

Information Environment of Artisans in Botswana

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A survey of 439 artisans in Botswana was carried out with a view to determining their information needs, information seeking behaviour and sources of information used for meeting their daily needs. The study reveals that about 70% of the respondents were 21–40 years old. The artisans were involved in a variety of vocations, dressmaking, welding and hair dressing being the most prominent. A significant number of the artisans (11.7%) had no formal education. The greatest job-related information needs were in finding sources for raw materials (55.6%), locating government tenders (46.2%) and improving their knowledge (44%). Health (59.9%) and sports (32.1%) were the major general areas of information

needs. The artisans sought information mainly through informal conversations (65.8%) and listening to radio (62.6%). The most used information sources were radio (50.3%), colleagues (49%) and newspapers (47.4%). Only 28% of the respondents were computer literate. The paper recommends that the government of Botswana should provide continuing education programmes for the artisans, as this would improve their skills in their vocations, as well as their computer literacy competence. Also, information providers, such as libraries should be involved pro-actively in the provision of information to artisans. They should also equip the artisans with information literacy competence.

Introduction

For purposes of this study, artisans are those who perform skilled work with their hands. They are equipped mainly with vocational education. This may be acquired formally or informally. In most cases, they serve as apprentices before they become adept in their vocation. They are involved in all kinds of occupations, especially those in construction and the motor industry; hence we have carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers, welders, painters, panel beaters, electricians, mechanics, etc. Other activities in which they are involved include hairdressing, tailoring and dressmaking. They have limited education. Most of them would have undergone primary education, and a few have attained secondary education.

Every individual, whether literate or illiterate, needs information for a variety of issues essential for his or her survival. It is, therefore, not surprising that information is needed for awareness, in-

creased productivity, health, etc. In studying the information needs of an individual, the information needs have to be studied in the context of the information environment, which includes not only the information needs, but also the information seeking behaviours, access to information and sources of information used for meeting the information needs.

The users of information are complex, while some are relatively homogenous such as professionals, students, policymakers, researchers, etc., some could be heterogeneous like rural inhabitants, artisans, etc. They have different backgrounds, education levels, and jobs; they operate from differing environments. Given the large disparity among users of information it is obvious that information providers must provide a variety of information sources in order to meet the needs of the various users. Because of the importance of providing information sources to users, the information needs of specific users need to be studied.

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The overall aim of this study is to investigate the information environment of artisans in Botswana, with a view to identifying how artisans perceive and use information with respect to their daily activities. The specific objectives of the study were to:

- Identify the information needs of artisans, that is, the type of activities they need information for.
- Find out how they seek information.
- Establish the situations that lead the artisans to seek information.
- Identify the sources of information used by the artisans when doing their work and also find out the extent to which they use both formal and informal sources of information.

Literature review

This review of related literature is being undertaken with full knowledge that there is a dearth of studies addressing the information needs of artisans. Perhaps the only study so far on artisans in Africa was by Mabawonku (2004). In that study a social survey of 253 artisans in Ibadan, Nigeria was carried out with a view to identifying their information needs and sources of information frequently used. The findings reveal that most of the respondents were involved in petty trading (27.3%), fashion designing/tailoring (22.5%) and hairdressing (9%). Only 4.7% of the respondents had no formal education. Information needs were mostly in the areas of job-related activities (68%), health (51.4%), politics (49.4%) and financial matters (48.2%). The artisans used their neighbours (79.8%), friends (71.5%) and radio (60.5%) as the most important sources of information. Formal information agencies such as libraries were rarely used as sources of information.

Besides this study, there are however a few studies on community information needs undertaken in Africa and on the information needs related to citizenship undertaken in other parts of the world. From the findings of such studies, one can argue that since the studies were looking at the general information needs of communities, therefore those of the artisans would have been taken care of. Mchombu (1996) investigated the need for information for development in Botswana, Malawi and Tanzania. He concluded that whilst some needs cut across communities, there are also some needs which are unique to particu-

lar settings or contexts, thereby suggesting that it is important to investigate the information needs of each community.

Sturges and Chimseu (1996) investigated the chain of communication between providers of information and the ordinary citizens in Malawi. One of the significant findings of the study was the lack of two-way communication between the information providers and the potential users.

Methodology

The social survey research technique was employed in investigating the information needs, information seeking behaviours and information sources used by artisans in Botswana. The population of the study was comprised of both male and female artisans who are presently practising their vocational skills in selected towns and villages in Botswana. Purposive sampling also known as the "snowball effect" was employed because of the nature of the participants and the richness of information that the researchers wanted to collect. This method of choosing participants for a study is common in qualitative research.

A study of this nature needs to be as comprehensive as possible. However because of the large population of artisans in Botswana, a sample was invited to participate. Artisans in the southern and northern parts of Botswana were included. In addition, the sample covered artisans in both urban and rural areas of each region. The selected sites of study consist of three urban towns (Gaborone, 186 007; Francistown, 83 023; and Lobatse, 29 689) and four villages (Palapye, 26 293; Maun, 43 776; Kanye, 40 628; and Masunga, 3 110). These towns and villages have been chosen because of their locations in Botswana and their accessibility by road and air.

For the southern part, Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana and another major town in the region, Lobatse were surveyed. Kanye is one of the major villages in the country. The Northern part consisted of Francistown, the second largest city in Botswana. Artisans in the villages of Maun (a tourist village) and Masunga are situated in the northern region. The population of the study tends to operate their businesses on a small scale. Artisans tend to work from their houses and backyards. A few are seen working in business sites and along the main roads.

The major data collection instrument used for this study was the questionnaire. The nature of the study called for the usage of an instrument that would collect a significant amount of responses within a reasonable length of time. The authors acknowledge the limitations of a questionnaire as documented in the literature. We felt that it would be the most appropriate tool to use for a baseline study and the number of research sites that we visited. As a way of trying to overcome the weaknesses of this instrument, more closed questions than open-ended questions were asked to encourage the participants to respond. The research assistants wrote down the responses of the participants as opposed to self-administering the questionnaires. Twelve research assistants were recruited and trained in order to collect valid data. The researchers randomly interviewed some artisans who were employed in Gaborone, Francistown and Maun. The study was carried out between May and August 2005.

Findings and discussion

A total of 439 respondents were purposively selected for this study. The distribution of the respondents among the towns and villages used for this study were as follows. Francistown, the second largest city in Botswana with 96 (21.9%) and Gaborone, the national capital, with 89 (20.3%) had the highest number of respondents. The main villages also had a significant number of artisans. In Kanye, 61 (13.9%) artisans participated; Maun, which is a tourist urban village in the northern part of Botswana, had 60 (13.7%); Palapye in the central part of the country 80 (18.2) and Lobatse, a town in the southern part of the country, had 39 (8.9%) participants. The least number of participants were in Masunga in the northern part of the country where only 14 (3.2%) artisans participated.

Background information

A majority (62.6%) of the respondents were male. The marital status of the respondents revealed that 66.5% were single, some with dependants (29.8%). Only 33% of the respondents were married at the time the study was carried out.

The age groups of the respondents varied from less than 20 years to over 70 years. However

those within the age groups of 21–30 (39.9%) and 31–40 (28.9%) predominated. The majority of the respondents were in the age group of 21–50 (84.2%). This is not surprising because youths are actually encouraged to study a vocation. There are a number of other reasons that could explain the large number of artisans in this age range. One has to do with the shortage of space at the limited number of senior secondary schools and tertiary institutions such as university and colleges of education in Botswana. As a result, school leavers see vocational colleges as viable alternatives.

Most of the elderly (11.7%) had never attended any form of schooling. A quarter of the respondents have read up to junior secondary (25%) and senior secondary accounted for 17.9%. This is because education has been virtually free in Botswana. Some respondents had undergone vocational training (23.6%). They had trained in various institutions within Botswana and neighbouring countries. The majority of the respondents were employers (63.8%) and 35.3% of the respondents served as employees.

People from neighbouring countries practise vocational skills. This could be attributed to the economic situation in Botswana, which is doing relatively well as compared to most of the neighbouring countries, like Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. The respondents spoke a variety of languages, however, a majority of the respondents (50.6%) spoke both English and Setswana languages (Setswana is the national language of Botswana citizens). A large number of the respondents (17.8%) spoke only the Setswana language. Other languages spoken were Ikalanga (a language spoken in Botswana), Ndebele and Shona. The latter two languages are widely spoken in Zimbabwe. A large number of artisans in Botswana are from Zimbabwe. A majority of the respondents could write both in the English and Setswana languages (51.5%). A large number of the respondents (15%) could only write in the Setswana language and 11.6% only in the English language.

Vocational specialisation

When the respondents were asked to indicate areas of their vocation, it surfaced that various vocations are being practised. Table 1 below shows a distribution of these vocational areas. The most prominent areas are dressmaking (13.7%) and

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents according to Vocation

Vocation	Frequency	Percentage
Dressmaking	60	13.7
Welding	45	10.3
Hairdressing	45	10.3
Shoemaking	40	9.1
Carpentry	39	8.9
Mechanic	36	8.2
Catering	31	7.1
Bricklaying	26	5.9
Panel beating	19	4.3
Electrical works	19	4.3
Plumbing	13	3.0
Horticulture	11	2.5
Painting and spraying	10	2.3
Others	45	10.3

welding (10.3%). The least practised vocations are painting and spraying. Dressmaking used to be a vocation for women, but it has also been taken up by men, especially from outside Botswana. They have brought skills such as embroidery, which was rare among the local tailors, and designs from their resident countries, which were accepted by the Botswana market.

Information needs

The information needs were categorised into two major areas, viz. job-related information needs and general information needs. Table 2 shows the distribution of work-related information needs. The most acute work-related information need had to do with finding sources of raw materials to make products. The lack of reliable sources for raw materials for their businesses is an obstacle to the delivery of timely services. They did not have information on where to locate raw materials at reasonable prices. They had no choice but to depend on local suppliers who at times are unreliable and offered a very limited variety.

Artisans also expressed the need to understand the government tendering system to improve their chances of securing such jobs. They believed that the lack of understanding of the application process and the possible failure to provide the pertinent information would disqualify one from se-

Table 2: Job-Related Information Needs

Information need	Frequency	Percentage
Raw materials	244	55.6
Tenders	202	46.2
Improving knowledge in the area of chosen vocation	194	44.0
Job opportunities	136	31.0
Understanding government policies	134	30.5%
Equipment in vocation area	128	29.2
Financial matters	120	27.3
Credits loans	118	26.9
Sales	98	22.3
Registration of companies	82	18.7
Tax	35	8.0

curing a job. The lack of knowledge as expressed by the artisans contributed to the lack of growth and business opportunities.

Other areas mentioned were in tenders for jobs (46.2%), improving knowledge of their chosen vocation (44.0%), job opportunities (31%) and understanding government policies (30.5%). A large number of the respondents indicated the need for improving knowledge in their vocation. It is therefore not surprising that the marketing strategies employed by artisans are limited, reflecting a community that lacks knowledge and effective methods of marketing their goods and services. When the artisans were asked during interviews, what marketing strategies they employed in publicising their products, they indicated that they used localised marketing strategies such as displaying their products by the roadside and in the workshop, exhibiting their products at different shows and by word of mouth. Very few could afford to put advertisements in the newspapers or in commercial radio stations or employ any effective ways of letting potential consumers know what they could offer. They believed that the products market themselves well because of their quality and the high level of services that they render to their customers.

General information needs are listed in Table 3. The greatest areas of information needs were health (59.9%) followed by sports (32.1%), religion (30.8%) and family matters (27.6%). There is an

acute need for health information in Botswana not just among artisans, but also among the general public. The government of Botswana in 1998 declared HIV/AIDS a national crisis, hence the high demand for health information. Close to two-thirds (59.9%) of the participants in the study indicated that they needed health information for themselves and for members of their family. Interviews revealed that the health information needed spread across different health programmes such as the use of retroviral drugs, prevention of the transmission of the HIV/AIDS virus from the mother to child in case of expectant mothers and other diseases such as high blood pressure.

Information seeking

The respondents were asked to indicate how they go about seeking information. Informal conversations (65.8%) constituted the major way in which artisans in Botswana sought information. Informal conversation here refers to discussing the need with colleagues and family members including members of the extended family. One of the major flaws of using informal conversations as a way of seeking information is that the information provided may be distorted

Other major ways of seeking information include listening to radio (62.6%), reading (56.5%) and listening to television (51.0%), and searching the Internet (10.3%). Formal conversation was used by only 15.5% of the respondents. These findings are not unique to this study. Studies have shown that informal conversations and listening to radio are the preferred channels for seeking information.

Sources of information used by the respondents

The variety of sources of information as revealed by the respondents appears in Table 5 below, but radio (50.3%), colleagues (49.0%), newspapers (47.4%) and friends (44.2%) seem to be the major sources of information. Other sources of information mentioned were television (39.9%), family (37.6%) and the *Botswana Advertiser* (a major advertising magazine commonly used by the artisans) (27.8%), and clients (26.9%). From Table 5 one can see that libraries (7.5%), professional associations (4.1%) and banks (5.2%) were not regularly used as sources of information by the artisans. Surpris-

Table 3: General Information Needs

Information need	Frequency	Percentage
Health	263	59.9
Sports	141	32.1
Religion	135	20.0
Family matters	121	27.6
Social	88	20.0
Politics	70	18.0
Housing	65	14.8

Table 4: Information Seeking Behaviour of the Respondents

Information Seeking	Frequency	Percentage
Informal conversations	289	65.8
Listening to radio	275	62.6
Reading	248	56.5
Listening to television	224	51.0
Formal conversation	68	15.5
Searching the Internet	45	10.3

Table 5: Sources of Information

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	221	50.3
Colleagues	215	49.0
Newspapers	208	47.4
Friends	194	44.2
TV	175	39.9
Family	165	37.6
<i>Botswana Advertiser</i>	122	27.8
Clients	118	26.9
Local council	56	12.8
Boss	54	12.3
Suppliers	52	11.8
Internet	47	10.7
Libraries	33	7.5
Bank	23	5.2

ingly, Internet and libraries constituted insignificant sources of information used by artisans in Botswana. This could be attributed to the fact that libraries have tended to neglect artisans. Rather, they concentrate their services on the elite groups of the community, especially students, professionals, researchers and policymakers. The low level use of the Internet as a source of information could

be attributed to the level of education of the artisans or the lack of widespread use of computers within their immediate environment.

When the respondents were asked to indicate the preferred method of obtaining information, personal contact was mentioned as the most preferred means of obtaining information. This is not surprising given the fact that a majority of the respondents used informal conversations when seeking for information. Radio (52.4%), newspapers (47.4%), colleagues in the trade (49%) and television (34.4%) were the preferred methods of obtaining information. Surprisingly, the telephone was ranked very low (34.4%). The use of computers also received a very low mention (12.1%).

The information channels and sources of information preferred by artisans confirm what has already been documented on the information seeking by various communities in Africa. The continent of Africa is sometimes described as an oral society. Artisans in this study prefer informal conversation, radio and television as the main channels of information. Nearly half of the participants also read newspapers and magazines to get the information that they need. This finding is expected because most of the participants were literate, and also the sample consisted of young and middle-aged adults. In addition, the artisans are constantly seeking information about where they could possibly sell their products and services. Most tenders are advertised in the local newspapers and the Botswana government gazette. Therefore they have to read newspapers on a daily basis to locate such information.

The social network continues to play an important role in the world of artisans. Close to half of the participants stated that colleagues (49%), friends (44.2%) and family members (37.6%) were their preferred sources of information.

Computer literacy

Given the importance of computers in business, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of computer literacy by answering a series of questions. Only 127 (28.9%) of the total number of respondents had basic computer skills. When they were asked to indicate the activities they undertake using a computer, a majority stated word processing (62.2%), printing of documents (55.9%), access the Internet (49%) and e-mail (33.9%); a

smaller number (28.9%) were able to use the computer for accounting purposes.

When asked how they accessed computer services, respondents mentioned they made use of commercial secretarial services and asked family members who have computer skills to help; some have employees who are computer literate. A select few of the artisans interviewed on the availability and accessibility of ICTs stated that these services were not widely available and accessible because private companies charge high prices for the use of Internet. Some of those interviewed suggested that computers be made available in libraries and community halls. They believed the government was unlikely to charge high prices for the use of computers. Also, during the interviews, the artisans revealed that in terms of communication tools, they used cellular telephones and fixed telephone lines, and public telephones for business purposes.

Conclusion and recommendations

Artisans in Botswana generally have a high level of literacy rate, as about 89% of the respondents had one form of education or the other. A majority of the respondents had a variety of job-related information needs. The general information needs were in health, sports and religion. Informal conversations and listening to radio were widely used by the respondents when seeking information; the major sources of information used for meeting their information needs were radio, colleagues and newspapers. Internet and libraries, major information providers, were rarely used as sources of information by artisans in Botswana. Banks, which are supposed to be the engine of development in the vocational sector of the economy, were rarely used by the artisans for credits/loans. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the government should provide continuing education programmes for artisans in their various vocations to enable them to perform their duties effectively. Artisans could be encouraged by the government to take advantage of distance education programmes and to enrol in evening classes offered at some vocational colleges in Botswana. This will sharpen their skills.

Also, the government needs to develop programmes encompassing more generous support for artisans in the form of training on proper busi-

ness operations such as record-keeping, a tendering system and preparing funding proposals to secure funds from government-supported institutions such as the Citizen Enterprise Development Agency (CEDA).

There is a need to establish information centres with Internet access in the towns and villages throughout Botswana to meet the basic job-related information needs of the artisans. The centre could also give the artisans access to government information of interest. Presently, the Government of Botswana is making significant strides towards e-governance.

Public libraries should be proactively involved in the provision of information to artisans. The public library system in Botswana should include materials in their collections to support the learning needs of artisans in different vocational areas. They should assist in equipping artisans with information literacy competence to enable the arti-

sans to search for information independently. The Botswana National Library service should look into the provision of other information sources besides print. It is suggested that the Botswana National Library look into the possibility of providing Internet and e-mail services as a way to raise funds for the library.

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