

Information for Development: Unveiling the Views of Ghanaians on Community Information Centers as Mass Communication Tools

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ABSTRACT

Access to meaningful information is essential for achieving sustainable development. This research explored the views of Ghanaians on Community Information Centers (CICs) as critical mass communication tools for development, using La-Nkwantanang Madina Municipality, Greater Accra Region as a case. Anchored on the Uses and Gratification and Diffusion of Innovation theories, this sequential-explanatory mixed-method study solicited views from inhabitants, operators of CICs and other stakeholders in the Municipality who constituted the target population. Quota, convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 153 participants with questionnaires, interview schedule and interview guide as research instruments. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively whilst content analysis was conducted for the qualitative data. The study found that CICs were critical information tools for facilitating development in the Municipality since respondents mostly relied on them for information about community events, government announcements, health, education and religious programs. Information the Centers provided was perceived as generally relevant, reliable, clear, timely, and responsive to the needs of the community members. Respondents were generally satisfied with the kind of information CICs in the Municipality provided to them. However, inadequate funding, language barrier, high operational cost, low community support, low technology, and increased competition from mainstream media were challenges hindering the operations of the Centers. The study concluded that despite the challenges CICs face in the Municipality, they are vital mass communication tools for facilitating meaningful development. Operators of CICs in the Municipality should find innovative ways of mobilizing resources to promote their activities including collaboration with corporate bodies.

Keywords: Community Information Centers, Development, Information for Development, Mass Communication, Uses and Gratification Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Achieving meaningful development for all citizens of the world remains critical on the agendas of many nations. In fulfilling this noble agenda, nations strive to institute policies and programs to improve the lives of their citizens (Odoom et al., 2022; Sen, 2012; Todaro & Smith, 2006). However, efforts to promote meaningful development will remain incomplete without access to information. Thus, access to information is an essential driving force for promoting development at all levels. Throughout the world, citizens need information to take critical decisions not only about themselves but also about their society. Information is important to every human activity; its value in development is an issue which has attracted extensive discussions (Ndinge & Kadodo, 2014). Meaningful information is vital for empowering individuals and for promoting transparency and accountability of state agencies in the interest of good governance and democratic development. In essence, inadequate or unequal access to information contributes to poor decisions, low transparency and poor accountability, which ultimately stifles development (Leitner, 2019).

In today's interconnected world, effective mass communication is crucial for disseminating information, fostering social cohesion, and empowering communities (Aruma, 2018; Chitkoor, 2019). An essential part of mass

communication mechanism has been the adoption of community information service. Historically, community information service can be traced to the efforts to overcome crises encountered by the world during the Second World War. Following the war, there was the need for information on emergency regulations, missing relatives, evacuation and separation of family members, etc. (Krishnamurthy et al., 2012). Within this context, the need to provide appropriate information to the queries of the people within various neighborhoods or communities at the time became apparent. Following the Second World War, community information services became a notable part of the public library system in what is termed as *Community Information Centers*. As a vital part of society, community information centers (CICs) enable people and communities to solve their daily problems and participate in democratic governance. CICs help to emphasize the needs of the marginalized and the excluded in society by offering them access to information and assistance (Krishnamurthy et al., 2012). According to UNESCO (2005), CIC as a concept became a dominant issue around the 1970s to process and disseminate information in response to community needs rather than mere publications.

In the views of Harris (2004), CICs help to increase access to information and knowledge sharing for the attainment of socio-economic development. The centers enable people in specific geographical areas, particularly the excluded and those in lower socio-economic groups, to both individually and collectively address their problems in diverse aspects including education, housing, employment, family and personal matters, civil rights, house-hold finance, etc. (Krishnamurthy et al., 2012; Sarada, 1999). The centers have emerged as valuable platforms for providing access to information and promoting two-way communication between authorities and the public (Agwuna & Enweani, 2019). CICs play a major role in the development of communities by helping community members to find information on subjects of interest to them and to take part in learning activities; discuss and share knowledge, information and concerns with extension and other community workers, planners and administrators (Kibat, cited in Roziya et al., 2011; Krishnamurthy et al., 2012).

Moreover, CICs help community members to find materials to improve their literacy and numeric skills; meet to organize and work together on community projects; use equipment to produce their own information materials; and enjoy cultural and leisure activities (Kibat, cited in Roziya et al., 2011; Krishnamurthy et al., 2012). Again, CICs serve as hubs that facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the public. These centers act as mediators, offering a diverse range of resources and services to meet the informational needs of communities (Agwuna & Enweani, 2019; Ndinde & Kadodo, 2014). By utilizing various communication channels such as digital displays, interactive kiosks, and trained staff, CICs can effectively disseminate vital information and new ideas to a wide audience in line with the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 1995, 2003).

Governments, communities, development agencies and individuals especially in Africa have invested in many kinds of CICs as a critical mass communication tool for promoting development (Ibrahim, 2018; Oppong-Tawiah, 2010). According to Oppong-Tawiah (2010), CICs are now the commonest initiative in developing countries especially in Africa. Other scholars have confirmed the relevance of CICs to the development of African nations. For example, Adewusi (2013) argued that CICs impact on development in rural Nigeria. Similarly, Ndinde and Kadodo's (2014) highlighted the role played by of CICs in development in Zimbabwe. Again, Agwuna and Enweani (2018) contended that CICs can be effective in providing health information to rural women in Nigeria. In Ghana, Obeng-Fosu (2021) submitted that CICs are critical community development. However, there is limited research on the extent to which information centers effectively facilitate mass communication in urban environments.

Again, an examination of the literature (Agwuna & Enweani, 2019; Apata & Ogunrewo, 2010; Asenso-Okyere & Mekonnen, 2012; Breitenbach, 2013; Chitkoor, 2019; El-Kalash et al., 2016; Kapondera & Namusanya, 2016; Krishnamurthy et al., 2012; Ndinde, 2014; Ndinde & Kadodo, 2014; Obeng-Fosu, 2021; Zabed et al., 1997) suggests that most of the research works on CICs focused on rural communities, with very little attention on urban settings. Very few scholars including Ibrahim (2018) have focused on CICs in the urban centers. Again, most scholars appear to focus on looking at CICs mainly from qualitative research perspective without much concentration on quantitative research approaches. This suggests that knowledge and methodological gaps exist on CICs especially in the context of the urban settings. This position finds validation in the works of scholars (Dorji, 2019; Ibrahim, 2018). According to Dorji (2019), more in-depth studies need to be conducted on CICs because of their vital role to the development of nations. In support of Dorji's (2019) view, Ibrahim (2018) called for more studies on CICs with some focus on quantitative methods.

The government of Ghana in partnership with the Indian government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), officially launched the first batch of CICs in the country in 2005 (Ghana Integrated Fund for Electronic Communication, 2013). As a hybrid model, the CICs in Ghana are expected to work as a non-profit community resource centers and for-profit telecenters. Among others, the CICs provide ICTs access to underprivileged communities mainly to empower inhabitants of marginalized communities in Ghana (Ghana

Integrated Fund for Electronic Communication, 2013) and support economic activities in rural areas through the provision of information to people. The CICs therefore serve as strategic foundation for building a functional ICT framework for national development. The centers also create ICT awareness in communities, provide ICT training to enhance human resource base of communities and promote all e-governance projects of the Government of Ghana through partnership with Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (Abissath, 2007).

Relevant information and effective communication channels help to promote public awareness of programs, policies and initiatives across all sectors and in all areas including the urban centers (Aruma, 2018; Buaku, 2017; Chitkoor, 2019; Odoom et al., 2023). It is apparent from the expressions of Mensah et al. (2023) that CICs are required to play a critical role in providing frequent and adequate information to improve public awareness and public support towards sustainable development in the urban centers. Yet, there is limited research on the extent to which CICs facilitate mass communication in urban settings and how stakeholders including inhabitants, opinion leaders and operators of CICs perceive information centres (Dorji, 2019; Elahi, 2016; Ibrahim, 2018). According to Miles (2017), the issue of inadequate research on CICs from the perspective of the urban settings coupled with the low focus on quantitative and mixed-method research designs constitutes a critical gap which needs to be addressed. Thus, beyond addressing the methodological gaps, researchers need to conduct more studies on CICs from the perspective of the urban settings for a more balanced appreciation of the issues. The current study contends that urban areas of Ghana have and indeed continue to witness increasing number of CICs because of the potential CICs hold for promoting development. Clearly, more studies on CICs in urban areas in Ghana would significantly help in improving public awareness on issues such as education, health, sanitation, governance and security in the country. This is the rationale of the current study which focused on the La Nkwantanang-Madina Municipality (LNNM) as a case. The Municipality, which is situated in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, was chosen as an ideal setting for this study due to its dynamic demographic composition and rapid urbanization. It is a densely populated urban area known for its vibrant social fabric (LNNM Assembly, 2019). The findings of this study would offer valuable insights for enhancing the use of CICs as vital information tools for facilitating public engagement and sustainable development.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To ascertain the dominant forms of information inhabitants seek from the CICs in the Municipality.
- ii. To examine the level of satisfaction among the inhabitants, operators of CICs and other stakeholders with respect to the information provided by the CICs in the Municipality.
- iii. To explore the challenges CICs in the Municipality face.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What are the dominant forms of information inhabitants seek from the CICs in the Municipality?
- ii. How satisfied are the inhabitants, operators of CICs and other stakeholders with respect to the information provided by the CICs in the Municipality?
- iii. What challenges do CICs operating in the Municipality face?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Context

2.1.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), developed by Katz and Blumler, posits that individuals are active participants in their media consumption and seek specific gratifications to fulfil their needs. The UGT underscores that media consumption is an active process where people choose media sources that offer them gratification and fulfil their psychological and social needs (Blumler et al., 1974; Katz et al., 1974). The UGT helps researchers to appreciate the complex relationship between media and audiences. According to the theory, people utilize media to achieve five main forms of gratifications. They are cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Ruggiero, 2000). Cognitive gratification refers to the attainment of knowledge and information, whilst the affective gratification entails the emotional responses and entertainment obtained from media consumption. Also, personal integrative gratification pertains to the reinforcement of personal values and identity. Again, social integrative gratification refers to social interaction and connectedness, whilst tension release gratification involves media's ability to relieve stress and provide escapism (Ruggiero, 2000). Information centers are vital tools for providing gratification to people. Information centers can be effective based on the extent to which they fulfil the gratifications individuals seek. Factors such as accessibility, relevance of information, and user satisfaction contribute to the effectiveness of CICs (Palmgreen, 2016).

The UGT is relevant to this study because it helps to analyze how individuals in the Municipality utilize CICs to fulfil their needs and gratifications. However, this theory is not without criticisms. For instance, the theory is built on the certainty of people knowing their needs and gratifications. This assumed certainty is problematic because it is practically not possible for individuals to know all their needs and gratifications. This is largely because some of the needs and gratifications of people can be known by them only when they are using the media platforms. They may certainly not have thought about these needs and gratifications before (Elliott, 1974). Another key criticism of UGT is its heavy reliance on self-reported data. The theory assumes that individuals accurately report their media usage and motivations, but research has shown that people may not always be aware of their own motivations or may provide socially desirable responses (Blumler et al., 1974; Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz et al., 1974). Again, the theory fails to offer adequate explanations about the influence of social and cultural factors on media use. The theory focuses primarily on individual motivations and overlooks how social context, norms, and cultural values shape media choices and behaviors (Rogers, 1995). Thirdly, UGT tends to emphasize the active and goal-directed nature of media consumption, neglecting the passive aspects of media exposure and the unintended effects it may have on individuals. The theory assumes that individuals are always purposefully seeking gratifications, disregarding the potential for media to influence and shape attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors outside the conscious awareness of the audience (Palmgreen, 2016).

2.1.2 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory (DoIT), developed by Rogers (1962), provides a valuable framework for understanding the adoption and diffusion of new ideas, products, or technologies within a social system. The DoIT emphasizes the role of communication channels, interpersonal and community networks and social systems in facilitating the adoption of new ideas and technologies. The information centers in LNMM can be considered as innovations within the context of mass communication. These centers offer various services, including internet access, information resources, and training programs critical for development. Innovativeness, perceived benefits, compatibility with existing practices, social influence, and communication behavior are key factors influencing an individual's decision to adopt an innovation (Rogers, 1995, 2003).

Again, characteristics of new innovations such as relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability including CICs, can influence their adoption and effectiveness (Rogers, 2003). For instance, the relative advantage of CICs over traditional modes of communication, and the compatibility of their services with the needs and preferences of users in LNMM can enhance their adoption and utilization. The adoption and effectiveness of CICs also depend on the perceptions and attitudes of potential adopters within the Municipality (Rogers, 2003). Exploring the perceptions of residents, operators of CICs and other stakeholders in LNMM on information centers in the Municipality would help offer valuable insights into how to make these centers effective as mass communication tools for development.

2.2 Empirical Review

The value of information to development and the critical role of CICs in disseminating information to communities bring about development have been explored severally. For example, Gomez et al. (1999) established that CICs deliver educational information to communities by providing access to databases and receiving and posting information of general interest to local people. CICs provide information on government notices, outbreak of diseases, educational opportunities, weather information, and farm products. Adewusi (2013) published a study in Nigeria, exploring the impact of CICs on development in a rural community in Akoko North-West Local Government, Ondo State. Similarly, Ndinde and Kadodo's (2014) highlighted the role played by of CICs in development in Zimbabwe. Again, Agwuna and Enweani (2019) revealed the importance of CICs in effectively providing health information to rural women in Nigeria. Information centers play a crucial role in facilitating communication and disseminating information to communities. Adewusi (2013) found that information centers have the potential to foster overall community development, as they serve as a valuable resource for the community. According to Ndinde (2014), community-based information centers served as hubs for knowledge sharing, empowering individuals, and enhancing social and economic development.

Chitkoo (2029) highlighted the role of mass media, including information centers, in spreading knowledge and raising awareness about various development initiatives. Chitkoo (2019) concluded that information centers contribute to rural and urban development through effective communication strategies. Similarly, a study on CICs conducted by Apata and Ogunrewo (2010) in rural areas of Nigeria found that revealed that access to agricultural information, especially through radio and television, and traditional methods such local gatherings helped farmers to address their agricultural problems and led to an increase in crop yield. In their study, Garrison et al. (2012) found that

CICs can help to provide socio-economic services such as financial service, agricultural market price, entertainment, and civic engagement.

In Rwanda, Karara (2010) observed that CICs play a vital role in education by offering certificate courses to make their graduates compete in the county and beyond. A study in Ghana by Obeng-Fosu (2021) found that CICs played a crucial role in community development by providing access to information, promoting education, and facilitating economic activities. Aguna and Enweani (2019) explored the management of community information centers (CICs) and their effectiveness in providing health information to rural women. The study found that well-managed CICs facilitated access to health information, which positively impacted the health knowledge and behaviors of the rural women in the community. This suggests that information centers can be effective tools for disseminating vital health information to specific target groups. As already stated, apart from the over-concentration of the existing studies on the rural settings, there is very little focus on quantitative and mixed-method research approaches. In short, there are gaps in knowledge and methodology (Miles, 2017) which must engage the attention of researchers, hence the current study.

III. METHODOLOGY

A sequential-explanatory mixed-method research design was used for this study. Basically, this mixed-method design allowed the researchers to first collect and analyze quantitative data before the collection and analysis of the qualitative data (Guest, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The target population of the study was made up of inhabitants, operators of CICs and other stakeholders (e.g., opinion leaders, the Director of the Information Services Department and the Principal Civic Education Officer of NCCE) in the Municipality. A total of 153 respondents took part in the study. Quota sampling method was used to select 128 inhabitants in the LNMM. The researchers divided the Municipality into four subgroups, after which 32 inhabitants were selected from each subgroup. Again, convenience sampling method was used to select 20 operators of Information Centers and one opinion leader from the Municipality. Finally, purposive sampling method was used to select the Director of the Information Services Department and the Principal Civic Education Officer of NCCE at the Municipal Assembly due to the critical role they both play in information dissemination within the Municipality. The Director of the Information Services Department, the Principal Civic Education Officer of NCCE at the Municipal and the opinion leader constituted the key informants in this study.

Questionnaire, interview schedule and interview guide were used to collect data for the study. A set of questionnaires was used to collect data from operators of Information Centers and residents. Interview schedule was used for persons who could not read or write. The questionnaire was distributed electronically and in-person, depending on the preferences of the residents and operators who were willing to participate in the study. A key informant interview guide was used to obtain data from the Municipal Director of the Information Services Department, the Principal Civic Education Officer of NCCE at the LNMM Assembly and the opinion leader. Also, four operators of information centers (one from each of the subgroups) were interviewed. Data collection instruments were piloted on a small number of inhabitants and operators of CICs before the actual data was collected to ensure validity and reliability of the research instruments. The researchers employed descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to analyze the quantitative data obtained. Again, content analysis technique was used to analyze the qualitative data after transcribing the data. In line with the rules of sequential-explanatory mixed method research design, the researchers collected and analyzed the quantitative data, followed by the collection and analysis of the qualitative data. Thus, data obtained through the questionnaire and the interview schedule were collected and analyzed first before the collection and analysis of the data from the interview guides (Guest, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

Conducting research on information centers as a mass communication tool in urban Ghana necessitates careful attention to ethical considerations to ensure the study's integrity and fairness. These ethical dimensions are crucial not only for safeguarding participants' rights and well-being but also for upholding the credibility and validity of the research outcomes. Informed consent was obtained from study participants prior to data collection. Research participants were fully informed about the data usage and the methods to store the collected data. They were also informed of their rights to cease participation in the study without offering any explanation for doing so.

Finally, the study had some limitations. One, the results of this study cannot be generalized and apply to other settings because the Municipality has its own unique features. The demographics, socio-economic factors, cultural issues, and infrastructure of LNMM may differ from other urban areas in Ghana. Therefore, views on CICs as mass communication tools for development in other urban settings in Ghana or elsewhere may not be accurately represented by the current study's findings. Secondly, the study data may be subject to participants' bias. Because the study relied on participants' own perceptions, there is the possibility that responses might be influenced by the biases of the study

participants. Thus, participants might likely alter their responses to align with their own beliefs, rather than expressing their objective opinions and experiences. Despite these limitations, the results of this study are very useful not only for use in similar settings and contexts in Ghana and beyond, but also for expanding the existing knowledge on information centers especially from a mixed-method research perspective.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Demographic Features of Participants

The demographic features of the respondents are presented below (Table 1).

4.1.1 Sex Distribution of Respondents

Based on the data presented in Table 1, it is clear that among the 150 respondents surveyed, males (52%) slightly outnumbered females (48%).

Table 1

Demographic Features of Respondents

| Sex | Frequency | Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Male | 78 | 52 |
| Female | 72 | 48 |
| Age | | |
| 18-25 | 25 | 16.7 |
| 26-35 | 45 | 30.0 |
| 36-45 | 44 | 29.3 |
| 46-55 | 23 | 15.3 |
| 56-and-above | 13 | 8.7 |
| Educational level | | |
| No formal education | 37 | 24.7 |
| Basic education | 23 | 15.3 |
| Secondary education | 30 | 20.0 |
| Tertiary education | 60 | 40 |

4.1.2 Age of Respondents

From Table 1, it is evident that the 26-35-year-old group constituted 30% out of the respondents, whilst 29.3% were within the 36-45-year-old group. On the other hand, the 56-and-above age group constituted the lowest level of participants (8.7%) in the survey. Majority (59.3%) of the respondents were between 26 and 45 years.

4.1.3 Educational background

Table 1 displays results on the educational qualifications of the respondents. The results indicate that a considerable (40%) portion of the respondents had completed tertiary education. On the other hand, 24.7% of them had no formal education. Clearly, 60% of the respondents had education not below the level of secondary education.

4.2 Ascertaining the Dominant Forms of Information Inhabitants seek from the CICs in the Municipality

The first research objective focused on the dominant trends in information-seeking behaviors of respondents. It basically examined the dominant forms of information respondents expected the CICs in the Municipality to focus on. To answer this question, the researchers first asked respondents to indicate whether they listened to CICs in the Municipality. All of them admitted that they listened to the information centers within their areas. Also, the researchers found from the respondents if they considered the CICs as useful. Table 2 shows that many (98%) of the respondents said the CICs in the Municipality were useful to their diverse information needs, while a few (2%) of them said that the CICs were not useful to their needs.



Table 2

Usefulness of Information Centers to the Varied Information Needs of Respondents

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------|-----------|---------|
| Yes | 147 | 98.0 |
| No | 3 | 2.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

Again, the researchers examined the frequency with which respondents utilized CICs in the Municipality. It was found that the majority (63.3%) of respondents utilized Information Centers daily whilst 14% of them used the Centers weekly, and only 8.0% of respondents used the Centers every month (Table 3).

Table 3

Frequency of Utilization of Community Information Centers

| Frequency | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Daily | 95 | 63.3 |
| Weekly | 21 | 14.0 |
| Monthly | 12 | 8.0 |
| Rarely | 10 | 6.7 |
| Never | 12 | 8.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

4.2.1 Dominant Issues Respondents Expect the CICs to Focus on in the Area

Additionally, Table 4 illustrates the predominant trends in information-seeking behaviors among respondents. About 89% of them predominantly relied on the Centers for information about community programs and initiatives whereas information about government announcements emerged as second followed by health (74.7%) and educational information (74.7%) in Madina. Religious information was ranked fourth whilst local news and events came 6th. Thus, respondents largely relied on the CICs for information about community programs and initiatives, governmental, health, educational issues and religious programs.

Table 4

Dominant Forms of Information Usually Sought from the Information Centers

| Type | Frequency | Percentage | Rank |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Local news and events | 92 | 61.3% | 6 th |
| Health information | 112 | 74.7% | 3 rd |
| Educational information | 112 | 74.7% | 3 rd |
| Government announcements | 120 | 80.0% | 2 nd |
| Community programs and initiatives | 134 | 89.3% | 1 st |
| Religious information | 105 | 70.0% | 4 th |
| Water and sanitation information | 102 | 68.0% | 5 th |
| Others | 89 | 59.3% | 7 th |

The qualitative results showed that inhabitants relied on the CICs for various forms of information which can promote development in the area. The Centers were perceived as playing a critical role in enhancing access to information on community programs, government announcements, health and educational issues in the area. One key informant explained, “Inhabitants often rely on the Centers for information on community events, government announcements and health programs. again, some religious messages including preaching are shared via the Centers.” Another informant stated, “Information centers here are used to provide local news and information on local events.” The CICs operators who were interviewed said, “by providing alternative sources of accessing information on community programs and initiatives, and government announcements, the Centers help to alleviate the struggle citizens would go through to access such information.” One operator stated, “The Centers help inhabitants to obtain easy access to information on community programs and initiatives and government news. They easily obtain information on local issues, government news and educational issues through the Centers”.

Another operator commented, “You know that Ghanaians are very religious. They don’t joke with religious messages. Many of the inhabitants often receive religious messages by listening to the Centers.” Other operators of CICs said, “Inhabitants rely on the Centers for various forms of health information.” All the participants agreed that the information provided by the Centers was very helpful to community members as, “It helps to reduce associated



costs, risks and time constraints”. Other operators of the information centers stated that the Centers help to facilitate community engagement and responsiveness. They added that the Information Centers have proven to be effective in addressing the information-seeking behaviors of inhabitants in the Municipality. One of the CICs operators emphasized, “inhabitants often rely on the centers for diverse forms of information. Some inhabitants seek information on missing items in the area from the centers. The centers help in facilitating the prompt reporting of missing items. Such information dissemination leads to rapid responses from the local community.” Another operator stated, “There are various forms of interactions which go on between the Centers and community members. These interactions showcase the tangible benefits of the CICs in fostering communication, community cohesion, and efficient resource utilization within La-Nkwantang Madina Municipal.” Overall, the Centers help to address the information needs of inhabitants which enhance community welfare and connectivity which are critical for development.

4.3 Level of Satisfaction among the Inhabitants, Operators of CICs and other Stakeholders with respect to the Information provided by the CICs in the Municipality

Having established that respondents frequently listened to and utilized the CICs to meet their diverse information needs, the researchers further examined respondents’ level of satisfaction with the information provided by the Centers. Issues examined include relevance of information, reliability of information, credibility of information, and accuracy of information. Other indicators used were clarity of information, timeliness of information, and responsiveness of information as presented below.

4.3.1 Relevance of information

Table 5 displays insights from respondents regarding the relevance of information received from the CICs. About 53% of respondents indicated that they find the information to be moderately relevant, whereas 16% rated the information as "very relevant", with just 4.7% of them expressed dissatisfaction with the relevance of the information the Centers provided. Many (69.3%) of the respondents rated the information they received as generally relevant.

Table 5
Relevance of Information

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very relevant | 24 | 16.0 |
| Moderately relevant | 80 | 53.3 |
| Less relevant | 39 | 26.0 |
| Not relevant | 7 | 4.7 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

4.3.2 Reliability of Information Disseminated through the Information Centers

Based on Table 6, it is clear that 44.7% of the respondents considered information from the Centers to be moderately reliable, whilst 10.7% said the information was not reliable. Furthermore, most (67.4%) of the respondents rated the information they received as generally reliable.

Table 6:
Reliability of Information Received from Information Centers

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very reliable | 34 | 22.7 |
| Moderately reliable | 67 | 44.7 |
| Less reliable | 33 | 22.0 |
| Not reliable | 16 | 10.7 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

4.3.3 Accuracy of Information

On accuracy of information, Table 7 shows that 68% of the respondents perceived it as generally accurate, with 22% believing it was less accurate. Also, 20% of the respondents found the information they received to be inaccurate.

Table 7*Accuracy of Information Provided by the Centers*

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very Accurate | 22 | 14.7 |
| Moderately accurate | 65 | 43.3 |
| Less accurate | 33 | 22.0 |
| Not accurate | 30 | 20.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

4.3.4 Clarity of Information

It is evident in Table 18 nearly half of the surveyed population (45.3%) expressed that the messages conveyed through Information Centers are moderately clear whilst 18% saw them to be very clear, with a few of them (14%) stating the messages lacked clarity. It is vital to state that many (63.3%) of the respondents believed the messages they received from the Information Centers were clear.

Table 8*Clarity of Information*

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very clear | 27 | 18.0 |
| Moderately clear | 68 | 45.3 |
| Less clear | 34 | 22.7 |
| Not clear | 21 | 14.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

4.3.5 Adequacy of Information

Table 9 reveals insights about the perceived adequacy of information obtained from the CICs. About 43% of the respondents found the information from the Centers as adequate, 20% expressed doubts about the adequacy of the information they received, while 14.7% of the respondents found the information to be very adequate. Most (68%) of the respondents said the information they received from the Centers was generally adequate.

Table 9*Adequacy of Information*

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very adequate | 22 | 14.7 |
| Moderately adequate | 65 | 43.3 |
| Somewhat adequate | 33 | 22.0 |
| Not adequate | 30 | 20.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

4.3.6 Timeliness of Information

From Table 10, approximately 53% of the respondents indicated that the information they received was moderately timely and 16% rated the information as very timely. Also, 26% of the respondents characterized the information as less timely. In all, many (68.3%) stating that the information they received was generally timely whilst 4.7% said it was not timely.

Table 10*Timeliness of Information*

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very timely | 24 | 16.0 |
| Moderately timely | 80 | 53.3 |
| Less timely | 39 | 26.0 |
| Not timely | 7 | 4.7 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |



4.3.7 Responsiveness of Information Disseminated through Information Centers

On responsiveness of the information received, 44.7% of the respondents said it was moderately responsive, 22.0% said the information from the Centers was less responsive whilst 10.7% believed it was not responsive. However, most (67.4%) of the respondents perceived the information as responsive (Table 11).

Table 11

Responsiveness of Information Received from the Information Centers

| Response | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very responsive | 34 | 22.7 |
| Moderately responsive | 67 | 44.7 |
| Less responsive | 33 | 22.0 |
| Not responsive | 16 | 10.7 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

4.3.8 Overall Satisfaction with Information Provided by the Centers

On the overall satisfaction with the information the Centers provided, 66.7% of the respondents stated they were generally satisfied, whilst 24% indicated that they were not satisfied. Thus, many (66.7%) respondents were generally satisfied with the kind of information the Information Centers disseminated to the inhabitants but 24% were not satisfied (Table 12).

Table 12

Satisfaction with the Relevance of the Information Provided by the Centers

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|
| Very satisfied | 30 | 20.0 |
| Moderately satisfied | 70 | 46.7 |
| Less satisfied | 14 | 9.3 |
| Not satisfied | 36 | 24.0 |
| Total | 150 | 100.0 |

The results from the interviews revealed that the Centers generally provided satisfactory information to the inhabitants in the Municipality. Participants admitted that the information provided by the Centers was relevant, reliable, accurate, and clear. The information provided by the Centers was also adequate, timely, responsive and less costly. One informant commented, “The Centers provide very relevant and reliable pieces of information to the community. The information they provide is very relevant and useful to the various information needs of the community.” Another informant expressed, “The CICs provide clear and accurate messages to the inhabitants. Often the Centers try to ensure that information they give is authentic and clear.” The operators of CICs generally agreed with the key informants. One operator stated, ‘Community members obtain timely information from the Centers. The messages are also generally adequate and timely.’ Though the key informants believed community members get generally good information from the Centers not all of them utilized the Centers as expected. The informants remarked, "Effective communication is influenced by various factors, among which information plays a significant role. Community members typically rely on CICs but some factors contribute to the reluctance of people to utilize these Centers including insufficient number of these centers." The operators who were interviewed largely held a similar view. The interviews revealed that more CICs were needed in the Municipality. Participants called for more information centers to be strategically located throughout the Municipality to improve access to and increased utilization of information centers. Establishing more information centers within the area, “would facilitate easier information access, thereby enhancing information utilization."

4.4 Challenges Community Information Centers in the Municipality face

The study also explored the challenges faced by the CICs in the area. In addressing this objective, data was obtained from only the operators of the Centers (Table 13). This is because they operated the Centers and were deemed to be the right persons to provide valid information on the challenges they faced. The respondents ranked inadequate funds (95.3%) as the highest challenge the CICs face, followed by language barrier (83.3%), and high operational cost (89.3%). Other challenges mentioned were increased competition from mainstream media (83.3%), poor community support (77.3%), inadequate infrastructure (75.3%), and poor technology (77.3%).

Table 13*Challenges Faced by the Information Centers*

| Challenge | Percentage | Rank |
|---|------------|-----------------|
| Inadequate funds | 95.3% | 1 st |
| Language barrier | 93.3% | 2 nd |
| High operational cost | 89.3% | 3 rd |
| Poor technological capacity | 73.3% | 7 th |
| Low community interest | 37.3 | 9 th |
| Power outages | 56.4% | 8 th |
| Poor community support | 77.3% | 5 th |
| Inadequate infrastructure | 75.3% | 6 th |
| Increased competition from mainstream media | 83.3% | 4 th |

Further data obtained through the qualitative methods showed that the Information Centers faced various challenges. All the interviewees agreed that CICs face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to efficiently disseminate information. Challenges identified include inadequate funds, high operational cost and power outages. One informant stated, “These challenges disrupt information distribution during critical moments.” Another informant explained, “Insufficient funding is a primary concern for CICs’ operators. Securing adequate financial resources is vital for sustaining their operations but this has always been very difficult for them”. The operators of CICs who were interviewed supported the views of the key informants. The interviewees added that the diversity of languages in the area poses substantial challenge to the Centers. Some interviewees explained further, “This Municipality is very diverse in terms of its linguistic landscape. This necessitates the adoption of multiple languages by the Centers to be able to reach a broader audience.” Another operator said, “Language barrier impedes content creation, translation efforts, and interpretation services.” The interviewees stated that the language barrier contributes to miscommunication or the exclusion of some audience.

High operational cost also hampered the operations of the CICs. The operators explained that limited funds impede their work due to competing priorities which, “often leave CICs struggling to fulfil their operational requirements.” They added, “Expenses including utilities, salaries, rent and maintenance constitute a major financial burden to the Centers often compounded by high costs of living and doing business in Ghana.” The operators stated the sustainability of many CICs in the Municipality is threatened due to “Insufficient resources.” The situation stifles the ability of CICs to invest in necessary upgrades, ultimately impacting the Centers’ ability to serve the citizens effectively.

Poor technology also hinders the operations of the Centers. An informant stated, “keeping up to date technology is a key challenge the Centers face.” One operator added, “Many of the Centers struggle to adopt the most current technology for their operations due to inadequate funds”. Other informants and operators admitted, “Many of the Centers still rely on outdated equipment, inadequate internet connectivity, and poor digital tools which hamper their capacity to deliver modern communication services.” Thus, technological gap does not only inhibit the efficiency of information dissemination in the area but also limit the variety of communication channels available to effectively engage the urban populace. Moreover, poor community support hampers the operations of the CICs. The operators said, “Community members in the area do not want to support our activities even though they are interested in what we do.” Finally, the situation is compounded by increasing competition from the mainstream media and social media platforms. Television, radio and online news sources often compete for audiences’ attention in the area, offering diverse content and immediate access to information.

4.5 Discussions

The study revealed that most of the respondents had attained educational qualification not below the secondary level. Garrido and Wyber (2019) have argued that education is key to access to information. People with low level of education stand the risk of being denied access to meaningful information. Again, the study showed that all the respondents were listeners of the information centers in the Municipality because they considered the Centers as useful to their diverse information needs. Also, most of the respondents utilized CICs daily. That, the Centers offered easy alternative access to information to the respondents. These centers are seen as pivotal platforms which enable individuals to stay abreast of local events and developments, which ultimately underscores the vital role of CICs in community cohesion and awareness. This aligns with Ansu-Kyeremeh’s (1998) argument which emphasized that communication is a shared experience. The results also affirm previous studies (Agwuna & Enweani, 2019; Ndinde, 2014) which showed the value of CICs to the informational needs of people. The results further validate Leitner’s (2019) submission that access to information is very essential to individuals.

Again, respondents mostly relied on the CICs for information about community programs and initiatives, and government announcements. The results reinforce the core value of information centers in gathering, preparing, and distributing information to the local people (Ofori-Birikorang & Aggrey, 2018). Similarly, the findings converge with UNESCO (2012) which identified community development initiatives as a vital function of CICs.

Furthermore, many respondents relied on the Centers for information on educational issues. This revelation mirrors observations by scholars (Gomez et al., 1999; Karara, 2010) which stated that CICs provide information on educational services and opportunities to the local people. Again, the result on the role of CICs in education coincides with Obeng-Fosu (2021) who observed that information centers help to provide information on educational issues. The finding on educational information also resonates with the position of UNESCO (2012) which considers education as one of the core functions of CICs.

More so, most respondents relied on the Centers for health-related information. In the context of development programs such as health initiatives, inclusive communication strategies are paramount to ensuring that every member of the community is engaged and informed. An important observation is that the situation in the Municipality which is an urban center is similar to what exists in rural areas of the country. Mass media, including information centers play a critical role in spreading knowledge and raising awareness about various health issues (Anyaku & Nwosu, 2016; Chitkoor, 2019; Harris, 2004). The result on health further agrees with Aguna and Enweani (2019) who found that information centers are generally effective in providing health information to people. The findings on the information-seeking behaviors of respondents generally reinforce the practical relevance of the Uses and Gratification theory. The different issues covered by the information centers would fulfil the gratifications sought by inhabitants in the Municipality (Palmgreen, 2016).

Also, many respondents found the information provided by the Centers to be generally relevant and reliable. This result agrees with literature (El-Kalash et al., 2016) which observed that CICs need to provide reliable and timely information to meet the satisfaction of people. Besides, most of the respondents perceived the information provided by the Centers as generally accurate and clear. Moreover, the study indicated that information provided by the Centers was generally adequate, timely, and responsive to the needs of the respondents. Overall, respondents were generally satisfied with the kind of information the CICs disseminated to them. This revelation is especially relevant because, according to Leitner (2019), access to information promotes empowerment, effective policy delivery and accountability of state agencies.

Though CICs in the Municipality faced various challenges, inadequate funding was ranked high on the list of the challenges coupled with power outages. These findings align with Obeng-Fosu (2021) who found that inadequate funding and power outages are common challenges faced by CICs in Ghana. What is revealing is that the funding gap in the urban settings is very much like what pertains in the rural areas. According to Mtega and Ronald (2013), power outages hindered the operations of information centers. Beyond funding gaps and power outages, the current study established that language barrier and high operational cost appear to threaten the effectiveness of the Centers in the Municipality. The challenges faced by the CICs in the Municipality constitute a challenge to the practical value of the diffusion of innovation theory. The theory underscores the critical role of communication channels such as information centers in ensuring effective adoption of new information and ideas needed to build societies (Rogers, 1995, 2003).

Besides, insufficient resources, increased competition from mainstream media and poor technology hinder the sustainability of the Centers in the area. Dorji (2019) maintained that inadequate resource threatens the effectiveness of information centers. CICs struggle to compete with mainstream media and social networking platforms, which dominate the digital age. To remain relevant, they must adapt strategies which will help them to navigate this dynamic media landscape effectively and showcase their unique value proposition. The finding on poor technology affirms earlier research by Ibrahim (2018) who found that poor technology hampers the operations of CICs in Ghana. Clearly, CICs in the Municipality face a plethora number of challenges which could inhibit their full operations. The situation in the Municipality is problematic because a fully operational CIC must, among others, have the physical building itself with power supply and telephone facilities; a Local Area Network with not less than five workstations often supplied by the country office of the UNDP; one server; one switch; one printer; and one scanner (Akakpo, 2008; UNDP, 2009).

Finally, however, the finding on low community interest contradicts a revelation by Baffour et al. (2023) which indicated that communities have low interest in CICs. Baffour et al. (2023) attributed the low interest of communities in CICs to the over-concentration of information centers on the selling of herbal medicines.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

It can be concluded that the participants listen to the information centers within the Municipality because they consider the Centers as useful to their diverse information needs. Again, the participants utilize information centers daily to access information about community programs and initiatives, government announcements, health and educational information. Also, respondents rely on the Centers for religious messages and programs. Respondents mostly find the information the Centers provide as generally relevant and reliable. Besides, most respondents perceive the information the Centers provide as generally accurate, clear, adequate, timely, and responsive to their needs. Furthermore, respondents are generally satisfied with the kind of information the Information Centers disseminate to them. Nonetheless, the CICs in the Municipality face challenges including inadequate funds, language barrier, high operational cost and increased competition from the mainstream media. Other challenges are poor community support, inadequate infrastructure, and poor technology. Despite these challenges, community members show interest in the operations of the information centers in the Municipality. Finally, it can be concluded that the situation of information centers in the LNMM, which is an urban center, may be similar to what pertains in rural areas of Ghana. Despite the challenges they face in the LNMM, CICs equally contribute to development service delivery through the vital information they provide.

5.2 Recommendations

As a way of recommendation, operators of CICs in the Municipality are encouraged to put in place measures to improve the quality and diversity of information they disseminate through regular needs assessments and feedback from inhabitants and other stakeholders in the Municipality. Operators of CICs need to institute measures aimed at increasing community awareness, building trust in the information provided, and showcasing the unique value of information centers in enhancing community engagement and securing necessary resources for sustained growth. They also need to devise measures to enhance the accessibility of information centers by strategically locating them within the Municipality and implementing mobile outreach initiatives. Inhabitants are encouraged to advocate for the establishment of additional information centers at strategic locations within the Municipality to improve information accessibility and utilization. The Ministry of Information should liaise with the Municipal Assembly and the NCCE to provide periodic capacity building programs for operators of information centers to enhance their communication skills and technological literacy. Inhabitants and corporate bodies in the Municipality are encouraged to support the Centers in kind and in cash to enable the Centers to continue to provide reliable, relevant and accurate information. There should be constant partnerships and collaboration between information centers, local authorities, and other stakeholders including corporate bodies and opinion leaders to leverage resources and expertise in addressing common challenges. Finally, to remain relevant and competitive, CICs in the Municipality need to adopt digital communication strategies which will enable them to navigate the dynamic media landscape effectively.

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