the users.

Considering the revolutions all-round the globe, information exists in different formats, soft and hard copy. For example, e-journals, e-books, audio -visual materials, posters, pamphlets, etc. and there are various information providers, for instance, various types of Libraries (physical and virtual), specialized information centers and the Internet. Although it is said that there is vast amounts of information today that people can use to make decisions, there are still categories of people in society that still cannot access it. One such category is women,

especially those with no formal education. When women are empowered and can access information, food security is enhanced and prospects are improved for current and future generations. Women are the backbone of national economies.

II. BACKGROUND OF NGOMBE TOWNSHIP

Ng'ombe is a Nyanja word for a cow or cattle, denoting its previous role as a cattle ranch for Galaunia farms. The Settlement started in the 1930s as a small settlement for farm 52 workers who looked after cattle [2]. In 1964, after Zambia got its independence, the farm was repossessed from Galaun by the Government of the Republic of Zambia and was earmarked for national development programmes. Ng'ombe Township was legalized on 16th February, 1999 by the Ministry of Local Government and Housing under Statutory and Improvement Areas Act of 1999 [2]. Ng'ombe Settlement is located about 10 kilometers from the main post office or 3 kilometers from the University of Zambia, main campus. It is surrounded by the following settlements; Kalundu to the south, Chudleigh to the east, Chamba Valley to the north and Roma to the west. It covers an area of about 933,259.33 square meters of almost high land. Ng'ombe Settlement consists of two areas, old and new. In the old area, there is no proper layout of houses. The houses are haphazardly and located very close to other [2].

The township has a total population of 92, 000 of which 23% are male, 45% female and 32% children and youths. The population of the settlement is growing very fast due high birth rates and immigration of people from other areas. There are a few residents who are in formal employment. These include health workers, police officers, teachers, clerks, security guards and drivers [2]. The majority of the residents work in the informal sector and live without access to safe drinking water. Most households share unprotected pit latrines. The houses which are made of mud bricks, and are also very close to each other, poorly ventilated and the room occupancy rate is also very high and mostly not connected to electricity; the residents depend on charcoal and firewood for cooking [2]. This is an area where most people live in poverty, have no or limited education, are unemployed, lack decent housing and infrastructure, prone to diseases due to poor sanitation, largely unsecure and overcrowded. School dropout and early marriages are common among young girls. Other engage in prostitution, alcohol and drug abuse [2].

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In their effort to live a successful life, women need to adequately utilize information at the right time, in the right format and when needed. The viability of any activity they can engage in depends on information. In spite of the growing recognition of women's role in society, their information needs largely remain unmet and largely neglected within the conventional policy making processes. This is true especially for women who have never been to school as their information needs are not well known, yet contribute immensely to the development of communities. The different characteristics of work environment make one type of information need and seeking behavior different from the other [1]. Thus, it is important to study each group of information seekers one at a time and use the results to develop user-oriented information systems in order to serve each group better. Moreover, the assessment of information need and seeking behavior of various groups and individuals is essential in assisting them to access and use information resources for optimal performance and productivity [1]. Certainly, an improved understanding of the nature, workings and potential contribution of women with no formal education in the informal sector is critical to ensuring a more inclusive form of economic development.

IV. STUDY OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the study was to explore the information needs and seeking behavior of women with no formal education in Ng'ombe Township of Lusaka. The specific objectives of the study were to investigate;

i) The kinds of activities that women with no formal education in Ng'ombe Township were involved in for daily living

ii) The information needs of women with no formal education in Ng'ombe Township

iii) The information sources of women with no formal education in Ng'ombe Township

iv) The challenges that women with no formal education in Ng'ombe Township faced to meet their information needs

V. METHODOLOGY

The study was qualitative in nature and a case study design was adopted for the study. Twenty-five women purposively selected participated in the study. Only women who have never been to school aged 25 years and above were included in the study. These women were drawn from Chikumutso club in Ng'ombe township of Lusaka, Zambia. In this study, the age of the respondents with no formal education was one of the important characteristics in understanding their information needs and seeking behavior as it indicated the level of maturity. A structure interview guide was used to solicit information from the respondents. Data was analyzed thematically.

VI. FINDINGS

a) Age composition of study participants

Age of the respondents		
Age	Frequency	Percentage
25-30	5	20
31- 35	11	44
36-40	7	28
41 and above	2	8
Total	25	100

b) Activities participants were involved in for daily living in Ng'ombe

Findings of the study revealed that participants were involved in a number of activities for daily living including: Small-scale businesses such as selling groceries, foodstuffs, and charcoal along the roadside or in the markets; work as maids, cleaners, wash clothes for those with money; design and tailoring; knitting e.g. jerseys and door mats; gardening; hair dressing; housewives taking care of their families.

The findings show that though not educated, the participants are actively in a number of informal activities to sustain their lives. This clearly shows that the informal sector remains critical in national development. Approximately 50% or more of Zambia's population work in the informal sector. In fact, previous studies have shown that the majority in the information sector are women [9] who are often exposed to personal, financial, economic and social risks and vulnerabilities resulting from their need to find appropriate information, employment and generate income. The informal sector generates much needed employment, in a country where job creation programmes are scarce. It also a major source of goods and services for lower income groups. Many people today remain excluded from the security of waged or salaried employment such that the number of people working in informal employment is likely to rise. Yet, informal activities are underestimated and mostly disregarded in many regions.

c) The information needs of women

The study further revealed that women under study needed information on the following issues: health (HIV/AIDS, hypertension, heart disease, diabetes female cancers, and family planning), Child health (nutrition/diet, birth preparedness); financial management (saving, credit, budgeting, insurance, pension); home management; food preparation; business development; tailoring and design/fashions; Constituency Development Fund; politics; social cash transfer; education (literacy skills, child's school, child's performance, sponsorship); Gender Based Violence; child marriages; child care; family matters; security; employment; and entrepreneurship

It can be concluded that women need a wide array of information. The information needed is mainly on activities they are involved in and the daily problems they encounter. This information is needed to improve their knowledge levels, solve daily problems, improve their living standards, improve their small business, earn more income, conduct home activities and entertain themselves. For instance, health information is crucial for women to understanding the causes of disease and the factors that influence health; for self-diagnosing and treating minor conditions; knowing when to seek advice and professional help; choosing appropriate healthcare providers; selecting appropriate tests and treatments; monitoring symptoms and treatment effects; being aware of safety issues and preventing errors; coping with the effects of chronic illness and self-managing their care; and adopting healthy behaviours to prevent occurrence or recurrence of disease [6].

Similarly, the need therefore, for information on child care is critical for women particularly on food preparation, hygiene, diet/nutrition and emotional support. Good child care is vital not only to the development of individuals but also societies at large. There are strong links between early childhood nurturing and adult outcomes. Early childhood nurturing impacts on cognitive development, schooling and labour market outcomes. Information helps people understand how to compare the price and quality of different food options, and how to affordably feed their families with healthy, nourishing food and also gain knowledge in food preparation.

Financial information or literacy is key to better plan for key life events. People experience some key life events during their lives which are associated with higher levels of responsibility and financial obligations. The key life events include: marriage partners, birth of a new child and raising children, education, home ownership, employment, starting a business, retirement, and unexpected calamities. Nevertheless, very often, people fail to plan or are inadequately prepared for the key life events, thus causing pressure/stress on household finances and leading to poor choices of financial services to cope with these events. Information builds people's awareness of not only key life events empower them with knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence to make prudent financial decisions for themselves and their families. Financial information is also critical for people to make informed choices about how much to save, where to keep their money, where to obtain credit for major purchases. In other words, financial information equips people on wide array of financial services products, tools and resources that they can use to manage their finances and cope with the key life events.

The need for information on Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Zambia cannot be over-emphasised. Much of the information is only through press reports, parliamentary debate speeches and council documents on CDF, but these documents in most cases are not easily accessed by the majority of people. People need to know the role CDF plays and its utilization.

In the current information society, information is one of the important political tool. It is through information that women can market their political aspirations including party manifestos, know elected leaders or aspiring for candidates for political positions and so on. Any political career, and any basic interest in politics or political participation, is anchored in an understanding of the issues, concerns and needs that exist in a particular community. Thus, empowering women through improved information, however small, will serve to strengthen the number and activities of women in politics. However,

women often face more difficulties when it comes to seeking out information that might be relevant to their political objectives. The reflex to take needs or concerns up with local actors, to request information on issues that are important to them is often missing. Information in the right quality and format has been identified as a missing link for women to effectively engage in political participation.

d) Participant's sources of information

For any meaningful information to be provided, certain relevant information sources must be consulted. It is only through such sources that information seekers can obtain information that is ideal for a meaningful decision-making leading to increase in productivity [3]. This study solicited for information on participant's sources of information and the responses were as follows: One participant said "I belong to some women club like Cikumbuso here where we I learn a lot of things." While another said "there are meetings that are called for by ward chairpersons or neighborhood watch were we get up dated on what is happening." Another participant explained: "church is one important place that I receive most information which help me and my family especially in times of difficulties." And another indicated as follows: "I have friends whom I share a lot of information with…they encourage and advise me on lots of things like food preparation." Further, another participant said "I see relatives as one of the first point of contact when in need of information or when faced with a problem." Again, another explained: "We are helped also by police posts especially on information to do with gender based violence." Also, one participant mentioned that "most of us have televisions and radios where we get to know most of the things.

From the responses, it is clear that participants looked for information from a variety of sources such as community clubs, community meetings, church, friends, relatives, police posts, television and radio. Many studies confirm the above findings that women acquire information from a variety of sources [4, 5, 6, 7]. This study also confirms that most sources of information consulted by women with no formal education are interpersonal sources. Consistent with earlier studies, the current research has found that interpersonal sources of information are more likely to be used than other types of sources. It seems clear that interpersonal sources of information are more capable of being a provider of impartial, current, digested and interpretable information to women with no formal education. Use of interpersonal sources can be seen as very consistent with informational motives (i.e., improving communication, lowering the costs of search, etc.). Particularly in cases where the costs of a poor decision are high and search costs are also high (because of the complexity of the product, uncertainty about availability or prices, etc.), the incentive to use the Judgment of a knowledgeable interpersonal source is substantial [8].

e) The challenges participants faced

When asked on the challenges participants faced to access needed information, this is some of what they said are some of the challenges: "Much of the information is presented in English. Even at the meetings where we are invited, most times they use English". Language barrier was a point that was emphasized. Pointing out on cost constraint, one participant said "it requires money in most cases to have information. For instance, one has to buy a newspaper, radio, television, or sometimes one has to travel to get the necessary information…money is hard to find due to poverty." "In most times because of lack of knowledge, we have difficulties to acquire the information we need." Complaining on time constraint, one participant indicated: "These days we are too busy looking for money or survival such that looking for information seem to be a waste of time." Another participant described fear as challenges as follows: "I fear so much to go to offices to look for information mostly because I cannot communicate in English." Distance was another factor as stated by one participant: "I stay very far from sources of information like the church, police post and the library is in town." One other participant also mentioned the lack of information center in the area as follows: "We do not have an information center here where we can go to for information."

In short, the responses clearly show that the challenges faced by participants include language barrier, poverty, ignorance, limited time, distance, limited skills, inadequate information centers and intimidation to effectively meet their information needs. The challenges women face to meet their information needs have also been highlighted by a number of studies [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14].

VII. CONCLUSION

Findings of the study revealed that participants were involved in a number of activities for daily living. As such, they have a wide range of information needs ranging from health to entrepreneurship. These needs have to be seriously met if their lives are to be improved. The study also revealed that women looked for information from a variety of interpersonal sources. However, they face challenges such as language barrier, poverty, ignorance, limited time, distance, limited skills, inadequate information centers and intimidation to effectively meet their information needs.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for information providers to provide these women with information in local languages.

2. The government should also consider introducing adult literacy programmes so that women of adult age can be empowered to learn how to read and write.

3. There is need for government to establish information centers in compounds like Ng'ombe to cater for the information needs of people in Lusaka.

4. Women should be empowered with small loans to improve their small businesses.

5. The government, community or civic leaders should organize sensitization/ awareness campaigns on various issues affecting people in compounds.

6. The government, community or civic leaders should capacity build women with various survival skills.

7. Government should put in place a clear and coherent policy that can support the transformation of the different kinds of informal economic activities that women engage in to viable businesses.

8.

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