STRENGTHENING WOMEN FARMERS’ INFORMATION NETWORKS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

The most urgent priority in Africa is to ensure food and nutrition security for the rapidly growing population. Food production on the continent depends mainly on millions of small-scale women farmers. Yet, these women find it difficult to access information they need for increasing production and marketing due to handicaps such as illiteracy, distance from information centres, cultural inhibitions, domestic responsibilities etc. The aim of this paper is to discuss the contribution that librarians can and should make to strengthen women farmers’ networks with information for agricultural production and marketing. The assumption is that if librarians supported small-scale women farmers to access vital agricultural information, it is likely that women would use information to enhance production levels and quality of produce. This would in turn make it easy for them to market their produce thereby addressing food and nutrition deficiencies. The essence is that increased agricultural production is one way of attempting to contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal One, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. The paper recommends that librarians should help women develop information competencies necessary for accessing, analyzing, using and communicating information and to develop or identify and apply information access tools and systems and services that they see can meet women farmers’ information needs. Librarians should be able to identify, target and work with such networks as a strategy for disseminating information to women farmers at the village level. Tapping into these networks it is assumed, can cause women’s move towards increased information seeking and retrieval.

Introduction

Information networks have become established methods of sharing information in and among organizations and communities in formal and informal ways. Networks have grown out of the members’ interest in making change to happen. It is a development communication strategy in which an information service becomes more valuable as more people access and use it, thereby encouraging increasing numbers of adopters. The paper is motivated by two basic facts that ag-
Agriculture is the main economic mainstay in most African countries with about 70-80 percent of the population engaged in it. It is also because African women's fundamental contributions in their households, food production systems and national economies are increasingly acknowledged, within Africa and by the international community. This is due, in no small part, to African women’s own energetic efforts to organize, articulate their concerns and make their voices heard (Takyiwaa, 1998). The paper aims to discuss the contribution that librarians can make to strengthen and support women farmers’ networks with information so that increased agricultural production is realized. Food production in the continent depends mainly on millions of small-scale women farmers.

A situational analysis of the information environment in Africa reveals that small-scale women farmers find it difficult to access information they need for increasing production. Women living in rural areas are at a particular disadvantage in the digital world facing barriers related to both gender and location. Given their central role in the agricultural economy, women often have too much work and too little time to become familiar with these new technologies. And with their special responsibilities for children and the elderly, women typically cannot migrate as easily as men to towns and cities where training in the new technologies is more available. Cultural attitudes also prevent women from visiting public access points (libraries) frequented by men in addition to generally lower levels of education and less political and economic power than their male counterparts that limits women ability to enter the new world of ICTs. Added to this is the lack of ICT materials in local languages (Shore: 2002). It is further observed that the environment under which women operate is not adequately supportive for them to acquire information and document their experiences. The majority of women in Africa are illiterate or semi-illiterate and poor. Only 47 percent of women are literate on the continent (UN, 2006). Many a time women do not have time to look for information because they are heavily involved in family chores (Ikoja-Odongo, 2002). Married women have even more problems. Their movements are often restricted by their spouses who limit their participation in information based activities outside their homes, thinking that seminars/workshops are platforms for women to gossip and promiscuity. Many women are also disadvantaged by lack of appropriate information materials in local languages, absence of library and information services in rural areas in which case the oral culture predominates (Kigongo-Bukenya 1996:17). Ignorance of existing information services is also a barrier. The majority of them are not even aware of the information services that exist. This effectively amounts to women being poorly prepared and equipped to deal with using and managing information on a daily basis due to lack of abilities to locate relevant informa-
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Under such circumstances women rely on oral media and information sources which are also located near and far from their homesteads. These local means of accessing information are informal using informal channels such as relying on personal experience as prime source of information, contacting people who may know what they need to know; asking friends, relatives and neighbours, customers; listening and talking to other people and relying on social networks. This is how women networks come about and become more pronounced in agriculture. It is a movement away from isolation into the mainstream of development ideas. The unfortunate thing about informal networks is that almost everyone knows what the others know and in most cases information requires a lot of filtering to make it usable. Women farmers may not be able to do that. This is how librarians become relevant.

Attention is paid to librarians partly because there have been many complaints that librarians in Africa are less relevant in rural communities. The groundbreaking statement came from Mchombu who in 1982 raised the problem of librarianship of poverty and followed by Sturges (2001) who discussed the poverty of librarianship practiced in Africa. Both suggested a need for African librarianship and information work to become meaningful. African librarians needed introspection and opening up their minds to realities if change was to be achieved. Aina (2004:292) attributed this failure of library and information services to the practice of librarianship in Africa. He said librarianship followed in Africa was based on the western world, where the philosophy of practice is based on the concept of literacy. Only users with adequate literacy skills can benefit from them. Attention is also brought to bear on librarians partly because librarians understand that since the beginning of this century, information environment is greatly changing throughout the world (Ping Sun, 2002:210) and sub-Saharan Africa is no exception. One of the biggest challenges is the exponential growth of information. Information has become a valuable commodity affected by the knowledge-based economy. Individuals are facing multiple information choices within the escalating complexity of the environment. Information literacy therefore forms the basis that can lead to unlimited sources of knowledge. In this context even groups like rural women who cannot use libraries due to their illiteracy, inadequate access tools or other difficulties need information using alternative ways and should to be reached as a matter of their right. What is needed is creating conditions that enable women develop the attitudes and skills necessary to become knowledgeable producers and consumers (Adodo, 2006:116). Women farmers could perform miracles if intensive and sustained efforts were made to foster their “scientific education” at the village level and to involve them in decision-making on issues relating to food security and agricul-
tural development. African librarians should know how to help women in rural communities’ access information. Librarians are trained in knowing how to recognize the value of weaving information into activities. They know or supposed to know where to get the information women may need. They are the information processors and packagers who make information easier to access. They have the teaching and guidance function to assist women use information. They know better channels to deliver information to the women.

The declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2002) in September, 2000 was historic event in the world history since it brought about the commitment of 192 world leaders from developed and developing countries to set goals that their countries should aspire to attain for a better and just world. The MDGs, eight of them, represent a global partnership in which the developed countries pledged to support the developing countries and the developing countries pledging to do better in the ways they do development work in their countries. This paper makes the argument that by librarians recognizing, strengthening and helping women farmers’ information networks at community level, it will be easier for such women to access and/or receive information and innovations they need to increase agricultural production and consumption. By doing so, women would be contributing to the attainment of MDGs, a move that should see them ridding themselves out of poverty. MDGs may not actually be achievable by 2015 considering that half the journey has been done yet hunger and malnutrition still ravish the continent blocking development, investment and economic growth (RAIN, 2007:6). But what is important in my view is that the road map for development has been set and aspirations should remain our challenge.

Context and Justification

MDG 1 aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. It is the aspiration of this goal that by 2015 the proportion of people earning below one dollar a day should have been halved, prevalence of underweight children less than five years of age should have also been halved and the proportion of the population living below minimum level of dietary energy consumption should have also reduced as much as possible. These symptoms of deprivation are prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and relate directly to agriculture and food. To address the issues of nutrition African countries need to look critically at other MDGs that affect women’s health and education. Women need more literacy now than ever before and universal programmes of education should be consistently implemented.
Nutrition education is equally relevant for mothers if families have to emerge out of poor health and growth.

In sub Saharan Africa women, produce between 60 to 80 percent of the food (UN 2006). The food situation depends largely on decisions made by millions of small-scale women farmers who are the major food producers and transformers in Africa (Adodo, 2006). Yet, despite their contribution to food security, women farmers find it very difficult to access information or new technologies from outside their communities. Women farmers instead rely on networks they create and are close by their places of stay. We must agree that women are intelligent but in most cases remain quiet in many issues. To allow them gain confidence, information education would be the key for them to become information literate.

**Networks**

A network can be defined as a formal or informal cooperation among three or more organizations with common interest and common goal. It may involve various relationships, including relationships with other organizations, customers, stakeholders and communities (CTA, 2001:24). Networks have emerged out of the realization that, public libraries in Africa are largely a failure. They are few and are poorly resourced. Information in those that exist is largely irrelevant to the needs of women farmers. In the absence of any reliable information system, networks have come in to fill the void. NGOs have and are setting up resource centres or telecentres centres for documenting their experiences and providing information to communities. Examples are, WOUGNET in Uganda, Wendano Farmers Knowledge Club in Machakos Kenya, Arche d’Alliance, of Democratic Republic of Congo. All these NGOs operate resource centers as organs for collecting and disseminating agricultural information to women. Through such networks, women use different ways for accessing information. Some of them are discussed below.

**Talking model:** By far the most widespread of these models is the community wide aural model. Women from the historical perspective have been and still rely on the informal and internal community sources to access agricultural information. The preference in this model is receiving information directly by word of mouth and face-to-face, listening and talking with fellow women, socializing, relying on personal experience, seeking and receiving information from friends, relatives and neighbours. Privileged occasions when this model is applicable include: community meetings such as local council meetings, chatting in market places and when drawing water from wells, after prayer service (espe-
cially through Mothers Union meetings) discussions, during communal gardening, cultural ceremonies such as marriages, baptism etc. Using this model, women farmers rely mostly on tacit knowledge. A face-to-face mechanism that is growing in application is the farmer-field-schools. A field school is a group of around 20-30 farmers from the same locality who meet weekly for a whole cropping season. A facilitator guides the group and the learning is hands on. This non-formal environment encourages valuing and sharing of own knowledge (Braun et al, 2000). Experience with farmer field schools in East Africa show that farmers have been able to produce crops more effectively in addition to bringing about social change (FAO, 2001). Through this method, families without food security have also been reduced.

**Mass media:** Women are increasingly using radio and videos. With liberalization of most economies in Africa, markets are being flooded with cheap radios. Local video viewing halls are becoming popular in less privileged communities. These channels of accessing information provide opportunity for communication and are able to reach wide audiences quickly. Radio communication has been helped by the rapid growth in FM community radio stations in every country. In Uganda there are over 160 community radio stations operating. In these stations, phone in programmes (Question and Answer Services) are staged where community-based issues including those relating to agriculture are discussed. Local content is aired thus increasing interest and relevance in the subject matter, and the chance for communities to be heard (Rangi et al 2006:199). An example of community broadcasting that has been successful is Women’s Voices of Practical Action, formerly Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) in Zimbabwe. Tanzania has developed community television that uses batteries or solar instead of electricity to take information to remote areas of the country. Community Television is currently operating successfully in communities such as Orkonerei (Maasai), and Sengerema (Kapange, 2006:155).

**Agricultural Advisory Services:** Although the traditional approach of extension services is reducing in importance, government of Uganda introduced the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS). This approach has been successful in delivering demand-driven private-sector-led extension services such as information dissemination to women. NAADS is enabling subsistence farmers to access agricultural knowledge, information and improved technology. The success of NAADS lies in the power of farmers calling for the extension agents to serve them and thereafter extension agents go away.
Agricultural shows: Participating in local agricultural shows is the model that has worked effectively in many parts of Africa. Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), one of the most successful Ugandan NGO has been participating in many projects aimed at supporting women access agricultural information. In 2005 through its Rural Access Project, this NGO participated in an exhibition for northern Uganda under the theme “improving rural food security and household income through organic farming.” It exhibited publications in agriculture, food security, HIV/AIDS and posters on improved seed varieties. Its stall attracted a lot of interest since it was the only information stall in the agriculture sector and it won award for information and relevance and in disseminating information to rural women (Weddi, 2006).

Community theatre: Attending or participating in community theatre has been found to be effective way of disseminating information to women farmers. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, community theatre has been used as one of the ways of propagating information to people. As agricultural countries, information in languages of the local people is disseminated through theatre and people learn from it. Theatre is used mainly to identify farmers’ problems and videos to show how the problems can be solved. Video is chosen to illustrate problem solving because it shows realities and viewers can replicate the idea. The value of theatre is that it is community based. Actors or drama actors are members of their own community. Language is the same making interpretation of messages easily done and instantly.

Mobile cinema: Cinema has been a popular model for reaching rural communities with information for a long time. Mobile cinema is particularly the work of the Ministries of Agriculture, Health in liaison with Information Ministry, and NGOs. This medium consists of vans carrying video projectors and screens, with operator vans traveling on appointed basis from location to location, staging outdoor shows in the evenings free of charge. This model has enabled entertainment and agricultural information to reach rural populace including women. For instance mobile cinema by some NGOs in Uganda traverses villages with film directly relevant to farmers e.g. growing cotton, fishing and ploughing using oxen. The cinema was very successful.

Consultative fora: Another model that has been applied with success is the discussion fora. In the Republic of South Africa, Rural Consultative Forum has been used as one of the models for distributing information for development for people in agriculturally rich Kwa Zulu Natal region. In using this method of accessing information, community members largely women find time to seek and
learn much about different issues affecting them in agriculture and in their villages. Extension agents are present to help women with when they need to know about agriculture as a business. In this way solutions to problems are addressed simultaneously.

**Community Information Networks:** are networks providing the best opportunity for stakeholders to share information, since the culture and information sharing are well ingrained in the way of life of many African peoples. Going by the name of rural development networks online, this initiative targets rural farming communities, community development policy makers, researchers and other prime movers in the agricultural sector. According to Juma and Kahinga (2006:249) rural development networks aim at exploiting the rapid proliferation of ICTs, to empower the farming communities who form the bulk of the population. Rural development networks online is a Kenyan information system based on a database. The system contains critical information on rural community development associations, self-help groups, farmers cooperative societies, agricultural projects, milestones and achievements of the affiliated members and the viable agricultural development options in various locations. These networks enhance the local content of the Internet for the benefit of the rural community.

**Community Telecentres:** Although there are arguments that telecentres are mostly outfits for the educated, they are one of the most important resources for improving the plight of women in agriculture that has worked well in Africa (Asaba, et al, 2006:145). Known by various names, telecentres or multipurpose community telecentres were established to test and demonstrate new technologies and applications, to show their impact on the development of rural communities. They were also established to investigate innovative policies, tariff structures and new approaches to organizing telematics, to stimulate and create capacity for community to access local, national and international information services and resources. Furthermore they were established to serve as centres for utilizing information and library for rural community development, to generate local information and knowledge from resources available within the community (Ikoja, 2004:108). The centres are providing basic communication services such as phone, fax, library, Internet, email, community radio and video shows. Associations and self help groups (formal and informal) use telecentres as successful model for women to share information about agricultural and health related matters. The goal of the telecentre is building capacity of rural women in accessing and using ICTs through the training programme and effective use of radio and cell phones and the basic use of computers. In those centres women generate agricultural local content, are able to repackage information, document
their experiences, in print, video etc. In Uganda four examples are worth emulating. Women have benefited from Nakaseke, Buwama, and Kasangati Telecentres in Central Uganda and Kubere Information Centre in Apac, northern Uganda and Sengerema in Tanzania. In these centres women come to read local literature in print, use ICTs for Internet, listen to community radio, watch television programmes on agriculture, view CD ROMs, listen to recorded tapes on improved agriculture, hold meetings to discuss problems of agriculture or exchange ideas of improving crops, animals and marketing. They are guided by programme officers in charge of information and librarians. Using this approach women enrich themselves with modern knowledge and integrate this with their indigenous knowledge instantly taking advantage of the synergy of both. Location, scope and language of information products of the telecentre are important. In the case of Kubere Information Centre, this is located in the market place and has a big notice board where vital information is pinned up for people including women to come and update themselves on new information. In the case of Nakaseke telecentre, this is located in a civic area where community leaders work. By being here, issues requiring answers are dealt with by leaders, and extension agents. The community radio is also located next to administration block.

**Market Information Centre:** Information about markets and marketing has been made available through a model called Market Information Centres. Kenya Agricultural Commodity Exchange (KACE) has taken a lead on this and has made progress in marketing agricultural information. The Exchange pioneered with market information centres (MICs) and market information points (MIPs) in several towns of Kenya. This approach is helping smallholder farmers’ access current market information services such as fair prices and commodity stocks. MICs are equipped with computers and mobile phones that provide access to current market information. Farmers visit centres to access and to be provided with information services such as bids, offers and prices of agricultural commodities. The MICs also provide value-adding services like storage, transport and quality testing. Information is downloaded at the MIC and distributed to MIPs on every market day (Mukhebi in Asaba, et al, 2006: 145).

**User knowledge Clubs:** Engaging communities is an important aspect of promoting access to knowledge at a rural knowledge centre. Knowledge clubs constitute groups of people with common interest, supporting each other to access and use the resources of the centre. For example the Nakaseke Farmers Knowledge Club in Uganda and the Wendano Farmers Knowledge Club in Machakos, Kenya each has over twenty members who include farmers, traders, business people, women’s groups, extension workers and people in community-based or-
ganizations. Club activities include promoting access to information and training in ICTs. Topics include crop cultivation, pest management, post harvest control and agricultural marketing. Members pay a nominal fee (in cash or kind) which are used to facilitate activities of the club. The Club is enjoying many benefits including increased access to information and to markets of agricultural commodities (Asaba et al, 2006:149).

**Agricultural Extension Services:** Extension services have a long history in African agriculture. As government workers, agricultural extension workers move on a routine basis to provide the necessary information to women farmers within the communities and sometimes organize agricultural meetings either within the communities or at parish level for these women farmers to share experience. These extension workers also direct the farmers where to obtain agricultural information. But there is still a need to provide these extension workers with modern and up-to-date agric information which they can later pass on to the women farmers.

**Tools**

**Cell phones:** Women in villages have traditionally been networked by meeting and sharing information at the village well when they fetch water or when they are communally digging. But this sharing of information has expanded to infuse mobile telephony. For more than a decade now mobile phone technology has grown rapidly in Africa. There are many opportunities women say, cell phones are bringing to them. Women can find farmer prices by merely dialing preferred numbers and information is given directly. Women can ring friends about market prices or any other agriculture related information, compare notes and they are served. They can send short text messages to designated numbers and ask for whatever agricultural information they need and they are instantly served. Other opportunities that the new technologies are offering are cutting costs and time in information seeking, quick action and the emergence of new response to information use. This has been made more attractive by cell phones becoming cheaper due to increasing competition from investors. Example includes Lesotho, a country with declining farm activities where women have made a breakthrough in improving their productivity through Thulare-Eyking Agricultural Development Project. Women are able to find quickly what markets exist and at what market prices. In this project women are given cell phones and air time to create a well head and get connected (Shore, 2006). This project is expanding to cooperative groups. Related to cell phones are portable phone kiosks. Private phone kiosks, public call boxes are extending to local areas and technology de-
developments that have made it possible for village entrepreneurs and phone companies to develop portable phone systems. Villagers can now have connectivity in their villages and are able to use the facility for information exchange. Another development in a country like Uganda is village phones that have been set-up in a number of districts in Uganda especially communities in northern Uganda. These phones are mainly used for communication in case of an emergency and disease outbreaks. But evidence on the ground shows that, village phones are also used for other communication purposes within the community such as the exchange of agricultural information especially relating to the prices/market of agric commodities.

The Internet: In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country badly hit by war for most of 1999-2004, *Arche d’Alliance*, a non governmental organization (NGO) spearheaded a project in the Uvira region to raise women’s status there. The project is teaching women how to use the Internet to find information and apply better farming methods and better ways to market their produce (Shore, 2006). Use of the Internet is bringing a real impact on their ability because it is helping rural women make strides in the agriculture, (animal) breeding, fishing, and crafts sectors. Realizing those practical goals is expected to lead to an improvement in the status of women in their communities partly because of the projects subsidiary impact of teaching women their rights while eliminating illiteracy. Related to that is the case study of Burkina Faso (Shore, 2006) where a similar situation is taking root. *Association Manegdbzanga* is running a project designed to stimulate much broader communication within rural communities using the Internet. This Association envisions the new Internet access, first as a way of allowing participants to communicate with other rural women around the world, so as to gather insight into how women elsewhere deal with challenges similar to their own. But during their daily work as farmers and gardeners, women also are in contact with neighbours through their electronic connectivity. To support the Internet initiative, the Association is publishing a nation-wide newspaper that transmits more broadly the projects participants’ new, Internet-derived knowledge.

Contribution of librarians

There are many things that librarians can and should do to enable women farmers’ access information for agricultural purposes. In the first place it is my experience that many librarians especially in Uganda are employed in the NGOs sector as information management specialists. Taking this as an advantage such librarians are well placed to promote information use among women farmer
groups. The need is to begin to succeed. Even if not, they can work together with public librarians to render the same services. There are many areas of engagement that allow librarians to do community librarianship and information services. For instance, conducting research on agricultural information needs of various women groups is a means through which the librarian can identify what types of information is required. Results of such studies have to be disseminated widely among women so that they come to realize the need for information. Compiling a directory of women groups in agriculture and putting this information on the Internet as well as producing hard copies for those who cannot access it electronically is important for reference service. That kind of directory could be used for promoting access to women groups. Policy makers and other stakeholders would use the directory for reaching women groups.Documentation of women information empowerment practices using women groups that already are success stories could be a big contribution. Librarians should be able to use outcomes mapping methodology to establish positive behaviour changes that have taken place among participating women and use the best practices for guiding other women to emulate. Research on information models and information user behaviours in different community environments and sharing the outcomes with community groups is a way of increasing women’s understanding of information environment. That should be part of the librarians’ duties. Since no one model is deemed significantly successful in every environment, constant search for working and reader friendly information models is a useful proposition for librarians. Such studies would raise ideas needed in planning information services. Teaching and training women in information skills using multi media would enable them acquire better level of information literacy. This is in line with a Chinese saying that: “equip a person with hunting rifles rather than bags of food”. By rifles are meant people’s skills and abilities. Information literacy is the rifle. Once they have skills and abilities, then they become independent information seekers. Marketing of existing information systems/centres is fundamentally a way of creating awareness about existing information systems and encouraging their use. Equally important would be constant information updates in those systems so that women learn what is new. Participating in radio talks discussing topics relating to agriculture is an enterprising idea for librarians to do. This idea has worked well in Nakaseke Tele centre in Uganda where the librarian always addresses the communities on various topics especially agriculture. Librarians should also be organizing workshops/seminars for women farmers to learn more about new information, and methodologies brought about by research institutions. Likewise, repackaging of information in various formats such as CDs, tapes, or print and distributing them to women farmers is an important information service. Availing this information in alternative and local lan-
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languages that women understand is an information service librarians can do to satisfy women’s information needs. Within the information centre, the librarian can do information searches on behalf of women who are not quite capable of looking for information unsupported. The librarian can also organize discussion groups for purposes of exchanging innovative ideas and sharing of experiences. Participating in exhibitions and managing information stalls, encouraging Question and Answer Service and, taking stock of Frequently Asked Questions are essential tasks for the librarian. This can help the librarian to develop information databases out of such questions and requests. And there is no harm librarians’ investing in information as a business. Information entrepreneurship is a good business especially when tailored to meet the needs of the educated women.

Network Model

What model can serve as a basis for bringing information closer to women farmers? Obviously this will require active imagination and innovative ideas to make it work. Before I propose any model introspective thinking reminds that already there are many models in use in different places with varying degrees of success. Analysis of them reduces their number basically to one, an information system. What is significant to note about them are their names as chosen by their founders. For instance, telecentres are so called because much of the information work is designed to use information technology. Resource centres is because information is a resource. Community information service and networks are because of their location in communities. Mass media, cinema, Internet, cell phones, radio and video are all channels. Advisory services, shows, theatre are services while clubs are just a group of people. It is possible to bring almost all of these under one roof and organize the rest through it. We need a librarian for the organization and managing. Secondly, in planning a model specific attention is paid to factors contributing to women’s failure to access information. A model is needed that will be accepted and used by women irrespective of their literacy levels. It should be easily comprehensible and relevant to the women’s agricultural needs. This, according to Mokgaboki (2002:78) will require more of physical exchange of information in many instances; the need for outreach information service with the librarians participating as information gateways. Thirdly like other government programmes, extending information services to rural women will definitely need a policy framework. I propose government finances it for sustainability purposes. Other stakeholders can support. The policy would detail issues relating to information system justification, goals, objectives, user (including women farmers) community, participation, funding, stakeholders, and
expected impacts of such a service to communities. The model, its success and efforts would place emphasis on integrating women’s information activities with other government programmes or agencies with similar objectives.

In this context I propose an inclusive cluster model that can serve women farmers and at the same time serving other community members. This model should take into account activities of other government departments or agencies within the communities. This reduces scattering of information units in one geographical area. In this model, communities forming the lowest government administrative unit within a geographical area are served from one point. Administratively it is easier and economical. This arrangement should allow communities to participate meaningfully in their socio-economic development. Justification for the inclusiveness is to reflect social characteristics of women (literate and illiterate) and other community members, use of formal and informal communication channels, information in different formats, use of ICTs (computers, radio, cell phones, TV). Information will be coming into the information system from different sources e.g. government, NGOs, lead farmers, other informal sources etc. Information will also go out to women and other community members in varying formats through civil servants, village leaders, secretaries of information, women affairs, production and marketing and lead farmers. Since there is government infrastructure at this level including land for demonstrations, seminars/workshops, and briefing sessions can be conducted here.

Conclusion

Librarians can succeed in disseminating agricultural information and support women’s efforts in Agriculture when they move beyond their own discourse of formal information institutions. They should be in a position to develop innovative community based models that take into account women characteristics, information sources and information channels. Librarians need to understand how women groups work and manifest themselves and how they seek for information if we to move towards achieving the MDG one of eradicating poverty and hunger by 2015. A community based model that radiates to villages is most ideal.

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