AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE INFORMATION AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION BY THE RURAL WOMEN OF MELMOTH, KWAZULU-NATAL

BY

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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE INFORMATION AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION BY THE RURAL WOMEN OF MELMOTH, KWAZULU NATAL

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Declaration

Declaration by the candidate

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

Glenrose Velile Jiyane — Date: 10 May 2002

Declaration by the supervisor

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as University Supervisor

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband Vela (Mahlinz' ayiyek' iye sokeni) and my daughters Noma and Nandi, for their warm love, perseverance while away from home, encouragement, support, assistance and understanding during this study.

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Abstract

Women constitute 51,6 % of the population of South Africa. It is widely known that in many households, especially blacks, men leave homes for urban areas in search for jobs, leaving women behind to maintain the entire household on their own. Despite significant role played by the women, they are faced with many problems as those experienced by women in other developing countries such as illiteracy, poverty, low social status and multiple roles of child care, farming and housework. The plight of women in rural parts of South Africa, hinder their access and exploitation of media, that can enable them to participate responsibly in nation building.

The study explores the media needs of the rural women and how they are fulfilled in the areas of KwaZulu-Natal. Through a normative survey method and critical incident technique, 109 women were interviewed and questionnaires administered to 18 community leaders as well as observation for primary data. Evidently, there is need for suitable media where information on agriculture, health, education, business, legal, and career opportunities as well as self-help-related activities can be accessed.

Such media should be available closer to home environment, in visual and sound formats, orally delivered by people closer to the community such as friends, relatives and neighbours as well as community leaders. Methods of information transmission should be overwhelmingly oral that includes greater use of radio transmission. Largely, the findings are consistent with similar studies conducted elsewhere in the developing countries.

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List of Abbreviations

UN- United Nations

WHO- World Health Organization

ICT- Information Communication Technology

CIA- Central Intelligence Agency

UNICEF- United Nations Children's Fund

ATM- Automatic Teller Machine

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1.Introduction and conceptual setting

Women make 51,6% of the population of the Republic of South Africa. According to the Census report done by CIA(2000), there are 6,928,559 females between age bracket 0-14, 14,244,484 are between age brackets 15-64 and 1,325,847 are those females who are 65 years and over. Similarly, the preliminary estimates of the size of South Africa's population census 1996, revealed that there were 37,9 million people in South Africa on the night of 9-10 October 1996. Of this number, 18,2 million (48 %) were males and 19,7 million (52 %) were females. Therefore females are in large numbers in South Africa. They are in practical terms, significant members of each and every household, yet, rural people and women in particular, bear the largest burden of poverty in South Africa. If we can change the inequalities and inefficiencies of the past, rural areas can become productive and sustainable (President Mandela,1995:5). According to Ngimwa, Ocholla and Ojiambo (1997:46) women are the most exploited and least privileged members of many households in the developing countries. These authors observe that the majority of women are based in the rural areas, where their major occupations include farming, child-bearing and sustainability of families in many ways. While the significance of South African women in development may have been looked at in the past, the present Government is actively promoting gender equality and seeking to improve the lot of rural women and their families (Sotshongaye & Moller, 2000). Despite all the vital tasks done by women in every household such as child care, food supply and home management, one can still hear their lament as they are highly marginalized when it comes to supply and distribution of resources, in matters of development and in matters of high profile in their communities. Nelson (1979:37) notes that women have been excluded from the advantages of modern education, and their literacy rate is appallingly lower than that of men. She further observes that a

woman's access to resources, participation in family decision-making, and mobility is strongly linked to her age. This unfortunately does not necessarily represent women's role in the community and household.

Women in South Africa, for instance, are faced with many similar limitations as those in other developing countries such as illiteracy, poverty, low social status and multiple roles of child care, farming and housework.

It is widely known that in many households, especially households of blacks, men leave homes for urban areas in search for jobs, leaving women behind to maintain the entire household on their own. According to Friedman (1989:4) migration levels for males of working age are considerably higher (51%) than those for females (15,3%). The women are therefore left in very remote rural areas where the infrastructure is poorly developed and the distribution of water and electricity is poor. Women are a marginalised community. Even in high-status fields such as medicine, men are more likely than women to be administrators and surgeons, occupy powerful positions, whereas women tend to be over represented in the relatively low-status positions (Basow, 1992:264).

Literacy is one of the principle goals of education around the world. The ability to read and write is considered almost a basic human right, yet a low literacy rate prevails among women in many countries (King and Hill,1993:2). In the area of Melmoth, where most rural women are unable to read and write, there are high percentages of unnecessary deaths in children and aged people. For example the cholera epidemic which is attacking KwaZulu-Natal is regularly experienced by the women in this area. Besides the fact that health facilities are not found in their vicinity, women cannot follow instructions as to how to use other helping aids on their own, such as "jik" or a mixture of salt, sugar and water, which need to be carefully measured.

The plight of women in the rural parts of South Africa, hinder their access and exploitation of information, that can enable them to participate responsibly in all spheres of life.

In the society, women experience many problems such as crime, sexual abuse, domestic violence, sickness of a family member and death). Evidently, they need information because it provides a context and a reason for gathering together to discuss problems and seek solutions Ballara(1991:3). Ballara advises that information provides women with support for dealing with women's personal concern and help to break the isolation deriving from their home environment or employment.

A lot of information needs and the role of information to women is innumerable. For instance, women need health information. South Africa is faced with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Currently Kwa-Zulu- Natal is infected with the Cholera epidemic. A woman in the house has to deal with most of these health hazards by taking care of the husband and children. Information on the prevention, healing, nursing, and counselling is very essential for them to deal with this mammoth social responsibility. Besides some social and health information needs already mentioned, they require information related to business(eg trade, income, investment, saving, banking, profit, insurance, inheritance, property, ownership etc) agriculture, legal, welfare, self-reliance, politics(particularly the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities in the society), food and nutrition, as well as education and many more.

Presumably, through information, women learn to read, write and calculate, think broadly, become self-reliant and empowered, make decisions concerning their own lives and families, protect the environment and natural resources, support their children's education and get employment.

The social burden placed on women by society demands a high level of knowledge and information for women to responsibly know their rights and responsibilities in the society.

1. 2. Contextual setting

South Africa as a country comprises many of its places in rural settings. The inhabitants of these places are poor and unreachable. Birger observes that in South Africa „ .....rural households comprise the majority of poor homes, and are characterized by poverty" (Birger, 1998:107)

One of the poorest and highly populated province in South Africa, following the Eastern Cape, is KwaZulu- Natal, which is followed by the Northern province in terms of poverty (Hirschowits, 2000: 25). The Census report (1996-1997: 12) reports that KwaZulu-Natal is a geographically small area. It is by far the most populous province, with a large economically underprivileged rural population scattered throughout the province.

A study conducted by Leach, reveals that KwaZulu-Natal, as a province is very poor. According to this author the KwaZulu-Natal inhabitants have the least access per capita to development resources (which includes access to information) (Leach, 1999: 163). Leach's observation of the whole set up in KwaZulu-Natal is dramatically expressed as follows:

> "The people are under resourced in many ways which affect their ability to access information. Unemployment is well above the national norm; education levels are low and resultantly many people are illiterate. This is particularly true among women. A lack of electrification makes night-reading almost impossible and ideas of using computer based information difficult to implement. Road infrastructure in rural areas has been neglected for decades, making the use of

> travelling libraries impossible in many communities, and distances are considerable, making access to town libraries very difficult. The fact that most rural dwellers are subsistence farmers with the very long hours of manual work this entails, leaves little time for searching for information in books" (Leach, 2000:163).

The above observation concurs with Haywood's (1995) observation of underdeveloped communities, especially in Africa. According to Haywood the majority lack access to development oriented information. ''....they have no knowledge surplus that they can trade, and too often their objectives cannot be lifted above the demands of survival: how to feed a family, how to protect it from war and diseases, how to get children to a school 20 miles away without transportation, how to retain access to clean water, how to get a loan to start a cash crop....." (Haywood, 1995: 114). Haywood correctly called such a community " information poor".

The Melmoth area is found in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. It is situated on the Northern part thereof, approximately 100 km away from Richards Bay. It covers an area of about 39 km2. It borders Ulundi in the North, Eshowe in the West, Empangeni in the South and Sangoyana-Ntambanana in the East. Melmoth, which is the main town, has a Post Office, two banks, that is Standard and First National banks, a Magistrate's court, a couple of clothing and grocery shops, that is Bee Gee, Spar, Boxer and a few small shops. A public library which caters mostly for the needs of the White commercial farmers and urban population, who live in the vicinity, is also found in town. For the rural women, this library is irrelevant. Therefore, it is highly possible that they do not use it and hence access information through other media such as radio and social gatherings or by mobile clinic staff who visit the area almost once in six months or once a year if possible. There is a community hospital which is approximately three km away from the main town.

Around the main town are white residences and a few blacks who can afford to buy land or a house in the vicinity of the town.

Melmoth has a total population of 18 604 people of which 11 199 (60, 1 %)are women. Rural districts where infrastructure has not developed characterize Melmoth. In this place there is no electricity, water supply, proper roads, communication devices or any other development that can provide people with acceptable standard of living. Most people are illiterate. They practise cattle and crop farming for food. Schools and clinics are very limited and in some areas they are further away by 15 km.

There is no regular income in most households. Many boys and old men characterize the place. Most strong and middle-aged men leave their homes for big cities in search of jobs. In most occassions women have to practise agriculture in order to get subsistence food for their families.

Most women are not working. Very few are working in the local hospital. Young women between ages 15-40 work in the nearby sugarcane, gum tree or orange farms. They leave school very early in order to contribute to their family income by working on the farms where they are paid fortnightly by the white commercial local farmers.

A very high percentage of school attendance can be observed in primary schools, but from grade seven the numbers of school attendance drops tremendously. That is why in general the Melmoth rural community is semi-literate and these are women in particular. It can therefore be said that functional illiteracy prevails in this area.

Like the women in Ghana, women in the six Melmoth districts are subjected to some customary laws to observe the traditional reasons for desiring a high female fertility profile that is expected by the society. According to Citrufelli (1983:133), the motives behind the desire for a larger family in Ghana have been institutionalized through various and complex rites, taboos, social behaviour and beliefs. Beliefs that the ancestors still exist in some land of the dead from where they can influence life on earth, highly govern

people's minds. Therefore, reproduction as a means of replacing ancestors is a man's primary function. There are even fertility rites evoking blessings and protections for women so that they may be abundantly fertile. (Citrufelli,1983:134). Similarly, rural women of Melmoth bear between eight and ten children in order to gain social status.

1. 3. Motivation and statement of the problem

Evidently, women in rural areas lack opportunities to develop themselves socially, academically and intellectually. This makes them feel inferior to their male or urban counterparts. While women tend to bear the heaviest burden in many households in Melmoth, the level of information accessibility and use is relatively low. It is assumed that social, economic, cultural, and political welfare of women can improve tremendously when relevant information is provided to them.

Besides the fact that the researcher is a woman, understanding very well the position, experiences, burden and responsibilities of women, the way the women from other places in South Africa and worldwide are trying to uplift their standards of living , and expose themselves to opportunities that would help them develop themselves, their families and their communities, has created awareness to the researcher that if she can motivate the rural women from her own community to wake up and fight for their rights, and stand up, talk and be heard, cannot only improve their way of living and speed up the process of development in their communities, but will help level the better future for the next generations.

Melmoth was chosen because of the author's experience and observation that women do not have access to any information and that they live in tremendous poverty.

1. 4. Aim

The study aimed at investigating the rural women's information availability and exploitation. The aim is articulated through specific objectives outlined below.

1. 5. Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1) To explored information needs of the Melmoth rural women and how they were catered for.

2) To determine their information seeking behaviour.

3) To identify and characterize the information available to them.

4) To investigate problems encountered in accessing and using information.

5) To develope a model for information availability and accessibility by the women.

1. 6. Hypothesis

It is recognized that hypothesizing is not necessarily reliable in a large qualitative study such as this one. The use of a hypothesis is merely to provide a conceptual direction that is pursued by specific research questions appended in appendix A and B.

Null hypothesis was used. The following hypothesis is developed:-

- Rural Melmoth women are not keen to access and use information.
- Unavailability of relevant information in the appropriate format hinders its exploitation by the Melmoth rural women.
- Conservative traditions deter Melmoth women from accessing information.

1. 7. Assumptions

It is assumed that if information can be repackaged and made readily available for rural women of Melmoth to exploit, they can access information they need and rural development in all spheres of life, can improve.

1. 8. Significance of the study

This study was very important politically, as it created awareness of boundaries, not only physical boundaries, but also opportunity boundaries, which are still existing in Melmoth area in particular. It revealed that some communities are better resourced than others because they happen to be occupied by relatively better resourced Whites rather than the poorly resourced African people.

Socially, it was revealed from the study that under no circumstances can you find similar social aspects enjoyed by different people in terms of colour or social background, despite the fact that the country is one and served by the Government of National unity. This study creates awareness to the Government, especially the local Government, which is closer to people to redress any social issues which might still cause indifferences among people.

Economically, the rural communities lack a number of resources which can help them develop their economy and become better community inhabitants like those in other

areas who are economically viable. In such a community there are no banks, no descent trading centers. The street markets which are available, are not conducive enough to develop the economy. Through this study, the need might be felt by the people concerned that it is time that the rural places such as Melmoth receive economic improvement and development. Thus, the study provides insight into the magnitude of poverty and overdevelopment.

In practical terms, the study reveals the differences between places and communities. It exposed the researcher to a very poor, rural setting where most of the inhabitants are information poor. This leads to the need of the establishment and the development of an information resource center to be run by a professional information specialist. This resource center will provide reliable information to such a community so that the access to and use of information for development, can improve.

The study was expected to create awareness to the rural women of Melmoth on how information, be it from the media such as radio, television, newspapers or books, from other people through workshops, conferences or social gatherings, can improve their welfare and develop their communities. From this study, publication will be produced that can be used widely by the community resources and policy makers for social development, as well as scholars and students of Library and Information Science for rural development.

1. 9. Scope and limitation of study

This study was conducted in the rural areas of Melmoth. It investigated the extent to which information was available and exploited by the rural women of Melmoth. It focussed only on women between the ages 15-60. It was the researcher's assumption that women between ages 15-40, were still young and active and were likely to be involved in family maintenance through their hard work, and those who are 41-60 have more information due to more years they have lived, and are the ones who give guidance to the

younger women. The availability of information and its exploitation by men in rural Melmoth for development was not covered in this study.

The study was done in thirteen months, that is, from February 2001 to April 2002, thus there were many problems that interfered with it. The time was not sufficient and therefore the researcher had to work under severe pressure to meet dead lines. The researcher is still a novice. Although the researcher tried to be well prepared to carry the study, the problems encountered prepared her and gave her more experience in conducting a research project. If it was not for the University's support in terms of finance, transport, subsistence and time the study would not have been successful. Some of the information sources the researcher thought would be worthy to access were either not accessible or could only be accessed on certain times which could not be fitted on the researcher 's schedule. Some of the support resources like mobile phone and camera were purchased much later as the need for these was very pressing. Communication constituted a serious problem. For instance, households were situated far away from each other, the place is mountainous and there are no proper roads in between the homesteads. That slowed the whole research progress especially the collection of data. Those who offered to give information, provided maximum cooperation.

1. 10. Glossary of main terms

Rural women

These are women who spend most of their life time in the rural areas and participate in the rural activities (Ngimwa, Ocholla & Ojiambo, 1996:27)

Functional literacy

In this study functional illiteracy refers to those who possess basic literacy and numeracy skills which are not sufficient for paper functioning- that is remaining unable to read or write or to make sense of written material (Ballara, 1991:1).

Information needs

In this study the term information needs refers to the information which is needed by rural women of Melmoth in order to cope with the demands of their daily lives.

Public library

A public library is primarily a local source of information and documents accessible to the general public. It provides the public access to the information at little or no direct cost to gain access to materials from which they may gain knowledge, information, cultural experience and entertainment (Shillinglaw, & Thomas, 1988: 258).

Information

Information is a basic need that is required to fulfil the usefulness of other human needs such as shelter, food, clothes, it is therefore regarded as a resource of survival (Maitwe,2001: 26).

Information availability

It is when the information can be accessed by anyone who needs it

Information utilization

This term means the process by which the information is used by people for some reasons.

White

This term denotes a person with a very light skin colour, straight hair, born from both white parents and usually comes from a 'better off,' rich society.

Black

In the context of this study, the term Black refers to a person with a black skin colour, born from both black parents and usually born into the poorest sector of society.

Rural area

This is an area without modern infrastructure such as electricity, proper water supply and sanitation, and proper roads. It is usually occupied by low educated, low skilled and unemployed people.

1. 11. Conclusion

Women, who constitute a large proportion of the South African population, should be the ones receiving prior attention in terms of development, welfare, literacy and other activities that take place in their societies, however, this is not always possible in most societies.

Women reflect a high degree of illiteracy, unemployment and under-development when compared to men. This situation does not only limit them from obtaining good employment opportunities, education, involvement in economy and development in many facets of life, but also they lack comprehension and use of English as a conversational language, fail to understand meaning of signage in roads, public places, town and big cities, they also do not comprehend the meaning of certain laws, regulations and procedures in the country and in their own communities in particular.

In this chapter, background information has been provided. The geographical location of the area of study and its background was also provided. The aims and objectives, hypothesis and assumptions of the study have been given. The significance as well as the scope and limitation of the study were also provided. Finally, a brief definition of terms used in the study has been given.

The next chapter will present the literature reviewed by the researcher. It will provide insight into similar and related studies conducted elsewhere. It will help to verify the strength and weaknesses on the current study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.Introduction

Literature review involves thorough study of the works similar or related to those written by other scholars and make them relevant for purposes of a particular study with the aim of comparison, evaluation and identification of gaps or omissions or similarities that might be reviewed for further development and use by the study. It is very imperative that the researcher review the literature not only to compare the results with the previous results, and to present new and perhaps unique dimensions.

This chapter presents the literature that has been reviewed in relation to the availability and exploitation of information by rural women.
The information needs of rural community are discussed. The role of women in development is looked at and the role of information in development is also looked at. The information needs and seeking of rural community as well as the information available to them are examined. The problems rural women in particular, encounter when accessing and using information as well as the ways that could be applied to improve availability and exploitation of information by them, are discussed.

2. 2. Information needs of rural community

Rural areas are defined as the sparsely populated areas, in which people farm or depend on natural resources, including the villages and small towns that are dispersed through these areas (RDP,1997:4)

Donohue in Pienaar (1995:15) identifies survival information such as that related to health, housing, income, legal protection, economic opportunity, political rights and

citizen action information, which is needed for effective participation as an individual or as a member of a group in the social, political, legal and economic process.

Similarly, Van Lill (2000), observed that the user's situation, roles and tasks to fulfil, problems to solve and decisions to take, create goals which result in needs at different levels; cognitive, affective, social, spiritual and physical levels. This author further clarifies that these needs, which are regarded as primary, further result in secondary needs such as information needs, which in turn motivate information seeking and information use (Van Lill,2000:47).

There are several reasons why a rural community would need information. Firstly, information can help the community to plan and implement local economic development. Thus information can lead to the provision of physical infrastructure, like proper houses, since most of the people do not have them and cannot afford such houses, water and power supplies. Most of them depend largely on river or dam water, which are contaminated with diseases like those that lead to cholera. Information will enable them to acquire knowledge on how to prevent water borne diseases and other health hazards.

Secondly, information helps them to develop transport and communication in their communities. They walk long distances to and from the nearest facilities such as shops, clinics, hospitals and welfare offices. In many instances, the transport is not available because of various reasons which range from poor or non-existence of proper roads, negligence of rural areas by officials. The results are the high number of deaths of the aged and the sick people, who die on long journeys to health centers, pension centers or wherever they have to go in order to satisfy their needs. Information on their rights and responsibilities would enable them decide on who should represent them at local and national government, what are their legal rights and how they can make themselves better heard and supported.

Thirdly, the rural communities need information on basic health care and education. There are no hospitals or clinics as expected in most of these areas. People do not get health services, because they live in remote areas where professional nurses and Doctors are not prepared to render health services. Therefore they live in misery and with diseases for a long time till they die sooner than they could have. Health information systems and services are very critical for a modern person.

Fourthly, the problem of illiteracy among rural community is very significant. Although Maveneka(1991:55) laments that many rural women are illiterate and live in remote areas with no access to newspapers, even where newspapers are available, the newspapers are expensive and in most cases written in English which the community at large cannot understand. The fact is that they really need the information which appears on newspapers, because it is where various current issues on education, employment and other opportunities, are found. Alternatively, a more effectively access to broadcasting media, that does not require rearing, is essential to reach this community.

Ike (1998:1) observes that Nigeria does not have a reading culture. The absence of such a culture is seen as one of the distinguishing features of a Nigerian child. The similar features blanket the rural community in South Africa generally, and that is why there is an obvious need for schools in order for the rural community children to develop the reading culture. Construction of more schools and information centers in rural communities can promote availability of appropriate and relevant books and other reading materials, thus developing their literacy skills. In his suggestions, Ike (1998) points out that the reading culture can be successfully inherited by the young generation if the government can seriously observe the role that libraries can play in bringing economic, educational and social development.

Unlike Nigeria, South Africa has a relatively well developed ICT infrastructure that is capable of bringing telecommunication and broadcasting services to rural households.

Similarly, the creation and development of public library services is very promising,. What South Africa shares with Nigeria is the cycle of rural poverty and illiteracy. Understandably, poverty and illiteracy affect information utilization.

Related to Ike's observation Lorenz (1996:226) pin points that books, pamphlets, periodicals, films and other library materials are indispensable tools to all levels of education from training in literacy to University education and continuing adult education. He further explains that such materials are also of basic importance in the dissemination of social and economic information, for example, good health practices, improved agricultural methods, or vocational practices, (Lorenz, 1996:226). Thus, it is evident that library materials, with relevant information will arm the rural community with the knowledge they need. Again in this case, alleviation of rural poverty, infrastructure, support and upliftment of the levels of literacy are significant factors not to be ignored.

2.3 The role of women in development

The importance of raising the status of women in society as a vital necessity to development, has been discussed in many national and international gatherings and continues to be a pre-occupation with many governments and NGO's alike (Ofori-Mensa, 1999:1) This author observes that this approach has been driven by a recognition that to achieve sustainable development, it is essential to tap the experiences and knowledge of women to improve and widen access to education by women especially, and that this is a major concern in developing countries. It is further recognized by Afori-Mensah that education improves the welfare of the country, and empowers its inhabitants to contribute meaningfully to national development. Ofori-Mensa (1999:2) is of the opinion that through educating women, the country can invest and raise the quality of life. He

emphasizes that educated women are likely to invest into the education of their daughters, slow down population growth, have greater labour mobility, and high social capital.

The role of women in community development, is, according to Linda(1998:20) influenced by factors such as the status of women, migration and poverty. Linda observes that women have to abide by the norms, values and customs in their communities, and that they have to do domestic work and play roles of being mothers and wives. This author further notices that some women find themselves being heads of households in many instances, because of the men leaving homes in rural areas in order to work in urban areas.

Although industrialization has had a significant role on people's lives, it has destroyed others lives in the same way. Linda (1998: 23) observes that women left in rural areas have many responsibilities of caring for children, elders and keeping households lively.

It seems that the situation has not changed over several years. Brindley confirms Linda's observations on the significant roles played by women in our communities. According to this author cultural growth, economic growth, social growth and other developments in the society are better supported and practiced by women (Brindley, 1982:26). This author has also witnessed that old women in particular, are vital members of the community, in passing good and important knowledge from one generation to the next without any profit. In child birth, she noted, old women play a role of guiding young women in conception, child birth, breastfeeding and other important information concerning motherhood.

The practice of culture in weddings, rituals, ceremonies and agriculture and field, is something very popular in African cultures. According to Brindley(1982:120) the women play a vital role in the activities performed during these ceremonies. In her study of Inkandla area, Brindley noted the great involvement of old women in weddings and agricultural practices following certain norms set aside by ancestors. According to this

author, old women allocate fields to young brides and other women. They teach them how to enhance crop fertility, how to store seeds, how to medicate seeds and overcome draughts, how to care for crops and eventually harvest them (Brindley, 1982:121). Old women also lead the performances of certain ceremonies or rituals among the family or community.

The authority of an old man in the home is passed over to the old woman as soon as he dies. This is usually practiced in many homes which follow the traditional African way of practicing authority at home. Having those powers, that old woman is then regarded as semi-ancestral and gets all the dignity (Brindley,1982:121). It is thus, without any doubt that women play an important role in many households and communities.

Still on the issue of the role which is played by women in developing their communities, Cousins and Maart (1994) witnessed their roles as educare givers. According to these authors daycare for young children offers children safety from rape and male violence(a strategic gender need) within the extended family or in the neighbourhood, and from the street violence that many communities are currently experiencing. These authors further observe that educare potentially offers a very wide range of benefits such as essential primary health care interventions like vaccination, school feeding schemes, access to social peers, support and encouragement for cognitive and language development and access to resources such as books, paper and art equipment (Cousins and Maart 1994: 36). Therefore the role of information to women who will perform duties as educare givers is not only essential to the children, but it is the empowerment of women so that they can contribute to their own development and that of their communities.

While the role of some information providers such as old women is recognized, such information is not normally recorded for future use.

2.4. Information in development

Information plays a very significant role in the lives of people, irrespective of their place of living, level of study, exposure to new development, age or gender.

The era in which people are living, demand new strategies and skills from them. People have to respond to change in order to manage and cope with future demands. Therefore, they have to be exposed to relevant information.

The importance and role of information is felt by many people. This is agreed upon by the Umhlatuze Municipality for instance. Municipality is creating the position of an Information Officer as they have realized that information demand by Municipality is a matter of urgency. Among other duties of the information Officer, as stated by Koekemoer (2001:9) are tabulated in the promotion of access to information act, Act 2of 2000, which came into operation on 8 March 2001.

This act deals with the right of access to information and establishment of voluntary and mandatory mechanisms or procedures, to give effect to that right in a manner which enables persons to obtain access to records of public and private bodies as swiftly, inexpensively and effortlessly as is reasonably possible (Koekemoer, 2001:9).

The widely held view is that through information, meaningful decisions can be taken. It exposes a person to the various creative talents and ability of innovation, that help in personal advancement and community development.

Information creates current awareness and one is always up to date with what is taking place in the world around him. The society which does not have education, is not exposed to information and therefore does not develop. When summarizing the role of education to the community Swanepoel & De Beer (1997:80) quotes three views on education and development. Firstly, there is the neoclassical theory which has a very positive view on education and information on development. According to this theory, education transforms individuals into responsible citizens who will co-operate with national governments who are trying to create a modern society.

Secondly, there is the reformists theory that looks at the lack of funds, the large number of illiterate adults, the high population growth rates and subsequent high dependency ratio, the lack of facilities and qualified teachers, the high-drop-out and failure rates, the general condition of poverty in both rural and urban areas, all indicate that an alternative approach to education is needed in order for it to make a meaningful contribution (Swanepoel & De Beer,1997:82).

Thirdly, there is the radical view that sees the situation in a different light. According to the radicals, the nature and goals of education have to be changed radically to enable people to break free from oppression(Swanepoel,1997:82).

These views highlight the fact that despite the significance of information in development, and that it must be available to all who need it, there are very critical issues which need to be discussed and rectified first, otherwise our communities, especially the rural ones, will remain inexposed to information in order to be educated and develop themselves and their societies. The critical factor is education and enlightenment.

Information empowers people. The definition of empowerment as given by Richard Carver in Clutterbuck & Kernaghan (1994:12) is encouraging and allowing individuals to take personal responsibility for improving the way they do their jobs and contribute to the organization's goals. This author further explains that it requires the creation of a culture which encourages the people at all levels to feel that they can make a difference and skills to do so (Richard in Clutterbuck &Kernaghan, 1994:12).

Several authors have discussed the vital role that information plays in the development of people and societies. In paper presented at the 66th IFLA Council and General conference held in Jerusalem, Nwalo (2000) associates the development of African countries with information. Nwalo recognizes information as the entity that is wanted in order to develop and provide a degree of self-esteem and freedom for people who could

be denied such by poverty (Nwalo, 2000:2). This author stresses that African countries have a challenge to effectively and efficiently manage information in the 21 st century in order to facilitate technology transfer, support teaching, learning and research, and project. Africa's achievements and potentials to the rest of the world for benefits.

Nwalo however, laments that there are bottlenecks that are encountered by African countries, such as apathy and inadequate funding by governments and their officials, underdeveloped information infrastructure and shortage of technical manpower, but suggests the need to share information resources between information rich and the information poor across cultures for mutual benefits, (Nwalo, 2000:2). This is in line with Kagan'n views, although his emphasis is on electronic information. According to Kagan (1998:1) electronic information is a commodity or public good that influences the development of library services, and the basic assumptions should be examined, concerning the provision of electronic information in order to address the growing gap between the information rich and information poor both within and between countries.

Mchombu's work "on librarianship of poverty', quoted by Kagan, gives a picture and a general situation caused by access to information for development in many places of the world.

> "In the underdeveloped countries the common man is poor, illiterate and concerned with the basics of survival; more than four-fifths of his income is spent on food alone. He is hungry, undernourished, and diseases such as malaria, sleeping sickness, and cholera are his constant companions. Children suffer more than adults; kwashiorkor and parasitic diseases claim many of their lives before they reach the age of ten" (Kagan., 1998:1).

This is a true depiction of communities who do not have access to information so as to develop themselves and other communities. They are information poor.

As perceived by Zulu in Kagan (1998:2), lack of access to adequate education, reliable electricity, lack of environmental controls, poorly developed telecommunication infrastructure, a large illiterate or semi-literate population are barriers to using information technology in Africa.

Access to information is hindered by many barriers. When discussing access to information and its limitation Heisser (1989:117) identifies the problems of physical access, cost and the lack of ability to use information. The principal barrier to information according to this author, is the lack of ability of the user to be aware of the resources, where to find them, and how to use them. Heisser points out the problem of illiteracy and the reason behind it, such as that some adults never went to school or dropped out, other were not 'ready' to learn and thus missed out in the early grades, others had poor teachers, or changed schools frequently. Further, others may have been affected by cultural forces such as T V or grew up in an environment where education was not valued-illiteracy breeds illiteracy (Heisser, 1989:120). Therefore, access to information will not take place under such problems and environment. It is clear then that the role which is played by information in development, cannot take place in such a situation, unless the 'poverty' is drastically redress.

2.5. Information needs and seeking of rural community

According to Icak & Kurbanoglu (1998:1), knowledge generated by user studies can help to develop information systems and information service. This is true when we look at information needs and the behaviour of certain people. When defining information seeking behaviour, Ocholla (1999:129) restates that it is a process that begins with the challenges and problems that impel the information seeker to look for information .

Icak &Kurbanoglu provide a wider view point by separating the terms. According to them, information within the context of user studies, is used to denote factual data or advice or opinion, physical object, such as a book or journal, or the channel through which a message is conveyed. But within the context of library and information science,

information is defined as any stimulus that reduces uncertainty (Icak &Kurbanoglu,1998:2). These authors echo the definition of information need which is given by Wilson and Streatfield. According to them information need is a subjective, relative concept only in the mind of the experiencing individual.

According to Wilson in Icak & Kurbanoglu (1998) information seeking behaviour, which results from the recognition of some need is defined as any activity of an individual that is undertaken to identify a message that satisfies a perceived need. Obviously, there are many definitions that have been given to these terms. It can therefore be added that 'information seeking begins when someone perceives that the current state of possessed knowledge is less than that needed to deal with some issue' (Icak &Kurbanoglu 1998:2).

In rural community, where sparsely distributed population is a typical scenario, the infrastructure is not well developed, as has been stated previously in 1.2. Since there are no proper roads available, it is difficult for daily newspapers, which carry up to date information on what is happening around the world, to be delivered. The story of international network is a dream to such a community. Therefore, information is sought from people. This is in line with Lundu and Milimo(1990:147)'s ideas. According to them, in terms of the communication of ideas and information exchange, the rural communities depend mostly, if not entirely, on oral and visual aids. These authors further explain that this indicates that people, because mostly cannot read and write on their own, employ the sense of seeing and hearing in promoting their own development and personal survival.

To Chamber in Lundu & Milimo(1990:47) knowledge acquired through the faculties of seeing and hearing, which Radebe (2001) defines as indigenous knowledge, is easily retained in the memory of the so-called rural illiterate dweller, and communicated orally from one generation to another through music, dance folklore and drama.

This is very common since the people in rural communities are usually illiterate, they cannot seek for information from the media for themselves, thus they rely on other

people. It is likely that they receive stale and out-dated information from unreliable sources. It can thus be said that information needs of rural communities are not met at all, yet factors like challenges facing the individual, uncertainty, accessibility and availability, as cited by Ocholla (1999: 129) are some that influence information seeking behaviour.

Ucak & Kurbanoglu in their study of 'information need and information seeking behaviour of scholars in a Turkish university', found out that regardless of nationality, information seeking behaviour is largely dependent on the type of the scholar's discipline (Icak & Kurbanoglu, 1998:2), but with the rural community, this entirely depends on literacy, availability of information and sources which carry information, and which can help the people to access it with ease.

2.6. Information availability to the rural community

A number of authors have observed that rural community is most of the time affected by illiteracy, poor road infrastructure, poor or non-electricity distribution (Raju 2001, Dladla 2000). In his study '' towards access to information in rural India'' Raju observed that rural India is characterised by limited land availability, poor literacy, inadequate health, sanitary and water facilities(Raju,2001:1).

Dladla investigated how redistribution of wealth was done to promote development in the poorer areas in the Rustenburg district council. According to him, some rural households in villages of Rustenburg do not have electricity because they cannot raise money to pre-pay. Although vast millions of rands have been donated and allocated to this district, and the electric cables are all over the villages, some of the villagers are so poor that they cannot afford to pay for electricity when they do not have money to buy food (Dladla, 2000:8).

To these authors, the illiterates depend largely on informal way of getting information as Lundu & Milimo (1990:147) points out that it is mostly through visual and oral aids. It is therefore very difficult to the semi-literate, even if they would like to read whatever is in their level of education, they are hindered by the inaccessibility of their areas, and therefore dependent on those few who are working in town, if they have extra money to buy newspaper or magazine, or their husbands, who usually come back home once a month or during prominent holidays, and bring with them the newspapers.

If there is such a high degree of rural illiteracy, the increase in unemployment and under-employment (Anderson in Kagan, 2000:280) will result.

Kagan (2000:29) observes that illiterate people often do not have access to an environment conducive to learning, and suggests that public libraries are ideal learning places and can provide the right surroundings and conditions conducive for development even in rural areas without electricity. However, Kagan's viewpoint assumes that public libraries are easily accessible in terms of locality, information content and format.

2.7. Problems of accessibility and availability of information to the rural community

A number of factors create problems when accessing information by any community, but in particular the rural community. As it is known, most information accessed is from the media such as radio, television, books, magazines, posters, church, health centers, community groups and clubs. Illiteracy, poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure, hinder rural community to access information.

Most dwellers of rural places are illiterate. They usually do not buy newspapers, magazines, or books or any other print media in order to acquire information. Largely, they cannot read. Most of them are unemployed. Those who can read on their own, do not have money to buy current sources of information like newspapers or magazines or

any other media, ultimately they seldom enjoy the entertainment in pleasure, informative, educative or self- development, attributed by information.

Poverty is the prominent factor which strikes every rural community. Most people in such areas are unemployed. They are poor in many ways. Their dwellings display poverty, their attire display poverty and hunger, the sicknesses they have, show that they are poor and cannot afford to consult Doctors.

The factors above make informal form of information utilization popular in rural community. Even the radio and television broadcasts that could reach most people world wide, are affected by poverty in such communities. Few members of rural communities can afford to buy batteries for the radio on rare occasions, thus do not keep radios in their homes. Most of them do not have television sets in their homes. The use of broadcasting for information dissemination is therefore insignificant.

The use of iconography and pictography is also limited. The informative posters are pasted on the poles or trees around the place for quite a long time without serving its purpose of disseminating information. Frequently, a format of presenting information with more text and less practical pictures is betraying.

Considering the literacy status of these people, posters hung there for days without being noticed or without ringing a bell to the community dwellers, because they cannot read what is represented. This is confirmed by Chinyere in Ngimwa (1996:94) that access to the mass media is lacking for rural women of Kenya, like in any other similar rural areas, that they depend on face to face interpersonal communication between friends, relatives, cooperative society and churches among other media.

There are different problems one can encounter when trying to avail information as observed by Ikoja-Odongo (2001), such as ignorance resulting from illiteracy, poor infrastructure, unreliable information, inability to locate information, information which

needs to be repackaged, and the information brokers who need commission. These problems can be explained as follows:

2.7.1. Ignorance resulting from illiteracy

The high percentage of women in rural communities are illiterate. Thus they cannot extract needed information from print media. For example information on agriculture, which is mostly found in Farmer's weekly magazine cannot be accessible because of problems of language and following instructions when it comes to information on pigs or chicken or cattle breeding, or maize farming. This will then cause their products to be insufficient and incompetent with other white local farmers, who are able to read and apply relevant information and measures to produce good results.

2.7.2. Poor infrastructure

In rural areas, 90 % of places have poor or no infrastructure. Telephone lines are not well developed, those which are constructed are not properly looked after.
Proper roads are not found, which makes it very difficult to move in between the households. For first aid and health services, it is difficult, since the ambulance cannot reach other places in deep rural areas because of the physical built of the places. The information , the very important assert, cannot be delivered.

2.7.3. Unreliability of information

A preliminary study by Ikoja-Odongo (2001), establishes that the most preferred channel of receiving information in Uganda is the word of mouth or oral transmission exchanges. This, he observes, is similar with rural community in Africa. The people in these communities, according to this author, are unable to access information on their own, thus rely on whatever information is disseminated through the word of mouth by local

people from other places, which is, in most instances, unreliable, inaccurate and distorted, as it passes from one person to another (Ikoja-Odongo, 2001). In-between and during the process of transfer of that oral information, he adds, one can 'spice' it. Often there are those rural dwellers who want to be known as 'newsbreakers', taking the advantage that the place is rural and remote. In their 'newsbreaking' status which they enjoy most, there is competition and 'hearsays', which result to delivery of unreliable information.

2.7.4. Inability to locate required information

Information poverty prevails in rural communities. Sometimes even if the information is around and available, people cannot locate it.

In their studies of ''info-rich, info-poor: access and exchange in the global information society'' (Haywood,1995) and ''the growing gap between the information rich and the information poor both within and between countries'' (Kagan 2000), it becomes clear that other communities are richer than others in terms of information availability and access.

Kagan (2000:28) separates the definition of the information rich and poor in two ways, that is the North versus the South, which means rich versus poor countries, and the gap between the elite and the disadvantaged within countries. Ocholla in Kagan defines them as "economically disadvantaged populations of the developing countries (the South), the rural people who are often geographically isolated by lack of communication and transportation systems, those disadvantaged by cultural and social poverty, especially the illiterate, the elderly, women and children, minorities who are discriminated against by race, creed and religion, and the physically disabled" (Ocholla, 2000: 28).

Talking about the information poor Haywood (1995), laments that the' poorest countries in the world have no knowledge surplus that they can trade, and too often their objectives

cannot be lifted above the demands of survival : how to feed a family, how to protect it from war and disease, how to retain access to clean water, how to get a loan to start a cash crop, how to get children to a school 20 miles away without transportation. (Haywood, 1995:114).

2.7.5. Repackaging information

Information needs to be repackaged in order to reach potential users. As already mentioned that in most instances, one of the criteria a rural resident can be identified with, is the illiteracy status. Rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, use Zulu as their medium of communication. Advisably, it would be wise if the information which is delivered to them is not in another language other than Zulu because there is a possibility that they do not even try to access it if it is in another language. Similarly, information must be presented in a format that is accessible such as audio-visual and that must also be contextually appealing.

2.7.6. Information brokers need commission

Presently, information has become a very important commodity. As South Africa moves towards information society, access to information is becoming expensive. It is important to note that the majority of rural dwellers are not working. Sometimes they ask for information from someone thinking that the spirit of 'ubuntu' will prevail. Information brokers need to be paid. Unavailability of funds will hinder these people's access to the information they need, and thus lose the golden opportunity of accessing information which would change their lives for the better.

Financial barriers to access information by the poor have been noted by Rowe (1989). According to this author, the value of information increases and inevitably the number of sources of information increases too, through large and small publishing enterprises. Therefore the cost of information, particularly that which is perceived as having high value increases very rapidly (Rowe,1989:47).

2.7.7 Incapacity to look for information due to disability

Disability is very common to poor communities. Blind, aged, physically disabled people with polio infection, and other diseases, like HIV/AIDS, Tubercolosis, high blood pressure and many others, are typical in such communities. These people therefore cannot move around quickly to look for needed and relevant information. They stay at their remote places hopelessly and perhaps eventually die.

Mchombu's work in Kagan (1998:1) illustrates this scenario. More vividly, he portrays a picture of a poor man in a rural area, who is undernourished and attacked by many different diseases. Therefore, it is obvious that such people cannot access information as they might wish, all they think about is to satisfy their basic survival need, that is food in their stomachs.

2.8. Ways to improve the availability and exploitation of information by the rural women

It is very important that the way in which information is available and used by the rural women is improved in order to develop themselves and their communities. As many studies have indicated that information is very important in developing anyone who accesses it, similarly it will serve the same purpose with the rural women. Although not holistically, the ways to improve the availability and exploitation of information by the rural women, are mentioned hereunder.

2.8.1 Availability of public library

As defined by Mhlongo (1995), a public library is a local source of information and documents accessible to the general public. It provides access to the information and documentary resources of a region or even a nation. A public library enables ordinary

people at little or no direct cost to them to gain access to materials from which they may gain knowledge, information, cultural experience and entertainment (Mhlongo,1995:9).

The establishment of rural libraries in rural areas can provide information which is a prerequisite to all development (Dasgupta, 1999;1) to rural dwellers, thus giving the development they need.

The library in rural communities is very important if it will be closer to the people living there, and exposed to their information needs and accordingly providing for their needs. However, such libraries must be suitably located with repackaged information that is accessible to the potential users.

2.8.2. *Literacy projects*

The literacy projects should be prepared and offered to the rural communities. These projects will help rural women to read and write and count on their own and in that way improve their way of living and be empowered due to their employability status. The local schools and teachers can be the relevant agents of such projects in the sense that the school buildings can house the materials and serve as centers where these projects are conducted. Teachers can offer tuition help to local women.

2.8.3. *Workshops and meetings*

Meetings and workshops summoned and conducted by extension workers can be of great help in giving the opportunity to rural women to access and utilize information. The extension workers should be representing various sections, such as agriculture, health, education, business and many others and disseminate information needed by the rural women.

2. 9. Conclusion

A vast literature shows that information is an important assert which needs to be accessed easily and used for development. However, many factors hinder its access.

It is evident that many communities, especially those in rural areas, are faced with various problems of the unavailability and accessibility of information to them when trying to access it to satisfy their needs, they are hindered by many obstacles, and therefore mostly depend on other people for information. It is assumed in this study that if information can be easily available to rural women, self and societal advancement, education, literacy and community development can be better.

It has come out from this chapter that factors which hinder accessibility of information by the rural community, such as illiteracy, information which needs repackaging, lack of skills in locating information and many others, need to be redressed so that such community can utilize information for their development.

The following chapter will present how the data was collected from the respondents, the methods used to collect it and the problems which were experienced before, during and after the field.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the research was conducted and data gathered, which was largely through primary sources. The following sections are presented: research design, the population and sampling procedure, data collection instruments as well as data collection procedure and problems encountered in the field.

3.2. Research methodology

Bailey (1997:33) describes methodology as the philosophy of the research process. In this philosophy, according to this author, the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for research, and the standards or criteria the researcher uses for interpreting data and reaching conclusions, are included.

Research methodology is concerned with how research is to be conducted. Closely related to research methodology is research design. Research design is the planning of any scientific research from the first step to the last(Barbie,1992:89). Barbie (1992) explains that the research design addresses the planning of scientific inquiry. He further suggests that it is a strategy for finding out something. It can therefore be concluded that research method is part of research design.

A descriptive survey design, sometimes known as the normative survey method, as well as critical incident method was used in this study.

According to Leedy (1989:140), a descriptive survey design is employed to process data that come to the researcher through observation. Using both structured and unstructured observation, the researcher took shots of the rural women performing their daily activities and recorded what was seen and heard from the respondents.

When describing the critical incident, Fisher and Oulton (1999) consider that it is a term used to describe a flexible set of principles for qualitative research, which was developed as a tool for the systematic study of human behavior. Similarly, Ngimwa, Ocholla and Ojiambo (1996:49), describe the critical incident method as a specialized form of survey technique which involves studying the performance of a group or individuals. They further explain that it is based on the theory that people have less difficulties in remembering or recalling accurately the latest events taking place in their lives. As the Melmoth rural population is mostly illiterate, it was easy for them to recall without contacting recorded sources. Critical incidence helped the researcher to ask more, probing deeper into the respondent so that information sought may not be shallow. This was applied through the use of face to face interviews.

3.3. Population and sampling

Neuman (1997:203), considers population as a pool of cases or elements, from which the researcher draws a sample, whereas sampling is a process of systematically selecting cases for inclusion in a research project.

Nachmias (1992:170) cautions that it is often impossible, impractical or extremely expensive to collect data from all the potential units of analysis encompassed in the research problem. Therefore sampling is done.

Viewing the social and economic status of rural women in these Melmoth districts, it was deduced that they were the same in all respects. Therefore, even 1 % or 50 % or 1005 could be used, and it would make insignificant difference. That is why the researcher used a purposive sampling technique based on the judgement regarding the characteristics of a representative sample.

As perceived by Grinnel in Mkhize (1995:50) purposive sampling relies on the closest typical subjects to constitute the sample. According to the researcher, the typical

characteristics with these women were illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, farm-working and housewives.

From the population of 11 199 rural women of Melmoth, a sample size of 1 % was drawn, which produced 109 respondents from six districts. The sample frame was drawn as follows: From Entembeni there were 20 respondents. Nineteen were from Mfanefile and 10 from KwaMagwaza. From Mfule 29 were selected for interview and KwaYanguye and Ndundulu, were 14 and 17 respectively. The distribution of the sample is presented in the sample frame in table 1.

TABLE 1: SAMPLING FRAME

DISTRICT	TOTAL NO. OF WOMEN	1 % OF TOTAL NO.
1. ENTEMBENI	2098	20
2. MFANEFILE	1973	19
3. KWAMAGWAZA	1059	10
4. MFULE	2968	29
5. KWAYANGUYE	1401	14
6. NDUNDULU	1700	17
TOTAL	11199	109

3.4. Data collection instruments

The research design was largely qualitative.
As is the case with similar studies, both primary and secondary sources were used for data collection. The secondary data helped to provide a framework and insight based on previous studies on the information need and information behaviour of rural community, particularly women, as discussed in chapter two.

The primary data gave information to the researcher on situational analysis, trends and issues related to information needs and seeking for women living in the research area. Specific data collecting instruments included questionnaires, interviews, literature review and observation.

3.4.1. Questionnaires

Questionnaires are instruments of collecting data which are self-administered. The respondent attends to them on his own time and place, away from the interviewer. This type of instrument was preferred because the respondent the is not face to face with the interviewer, which gives him freedom to respond honestly. It is faster and cheaper to administer than conducting interviews.

The researcher preferred to use questionnaires with all the respondents. This approach was, however, hindered by low literacy level among the respondents, majority of whom could not read or write. Ultimately, a few questionnaires were distributed to community workers and opinion leaders, who are largely literate . Although closed-ended questions only could have been used, because, according to Bailey (1997:118) they are standard and can be compared from person to person, the researcher used open-ended questions as

well, to give respondents a chance to express their views about the question. The closed-ended questions constituted 88 % of the all the questions, while 12 % was from the open-ended type. The questions asked included personal information of the rural informants, their information dissemination to the rural women, information gathering and use and finally, the remarks or comments on information provision (See appendix C).

3.4.2. Interviews

The interview schedules were largely used for data collection from the women. The interviews are interactions between the interviewer and the respondents. During this process, the interviewer probe for more information from the respondent and the respondent too, while responding, can ask questions for clarity when the need arises.

According to Bailey (1994:84), the interviews tend to have a better response rate than questionnaires. He further observes that persons who are unable to read and write can still answer questions in an interview.

Interviews are also flexible and control the situation. The researcher can thus be sure that all the questions were answered, and could also probe more answers. (Bailey, 1997:14). The researcher asked the questions in the Zulu language as most of them cannot understand any other language besides this local language.

The interview schedule included questions on personal data(name, address, age, marital status, literacy level), questions on occupation and daily working schedule. Other questions included in these schedules asked for information on their information needs, information seeking behavior, the availability accessibility, usage and effectiveness of information. The questions were asked by the researcher using the micro phone and the responses recorded in the cassette and noted. These were asked in the vernacular Zulu language, because most women could not understand another language other than Zulu (See the appendix B).

3.4.3.Source material

Source material was used to collect data and conceptualization in the study. Such materials are documents on the particular subject related to the researcher's topic. They have been studied and researched by other people. The intention is not only to get ideas, and opinions of other researcher on the subject of interest, but also to compare the situation in other places on the same subject. The researcher studied secondary works related to the topic. Primary data was not only obtained from the respondents, but from official documents from the Melmoth public library and the Melmoth townboard as well. Secondary sources were loaned from different libraries and others were obtained with the help of internet. Such sources included theses and dissertations and articles from papers presented or published by other researchers.

3.4.4. Observation

Observation always assists the researcher to gain first hand knowledge of what is required. When defining this process, Mason (1996:60) notes that it is a method of generating data which involve the researcher immersing herself in a research setting, and systematically observing dimensions of setting, interactions, relationships, actions, events and so on. Both structured and unstructured observation were used. Unstructured observation was used because it takes place in a natural setting and therefore does not quantify data (Bailey.1997:262). The researcher wanted to witness the first occurrence of behavior of women when seeking information, she thus followed them unnoticed, and recorded what she saw and sometimes took photo shots.

3.5. Data collecting procedure

In the first instance, a work plan was drawn (See appendix A).
The questionnaires for the informants as well as the interview schedules to the rural women, were prepared. The validity of these instruments was tested in the Ongoye rural area outside KwaDlangezwa, by 22 respondents. Fifteen of these were rural women and seven were rural informants including nurses, teachers, policemen, priests and indunas-the chiefs. The purpose of this pilot study was to highlight problems and ambiguity in the questions, allowing changes to be made and the survey to be conducted without errors. It was successfully completed and it confirmed that the layout of the survey was generally clear.

The researcher then proceeded to the area of the main study, Melmoth, to conduct research. Some of the informants were called over the phones and it was explained to them about the questionnaires the researcher would like them to complete. These questionnaires were self administered to them.

Not all informants had contact details such as cell phones or telephones. In that case there was no prior arrangements and discussions on work to be done. The researcher visited them in their homes or places of work. The procedure of completion of questionnaires was explained to them. The questionnaires were collected after a week, completed and ready to be picked up.

The interviews were conducted to rural women. The researcher helped by her assistant recorded the responses on paper and by the use of a tape recorder. The information on cassette was later transferred on paper by the researcher. Generally the response from all the respondents was good.

3.6. Constraints

The whole exercise of conducting research was eventually successful. However, the researcher encountered a few problems before going to the field, during the actual field work and after the, which, however, were overcome later.

3.6.1. *Before the field*

The researcher applied for finance to help carry the research tasks. Although the finance was received, it was not easy to access the funds before going to the field. The procedure is to claim for any task or activity performed. This created delay for the researcher as the duplication of the instruments could not be paid for in time.
The research instruments need to be prepared. Relying on technology is sometimes delaying the process. Several times the researcher tried to print and reproduce instruments so that they match the number of the respondents, but due to technology at that time, she failed. The server was down, therefore the printer was not working.

Photocopiers are very expensive. In a service station where the cheapest page is 30 cents is unaffordable when you think in terms of doing the task first and then claim. That slowed the process of embarking on the research.

3.6.2.In the field

When conducting the pilot study at the Ongoye area, the researcher had to use public transport and sometimes walk on foot when collecting data. The transport was difficult to arrange since the researcher did not have a valid driver's license. Dependence for driving was laid on the assistant, but that could not help since the research assistant was not a member of staff. The car assistance was later sought outside the University to assist the researcher with research duties

In Melmoth, the researcher came across socially related problems. The women in this rural area had not heard anything about research or heard anybody talking about research to them. They innocently heard about the term "research" for the first time, therefore the researcher had to explain to them first all about research, its aims and significance to the researcher and to them, before embarking on the interview itself.

Self introduction by the researcher and her assistant was very important to the respondents. If it was not done, the respondents would have demanded it.

Geographical problems were experienced. Melmoth is a mountainous place. The households are far apart from each other, without any proper roads in between most of them. The distance between the households, interfered negatively with the progress in the sense that several times the car had to be left on top of the hill in order to walk on foot and reach the households at the bottom of the hill. The researcher was then forced to spend longer time in the field than what was initially planned in the work plan. Fortunately, although the crime rate is reportedly high all over the country, this was not the case in this area. The car was not tempered with.

3.6.3. After the field

Much time was consumed by a number of problems encountered, this then slowering the pace of the whole process. To finish on the set time, the researcher had to work on this study until very late at night and over holidays in order to catch up on the lost time.

3.7. Data analysis

It is very essential that once the data has been collected, it is organized in such a way that conclusions can be drawn. According to Fisher & Oulton (1999) the purpose of analyzing the data is to summarize and describe the data in an efficient manner so that it can be effectively used for many practical purposes. The content analysis method was applied to analyze responses from open-ended questions. The content analysis is described by

Kerlinger as an objective and quantitative method for assigning types of verbal and other data to categories (Kerlinger,1978:417).

The responses were organized and assigned to major categories, which was thereafter analyzed by use of descriptive statistics in order to get frequencies and percentages.
The responses from the open-ended questions were grouped together according to their similarities and either summarized or presented as they were. The tables were used to present both frequencies and percentages of data items.

3.8. CONCLUSION

This chapter focussed on the research method that was used to collect data. The descriptive survey and critical incident methods were used in the study. The sample, sampling procedure, research instruments as well as data collecting procedure have been presented. Finally, the problems encountered by the researcher about the field have been eventually tabulated.

The data collected will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION,ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is intended to present the responses of the rural women and rural informants in Melmoth . Only the respondents between the ages 15 and above found in six rural districts of Melmoth, that is, Entembeni, Mfanefile, Kwamagwaza, Mfule, Kwayanguye and Ndundulu, were included in the study. The chapter presents the results of the study based on primary data. It has two sections. The first section presents the response from the rural women in Melmoth that was based on interview. The second section provides the response from the rural informants in Melmoth . This was based on questionnaire responses.

The aim of the chapter is to present the results the respondents gave to different questions they were asked through the interviews and questionnaire schedules.

The responses were coded using Microsoft Excel programme. The information given help to design the tables representing the number of respondents. In some instances, the information was tabulated.

4.2. Interview with the rural women

This section has the following subsections: (i)data on the rural women's personal information, (ii) information needs and information seeking behaviour (iii) information accessibility and effectiveness.

4.2.1. Personal information

4.2.1.1. Address

The following data was required; names, address, cell number or telephone number. This was done to ensure traceability of the respondent when the need arose. A large proportion did not disclose this information. The reason being that they had no straight addresses as they rely on schools post boxes, which sometimes cause losses and delays.

4.2.1.2.Age

Besides the address, they were asked to indicate their age. This was done in order to determine if there is a relationship between information need and age of rural women. Table 2 shows their responses.

Table 2: Division of rural women by age. (N =109)

Age category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
15-20	17	16
21-30	31	28
31-40	41	38
41 and over	20	18
Total	109	100

This table shows that the majority of rural women who responded are between the age category 31-40. Age category 15-20 is significantly very low.

4.2.1.3.Marital status

Following the two first questions, the rural women were asked to give their marital status in order to find out if there is a relationship between marital status and access and use of information. 78 (71 %) women are married, 26 (24 %) were found to be single, while 5 (5 %) were widowed. There were no women found divorced among the respondents.

The results show that the majority of women are married. Single women are fairly small in number. There are those who are widowed but none are divorced.

4.2.1.4.Daily activities

A further probing required the rural women to indicate their daily activities. This was done in order to estimate how busy rural women are and whether they do have time to access and use information for development. Table 3 indicates their response.

Table 3: Rural women daily activities (N=109)

Daily Activities	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Cooking for the family	**54**	**50**
Fetching water from the river	**25**	**23**
Cleaning the house/home	**24**	**22**
Doing the washing for the family	**18**	**17**
Working in the fields	**29**	**27**
Fetching woods from the forest for firemaking, building houses, making kraals, etc	**18**	**17**
***Going to school to learn* and to attend to school activities.**	**2**	**2**
Doing handwork like sewing, crotching, knitting etc	**1**	**1**
Total	**172***	**149**

*** Multiple responses**

From the above table, it is clear that the rural women of Melmoth spend most of their daily time engaged in different household chores and activities.

4.2.1.5.Level of education

To confirm Leach's (2000) observation on low educational level in rural places in KwaZulu-Natal, the rural women were asked to indicate their level of education. This was done to find out if they are able to read on their own or depend on others to read for them.

38 (35 %) women had not received any education at all. This means they had not put their feet at the gates of the school or got any formal education.59 (54 %) women had received primary education. This means they either started from grade 1 to grade 7 or from grade 1 and dropped in any grade between grade 1 and grade 7.

10 (9 %) had secondary education, which starts from grade 8 to grade 12. They had either finished it or dropped in between. Only 2 (2 %) women had received education after their grade 12. They had either gone for professional training such as teaching or nursing or received other skills such as typing or computer.

The results indicate that the majority of Melmoth rural women have primary education. This means that they have either started from grade one up to grade seven only, or left school even before reaching grade seven, which is the end of primary education, and never proceeded to grade eight up to grade twelve, which is secondary education, or left the school in between the grades. However the number of those who have never been to school in their lives, is quite noticeable. This leaves the doubt that they can freely read and write, especially other languages other than Zulu. A very low proportion of the rural Melmoth women have gone beyond grade 12 to attain tertiary education.

4.2.2. Information needs and information behaviour

4.2.2.1.Information needs

In order to provide relevant information to people, their information needs and seeking patterns have to be known. The respondents were asked if they have ever felt the need for any kind of information under any circumstances. This was asked in order to find out if these rural women have experienced the need for information. All 109 women indicated that yes, one time or another, they have had a need for information. They were also asked the kind of information that they have required. This was to specify information according to their need and also to find out if the rural women in this area have approximately the same information needs or totally different information needs. Table 4 indicates their responses.

Table 4 : Nature of information required by the rural women (N=109)

Information required	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Agriculture/Farming (Crop farming /Land issues)	38	35
Health (Personal/Family)	20	18
Transport/Road	15	14
Job(part-time/weekends)/Career	11	10
Education(Tertiary/Adult)	10	9
Welfare & Pension	6	5
Entertainment(Sports/Games/Festivals etc)	4	4
Business	3	3
Legal	2	2
Total	109	100

The table above indicates that in Melmoth, the majority of rural women 38 (35 %) are in need of agricultural information, which tells us that farming is practiced by the majority. Information in health is needed by equally a high proportion 20 (18 %). Although the crime rate is very high in South Africa, it is noted that very few rural women 2 (2 %) in

this area are bothered by crime. Some rural women, especially young 4 (4 %), expressed the information need on entertainment.

4.2.2.2. Information seeking

As a follow up to the above question, the rural women were also asked to state why they needed that particular information. This was asked in order to get the main purpose of seeking for that information. Several reasons were given.

Their reasons are in line with their geographical situation. Since they practice farming the majority of them need this information in order to gain agricultural knowledge and have good produce out of their crops.

On health the stress was on different diseases which are found in the area. They want to know the cases and how they can protect themselves and their families.
Entertainment refreshes the mind. It helps a great deal especially after hard work and examination stress. Lack of entertainment facilities and programs was felt when the rural women explained the need. They expressed the information need on sports, festivals, clubs etc.

A further probing inquired from the respondents was whether they got the particular information they needed. This was asked in order to find out whether it sometimes happen that they do not get the information they need. 80 (73,4 %) respondents agreed that they got information. Only 29 (26,6 %) said they did not get information.

4.2.2.3. Methods of information seeking

When they were asked how they started to look for information, the respondents gave various reasons. Table 5 indicates their responses.

Table 5 : *Information sources* (N= 109)

Sources of information	Frequencies(N)	Percentages (%)
Friends/Neighbors/Relatives	61	56
Teachers/Educators	19	17
Nurses/Health workers	13	12
Radio/Television	10	9
Government employee/Clerks/Administrators	2	2
Magazines/Newspapers	2	2
Policemen/Security personnel	2	2
Total	109	100

The table indicates that the majority of women 61 (56 %) go to people around them such as friends, relatives and neighbours to get information.

Professionals in their area are contacted when information is sought. Teachers 19 (17 %) and nurses 13 (12 %) are largely used. Others 10 (9%) use either radios or televisions.

Very few women 2 (2 %) use modern media , policeman 2 (2 %) and Government employees 2(2 %).

Further interrogation on whether they were satisfied with the information they got from these sources to determine whether they are able to use information they receive or it cannot be used fruitfully, was equally important.

83 (76 %) women said they were not satisfied , whereas 26 (24 %) indicated that they were satisfied.

Those who were not satisfied with the information were further asked why they were not satisfied. This was to get reasons that made them dissatisfied with the information. Some of their reasons are summed up here.

* *The people I talked to (Izinduna, the chiefs) said there are no funds yet given to this area to build proper roads, this is incredible because our Government is talking about giving us people roads and other services, so I was not satisfied at all.*

* *The information I got did not satisfy me and so did not help me in my problem.*

* *My friends did not know too like me.*

* *I did not get the relevant person to help me with what I wanted.*

These respondents were further asked what they did to satisfy their information needs. This was to find out if after dissatisfaction there was any other attempt done to get the required information.

The majority 65 (78 %) indicated that they did nothing. 15 (18 %) ask the alternative people instead of just giving up. A small number 3 (4 %) read books to get information on their own.

Other respondents 26 (24 %) had said they were satisfied with the information they received. They were then further asked how they used that information they got. This was asked to find out if they had any particular reason for needing the information and whether they used it fruitfully. Table 6 indicates their responses.

Table 6 : Uses of information (N =109)

Uses of information	Frequency(N)	Percentage(%)
I visited the nurses in hospitals and clinics and white women in their home, asking for domestic work.	3	12
I followed instructions as I was given and I succeeded.	11	42
I went to school and discuss my matter with the teacher.	10	38
I consulted the policemen	2	8
Total	26*	100

*Only those who were satisfied

The respondents who said they did not get information were further asked what made them not to get the information they wanted. This was to give the oversight of the problems that might hinder them to access information. Their responses are summarized below.

** The civil servants from various Departments do not visit our area and hear from us what our information needs are.*

** My friends, relatives and neighbors do not know like myself perhaps because we are living in the same area.*

** I usually get out-dated information from old newspapers and magazines, which does not help me.*

** I always miss out from radio because I am always too busy to listen to the programs and stories from it.*

** The only hospital and the clinics are very far from our area therefore we are not immediately helped in as far as health is concerned.*

** There are very few learned people in this area and they are usually very busy.*

It seems like people are not satisfied when they seek information from the people whom they think know the specific information they need. It is clear that this community does have legal and health information needs as it does not have these facilities in its vicinity.

The respondents were asked to give the obstacles that they encountered while trying to access information they wanted. This was asked so that the obstacles if any, can be noted. Table 7 below indicates their responses.

Table 7: Obstacles that hinder information access by the rural women (N=109)

Obstacles	Frequency(N)	Percentage(%)
Communication	30	27,5
Finance	25	22,9
I usually do not have time	16	14,7
I did not know anybody to consult	10	9,2
Fright	10	9,2
Age	5	4,6
Information sources in schools are limited to children's/ learners' needs only.	5	4,6
Caregivers for disabled and the sick are not found in the area	5	4,6
My parents/husband/granny take the radio in the evening and I do not have one for myself	3	2,7
Total	109	100

The table above indicates that the obstacles are caused by a problem in communication 30 (27,5%) and financially related matters 25 (22,9 %). Lack of time which was indicated by many people 16 (14,7%) as well, is a significant obstacle. Possession of

modern media by pensioners (grannies), husbands, elders (parents), though in minimal basis but very important as an obstacle to access information.

To gain a deeper insight into the problem, the respondents were asked if there was any cultural and traditional barriers that could prevent them from seeking information. This was asked in order to find out if the traditional or the cultural situation hinders the women in this area to access information. They all (109) indicated that no such barrier has hindered their access to any information.

4.2.2.4. Media/Information sources

Preparing the form of media on how information should be made available to them, determines whether media/information source they each use was appropriate to them. They were thus asked to give the media /information source they had used. Their responses are indicated in table 8.

Table 8: Media/Information sources used (N=109)

Media/Information source	Frequency	Percentage
Friends/Neighbors/Relatives	60	55
Teachers/Educators	13	12
Nurses/Social workers	11	10
Imbizo(chiefs meetings)	10	9
Modern media(Radio,T.V., Newspapers,Magazines,Books)	9	8
Churches	6	6
Total	109	100

From the results, the friends, neighbours and relatives 60 (55 %) are the commonly used information sources in this area. Other rural women 9 (8 %) use modern media, especially radios to get information but they are not as many as one can think. Professionals like teachers 13 (12 %), nurses and social workers 11 (10 %) are also used. Churches 6 (6 %) Chiefs Imbizo 10 (9 %) also are used to obtain information

While tables 5 and 8 appear the same, they are different because in table 5 they are asked the method they used to get information, and in table 8 they were asked to give the sources they used to get information.

The respondents were asked if the information sources or media they used were easy to access. This was to ensure that the respondents were using the source or medium which was user friendly or not. 95 (87 %) said it was easy but 14 (13 %) indicated that it was not easy to use the information sources.

They were further asked if they had used that medium directly or through someone. This was asked in order to find out whether to access information, rural women have to use someone else or they are able to access it themselves. 104 respondents (95,4 %) indicated that they use the sources directly while 5 (4,6 %) showed that they use it through someone. This shows that the rural women in this area are able, most of the times, to use information sources themselves to get information, not perhaps through husbands.
This finding partly confirms that there are no cultural barriers that hinder women from receiving information from the media directly.

To probe further, they were further asked if they still continue to use that particular information source / media to get information. This was to find out whether they continue to use information sources they had used initially or they do not use it any longer.

98 (89,9 %) said they did not continue with the media they had used initially, while eleven (10,1 %) indicated that they continued. This is obvious since most (76 %) were not satisfied with the media, which is why they could not continue using the media.

Those respondents who said yes they continue to use the media were further asked why they are doing so. This was to find out if there is a particular reason that make them to continue. Their responses are summarized below.

* *We always help each other with information.*
* *To know other if there are other better opportunities that part time jobs.*
* *It is accessible to me.*
* *We are living together as neighbors and we always help each other, we have been doing this for years now.*
* *To get information I need at that point in time.*

The responses indicate that there are several factors which oblige the rural women to continue using the medium. Perhaps it can be articulated that it is because there is a

shortage of effective and relevant sources available to them, and they are left with no other alternative but to use what is available despite its shortcomings. There are also elements of proximity, accessibility, rapidity and dependability of information expressed through these answers.

To follow up from their previous responses, the respondents were asked if they encounter any problems when using the medium. This was asked in order to find out if there was any difficulty in using the media. 8 (73 %) respondents indicated that they encounter problems, while 3 (27 %) said they do not get any problems when using the medium.

Those who said yes they came across problems were further asked to state the problems they encountered. This was to determine the problems associated with accessing information by rural women in this area. The problems narrated include these:-

* *We know almost the same things as we live in the same vicinity, therefore there is no new information.*

* *If my friend does not know, I do not get help anywhere else.*

* *I do not always have money to buy modern media like newspaper and get new information.*

* *I most of the time get information irrelevant to my needs.*

* *When a people who help me with information, like teachers, husbands, children etc, are not available or are on holiday, I have to wait till they is back even if it is a long time.*

The respondents were asked to list the media they had ever used to get information. This question was asked to get the media commonly used by rural women in this area. Table 9 below indicates their responses.

Table 9: Media ever used by the rural women (N=109)

MEDIA	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Friends	70	64
Radio	52	48
Professionals/teachers/nurses etc	46	42
Neighbors	44	40
Relatives	39	36
Modern media(Newspapers,Magazines,Books	36	33
Television	24	22
Chiefs	22	20
Police	17	16
Priests	13	12
TOTAL	360*	303

- **Multiple responses**

Friends 70 (64%) are the commonly used media in this area of Melmoth by the rural women to get information. Radio is also significantly 52 (48 %)used Modern information media such as magazines, newspapers and books are used by 36 (33 %) and television 24 (22 %), are not popularly used in this area.

The above table is also different from table 8 in the sense that it needed the respondents to indicate the information sources they had ever used in their lives since they were born till then, not only for receiving information purposes but also perhaps for other purposes.

The respondents were further asked how easily accessible has each medium been. 89 (81,7 %)indicated that it was easy but 20 (18,3 %) indicated that it was sometimes not easy to access it. This shows that the medium which is commonly used is the one which is easy to access.

Sometimes we come across unreliable information from unreliable sources. Rural women were asked about the reliability of the media used. This was asked in order to determine whether the rural women were using reliable media or media that is not reliable. 74 (68 %) indicated that the media they used were sometimes not reliable, while 2 (2 %) indicated that they were reliable, but 33 (30 %) indicated that the media were not reliable at all.

It shows that most media used in this area is sometimes not reliable.

The respondents were further asked if the media they have used offended them in one way or another. All women 109 (100 %) indicated that they were never offended by any media they have used. This indicates that socially, religiously and traditionally the media

in this area are not offending. This must raise a question whether the rural women in this area are able to be aware if the source is offending them or everything to them is just the same.

People have a tendency to pass information they get to other people. To find out if that was the case with the rural women of Melmoth, they were asked if they contributed to the dissemination of information to the people in their community. This was asked to determine if rural women in Melmoth, too, disseminate information they have to other people or they do not. All rural women agreed that they are the disseminators of information to people around them in one way or another.

The respondents were asked where they get information they disseminate to other people. This was very important to determine if there was any particular place or manner from which they obtain information. Table 10 indicates their responses.

Table 10: SOURCES OF INFORMATION DISSEMINATED TO OTHER PEOPLE (N =109)

Source	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Friends	40	37
Experiences	24	22
Relatives	16	14,7
Professionals(Teachers,Nurses,Social workers)	13	11,9
Radio	10	9
Books	3	2,7
Modern print(Newspapers/Magazine)	3	2,7
Total	109	100

From the table, it is clear that women in this area depend on their friends, 40 (37%) for information. Experiences as sources of information are still regarded as important, as they are widely used by rural women 24 (22%).

4.2.2.5. Suggestions to improve information accessibility and use

The respondents were asked to give any suggestions that would help to improve the way the women in this area access and use information for development.

This question was asked in order to establish from them, how they thought information should be available so that it is easily accessible and used. Their responses are listed below.

** Proper roads should be built so that this place can easily be reached and information delivered as fast as possible.*

** Electricity should be installed to enable us to get and use information easily and even later at night.*

** Offices of different Departments should be mobile enough to reach our places so that they can hear and meet our needs.*

** Our schools do not have libraries. These should be built in order for us, learners to access information even outside our school subjects.*

** Clinics and hospitals should be built around our area We suffer very much when we need health services including health related information.*

** We need adult schools where we can continue with our education away from young children who will laugh at us, but also we want skills of doing things.*

** Telephones should be installed for better and easy contacts at all times. This is a communication issue.*

** At least each rural community must have an information center, where all kinds of information can be obtained.*

Although the rural women in Melmoth showed concern about the fact that the area usually does not have staff from the offices of Government like Pension, Works,

Education and others, coming to them to find what their needs are, the majority expressed the feeling that health matters need to be catered for as quickly as possible, and that is their main concern. But they rated agricultural information higher than the rest. Suggestions on telecommunications, information centers, school libraries and electricity among many, were stressed as the important need.

4.3. Data from the rural informants

Eighteen rural informants in the Melmoth area, which included the traditional chiefs (izinduna), local teachers, policemen, priests found in the area, nurses and social workers in the area, administrators who work in different Government offices, were given a questionnaire to complete. It was very important for data to be collected from these people because they are better informed than rural women in terms of development issues. They work with them in churches, hospitals or clinics, in schools, in Government offices like Pensions, Welfare and police stations.

This section comprises the following subsections. (i) data on respondents' personal information, (ii) information dissemination, (iii) information gathering and (v) remarks and recommendation on the accessibility and use of information.

4.3.1 Personal information

The rural informants were requested to give their designation. This was to ensure their level of responsibility. Their designations and responsibilities in the community are shown in table 11 .

Table 1 1: Designations and responsibilities of rural informants (N=18)

Designation	Responsibilities	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Teacher/Education	Educating/training	7	39
Nurse	Providing health services	3	17
Chief	Rural administrating and counselling	2	11
Administrator	Administrating	2	11
Social worker	Helping people with their social and family problems	2	11
Priest	Preaching	2	11
Total		18	100

Out of 18 rural informants who were given questionnaires, the majority 7 (39 %) were educators/ teachers.3 (17 %) were nurses and 2 (11 %) were social workers, administrators, chiefs, priests respectively.

The person's responsibilities in the community should be known, especially when he /she is the prominent member of the community or he or she is better educated than other community members. It is clear from the above results that most of the Melmoth rural informants render the educative and training responsibilities. Tribal chiefs and clerks do administrative works in the Government or tribal offices. The rural area in Melmoth is equipped with social workers who see to it that their family and social aspects and problems are attended to.

The rural informants were asked to indicate their vocational affiliation. This was to established whether they all work for the government or non-governmental organizations. 16 (89 %) were employed by the government and 2 (11 %) were employed by the church. This means that the Government is employing the large number of the rural South African inhabitants.

4.3.2. Information dissemination

The respondents were asked if the information dissemination is part and parcel of their service to the people of Melmoth. This was to establish whether they disseminate information to this community in any possible way they can.

All 18 (100 %) informants indicated that they were disseminating information in one way or another to the rural women of the area. This question was closed by asking them if people in their community come to them for information. This was to find out if the community under which they work recognize them as informants and therefore come to them for information. All informants indicated that they had experienced people coming to them for information.

To follow up to this question, the respondents were further asked who mostly come to them for information. It was essential to find out whether women seek information from them. Their response is on table 12.

Table 12: Information seekers to the rural informants (N =18)

Information seekers	Frequency(N)	Percentage(%)
Women	9	50
Men	2	11
Children	4	22
Disabled	0	0
Aged	1	6
All of the above	2	11
Total	18	100

Essentially, women (50 %) are the highest information seekers in this community..

The regularity of information service was to be established, the respondents were therefore asked *how often do these people come to them for information.* The findings reveal that the majority of women, 12 (66,7 %) very often come for information to the informants. 5 (27,8 %) come often, while 1 (5,5 %) do not often come.

The respondents were asked the kind of information these people look for. This was to establish the nature of information sought by the rural women. Table 1 3 indicates their responses.

Table 13: Nature of information requirement. (N=18)

Information	Frequency(N)	Percentage (%)
Agriculture/Land/Farming	9	50
Personal/Family health	8	44
Education	4	22
Job/Career	3	17
Business	2	11
Handwork(Sewing/Baking)	1	6
Pension /Welfare	1	6
Total	25*	156

*Multiple responses

A large number of rural women (50 %) seek information on agriculture. Personal and family health information is sought by 8 (44 %), while information on education is needed by 4 (22 %). Jobs/ career information is needed by 3 (17 %) and that on business is needed by 2 (11 %). Information on baking and sewing as well as that on pension and welfare is needed by 1 (6 %) respectively.

The respondents were asked to state the form in which they give information to the rural women. This was to find exactly the form of sources or the type of medium used to transfer information to the rural women and whether they were good enough for the rural women.

11(61%) give them information orally or through discussions, while 4 (22%)informants indicated that they give them information on both visual and written form. 2 (11 %) used practicals while 1 (6 %) respondent said he uses the written form.

Most (61 %) of the information given to the rural women in Melmoth is through discussions or orally. The written form of information is extremely rare,1 (6 %).

The respondents were asked to indicate the method of communication they use to disseminate information to the women in the area of Melmoth. This was to establish the method commonly used to disseminate information. Table 14 below indicates their responses.

Table 14: Method of information dissemination (N=18)

Media	Frequency(N)	Percentage (%)
Discussions & oral presentations	9	50
Imbizo	3	17
Church	2	11
Films/Video shows	2	11
Women groups	2	11
Total	18	100

Discussions 9 (50 %) and Imbizo 3 (17%) are commonly used by rural informants to disseminate information to the rural women. The films and video shows 2 (11%) are not commonly used, so are the women groups 2 (11 %) and churches 2 (11%).

The source of information is very important in order to determine the frequency and reliability of information. The respondents, therefore were asked where they get information that they disseminate to the rural women.

5 (20, 8%) got information from clinics or hospitals and 4 (16,6 %) used information from their own experiences, either work or life experiences. 3 (12,5 %) indicated that they get it from libraries, 3 (12,5 %) indicated that they get it from radios and televisions.3 (12,5 %) said from books they read and 3 (12,5 %) said by talking to people

they get information and that is the very information they disseminate to the rural women. 2 (8 %) indicated that they visit local schools for information, while 1 (4 %) indicated that they got it from organizations such as Unicef, WHO and UN.
This question also yielded multiple responses.

The respondents were also asked if they know how else the rural women obtain information besides from them. This was to give the idea of whether there are other people or organizations that help the rural women of Melmoth with information besides the rural informants. Table 15 indicates their responses.

Table 15: Other possible sources of information used by the rural women (N=18)

Source	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Friends	**5**	**28**
Clinics and schools	**4**	**22**
Church	**3**	**16,6**
Induna(chiefs)	**2**	**11,1**
Nurses	**2**	**11,1**
Women gatherings	**1**	**5,6**
Don't know	**1**	**5,6**
Total	**18**	**100**

It is noted from this table that the high number of rural women (28 %) possibly get information they needed from friends. Quite a number of them rely on schools and clinics (22 %) for information.

To speculate the reasons of needing information, the respondents were asked for what use they think information is needed by the rural women of Melmoth. Their responses are presented in table 16.

Table 16 : Information uses by the rural women (N= 18)

Uses	Frequency	Percentage
For health purposes	5	28
To practice good agriculture	4	22,2
Upliftment of their families	2	11
To gain skills to rear their children	2	11
They want to perform their daily duties satisfactorily	2	11
For knowledge	1	5,6
For educational purposes	1	5,6
For women to know their rights	1	5,6
Total	18	100

Out of 18 informants, 5 (28 %) think that the rural women use information they get from them for health related tasks. A significant number 4 (22,2 %) also mentioned agriculture purposes as uses of information by women in this area. Although not in big

number 1 (5,6 %), the indication of the need for general knowledge on education and human rights, is assumed to be needed by rural women in this area.

The rural informants were further asked how women use information that they give to them. This was to find out if they know how the information obtained is put to use by rural women or it is never used at all. Their responses are narrated below.

* *They improve their knowledge.*

* *They help their family members in terms of health, medication or practicing health methods or even visiting health centers.*

* *They solve any problems they might have.*

* *They look for jobs and support their families.*

* *They look for land, plant crops or farm animals and improve on whatever they farm.*

* *They improve on their communication skills.*

The respondents were further asked if the rural women are normally satisfied with the information they give them. This question was asked in order to find out if they see any difference from the rural women after giving them information.

Out of 18 informants, 9 (50 %) indicated that they are not sure whether they are satisfied or not. They reasoned that they do not return to them to say how grateful they

are for the information, and as a result they cannot tell their satisfaction. They do not even meet the women's relative or friend or neighbour to convey such messages.

6 (33 %) informants showed that sometimes the rural women are satisfied with the information, sometimes they are not. The reason being that they sometimes come back to them saying that they were not helped. 3 (17 %) indicated that the rural women were happy with the information they give them, because they do not come back to them to complain.

These views suggest that most rural women are not happy with the information they get.

The respondents were asked the impact which arise from the information to rural women. This was to determine if they themselves could see any impact from the fact that they give rural women information. This is what they had to say:-

* *They know what to do when they encounter similar problems.*

* *Those who are working come to the understanding of their bosses, some are even promoted.*

* *They practice good health care and are able to follow measurements when they administer medication.*

* *Women do not stay at homes now and wait for money from their husbands, but they help themselves and bring improvement in their homes.*

* *They apply, on their own, for jobs or learning opportunities in other schools.*

Improvement on the way information is given to rural women is very important, so that eventually they can access and use it. The informants were asked to recommend methods of providing information to rural women of Melmoth effectively. Their responses are indicated in table 17.

Table 17: Recommendations for providing of information to the rural women of Melmoth (N= 18)

N=18

Recommendation	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Women's groups and discussions	**6**	**33**
Workshops/Seminars	**4**	**22**
A big hall should be built to unite and address women	**3**	**17**
Use of radio	**2**	**11**
People from different Government offices	**2**	**11**
If they could all possess radios and television, they could listen to informative programms and even other women motivating them	**1**	**6**
Total	**18**	**100**

The response shows that addressing women through discussions and women groups should be commonly used in this area to help them to easily access information.

As the rural women indicated some problems when accessing information, the informants too were asked if they encounter any problems when disseminating information to the rural women of Melmoth. This was to find out if there are any similar problems in the process of information dissemination and accessibility in this area.

Table 18 indicates the rural informants' responses.

Table 18: Problems on information dissemination to the rural women (N=18)

Problems	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Women do not come in big numbers when a workshop/seminar or women's group has been announced	5	23
Most women in this area cannot read well, so they cannot independently follow the instructions which is on text	4	18
Information disseminated cannot reach all areas where women are found, because of the nature of the places	3	13,6
Women do not meet, they always say they do not have time for that, or they only come when called by Induna(chief)	3	13,6
There are often no organized places like community halls, where to meet women to give them a particular information	3	13,6
There is a shortage of information written in IsiZulu, a language commonly spoken and that most can read	2	9,1
There are no good/proper roads for transport and deliver the needed information	2	9,1
Total	22*	100

*Multiple choices

From the table, it shows that although a significant number of women 4 (18 %) is associated with illiteracy, the biggest problem 5 (23 %) encountered is that women do not attend the workshop or seminars or women 's group which are normally called by informants.

The respondents were asked to comment on when information should be provided to the rural women in Melmoth, how it should be available, who should provide it, why should that particular person or organization provide it, where should it be obtained and why should it be obtained in that particular place. These questions were asked in order to find out if there are any similarities and differences in the views of rural women and those of rural informants in as far as how information should be provided to rural women, why it should be provided, who should provide it, where it should the provided and get that information and why should be obtained in that place. The response to these questions is indicated in the following tables.

Table 19: Comments of rural informants on the provision of information to the rural women of Melmoth

When			How		
When should information be provided to rural women? (N=18)	Responses (N)	Percentage (%)	How should information be delivered to women? (N=18)	Responses (N)	Percentage (%)
At all times/anytime/everytime	8	44	Through discussions and demonstrations	8	44,4
When the rural women want information	7	39	It should be oral in their language(Isizulu) so that they understand	4	22,2
Everyday because social issues are always there	2	11	Through chief's Imbizos	2	11
As soon as they need information	1	6	It should be written down in a book and given to them	1	5,6
			It should be delivered from house to house	1	5,6
			On radio	1	5,6
			In anyway people can better understand information	1	5,6
Total	18	100		18	100

Who			Where		
Who should provide information to women?(N=18)	Responses (N)	Percentage (%)	Where should information be provided? (N=18)	Responses (N)	Percentage (%)
Every concerned member of the community who has information	4	22,2	Clinics/Hospitals	6	33
Professionals (Teachers/Nurses/ Social workers	5	27,7	Schools	3	17
Government	3	16,7	Shops	2	11,1
Priests	3	16,7	Chiefs'meetings(Imbizos)	2	11,1
Chiefs	3	16,7	Churches	2	11,1
			Community places like halls	1	5,6
			Government offices	1	5,6
			Libraries	1	5,6
Total	18	100		18	100

Reasons why information should be given to rural women are narrated below.

* *To improve women's knowledge because they have knowledge themselves.*

* *People should learn how to do things on their own or with others, so these people can provide such information .*

* *To help them get information to solve their problems, so that the children who left school should go back and get education.*

* *To help these women who are not working.*

* *There are many sick people in rural areas, to help women with information to help them.*

* *To develop this rural area which does not have necessities so that one day it is like other better rural areas.*

* *So that women can do things on their own and help their families with the skills they get from these people.*

The reasons why the rural informants think information should be disseminated in these places mentioned above, are also narrated below.

* *To make it easier to disseminate information to many people at the same time.*

* *Many women visit these places, therefore it will be easy to get them.*

* *Many people are church-goers, they can be easily found in churches.*

* *Sometimes the schools have a hall, the community members can be accommodated in them.*

* *A lot of people need hospitals and clinics for one reason or another, so they visit these places occasionally.*

** Chiefs usually attend many different meetings, therefore they know many things which can help the rural women. Besides they are respected.*

** There are many different documents in the Government offices with a lot of information which can help people.*

The tables above indicate that the informants 5(27,7 %) prefer that professionals, that is teachers, nurses, social workers etc, should be the ones who give information to rural women.
The majority 8 (44,4 %) suggest that information should be through discussions, and 4 (22,2 %) stress oral dissemination with the use of vernacular Zulu language.

Although a number of places are preferred for information dissemination, it seems that the hospitals and clinics 6 (33 %)tend to be the most preferred place to disseminate information easily. The reason being that many people visit such places thus they can be found in large numbers.

4.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter, it is revealed that information is needed by the Melmoth rural women. The data suggests dissatisfaction about the reliability of information from certain information sources, but nevertheless, it has been suggested how best information can be accessed by these women.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS

5.1: Introduction

This chapter presents the discussions which emanate from the results of the study. These results are from both rural women and rural informants of Melmoth.

From this chapter, the information on personal details of rural women, their information needs and seeking behavior is presented. Information sources they use when accessing information and the reasons for being dissatisfied about the information they get, is given. Finally, the obstacles that hinder their access and use of information are outlined.

5.2. Personal details

5.2.1 Age

When dividing the rural women by age, it is noticed that age category 15-20 is not found in big number in the Melmoth rural area, as it is 16 %. This is totally different from the results from the pilot study which was done at the Ongoye rural area, where the highest number of rural women found was from the age bracket 15-20.

The low number of this age bracket in Melmoth could be attributed to the fact that young women who are still active, have gone to big cities to search for better living standards and in search of work. Age category 31-40 is high (38 %). Women in this age bracket all over the world are very active and strong. They are rearing and looking after children, aged and the sick. They are also in most cases, especially in rural areas, heads of the households while men are in cities working or still looking for jobs.

The report by the International labor organization indicates that there is a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that the incidence of female headed households in rural areas has been growing particularly among the poor. This report further mentions that there is a growing out-migration of males in search of more remunerative work. Whatever the reasons, says the report, the phenomenon has important implications for the labor process in general and women's work in particular, as well as the social attitudes to women, (International Labor Organization, 1975-1981: 38). Like in Nigeria in a study done by Saito et al(1994), in Melmoth women heading households are younger than men heading households (Saito, 1994: 27). This could be because men are working in towns.

5.2.2. Division of rural women by marital status

Regarding marital status , 71, % of women are married. This is in line with age bracket 31-40 of rural women found in Melmoth. These women rear, nurture and take care of their families.

None of the interviewed women were divorced. This is not surprising since in rural areas, families stay together, they practice and preach extended families where a large family stay together and bear the problems of each other. The problems which could increase divorce rates in rural places unlike in urban, could be better solved when more hands are bringing together assistance, guidance and counselling. This could be a possible reason why few or no divorce cases are experienced in rural areas

5.2.3.Daily activities

Kinavainen (1996) noted the responsibility of women as household managers. She states that they are responsible for food provision, improvement of food security and nutritional well being of family members, they also control income and manage the whole household resources.

It is noted from the results that rural women in the Melmoth area spend most of their time doing household chores. These activities range from cooking for the family, fetching water from far away rivers, cleaning the house, fetching wood from the forests, working in the fields and more. Saito et al (1994:27), is aware of hard and tiring duties performed by women as she notes that almost exclusively women provide and prepare the family's food - a time consuming and arduous process.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (1998), concurs with the above statement by Saito. It reports that women shoulder 90 % of the domestic production tasks, and they have indeed the biological and social tasks of bearing, nurturing and providing initial education for children and ensuring the well-being of the family and that of the entire society.

However, the general tendency in Africa to regard women's work as secondary and subordinate to that of the men, results in women's contribution especially to the domestic and agricultural sectors to go unrecognized, unpaid for, undervalued and largely ignored by policy- makers in spite of its crucial importance to the society.

A large number 78 (71 %) of women found were married and only 26 (24 %) found were single.

Fetching wood from the forest and doing family washing in the rivers are also daily and tiring activities performed by rural women in Melmoth. For them, these activities are daily demands.

Despite the fact that there is a tendency to think of energy as something only needed by cities and large scale industries (Money,1987:49), there is a daily demand to provide energy consumed in food to maintain the large rural population. Women in Melmoth, like in rural Chinese families, must of course, find energy to use for cooking and heating. It is obvious then that fetching wood will keep the pot boiling and chase away a cat from the fire place.

5.2.4. Information on education

Information on education was low. The reason could be that the highest number of rural occupants is not educated enough or has a low level of education, thus these women possibly do not take education as the priority. As noted previously, a significant number of rural women found are married. This is possibly the reason why they are not educated. It is the tendency of most rural parents to advise the girl to get married as young as possible in order to bring the cows back home. Therefore, they do not only increase the high percentage of illiterate community members, but also that of married women who become household heads as young as one can possibly think.

Although a report given by May et al on 'Poverty and Inequality in South Africa' (1998), indicates that education receives the largest proportion of the budget (21 %) in 1997/98, however, according to the report, pre-primary and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) do not receive the proportion reflected by the level of their need. Greater focus on these areas is crucial, particularly given the levels of poverty among African women, especially in rural areas, and the fact that these people tend to have the lowest levels of education. The report continues to stress that even the proportion of expenditure allocated for pre-tertiary education, has declined since 1994/95. Per student, expenditure has been lowest in provinces with the highest incidence of poverty, that is Kwa-Zulu-Natal,

Eastern Cape and Northern province. This could be the reason why most of the rural women in this area are illiterate and thus incapable of motivating their children to go to school and to continue with education.

It is noted that 59 (54 %) of the rural women have received primary education only, and on top of that, 38 (35 %) have not received any formal education at all. Only 2 (2 %) have gone up to tertiary education. The reason could be that most rural women are not employed or not engaged in paying jobs, thus they cannot afford to send their children to schools. This also confirms what was observed by Leach , as has been mentioned in 1.2, about the communities in Kwazulu-Natal. It is no surprise that Melmoth rural area has (38 %) of women who have not gone to school, which eventually lowers the standard of the educational level. This is the typical situation of rural areas in Kwazulu-Natal according to Leach (1999:163).

Since the high proportion of these women have received up to primary education, it could happen that they do not see any value in education, and thus do not motivate their children.

Mchombu (2000) has noted that one cannot have knowledge unless one gets information. He argues that information equips a person with power, the power to choose and to act in an informed manner. It empowers people towards actions that can transform lives and allows for a great sense of independence (Mchombu, 2000: 42).

5.3. Information needs

When asked whether they have ever had any information need, the rural women indicated that they have had a need for information and gave several reasons.

There are various reasons which push rural women to need the kind of information they have indicated. These reasons are in line with what the rural informants have noted on

agricultural, health, transport/road and communication, business, jobs or educational information.

As noted by Mchombu (2000) they wanted to get information in order to take actions towards a situation they come across. To Cillie (1991), information is the key to the development of a strong democracy. Our society needs information because it is the key to wealth, to empowering people through knowledge and to create growth and jobs (Cillie,1991:109).

Similarly, Rohde in Van Lill (2000: 42) observes that needs are the foundation for developing an information system and service provision.
The indication of information need by these women also concurs with what the rural informants observed. They noted that the rural women in Melmoth have come to them for information at one time or another.

5.3.1. Agricultural needs

Agricultural and farming related information is rated as the highest (35 %) information needed by the women in Melmoth. This could be so because most of them are not employed. They therefore have no purchasing for their daily needs. Most of their food is farmed and planted in the fields for subsistence. Some surplus is sold in town. It could be possible that they solely depend on availability of land and fertile soil for their products.

Saito et al (1994) has observed that women work in fields more than men do. 'Women work more hours than men, both in farming and in total' (Saito,1994: 21). According to this author, not only do women outnumber men in agricultural labor force, but they also work more hours in agriculture than men. The author gives an example of Kenya, where women spend an average of 6.2 hours per day in Agriculture compared to 4.3 for men (Saito et al , 1994:21).

The above observation confirms the International Labor Organization' s report of 1975. According to this report women workers constitute a significant part of the work force on plantations in most countries(International Labor Organization,1975; 38). The report continues and explains that the conditions of work for women are in general worse than those for men . Thus women are assigned more arduous tasks and are paid lower wage rates, and there are often no creche facilities nor maternity benefits and so on.

It is quite possible that the women in Melmoth area also, as they work in the fields, sugar-cane and gum-tree plantations owned by white farmers, work under such conditions. They often work with their babies on their backs without enjoying any maternity leave.

The report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa(1998), indicated that women constitute more than 50 % of Africa's population and account for 60-80 % the agricultural labor force. It further reports that women dominate informal and service sector activities and contribute substantially to self-help socio-economic development project.

According to rural women in Melmoth, agricultural related information is needed in order to possess land, practice good farming methods by applying necessary skills and knowledge in order to get good out put and products for family consumption and for sale.

Landlessness by women , agricultural business, planting and irrigation, farming and obtaining skills are the reasons why women need agricultural information. Advanced agricultural technologies are applied nowadays in every field of agriculture, therefore, it is such an information needed by these rural women.

The importance of the need expressed by rural Melmoth women in agricultural related information is confirmed by Leckie (1996) in her study asserting that '....they never trusted me to drive: farm girls and the gender relations of agricultural information

transfer'. Leckie noted that the social construction of agriculture is heavily reinforced by certain types of myth-making, which work to disadvantage farm girls and women. She also noted that since farm work itself is gendered, it stands to reason that the process of learning about farming is also gendered. Therefore the information and expertise needed in farming and agriculture as a whole, are needed by people who are engaged in process in general and rural Melmoth women in particular.

As D'Haese & Mdula (1998) noted, poor labor management is mainly a result of poor management skills, which brings about poor farm organization such as no record keeping, no short and long term planning. This will result in low crop productivity (D'Haese & Mdula, 1998: 87).

The problem of water supply during farming activity and household purposes is the main problem especially in rural areas. Reddy (1999) observes that the area of water supply and sanitation has been one of the main priorities of public policy in developing countries, However, Reddy notices that the progress in providing hygienic and sufficient water has been very slow.

Purnell and Coetser (2001) observe the necessity and importance of agricultural libraries. According to these authors, such libraries will "..... provide vital support to agricultural activities and rural development (Purnell & Coetser, 2001: 25).

It could thus be possible that the rural women in Melmoth, especially those interested in agricultural practices, have been aware of the problems causing failure in the agricultural field in their area, and really need to make change. They therefore need the information on agriculture.

5.3.2. Business information

For business information, one can possibly think of the geographical factors, which can contribute to low(3 %) needed business information. Considering Mchombu's observation, that women are an important component of any country (Mchombu,2000:

41), they contribute to business tasks to develop their communities, although, according to Mchombu, some factor can hinder their prosperity in that regard.

Epstein in Mchombu (2000) highlights the main factors which motivate rural women to become entrepreneurs as insufficient land to ensure a livelihood for their families and or lack of employment opportunities. Epstein's opinion clearly indicates that most women get into business, barefooted, without the necessary skills and knowledge of handling the business, thus they do not succeed or they just do not attempt to try.

However, Allen & Truman in Mchombu (2000) have a different view from that of Epstein. They have noted that the poverty, accompanied by lack of income-earning opportunities, rather than profit incentives, motivate an increasing number of rural women to become entrepreneurs.

For the business to prosper and work well for women, Mchombu (2000) noted that women need information in all aspects of business activities. The information required will enable them to identify suitable products, equipment and materials, and to identify suitable suppliers.

5.3.3 Security information

Rutakumwa & Krogman (2000) study on rural Ugandan women's views, has revealed that, although women in many countries put issues related to personal security and domestic violence at the top of their list, in rural Uganda, violence seems to be considered a normal consequence of marriage. It is noted that only 2 (2 %)of rural women have needed information on legal issues and security. It might be that they regard it as normal to be beaten by their spouses and they do not see any reason to report it, or it could be burglary, theft, rape and other crime-related issues that occasionally occur in rural areas.

It was not surprising to note that only 2 (2 %) of rural women need legal/security information. Few women who indicated the need of such an information, gave reasons to the effect that they fear that their farms can be invaded by other people. Others indicated that they always hear of increase rape incidents to children and the aged and therefore fear for themselves and their own children.

Despite these findings, it cannot be said that the Melmoth rural area is peaceful and the crime rate is not experienced as much as we normally hear about it in urban areas.

5.3.4 Health information

Information on health sought by rural women, which was 18 %, yielded many reasons which pertain to the caring for the sick in the family or neighborhood, personal health, sterilization, contraception and various diseases.

There are many diseases which are sweeping over South Africa nowadays, such as HIV/AIDS, cholera, STD's, asbestos, T.B. and many others.

There is an unrecognized burden of asbestos –related to lung diseases among women in the rural areas of South Africa who have worked in asbestos mines (Davies et al, 2001). It is not strange that rural women in Melmoth would be so concerned about caring for their families, relatives and community members from these dangerous diseases commonly diagnosed in South Africa.

The study done by Sotshongaye & Moller (2000) in Mavela and Cibane communities in Ndwedwe, revealed that other rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal have access to health resources, while others have little or none. According to this study, the Mavela area has one clinic which has to serve a large population. It is located a considerable distance from women's homes and also poorly equipped (Sotshongaye & Moller, 2000). This rural

community is very fortunate when looking at Entembeni community of Melmoth, where there s no clinic and ambulance service at all. Mfule, like Entembeni has no clinic. For KwaMagwaza, at least the community is being helped by the nearby hospital, the only one in the whole Melmoth area .But for far away people, the aged and the sick, it is very difficult to come to the hospital especially at night when there is no public transport available. Fortunately for Ndundulu and Kwayanguye areas, the clinics are available although they sometimes do not have health resources.The patience in these clinics have to be transferred to the hospital for their health needs.

Mfanefile has one, but like other areas mentioned above, it does not bear enough resources, but 'it is better off than nothing' say the community members.

The lack of relevant and enough health resources could be the reason why the rural women in the Melmoth area expressed the need for provision and improvement of health services in the area.

Due to the lack of health facilities in most rural communities, the report from 'Women's International Network News on 'India: Health education for rural women' (Chetna News, 2000) states that women spend scarce resources seeking health care from expensive and exploitative private practitioners. It further cautions that if women are empowered with appropriate information , they will be better equipped to take care of their own, their families and their communities' health.

As the women are so burdened, unemployed sometimes sickly, they need health information that is sometimes very confidential, even to their spouses. Consider the following revelations:

> * *I have seven children and not working. My husband is working in Johannesburg and seldom comes back home. I suffer from hunger, diseases and household burden.*

** I want to know how I can contracept, but he can kill me if he can find out. too many children to a person who is not working is not healthy, that is why I want to see the nurses about taking a pill or whatever, but my husband should not sense it.*

These are some of the reasons why rural women in the Melmoth area want to access health-related information.
As Mtshali (2000) observes, the home economics extension services offered to rural women are inappropriate and ineffective in relation to women's triple role pertaining to reproductive, economic and community management activities.

The report from New York Times (February: 1998) on sterilization program of poor rural women in Peru, laments that enough information is not given to these women.

"Tales of poor women being pressed and even forced to submit to sterilization operations that left at least two women dead and hundreds injured, have emerged from small towns and villages across Peru", says the report.

This report further reveals that the critics, of the program, which began in 1995, charge that state health care workers who are in a hurry to meet Government imposed sterilization quotas, that offer promotions and cash incentives, are taking advantage of poor rural-women, many of whom are illiterate and speak only indigenous Indian languages.

Easy access to health facilities is not taking place in most rural areas. This is confirmed by May et al (1998) where they note that reprioritization of expenditure in the health sector has been expansion of access to primary health care, particularly in under-served areas. These authors have also noted that the clinics are not widely used in South Africa., even by the poor, and that they are suspecting that the reason is due to the lack of easy

access and poor quality. This then could be due to poor transport infrastructure which accounts for the lament of rural women in Melmoth.

5.3.5.Transport/road information

Transport information was also indicated as important by rural women , as it was 14 %. Unavailability of proper roads and communication infrastructure have been felt by the rural women in the Melmoth area.

Money (1987: 34) notes that to spread manufacturing through out the country, there must be effective transport and communications facilities.

He emphasizes that industrial products from the manufacturing cities, whether agricultural machinery, electronic generators, girders for construction, have to be distributed over enormous distance.

The rural women in the area of Melmoth indicated that to do their groceries, rush the sick to the health centers and to move around is not easy without proper roads. The young rural women, who still attend school felt that they arrive at school dirty because they walk on paths with dew and mud after rainfall. The transport problem is almost everywhere in KwaZulu-Natal. The study of Mavela & Cibane communities in Ndwedwe, reveals transport crisis, like in the Melmoth area. Tarred access and community roads are identified as a development priority by the community, (Sotshongaye & Moller, 2000). According to these authors, the Mavela women have fairly good access to public transport, but their main problem is that the taxis drop passengers in the main road far from their homes because there are no internal roads. Then the women have to walk long distances from drop-off point, often carrying heavy parcels of purchase made in town. A study done by Leach reveals that the people in

KwaZulu-Natal including rural Melmoth, are under resourced in many ways. Among others, Leach (1999:163) pinpoints that the roads infrastructure in rural areas has been neglected for decades, making the use of travelling libraries impossible in many communities, and distances are considerable , making access to town libraries difficult.

Communication and telecommunications are very important. Without a sound infrastructure, it is difficult. These networks provide pipelines in which information flows between the user and the source, (Mureithi, 1998: 46). According to this author, the success of such flow is dependent upon the availability and capacity of the network and also availability.

Non-availability of proper roads hinders the smooth running of transport in the area and also interferes with movement and communication. Information is not readily flowing and transferred among the rural women and between the rural women and rural community workers and leaders as well as civil servants.

5.3.6.Job/career information

A noticeable number (10 %) of rural women indicated the need for information on career or well paid job opportunities. It is widely known that in rural areas, the communities are neglected most of the times, there is a high percentage of joblessness which leads to poverty. As noted by Hirschowits (2000: 25) KwaZulu-Natal is rated among provinces with a poverty level of 26 %.

The reasons to seek jobs/career information among others were that most rural women are unemployed, those who are employed, are experiencing bad working conditions, for instance those who are working in sugar cane fields, forest farms, orange and banana farms. Thus, they want alternative jobs and look for better terms of service. But it is not easy . They need to be well equipped with necessary information on career, education and training, employment opportunities, rights and responsibilities.

Particularly for younger women, it is noted that week-ends and holiday job information was most needed. According to these young women they want to help supplement their parents' provision for uniform. Others want to support themselves and their families.

Other respondents narrated their predicament this way;

> *"*"W e are very poor at home. My mother is not working and my father is staying in Johannesburg with another woman. He does not come home and does not support us. I want to help my mother with little money for food."*

> * *"Other children are coming from better off families. They laugh at my old pair of shoes and torn school dress. If I work on weekends I can buy myself uniform."*

> * *"Although my parents are working in a sugarcane farm nearby, the wage is not enough for the whole family of eleven children. They do not even spoil us at one time or another."*

The Melmoth rural women are no exception from other women in similar conditions. Job/career/employment need, has also been observed by Mchombu in the study "Information provision for rural development: measuring the impact of rural development", The author observes that this need is for self-employment, improved chances of finding work, improved chances of acquiring training and awareness of self-employment opportunities (Mchombu,1999:240).

5.4. Information sources

The results reveal that friends, neighbors and relatives (65 %) are preferably used as information sources by the rural women in Melmoth. This concurs with the findings from the rural informants of this area. This is a typical and common way of transferring information in rural communities. They cannot exploit information available in print

media. In addition, oral sources of information are always readily available than other sources. It is also common knowledge that people tend to exploit what is closer to them than what is far away. This conception is confirmed by close environment mentality, a major influence on information transfer as witnessed in other related studies(Ocholla:1998,1999: Ikoja-Odongo:2001) These information sources are readily available almost all the time when needed. Similarly, oral information transfer, as observed by Leach (1999), is as old as humankind. Leach describes it as immediate and requires no technology. Although he laments that it lacks permanence, he is of the opinion that it is a basic medium of information transfer, which does not require the acquisition of new skills such as reading (Leach, 1999:165).

Therefore, the way of providing and receiving information orally, is suitable for the rural women in Melmoth the majority of whom cannot exploit other sources of information effectively..

It is noted with surprise that nurses/health workers (table 7) were rated below educators as the information sources preferred by rural informants . This contradicts with what was initially said in as far as information needed by rural women. Health information was rated second from agriculture.

The reason could be that there are few clinics around the area than schools. They are able to meet with teachers/ educators easily as they are among the community. Some of the nurses stay in nurses' homes, some visit the rural areas occasionally using mobile vehicles. They do not stay long with these women, thus both rural women and rural informants are not familiar with each other.

For educators, their children have contacts with them, which might result in parents too, having familiarity with them.

A small number of rural women (2 %) opt for newspaper/ magazine which can give them the information they need. This is a factor caused by level of illiteracy and unavailability

of print media. It has been noted that friends, neighbors and relatives have been voted as priority sources of information.

In Uhegbu (2000:53), Iwiyi & Odi indicate that substantial success in communication network among the Nigerians can be achieved through the oral medium. They suggest that interpersonal information can be better effected in a face to face approach since the majority of Nigerians, like rural women in Melmoth, are illiterate and rurally-based.

Illiteracy is a hindering factor in many ways. As noted by Qunta in Mchombu (2000: 43), the dissemination of information on business management was hampered because the majority of women could not read and write and communication networks were in adequate.

5.5. Reasons for dissatisfaction

A quite substantial number (76 %) of rural women in Melmoth showed dissatisfaction with the information they obtain from the information sources they indicated. Saracevic and others in Hewins (1990:158) identified several variables for seven events which occur in information seeking and retrieval such as user characteristics, problem statements, searcher characteristics, question analysis, formats delivered and relevance and utility of responses. This statement clearly suggests that the factors above might have affected some rural women in Melmoth, and thus were not satisfied with the information they got from their sources.

For those who were not satisfied, a number of reasons were provided. For transport and communication information, it was indicated that there are no relevant people with sufficient information on this aspect, who can guide them. Moreover, they indicated that the Department of Transport personnel have not visited the area so that they can get

information from the "horses mouth" as to what the new developments are in as far as providing proper roads to rural dwellers is concerned.

The few people who possess adequate information argue that there are no funds allocated to develop the area. Whereas the Government of South Africa recognized that in the process of service delivery to all citizens, the process is being criticized to be slow and poorly coordinated.

It is worth noting that this area could be in the process of proper roads development as the Minister of Transport has promised to deliver.

Other women indicated that although they got the information, it was either not relevant to their needs or it was not helpful. This could be caused by poor communication systems available in this area and over-dependence on a limited sources of information.

Those women who indicated that their friends, relatives and neighbors are their information sources, lament that such sources suffer from lack of information themselves. The rural women of Melmoth cannot expect to get reliable information from their friends since they stay together in similar information poor environment and circumstances.

A large number (78 %) did nothing after being unsatisfied with the information they got. That is, after the defeat, they fold their arms and do nothing further. This is obviously a wrong way of creating development and progress.

It is pleasing, though it does not happen frequently, to note that others (4 %) opted for books and (18 %) ask their parents for the information they did not get from information sources they had chosen.

5.6. Uses of information

Menou (1998) notes that information is used when solving problems, in the broadest sense of any situation calling for action. He appreciates information impact in relation to the particular situation such as readiness, capability, appreciation, prosperity to change, objectification of processes. He concludes by strongly noting the importance of information to the outcome of any situation as lubricant to the performances of a car (Menou, 1998:11).

Thus, the rural women in Melmoth, like any other women, used information for various purposes. They consulted, visited and followed the instructions, used relevant people and places, they also took precautions when needed. This is in line with the rural informants views on whether they think rural women use information. Responses such as the following , among others were given.

* *They want to gain knowledge.*
* *They want to improve on their daily performances and duties.*
* *They feel that they have to uplift themselves and their families on nutritional, education and health matters.*

These responses concurs with Mchombu 's (2000:42) opinion that information is used for various reasons such as decision-making processes and enhances performances.

Various reasons hindering access to information were given. Among others, these were:-

* *I usually get outdated information from the newspaper, which my aunt brings from the kitchens*

* *There are no newspaper/magazine shops around, I get to read the newspaper when I am visiting my mum who is a domestic worker.*

* *At home we are so busy that I do not have time to sit and relax and listen to radio news or any program*

* *My husband locks up the radio, and I do not listen to it until he is back during the holidays like Easter or Christmas, so I miss out information.*

It is clear that rural women in Melmoth are always missing out important information for a number of reasons, yet they need it.

5.7. Obstacles that hinder information access by the rural women

It is noted that the rural women of Melmoth women do not communicate frequently in order to transfer or receive information in good time as they need it. This could be attributed to lack of time to relax. As indicated in their daily activities, time is a hindering factor to access information. Rural informants concurred that rural women in that area do not make time for workshops, seminars or meetings.

In townships, there is a tendency of women standing on fences, chatting with the neighbors, sharing current information. Women in rural areas do not seem to have time for that. They regard standing on fences as laziness and that it encourages cheap talk or gossip.

Financial obstacles (22,9 %) were mentioned by the rural women, where facts like inadequate or no money to buy information media such as radios, newspapers, magazine

and television were mentioned. It is very obvious of course that even if these media were available, the sustenance still cause a problem. It is a pity that access to radio and television broadcasts is impossible at present, due to lack of electricity.

The age (4,6 %) issue, especially in rural areas is very significant. As the rural women stated the age problem, is indeed the typical stereotyping exercise of rural community. The younger you are, the greater the chances are for a person not to be listened to by the older people.

It is also regarded as disobedience to address adults while you are young despite the importance of the information you possess. The Melmoth rural area is therefore facing such problems which hinder access to information especially by the elders.

Fright (9,2 %) is still dominating most people, especially Africans in rural areas. The fear of expressing one's feelings about something, or 'what will people say or think' or 'how will I say it' or ' will people listen to what I say', is still dominating the lives of people in general but women in particular. That is why women indicated it as a hindrance when they try to access information.

It was surprising to hear that 109 (100 %)of the sampled women in rural Melmoth indicated that there is no cultural or traditional barrier which prevent them from accessing information. However, such factors as age and fright mentioned above are attributed to cultural barriers. Women may not attend meetings called in the area without authorization from "senior " family members. The women have to stay at home, look after children and fulfil household chores. As noted earlier on from their reasons, women cannot access information because the radio is locked in by the husband, father or granny. This is one of the social and traditional barriers which deprive the women the use of husband's or in-laws (grannies) possessions without prior arrangement. This is so even if the owners are in town or far away in mines at work, nobody will ever touch their

possessions. These are barriers. It is however understood they are not aware of the barriers as they regard them as normal or just do not notice them.

Regarding the media or information sources used to access information, the majority indicated that friends, neighbors and relatives are their sources of information. Low number use radios as their sources of information. Their reason could be that they lack time to listen to radio programs due to the fact that they are very busy with house activities. It can also be that the rural women communicate very well orally with the people they are familiar with, like friends, relatives or neighbors.

It is likely that those (12 %) who regard teachers as their sources of information are school children or young women of the area. As Fourie (1999) observes, the youth rely on school as a source of information on opportunities in the job market. He cautions that career information could also be provided in the school library but warns that these collections cannot be expected to fulfil the demand for information on personal information needs while retaining the current emphasis on the curriculum, (Fourie, 1999: 75).

Accessibility of an information source all the time is vital to a person who needs information at that point in time. The reason why the rural women (33 %) continue using a particular media is because of its availability all the time, and that is not surprising. It is possible that they can wake their neighbors up any time they need some kind of information.Their neighbors are a source which is always available but not necessarily reliable. As noted by Menou (1995:456) information is indeed relevant to decision making, problem-solving and to the development processes.

It is noticed that one of the problems when using media or information source is that rural women and their friends, relatives and neighbours are staying at the same vicinity, and they might be possibly exposed to the same information. This could be true because

one cannot think of any other possible way friends can get new information without women knowing or without a different exposure.

Out dated information is likely to be accessed by rural women. As indicated, the information sources do not reach them timeously, current information sources like newspapers and magazines are not purchased around their area, these women usually do not have money to buy them, proper road for quick delivery of information sources is also a contributory factor. Outdated information does not help women in the area. That is why some women suggest information center or a public library in the area. The role of the public libraries in Adult basic education has been noted by Harley (1999). According to this author, the public library has important value as has been emphasised by other people especially those working with Adult Basic Education (ABE), such as their centrality (both geographically and culturally), their wide distribution/ accessibility, the fact that they are separate from the formal education system, and there is thus little stigma attached to their resource base, (Harley, 1999:30). Unfortunately, the Melmoth rural women cannot benefit from those benefits at the moment.

It is noted that friends are number one (64 %) information sources ever used by the rural women in Melmoth. Modern media are not commonly used, although they are used. This is in line with what they have said previously that friends are the source of information they easily access. The rural women's illiteracy status also contribute to their low level of use of modern media such as newspapers, magazines and books. However, poverty level contributes in a way that they cannot all purchase radios or television sets, those few who can afford, are hindered by the lack of electricity.

Experiences that the women in Melmoth rural area have come across, leave them with information which they later disseminate to others. This is common in rural areas. Experiences give lessons to a person, so are the fairy tales and folklores. When people transfer such information, it is usually oral and mixed with tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge, which may sometimes be known as indigenous knowledge according to the paper presented by Radebe in LIASA conference (2001), reveals that this is the important knowledge which has been all along not noticed. The experience will add to tacit or indigenous knowledge one has.

The confidence in indigenous knowledge is very important as this kind of information can also be used for development. As Mchombu (1999) observes, there is still considerable use of indigenous knowledge in the struggle for daily survival, but the author laments that the relentless dis-empowerment, which rural communities have undergone, as a result of colonialism and rule of an urban based African elite, has led to a crisis of confidence in indigenous knowledge (Mchombu,1999:241).

Illiteracy is noted as the highest problem on information dissemination to the rural women as informants pointed out. Lack of time by the rural women and lack of transport and proper roads too raised the informants concern.

These results confirm the laments made by rural women on the problems of transport and roads.

The comments made by rural informants 7 (39 %) clearly reveal that information should be disseminated to the rural women when they want it.

This is in contrast with the situation of this area in as far as infrastructure is concerned. The information from the results cannot be delivered to the rural women anytime they need it because of the poor infrastructure.

The majority 8 (44,4 %) indicate that information should be given to women in this area through discussions. Four (22,2 %) indicated orally through the use of the commonly used language, Isizulu. These results are confirming the previous findings that rural

women themselves prefer the information orally and through discussions. This is very obvious when one can consider their literacy level.

Professionals, including teachers, nurses and social workers, are preferred by the majority, 5 (27,7 %) of women as the people can deliver information to the rural women. It concurs with what the rural women themselves said when they indicated that they consult teachers in schools where their children go to school for information. This could be the reason that the rural women, whose educational status is very low, look up to educated people as those with relevant and correct information all the time.

Chiefs gained 3 (16,7 %) of rural informants preferences as relevant to give the rural women information. Chiefs are regarded as traditional authority. They work well and portray tremendous powers especially in rural areas.

The professionals were preferred to better give information to the rural women because they are regarded as knowledgeable, people with skills and relevant training, who can be able to give relevant information to relevant people, which can help them solve their problems.

Clinics and hospitals were chosen by the majority, 6 (33 %) of rural informants as better places to deliver information to the rural women. The reason given was that most of the women go to these places for health services one day or another, so they are found together in big numbers.

This contrasts with the women's indication that such health points are not normally found in their places or if found, they are far away from them or poorly resourced. This might raise the suspicion that they are never fully utilized. But nevertheless, every community member visit them one time or another.

5.8. Conclusion

The study revealed that from all age brackets of women found in Melmoth, the age bracket 15-20 is only 16 %. This is attributed by the fact that women in this category are in big cities in search for work so that they contribute to the support of their families.
In contrast to this, the middle-aged women, age category 31-40, are found in big numbers (38 %). Like in other communities, in Melmoth also, these women rear and look after children, the aged and the sick. They also act as household heads since most men in this area are working in big faraway cities.

It was also found from the study that 76 % of women found in this area are married. Very few are widowed and none are divorced. This shows that family bondage is still maintained in Melmoth.

From the study, one learnt that women in Melmoth have little time to access information for development, as they spend most of their time doing household chores.

The level of women who are educated in this area is very low, according to the results. That could be one of the reasons why they cannot access information, especially print, for their development.

It was also revealed from the study that women do have information needs on different perspectives of life, which they need for different reasons and usage. These information needs are sometimes inadequately met.
According to the study, friends, relatives and neighbours are mostly used information sources in the Melmoth area, because they are found within the women's vicinity.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to establish information availability and exploitation by the rural women of Melmoth. In specific, the study explored information needs of the Melmoth rural women and how they were met. It determined their information seeking behavior, identified and characterized the information available to them. It also investigated problems encountered in accessing and using information and lastly developed a model for information availability and accessibility by the rural women.

The study used largely critical incidence design to collect data. Besides the use of questionnaires, probing person to person interview and also observation were used as tools for data collection. The respondents included 109 rural women who were interviewed, and 18 rural informants who received and responded to questionnaires.

The data obtained was analyzed as presented on chapter 4 and 5.
This chapter summarizes the findings. It gives the summary by objectives and by hypothesis. It also gives the summary of the personal data of the respondents, their information needs and seeking, and the summary of the obstacles that hinder information access by the rural women.

It is also in this chapter where the summary of the types of media or information sources accessed by rural women of Melmoth is given. A summary of any information source ever used by the rural women is given as well as the suggestions for improvement on accessibility and use of information by the rural women.
Eventually the recommendations and conclusion are given.

6.2 Summary of findings

In this section, the findings of the respondents' personal data and the research questions that were used to carry out the study are summarized. The summary is made first by objectives and by hypothesis.

6.2.1. Summary by objectives

6.2.1.1. Objective 1

To explore information needs of the Melmoth rural women and how they were catered for.

It was revealed that Melmoth rural women have information needs. As indicated by the tables, their information needs included that of agriculture, health, education, business, job/career, transport/road, security, welfare and pension and entertainment. It is shown that, like any community in South Africa or abroad, each and every community has unique information needs. These information needs were catered for, but not to the satisfaction of the rural women's needs. There were some factors which hinder the catering of information needs of rural women.

6.2.1.2. Objective 2

To determine their information seeking behaviour

The results indicate that they largely seek information from friends, relatives and neighbours, who are closer to them. The use of extension workers is widespread but not higher than use of friends, relatives and neighbours. The use of media such as radios, newspapers or television to seek information is not effective enough since sometimes there are no means to facilitate easy access to such media, like finance to purchase them or time to listen to them or literacy to read them.

6.2.1.3. Objective 3

To identify and characterize the information available to them

Some of the information available to rural women, such as agricultural, health, educational information etc, is not meeting their information needs, therefore, it does not help them in development.

6.2.1.4. Objective 4

To investigate the problems encountered in accessing and using information

Illiteracy, time, unavailability of proper places for information accessibility, poor infrastructure such as proper roads, telephones, electricity are some of the problems which prevent access of information and use by the rural women.

6.2.1.5.Objective 6

To develop a model for information availability and accessibility by the women

It was from their response and that of rural informants, that the model for information availability and accessibility by the rural women of Melmoth was developed. Table 19 was used to develop this model. Their comments on when should information be provided to them, how, who should provide it, why and where should it be provided, were necessary to develop this model.

The results indicate that the rural women prefer that information be provided to them all the time and any time they need it. Oral transfer of information was much preferred by the rural women as well as rural informants.

The professionals, including teachers, nurses, social workers are better preferred to deliver information to the rural women, and this is confirmed by the women's response that schools, clinics, hospitals and shops can be better placed where information can be delivered, accessed and used, since many people usually meet in such places to do some groceries or collect their medication or their children attend schools and therefore can deliver information announced at schools.

6.2.2 Summary by hypothesis

Since this was largely a qualitative study, the hypothesis was mainly to render guidelines. The following hypotheses were developed.

6.2.2.1. Hypothesis 1

Rural Melmoth women are not keen to access and use information

From the findings, the rural women seek information when there is a need. They use their friends, relatives and neighbours to get information. Few consult even professionals and print media. It shows that they are keen to access information and use it for their development. Therefore, this hypothesis was not confirmed.

6.2.2.2. Hypothesis 2

Unavailability of relevant information in the appropriate format hinder its exploitation by the rural women in Melmoth

The rural women of Melmoth use the information sources readily available to them such as friends, relatives and neighbours, who possess approximately the same information as they do. They therefore do not always get information they need. Sometimes they are not satisfied with the information. Thus, their information needs are not met. Sometimes information is available in print, the format not suitable to most of them. It is therefore true that unavailability of relevant information in appropriate format hinder them to exploit information. This hypothesis was confirmed.

6.2.2.3. Hypothesis 3

Conservative traditions deter Melmoth women from accessing information

The rural women of Melmoth are always busy with household chores, and they do not have enough time to access information through attending meetings or traditional meetings (Imbizo)or workshops. Most of them do not use modern media such as radios when their husbands or mothers-in-law do not approve of it or are absent. These are cultural traditions which hinder their information exploitation. However all 109 (100 %) rural Melmoth women sampled for this study indicated that there were no such barriers. Therefore, the hypothesis was disapproved.

6.3. Conclusion

The study findings established that rural women in Melmoth have a large number of middle aged women between age brackets 21-30 and 31-40. There is also a significant number of those of 41 and above in the area, who are often regarded as more informative and experienced than the younger women.

In as far as education is concerned, the study revealed that most women had gone up to primary education or none at all. A very small percentage (2%) has gone up to tertiary

level. This means that the majority of rural women in Melmoth are semi-literate. It is imperative, as they mentioned the need, that adult education centers be built for them to improve themselves.

The need to adapt library and information services to the rural environment of Melmoth is necessary. This will ensure not only these services are offered but "...the departure from the traditional model of library and information services, which is based on print media and therefore largely unsuitable to the rural African environment (Maepa, 2000:287), is established.

It was also revealed from this study that the majority of these women are not employed on permanent and reliable jobs. They are interested in farming and practicing agriculture to generate money and help their families. That is why they revealed the high need of agricultural/ land/farming information.

The majority of the women also indicated the need for health information. It was also observed that most of the community members in these places are not well in as far as health is concerned, so it is very important that health services, as they indicated themselves, are rendered and improved in these areas.

In contrast to what is happening in most places around the country, the need for security / legal information was expressed by very few women. This suggested that the crime rate is still very low in this area or too common to the extent that people got used to it.

The Melmoth rural women do not have time to access information. They also go to their friends, neighbors and relatives for information. It is therefore assumed that they either get wrong, distorted information or out dated, irrelevant information.

The modern print media such as newspapers, books and magazines cannot be accessed by the majority because most women cannot read print material on their own, more so if presented in another language other than isiZulu.

Transport/ road conditions in Melmoth rural areas are a threat to these women. They cannot move around the area easily because of the unavailability of infrastructure. This was seriously stressed by rural women that transport/ road conditions are the problem to them and they deprive them chances of being connected and exposed to other better places.

6.4. Recommendations

These recommendations emanate from the results and conclusion of the study. They should be adopted in an effort to improve the way rural women access and utilize information for their development.

1. *Lack of health services*

The study revealed the lack of health services. Rural Melmoth will benefit profitably if such services are installed to facilitate good health practice.

Since the study established that shops are used by most women for doing grocery, they can be used as places to disseminate health information and other health facilities to women on certain intervals since they are usually used as a meeting place for many people. This will improve the provision of health in such areas while awaiting for proper buildings to be built.

2. Improve extension service

Most women in this area are interested in farming. It was established that the extension service in the division is quite inadequate. Agricultural extension workers and officers should be sent to this area. They should be equipped with necessary requirements such as

transport that is capable of moving around rural areas so that they are mobile and they can easily disseminate agricultural information to the community members.

3. Accessibility of the rural areas

The challenge to the Government is to provide services to the people and the rural communities in particular due to their history of neglect in as far as services and development is concerned. Unavailability of transport and proper roads hinder accessibility of the rural areas, thus delivery of necessary information, improvement and development become difficult. Proper roads should be built to facilitate access to rural communities. This cannot only help disseminate information smoothly to the rural women, but can also contribute in giving job opportunities to those community members who are unemployed.

4. Communication participation of women

It was revealed from the study that most women do not attend the workshops and Imbizos called by local chiefs. The decision on whatever matter, is taken by males present, the women 's views, ideas and information needs are not tabled and thereafter catered for. The communication should be both horizontal, within and between the women, who should organize themselves to discuss their information needs, and vertical, which is bottom-up and up-bottom to involve women who are receivers of information, and local chiefs or workshop organizers who are information deliverers.

5. Industries and factories

The Government should realize that the lack of infrastructure leads to poverty and isolation of the area. Therefore, the Government should consider bringing industries to the area. In that way power and electricity will be installed. The industries and factories will attract investors who will in turn improve the lives of people and lead to better road conditions. The community will then have electricity in their homes for lighting, cooking, fridges and to perform other household chores easily without going to the forest to fetch wood for fire and power. Many people will also be employed in these industries and factories, thus unemployment, are minimized, poverty is greatly reduced since many

people will be working, diseases and unnecessary deaths are reduced because people in the area will have money to buy and maintain health information sources such as radios, which will deliver to them health information and other information featured in that particular information source.

6. Adult education

Shortage of educated people in the Melmoth rural area to help conduct women's groups, workshops, seminars, or encourage, train and give skills to rural people, especially women for development, is noticeable. Adult education is recommended for the Melmoth rural area. Since the study established that the level of education among women in this area is very low, women should be made to understand the benefits of adult education and be encouraged to enroll for adult education classes, because it is hoped that the level and speed of disseminating education information will increase and the women will be in a position to utilize the information. In order for rural women in this area to improve their education and skills, adult educational centers should be built. Such centers should have enough learned people who would disseminate educational information. However, the financial situation of South Africa might be a hindering factor in establishing such educational centers, but the already existing school building can be used after school hours to facilitate the training of rural women.

7. Multi-purpose center

The few clinics and one hospital available in Melmoth rural area can serve as a multi-purpose center. While rendering health services to community people, clinics and the hospital can be used as education, information as well as Welfare and legal service provision centers. While still on queues, people can listen to a person from the bank, showing them how to open an account, or how to withdraw or deposit money at the bank or how to use an ATM. They can also watch a video where somebody is talking about raising cattle or chickens or growing mielies or cotton. In addition, one can show them how to sign for their pension or Welfare application forms or help them with pension

matters. Thus, almost all their information needs can be addressed in one place. The information they receive while waiting for health services cannot only be up to date and educational, it can help them transfer new information to their own community members who could not come to the hospitals or clinics themselves. In that way, the oral form of information transfer, as it is commonly used in this area, does not only provide new and recent information to the local people, but also a fast information system.

The clinics and hospital should be equipped with people, (speakers),a community information center where information is gathered, processed, stored and delivered, TV, radio, posters, pamphlets and other materials which people can access and take home free of charge and help them pass necessary information to others.

8. Communication sysytem

An effective information system calls for efficient information access, dissemination and services, effective use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT).(Zahng in Purnell & Coetser, 2001: 25). In Melmoth communication is very poor. It is recommended that the infrastructure such as telephones, bridges, roads and necessary lines should be installed to facilitate good communication process. Through proper communication system health, education, legal, pension, or business information can easily reach rural women. It will be in this system where radio programs in vernacular languages can be programmed so that they are aired in the evenings when women are back home from several duties.

9.Lack of enough schools

It was revealed from the study that the already existing schools are not matching the number of school going children found in the area. The Government should increase the number of schools which will shorten the distance between schools and homes where pupils/ students/ learners live. The children in these schools should be used as disseminators of information to their parents, neighbors and relatives.

There is no tertiary institution at all. At least one tertiary institution should be built which will help the youth to improve their level of education and their skills.

9. Traditional way of information dissemination

The study established that due to time limitation and lack of modern media, the rural women prefer to use oral communication through friends, relatives and neighbours. Besides mouth to mouth way of disseminating information, dancing, songs, drama, poems, story-telling can be used to disseminate necessary information to the rural women especially during their meetings, workshops or imbizos.

6.5. Suggestion for further research

The study focussed on women alone, it is necessary to look at the issue of men in this area as well.

The study also looked at the rural area of Melmoth only, but it is also very imperative that the urban part of Melmoth be studied too, for the purpose of comparison. The study should also be extended to other parts of KwaZulu-Natal and should represent a heterogeneous community.

It was revealed from the study that rural women in this area are so busy that they do not have time to access information for self-improvement. It is necessary to investigate what extensions and projects could be used to help them.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: WORK PLAN

Item no.	Activity	Timeline
1.	Registration	February 2001
2.	Development of research proposal	February 2001
3.	Submission and approval of research proposal	February/March 2001
4.	Devt, submission 7 correction of Chapter One: Introduction	March 2001
5.	Devt. & delivery of Chapter Two: Literature review	March 2001
6.	Devt. & delivery of Chapter Three: Research methodology	April 2001
7.	Compilation of instruments for field research	April 2001
8.	Approval of research instruments	April 2001
9.	Preparation for field work	May 2001
10.	Field research	June/July 2001
11.	Devt.& delivery of chapter Four: Analysis of results	August 2001
12.	Correction &submission of Chapter Four	September 2001
13.	Devt.,correction & submission of Chapter Five: Discussions	October 2001
14.	Devt., correction 7submission of Chapter Six: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations	November/December 2001
15.	Submission & correction of draft Dissertation	December/ January 2002
16.	Submission of final Dissertation for examination	January 2002
17.	Examination of Dissertation	February/ March

		2002
18.	Corrections based on examiner's report	April 2002
19.	Submission of final bounded Dissertation	April 2002
20.	Graduation with Masters Degree in Library and Information Science	May 2002

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES FOR THE RURAL WOMEN

Dear Friend,

I am a Master of Library and Information Science student at the University of Zululand. I am here to find out how you (women) receive information in this area of Melmoth. This information is for my master's dissertation on "information availability and utilization by the rural women of Melmoth". The purpose of the study is to explore and create awareness of information accessibility and utilization status and problems in rural areas and provide practical solutions that can help women access and use information for development. Please be assured that the information given will be used for the purpose of the study only and will not, in anyway, be divulged or circulated in a manner that violates your privacy and freedom. Therefore, your assistance will be very valuable for the project.

Please tick an appropriate answer

Section 1: Personal Information

1. Name:.....

2. Address:

Postal.....
.....
.....

Tel.....

3. Age

15-20 [ ]

21-30 [ ]

31-40 [ ]

41 and over [ ]

4. Marital Status

Married [ ]

Single [ ]

Widowed [ ]

Divorced [ ]

5. What are your daily activities? Please narrate

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. Level of Education

None [ ]

Primary Education [ ]

Secondary Education [ ]

Tertiary Education [ ]

Other(Please specify)

Section 2: Information needs and seeking behaviour

7. (i) In our daily lives, we experience several needs. For instance, we need money, food and clothing. We also need information on personal and child health care, food, farming etc. Would you please tell me of such time when you needed any kind of information?

(ii) What kind of information did you need?

(iii) For what purpose did you need information?

(iv) Did you get that information?

(v) How did you start looking for information?

(vi) Were you satisfied with the information you got?

(vii) If 'no' why were you not satisfied?

(viii) What did you do to satisfy your information needs?

(ix) If 'yes' how did you use that information?

(x) If 'no' what made you not get that information?

8. (a)What obstacles did you encounter during the whole exercise of looking for the information?

(b) Is there any cultural and traditional barriers that prevented you from seeking information?

Section 3: Information accessibility and effectiveness

9. (i) Referring to the incident you have given above, what forms of media/information sources did you use to obtain the information you needed?

(ii) How easily accessible were they?

(iii)Did you use the medium (media) directly or through someone? Who was it?

(iv) Do you continue using the media you used above?

(v) If 'yes' why?

(vi) Do you encounter any problems when using the medium?

(vii) If 'yes', what problems?

10. (i) List the media you have ever used.

(ii) How easily accessible has each been?

(iii) What do you think about the reliability of the media?

(vi) Would you say that the media you used offend you in any way, e.g. socially,

religiously etc?

11. Do you contribute to the dissemination of information of any kind to the people around you?

(i) If yes, how do you do this?

(ii) Where do you get information from?

11. Give any suggestions that would help improve the way you acquire and use information in this area.

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE RURAL INFORMANTS

Dear Friend

I am a Master of Library and Information Science student at the University of Zululand. I am here to find out how you , as informants, assist women in this area of Melmoth to receive and use information. This information is for master's dissertation on "information availability and exploitation by the rural women in Melmoth.". The purpose of the study is to explore and create awareness of information accessibility and utilization status and problems in rural areas and provide practical solutions that can help women to access and use information for development. Please be assured that information given will be used for the purpose of the study only and will not, in anyway, be divulged or circulated in a manner that violates your privacy and freedom. Therefore, your assistance will be very valuable for the project.

Please tick an appropriate answer

Section 1: Personal Information

1. What is your designation?

Social worker [ ]
Administrator [ ]
Chief [ ]
Nurse [ ]
Teacher/Educator[ ]
Priest [ ]

2. What institution / Department are affiliated to?

Government [ ]
Non-Government [ ]

Religious Institution [ ]

Private sector [ ]

Other (specify)

3. What are your responsibilities in the community you work for?

Educating/Training [ ]

Administrating [ ]

Counseling [ ]

Preaching [ ]

Social work [ ]

Other (specify)

Section 2: Information dissemination

4. Information dissemination is part and parcel of your service to the people of Melmoth. Do you agree with this statement?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

4. (i) Do members of community come to you for any kind of information?

Yes [ ]

No [ ]

(ii)If yes, who mostly come for information?

Men [ ]

Women [ ]

Children [ ]

Disabled [ ]

Aged [ ]

(iii) How often do they come for this information?

Very often [ ]

Often [ ]

Not often [ ]

(iv) What kind of information do these people look for?

(v) In what form do you give information to them?

5. What media/means of information do you use to disseminate information to the women in this community?

Discussions with people [ ]

Films [ ]

Video shows [ ]

Charts/posters [ ]

Church [ ]

Women groups [ ]

Imbizo [ ]

Other(Please specify)

Section 3: Information gathering

6. (i) Where do you get information that you disseminate to the people who come to you?

(ii) Besides you, how else do women gather information in this area?

Section 4:Information use

(i) Why do you think information is required by women in this area?

(ii) How do they use information that you give them?

(iii) Are they normally satisfied with the information you give to them? Elaborate.

(iv)What impact arise from the information given to them?

Section 5: Remarks/recommendations

7. If you were asked to recommend methods of providing information to the women, what would be your recommendations?

8. Problems encountered in information gathering and dissemination

9. Please comment on:-

(i) When information should be provided to women in Melmoth?

(ii) How it should be made available?

(iii) Who should provide it?

(iv)Why information should be provided?

(iv) Where should it be obtained?

(v) Why should it be obtained in that particular place?

APPENDIX D: MAP OF MELMOTH