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Citizens' Most Used Media of Interaction with the Local Governments in Nigeria

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Abstract: Information is a powerful instrument to prevent crimes if properly disseminated. Sources and channels of information play important roles in its utilization. It is on this backdrop that this survey was carried out to ascertain the appropriate media and channels to convey local governments' information to the citizens. Thirteen local governments in Imo State, one of the 36 states of Nigeria, were surveyed with the use of questionnaire. Out of 1840 selected respondents, 1785 returned their questionnaire. The data generated were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences and the results were presented in discrete figures, percentages, and graphs. The study revealed that over 60 percent of the respondents got information about their local government from verbal/oral sources, radio broadcasts, schools, churches or mosques, traditional rulers and ward councillors. The sources of information were mediated because they were from local government employees who dance to the tune of their employers. The paper recommended that village youth leaders and women leaders should be involved in information dissemination in the localities.

Keywords: *Information sources, Information channels, Mediated information, Information media, Timely information*

1. Introduction

Information can be used as a means to propagate transparency in the conduct of local government's affairs in Nigeria. "Financial information dissemination is perceived to be a deterrent to mismanagement of resources experienced in some Nigerian local governments which has hindered development all over the years" (Unegbu, 2012). Availability of information about the past, the present and perhaps, the anticipated future could make the government officials to be cautious in administration, since they could be called upon to give account of their stewardship after they had left office. All the key attributes of good governance, namely: transparency, accountability, responsibility, participation (the governors and the governed), and responsiveness (to the need of the people) could be achieved if there is information communication to the public as a checklist of inventory to cross-check performance. Publicity, according to Anyanwu (1999), is one of the determinants of citizens' participation in developmental issues. Lack of information to the citizens would reduce or hinder citizens' involvement in the affairs of the local governments. A survey conducted by Stipak (2005) concluded that local governments need information on citizens' needs and preferences and on citizens' satisfaction levels, and subjective evaluation of government services. If there is no citizen – government relationship, information on such needs may elude the government. A survey carried out in UK by Bromley and Rao (2000) to find out which agencies were responsible for hospital management, showed a low level of awareness as almost half of the population polled erroneously believed that Local Council managed hospitals. It has also been confirmed that the young people, in particular, in UK lacked information about their local authority, and there is evidence of a link between public satisfaction and the degree to which people feel that they are being kept informed by government.

There are numerous uses of information. To business people, information from customers helps business to improve. Information is the brain behind any good decision, so information plays an important role in decision making (Schwartz, 2012). Information could be used to target areas of improvement in a society or in an organization. According to Bluestein (2010), information that is provided to or obtained by local governments has become public record and anyone could have access to such information since local governments are public ventures. With the foregoing, local government's financial records should be made accessible to all for transparency. However, availability of information does not always mean accessibility

because of many limiting factors such as limitation of the sources (medium of communication), level of education of users, and timeliness of such information. There are some events that need quick action for their prevention or for fast-tracking them. Some calamities could be prevented if information is received on time. Certain obnoxious actions of the local government officials could be nipped at the bud if the intentions of such actions were to be known before hand. Local government authorities could be positively or negatively influenced if citizens could be aware of their intended plans of action. There are many media to communicate information to the citizens of any local government. All of the media may not be useful to the citizens because of their availability, knowledge of their uses by the users, and mode or channel of communication. Imo State, one of the 774 local governments in Nigeria, will be used as the case study. This study investigates the true state of affairs in Imo State as it pertains to information communication and the media or channels used.

The main objective of this study was to investigate the mode of citizens' information communication and their appropriateness. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- determine the sources of information for the citizens of the local governments in Nigeria;
- identify the channels of information communication to the citizens;
- ascertain the most useful channels of information communication to the citizens of the local governments;
- find out the suitability of the channels of information communication from the local governments to the citizens

In other to get answers to achieve the objectives of this study, the following questions were asked:

- What are the sources of local governments' information to their citizens in Imo State?
- What are the channels through which information is communicated to the citizens?
- Which channels of information communication do the citizens prefer?
- Are the channels through which information is communicated to the citizens desirable?

Significantly, this study would help in knowing the media to focus on in the discharge of the responsibilities of the local governments in creating awareness of what is happening in the local governments. Dissemination of information to the people at the grassroots is important, but most importantly is the appropriate channels for its accomplishment. So, this study would help the local governments to identify the appropriate channels of information dissemination to the citizens. Information communication is the dissemination of information from one source (the originator) to another (the receiver). Information communication is letting people know about what is happening in their community.

2. Literature Review

Literature was reviewed in line with the objectives of this study. Relevant literatures were reviewed to broaden the understanding of the focus of this paper.

Value of Information: Information, as a commodity, has value. Accountants realized this and so define information by its value as: "benefit produced by the information minus the cost of producing it" (Romney and Steinbert, 2000). The many values of information, which are its benefits, include "reduction in uncertainty, improved decisions and a better ability to plan and schedule the organization's activities" (ibid.). Though information has value, it is not easy to determine, identify, and quantify all of the costs associated with producing it. The benefits of information are noticeable and even visible but very hard to quantify. Of the five contributions of information listed by Yaya and Ebunuwele (2007), three are on developmental issues. Adetoro (2003) in his own contribution to the value of information confirmed, among others, that information is indispensable in economic management. So, without doubt, information enhances development. Since information enhances development, government should take it seriously.

Role of Information Communication in Governance: The proper dissemination of information in governance was noted by Olowu (2004) who reiterated that, for development to be sustained there must be

efficient dissemination of appropriate information to the populace. On their part, Albert and Isife (2010) advocated that an information officer should be appointed who would be responsible for the effective dissemination of information to the citizenry; an appointment which they said should be pensionable and not temporal to ensure continuity. One of the reasons for creating local government areas by the Federal Government is to bring the presence of federal and state governments to the communities. Councillors are elected from the wards to represent their communities by passing appropriate information to them. It has been "revealed that councillors are not the appropriate people to disseminate information since them are political appointees" (Albert and Isife (2010). For effective flow of information from the local government to the citizens, Martin (2003) and Albert and Isife (2010) are of the opinion that traditional leaders, local leaders, community groups (village groups), community development councils, and youth leaders in the villages, should be engaged in information dissemination. In situations where the local governments disseminate information through the mass media, there may be no evidence of feedback. This agrees with Adebayo and Adedoyin's (2005) five essential elements of effective communication namely: source/sender, message/information, channels/medium, receiver/effect, and feedback. Other media to disseminate information as revealed by Adeyemi (1991), Alemna (1995) and Munyua (2000) are churches, mosques, schools, and individuals - person to person (oral communication). These media come in form of announcements and advertisements through radio, television, newspaper, journal, magazine, etc. (Saevaes 2004). In addition, modern technology has brought to focus the internet (twitters, blog, and other social sites), wireless communication gadgets (different handsets, i-pads, and blackberries). One notice that postal agencies are going into oblivion; except for the Speed Posts, no trace of Post Offices could have been visible.

Communication between the Local Government and the Citizens: There are three complimentary uses of information as recognized by Avarado (2009). These uses are already known in information science, but the art in this is the way he intertwined, connected and weaved them around the government and her citizens. In connection with PUMA Policy (2001), a potential solid unbreakable bond is created between local governments and her citizens. Alvarado stated that information is more than an input for decision making or planning. Government portals are good ideas in government-citizenry communication, but how many Nigerian citizens are so enlightened as to use government portals? In Guatemala, for instance, in order to reduce the time it took her people to produce educational statistics, began an initiative called Platform for Integrated Social Information (PISI) in 2006. This was an initiative of Guatemala's Ministry of Education with support from USAID, the World Bank, the Inter – American Development Bank and other donors. In Kenya, the same thought applied and the aim was to implement information resources to improve transparency and efficiency in management.

Role of Information in Lasting Government – Citizenry Relationship in the Local Government: According to OECD Policy Brief (2001)**.** Strengthening relations with citizens is a sound investment in better policy-making and a core element of good governance. It allows government to tap new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources when making decisions. Equally important, it contributes to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity. Such efforts help strengthen representative democracy, in which parliaments play a central role. The above is the summary of the benefits of Local Government – Citizenry Interrelationship. There are three frameworks in the use of information between the government and the citizens in this interrelationship as outlined in the same OECD Policy Brief No. 10 (2001).

- The One–Way Relationship, where the government dishes information to citizens (Government to Citizens). Citizens are mere recipients; they are just like pots that the government fills with water. Citizens are obedient servants, a master – servant relationship.
- The Two–Way Relationship, in this type of relationship citizens provides feedback on government's issued instruction or information. Citizens can express their feelings in this kind of relationship. The government reacts to citizens' feelings either positively or negatively depending on government's intention and anticipation.
- The third type of relationship between the local government and its citizens is Partnership. This involves active participation between both parties. Here the citizens are actively engaged in the policy-making process. Information is shared in this type of cordiality. Even though final decision rests with the government, this type of relationship is preferred.

In Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries where this is practised, they are reaping the benefits. Government could use a range of information tools to accomplish this. It is necessary that every effort should be made to communicate local governments' information to the indigenes of that local government because this can enhance development.

Information Dissemination Techniques in the Local Governments: Traditional media and new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) like cellular phones have played a major role in diffusing information to rural communities. Traditional media have been used very successfully in developing countries. To speed up the flow of information, prints, videos, televisions, films, slides, pictures, exhibitions and demonstrations have been used and should continue to be used especially in rural areas where the Local government belongs (Munyua 2000). Because the rural dwellers do not have the prerequisite knowledge to handle modern communication gadgets these traditional methods should be encouraged. The governor of Bauchi State in Nigeria recently commissioned 5 community radio stations (Mohammed, 2012); his stated reasons are captured as: "The establishment of the community radio stations is a deliberate effort to give voice to the voiceless and take information dissemination to greater heights". This implies that he understood the importance of radio as a channel of information communication. Information is a very important tool to fight corruption by both individuals and government employees. Apart from evidence, information is the next item that helps jurists in the execution of fair judgement. The elimination of the "Nigerian Factor", hereby enumerated by Ijiomah (2002) as bribery and corruption, squandermania, tribalism and nepotism, the connection factors, lack of commitment to duty, greed and avarice, lack of sufficient patriotism, misappropriation of public funds, low public morality, advanced fee fraud (419), drug abuse, etc., is a problem inherent in a society that has no free information flow policy for its citizens from the government to the governed. Information is a harmless weapon that foils and arrests many atrocities. Aluko (2004), venting his displeasure on local governments' corruption, believed that restricted access to information on the workings of the government has given rise to poor understanding by civil society of the primary purpose of government. He suggested that access to information on the tasks, objectives and activities of the different organs of government must be provided and, by this, transparency is promoted. He further recommended that the masses, that is, the citizenry, should be involved in the activities of the government. Also, the mass media and NGOs should be involved. Further recommendations are that there should be community relation and introduction of Civics in school curriculum especially in primary and secondary schools. An essential ingredient to induce accountability is free press that makes it possible for the citizens to be well informed about the performance of the government; its strength and its weaknesses. Information dissemination is paramount to this assignment.

3. Methodology

Survey design was employed for the study because it is used to find out the opinion of a group of people towards a particular issue at a particular time. Again, surveys are usually more quantitative and easier to analyze and draw inferences from. Imo State has 27 local government areas with a total population of three million nine hundred and thirty-four thousand eight hundred and ninety-nine (3, 934, 899) (NBS 2008; Nigeriamasterweb.com, 2006). These local governments are distributed in three senatorial zones as follows: Okigwe (6 LGAs), Orlu (12 LGAs), and Owerri (9 LGAs). About half of the 27 local government areas (13) were involved in the study. Since the zones did not have equal numbers of local governments, proportionate numbers were used, that is, approximately half of the numbers of local governments in each zone were used. This was purposively done in order to include the local governments that are largely rural based. For Okigwe zone which has 6 local government areas, 3 were selected; Owerri zone with 9 local government areas, 4 were selected; and Orlu with 12 local government areas, 6 were selected. Statistics on the population of these 13 local government areas stood at one million nine hundred and fifty thousand one hundred and forty-nine (1, 950, 149) as of 2006 census figure which was the latest as at the time of commencing this study. Probability sampling, random sampling and cluster sampling were employed in selecting the population sampled. The 13 purposively selected local government areas have different numbers of people. So a proportionate number, determined by proportionate sample size representing the population of the selected local government area, was used. Respondents of nationally acceptable working age of between 20 and 60 were surveyed through the use of questionnaire. The population of this age group was statistically calculated

to be 959, 213 (NBS, 2008) from which 1840 was proportionally selected using Uzuagulu's formula as was used by Uhegbu (2004). The formula is expressed as:

$$\frac{n \times p}{N \times 1}$$

Where in this paper n = Total Sample Size = 1, 840; N = Total Number of Population to Sample = 959, 213; and P = Total Number of Population to be sampled in each of the 13 Local Governments. So to get the sample size for Ezinihitte Mbaise, the mathematical application becomes:

$$\frac{1\,840 \times 82,796}{959,213 \times 1}$$

$$= 159 \text{ Approx.}$$

This formula was applied to all the 13 local governments to get each local government's discrete number from the 1840 sample size (See Table 1).

Table 1: Selected Proportion of Employable Citizens Surveyed from the 13 LGAs

Local Govt. Area	Total Population Of the LGA	Worked Out Pop. No. To be Used (50%)	Finite No. Of Pop. To be Surveyed
Aboh Mbaise	196, 652	98, 326	189
Ahiazu Mbaise	170, 902	85, 451	164
Ehime Mbano	130, 931	65, 465	126
Ezinihitte Mbaise	165, 593	82, 796	159
Ideato North	158, 406	79, 203	152
Ideato South	159, 879	79, 939	153
Isiala Mbano	198, 736	99, 368	190
Owerri Municipal	127, 213	63, 606	122
Nkwere	80, 152	40, 076	77
Obowu	118, 114	59, 057	113
Ohaji/Egbema	182, 538	91, 269	175
Oru East	111, 822	55, 911	107
Oru West	117, 492	58, 746	113
GRAND TOTAL:		1840	

The questionnaire was administered to the citizens to collect information on the sources of information available to them and the channels through which information about the local government gets to them. The instrument was validated by the professionals in the field of Library and Information Science. It was criticised and corrected for content validity.

Procedure for Data Collection: One thousand eight hundred and forty (1, 840) copies of the questionnaire were administered either personally or with the help of six research assistants who were given two days training by the researcher and guided on what to do. These 1, 840 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the citizens in the 13 selected local government areas. All categories of citizens residing in the different local government areas were used. Oral explanation of the variables of the questionnaire was given to those who were not so educated so as to get reliable responses. Each research assistant was assigned to two local governments, and the researcher worked on one in addition to supervising the 6 field workers. Biro pens were provided for the respondents as sensitization materials.

4. Data Presentation, Analyses and Recommendations

Of the 1840 copies of questionnaire distributed to all the categories of respondents, 1785 were retrieved while 55 could not be retrieved; this makes a response rate of 95%. It is based on the data from the total retrieved that the following presentation has been made. The results are presented in frequencies, tables, and percentages, as well as in graphs and charts for easier understanding. Data generated were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Demographic Data of Respondents: The demographic characteristics of the respondents of this research are displayed on Table 2.

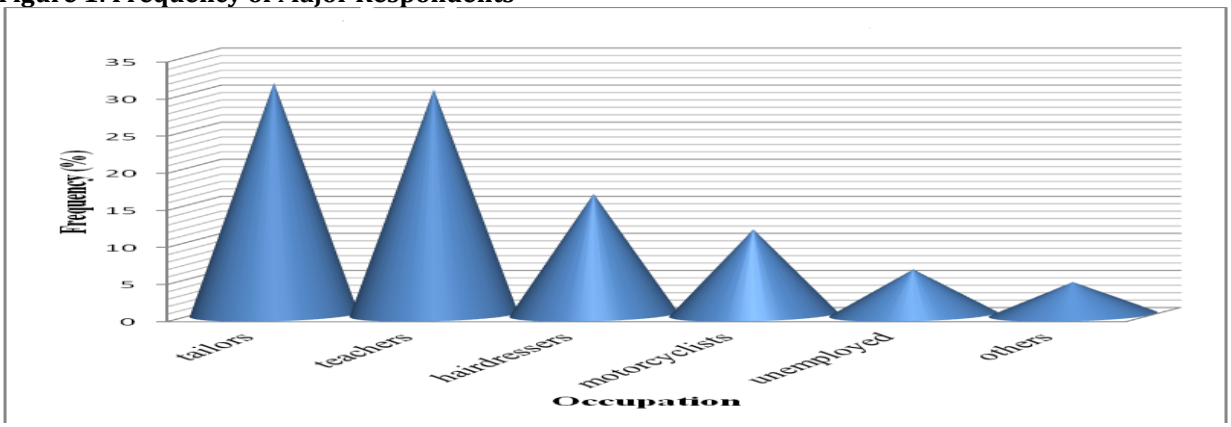
Table 2: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristics		Frequency (N=1785)	Percentage (100%)
Gender	Male	851	47.7
	Female	893	50.0
	NA**	41	2.3
Marital status	Married	1150	64.4
	Single	620	34.7
	NA**	15	0.8
Age (years)	15-20	19	1.1
	21-30	444	24.9
	31-40	767	43.0
	41-50	444	24.9
	51-64	100	5.6
	Above 64	0	0.0
	NA**	11	0.6
Highest Qualification	Primary Six	271	15.2
	JSS 1-3	163	9.1
	SSCE/GCE	680	38.1
	TCII/ OND/NCE	212	11.9
	HND/B.A./B.Sc.	430	24.1
	M.A./M.Sc.	16	1.0
	PhD	1	0.06
	NA	12	0.7

** Note: NA = Not available, No indication of choice answer.

Information on the respondents' gender, marital status, age and qualifications are hereby represented as indicated in Table 2. Majority of the respondents were of productive age of less than 64 years. Fifteen percent of the respondents (271; 15.2%) did primary six. Majority of the respondents (680; 38.1%) had SSCE/GCE and 25 percent of the respondents were university graduates or HND holders, with one PhD holder. Seventeen (17) occupational areas were indicated by the respondents and majority being in the purposively selected occupational categories of Tailors (559; 31.3%), Teachers (542; 30.4%), Hairdressers (291; 16.3%), and Motorcyclists/Okada riders (206; 11.5%). The least occupational distribution in the list of respondents was the Civil Servants, Directors and Nurses. Majority of the respondents were tailors, teachers, hairdressers and commercial motorcyclists as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Frequency of Major Respondents

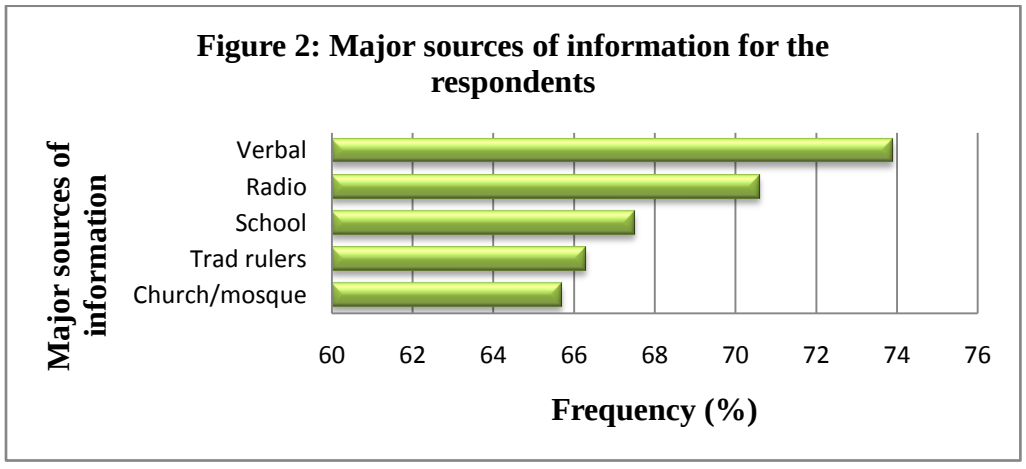


Methods Used by the Local Governments to Communicate With Their Citizens: Here are the channels through which the local government communicate with their citizens

Table 3: Channels of local government information communication to their citizens

S/N	Sources of information	Agree	Disagree
1	Verbally/orally from friends and relatives	1320 (73.9%)	465 (26.1%)
2	Radio broadcast	1260 (70.6%)	525 (29.4%)
3	Television (TV)	909 (50.9%)	876 (49.1%)
4	Newspaper/Magazine	802 (44.9%)	983 (55.1%)
5	School	1204 (67.5%)	581 (32.5%)
6	Church or Mosque	1173 (65.7%)	612 (34.3%)
7	Town Criers	1078 (60.4%)	707 (39.6%)
8	Library/Information Centre	698 (39.1%)	1087 (60.9%)
9	Community/Village Meeting	1058 (59.3%)	727 (40.7%)
10	Telephone/Handset	637 (35.7%)	1148 (64.3%)
11	Internet	595 (33.3%)	1190 (66.7%)
12	Traditional Ruler	1183 (66.3%)	602 (33.7%)
13	Ward Councillor	1088 (61.0%)	697 (39.0%)
14	Local Government	1072 (60.1%)	713 (39.9%)
		N=1785	

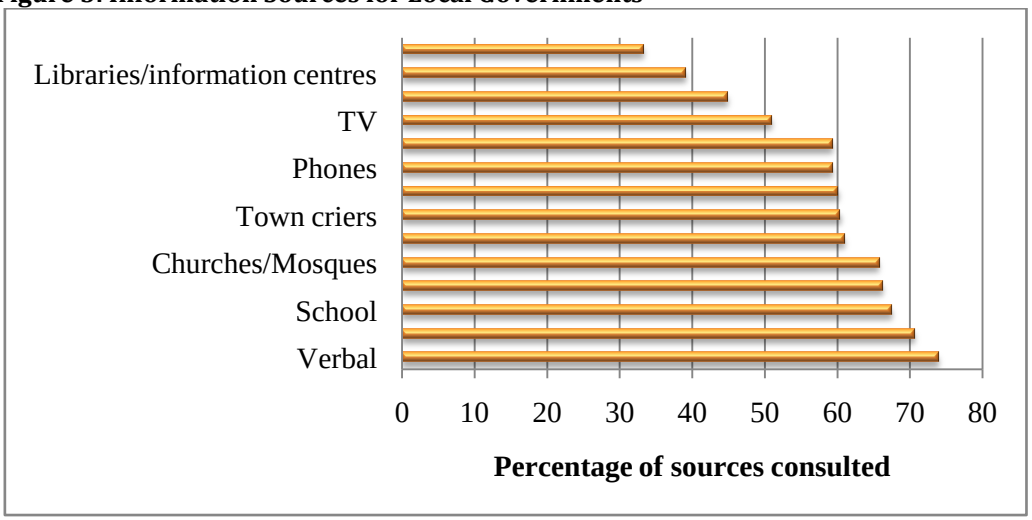
Table 3 and Figure 2 indicated that over 60 percent of the respondents got information about their local governments from verbal/oral sources, Radio broadcasts, schools, churches or mosques, traditional rulers and ward councillors. Less than 50 percent of the respondents got the required local governments' financial information from newspapers or magazines, libraries or information centres, telephones or handsets, and the internet. Oral face to face communication has been seen in literature as the most preferred method of communication especially in the rural areas (Adeyemi (1991), Alemna (1995), and Munyua (2000). The mass media, particularly the radio was also a popular source of information for citizenry. This suggests a high level of awareness and interest in listening to news on what is happening around them (the citizenry).



The five most important local governments' information communication channels indicated in Figure 2 needed to be more effectively utilized by the local governments for effective communication of financial information to the citizens because radios, churches, and schools were the most common and available communication channels for the common people in the villages.

Sources for Local Governments' Information to Their Citizens: Here 14 information sources were listed for the respondents to choose those that they use often. The result was analyzed using frequency and percentages (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Information Sources for Local Governments



The citizens' major sources of information about their local government included conversation with more informed friends, relatives or fellow citizens (73.9%), Radio broadcasts (70.6%), schools (67.5%), traditional rulers (66.3%), churches or mosques (65.7%), and ward councillors (61.0%). This conformed to Martin (2003) and Albert and Isife (2010) who advocated that the best communication channels to reach the rural communities are through local leaders, development councils, churches, schools, and individuals. Among the worst sources of information included the print media (44.9%), libraries or information centres (39.1%), and the Internet (33.3%). The local governments used opinion leaders, traditional rulers, village heads, and councillors to disseminate information about the local government. Also, the local governments reached out to the citizenry through village meetings to pass information across to the citizenry in the village areas. From Figure 2, the five most acceptable means of communication or information channels to reach the citizens were verbal, the radio, the school, the traditional rulers, and the churches. So, these five channels should be encouraged to be maximized for effective dissemination of any type of information to the citizenry especially local government financial information.

The means through which the local government administrators reached the citizens with the required information is also the means through which the citizens get in contact with them. Table 3 indicated these channels of communication. The data revealed in the figure implied that, although the citizenry of the various local governments had many means through which they communicated their desires, intentions, and preferences to the local government administrators for consideration and consequent implementation, the result was not impressive. Though this conforms to IFLA's (1995) advice and emphasized by Fayose (1997), that information provision must comply with local circumstances, it is not appropriate because these people are controlled by the government. This result agrees with Martin (2003) who confirmed that traditional leaders, local leaders, and community groups should be used in information dissemination to the villagers, thereby confirming oral communication as the best medium of communication to the rural dwellers.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Major Findings: Citizens communicate with their local governments through their councillors, traditional rulers, and village leaders during village meetings. These are their major source of the local governments' information. Other media, like the radio, were mildly used. The sources of local governments' information were also the channels of its communication. The channels of communication were not desirable because they were people who benefit from the government and therefore do the wish of the governments and not the citizens'.

Recommendations: From the findings of the study, the following recommendations have become necessary. Sources of information on local government activities were numerous but the availability of information to the citizens has been limited. Therefore, it is recommended that the local governments increase the flow of information to their citizens. The five major information dissemination methods preferred by the respondents - village leaders, traditional rulers, verbally through friends, schools, and churches/mosques – should be effectively utilized. Information centres should be created in strategic places by the local governments for the use of the citizens. There should be information centres (even if it is a-one room shop) in big market places, village town halls, vicinity of government facilities, social or health facilities, like maternity, school, stadium, etc. and where there are big churches or mosques. As of a matter of necessity, every local government area should have, at least, one radio station, fully hosted by the local government, from where citizens could hear about what the local government is doing, including information about local government finances. This could also provide job for the citizens. The channels through which information reaches the citizens are mediated and therefore not quite reliable because the councillors, the traditional rulers, and community groups are government appointed officials who may dance to the tune of their employers who they pay allegiance to. So citizens should select their representatives from among them. Village youth leaders and women leaders should be involved in information dissemination in the localities. The councillors and traditional rulers should allow them to get first hand information from the local governments. They citizens relate very cordially with them and respect and obey them often. Private sector media houses should be allowed access to local government activities and be allowed to disseminate any information that would be useful to the citizens and deter the local government from corrupt practices.

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