

# **Re-Engineering Public Libraries Information Literacy for Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This is a theoretical paper which reviewed critically public library services and their role for sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper thus examined variable such as public libraries and information literacy for sustainable development in Nigeria. The researcher therefore advocate adequate libraries funding, enforcing new library policy training and retraining of staff including availability of information and communication technology (ICT).*

**Keywords:** Re-Engineering, Public Libraries, Information, Literacy and Sustainable Development

## **INTRODUCTION**

This study titled re-engineering public libraries information literacy for sustainable development cannot overemphasize, because of the state of both libraries in Nigeria. Few states in this country can boast of functional public and public libraries services to their communities. There has been much talk about libraries, including public libraries, being uniquely positioned to act as key agents for developing the critical skill of information literacy in their communities. Yet there is a notable lack of literature addressing information literacy on public library, especially when compared to the volume of material on the topic in relation to public and academic libraries, which might suggest that public libraries are not actively engaged in information literacy efforts.

The public library has a mandate to cater for the people and interests. According to Okiy (2000), the public library is usually set up to provide service to everyone, it is a universal library that is usually supervised, financed or supported by Federal State and Local Government while public library refers to a library attached to primary and

secondary public with the goal of enhancing their curriculum, teaching and learning. Apparently, a Library is an indispensable centre where books and non-book materials are continuously acquired and organized by trained personnel. Udoh-Ilomechine (2000) notes that public libraries help children to discover for themselves by independent study and learning how to ask questions.

Fayose (1980) asserted that for any library to run efficient services, adequate accommodation, efficient and relevant materials (books and non-books materials) and qualified personnel are required. She also added that Government needs to provide all the amenities necessary for the smooth running of libraries.

In this paper, emphasis is on re-engineering public and public libraries information literacy for sustainable development in Nigeria. It is over forty years since the term 'information literacy' was first coined by Paul Zurkowski (Spitzer, Eisenberg & Lowe 1998) and nearly twenty years since the concept came to the forefront of the information profession. Libraries of all types have been charged with taking an active role in fostering an information literate society and public libraries have been presented as obvious and well equipped institutions for imparting these critical skills to the wider community.

Information literacy has been a hot issue in the library world for almost fifty decades. And it is still very pertinent today. In the age of information explosion and technological advancement, issues of information storage, organization, access, and evaluation have become important issues to be addressed by our societies. Library professionals in the Nigeria, particularly in the academia, realize that information literacy plays a critical role in students' learning process. They have attempted in various ways to address issues related to information literacy and have endeavored to make information literacy an integral part of the university curriculum (Adebayo, 2012).

The goal is to help students succeed, not only during their years in college but also in their life-long career choices. "The road to information literacy is about creating relationships between ourselves and the world," and librarians are "about facilitating those connections between students and their worlds. It is thus important to make space in the traditional curriculum for the role of information literacy in the learning process so that students will be able to build a stronger foundation for their future careers.

Information literacy is a critical component of this information age. An informed citizen is the basis of an active democracy and information literacy is important for sustaining democratic institutions. The objective of the UN Literacy Decade (2003-2012) is to provide information literate environments.

## **CONCEPT OF INFORMATION LITERACY**

One of the most frequently used definitions of Information Literacy was given by American Library Association (ALA) in 1989 and it states "To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information. The information literate people are those who have learned how to learn".

However in implementing information literacy programmes we need to have more specific objectives and these have been described in several ways. Campbell cited Gorman (2003) who indicated that "it is better to focus on teaching people how to utilize the information they can readily and regularly access, whether it is in a printed pamphlet from a government department, a radio programme, a newspaper – whatever is locally available." (Campbell 2008).

Campbell says that the ALA definition should be applied so that the focus should “move away from teaching people what tool to use to locate information to other aspects of the information literacy definition specifically in the areas of critical thinking and awareness of information, decoding the packaging of information delivery and the appropriate use of information.”

Information literacy challenges libraries, especially public and public libraries, to bring about a change in individuals’ lives, to make citizens independent seekers of knowledge. Information literacy opens the avenue to promote quests for information, to develop, to expand the information base of the individual which will finally lead towards personal empowerment and lifelong learning. Democracy cannot be successful without active participation of informed citizens.

Despite all these challenges faced by public libraries in Nigeria, there is still light at the end of the tunnel. Recently, a campaign tagged “Bring Back the Book” was flagged off on the 20th of December, 2010. This campaign was aimed at resuscitating reading culture in Nigeria. This brings a ray of hope that very soon; public libraries will receive the much desired attention they deserve to serve their communities more effectively.

## **PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION LITERACY**

The nature of a public library is different from other libraries. Its user community is very different and varied. Their needs for information literacy do not share a common background. Each demand is different from another. So the information literacy services will have to be accordingly flexible to be effective and meet the needs of all the user groups. A representative list of the different user groups may include the following:

- Children
- Women
- Visually challenged
- Indigenous people
- Senior citizens
- Unemployed persons

The groups given above are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. However it shows that the concept of information literacy is to be conceived as context dependent. The social situation, communities to be served, objectives of the institution all play an important role. Library services must be adapted to the different needs of communities in rural and urban area (Adebayo, 2012).

The public library service is developed to meet the need of the community. If the Community need is well defined the tasks become easier for the librarian. It is the responsibility of the public library to provide information in counseling and guidance to derive information from various sources to its different users with varied demands.

## **CONTEXT OF INFORMATION LITERACY SERVICES**

The end objectives of information literacy programmes can only be achieved if the public library not only makes the user aware where to get his/her relevant information but also provide it if it is not going to be easily accessible otherwise. For instance in rural areas the nearest government office may be far away and practically beyond easy reach to get a particular form. Here the public library could keep the important forms or may have the infrastructure

to download the forms. Internet access is even more difficult for an individual to get. So besides making the users aware of the information available there, the public library may have to provide training on its use as well as provide some internet access within its services. Without going this extra step the IL programmes will not be implemented in spirit and its practical benefits will not reach the users.

## **PROBLEMS AND PROSPECT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

### *1. Lack of adequate funding*

Funding is a major setback for public libraries. No matter what amount of energy expended by librarians to put in place programs of value to the community, if there are no funds to carry out these programs, then all efforts are in vain. Public libraries in this era should be boasting of e-resources and automation of all routine activities but this is farfetched because funds are not readily available to execute such projects.

### *2. Lack of public awareness*

The people the public libraries are meant to serve are generally not fully aware of the importance of having a public library in the community. Some feel the library is meant for the elites and students who need to read either to pursue their careers or pass examinations.

### *3. Out-dated materials*

Most reading materials in public and public libraries are outdated. The reason is that they are not able to subscribe to current journal titles and that they can buy just few new books at long intervals due to financial constraints. This can be demoralizing and can puncture the hopes of users who are willing to make use of the library.

### *4. Lack of ICT Facility*

Most public libraries lack ICT facilities. Okolo (2002) observes that the library needs ICT in order to give efficient services to its users.

### *5. Training and retraining of staff*

It is crucial for library staff to receive constant training and retraining. It is important for them to build capacity that will enhance their productivity. This can be in form of attending conferences, workshops, seminars, short-term trainings or pursuing higher degrees. If librarians are to offer their users efficient and effective services and bring best practices to the fore, then it is important for librarians to be very conversant with changing trends in their profession, (Adebayo,2012).

## **PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

Schools used to have libraries with librarians. The general roles of the librarian were to manage a collection of print materials, promote reading and a love of good literature, and teach children how to find things in the library (James, 1998) Some librarians also kept track of filmstrips, slides, 16-mm films, audio tapes, records, and the various accompanying projectors and players (although larger schools frequently had a person called an audiovisual specialist who was responsible for maintaining, scheduling, and circulating non-print materials and equipment).

Teaching children to find information was limited to the card catalog for the print collection, a guide for periodicals, and standard print reference sources such as dictionaries, atlases, almanacs, thesauri, encyclopedias, and various

books of people, quotations, and places. Teaching children to find information in the library was circumscribed by the forms of information available, primarily requiring use of card catalogs, indexes, guide words, and alphabetical and numerical sequence to about the third character.

Then rapid change began. In approximately a five-year period leading out of the 1970s and into the 1990s, and now 21<sup>st</sup>, we saw video disc and half inch videocassette appear; audio cassette began to replace records; public libraries, public librarians, and audiovisual specialists were replaced by media centers and media specialists; and micro computers showed up on desktops. The Information Age was beginning to touch schools, and as formats and sources of information proliferated, the question in media centers changed from “How do I find information in a limited number of resources?” to “How do I choose information that is most appropriate for my needs from a seemingly unlimited number of resources?” Clearly, the focus on tool skills that were specific to a particular information resource shifted to a focus on problem-solving skills generalized across many information resources. The researchers will not well more on public libraries, because of the situation of public libraries in Nigeria. Our focus would be more on public libraries re-engineering. There is section of public libraries in public libraries in different states of Nigeria, but they not doing their work to the communities.

### **ROLE OF LIBRARIANS IN INFORMATION LITERACY**

According to Joshi and Nikose (2009) Information and communication technologies have changed the complete scenario in libraries. Now a day, library has become point of resource-based learning the role of librarian is changing radically with skills of education paradigms. The impact of moving from text based learning to resource based learning will involve heavier use of library materials and a demand for more and a varied media resources, including print and non-print. The librarian is responsible for acquiring, disseminating and tracking information resources of many types. It might include database searching, interlibrary loans, monitoring internet newsgroups or maintenance of a computerized library information system. Libraries and Librarians play an important role in education of people for effective and efficient information use by teaching them information skills at all levels of education to enable to be informed citizens of the country.

### **RE-ENGINEERING PUBLIC LIBRARIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

The task of reforming and re-positioning Nigeria’s libraries and information services for their anticipated role as the gateways to National and global information and knowledge in Nigeria’s emerging information society is urgent, difficult and would require the commitment of library managers to a new vision of their profession, a reinventing and re-branding of library services, the implementation of new policies for library development, massive investments in technologies and information resources, increased and regular funding and, crucially, government support (Bango, 2015).

To jump-start the reform process and underline its importance, it is imperative that the Federal Government should urgently convene a high-powered national stakeholders meeting on the reform of library and information services in Nigeria. The meeting should result in affirming the important role of library and information services as gateways to information and democracy in the emerging Nigerian. Information society and approve a roadmap of vital reforms for their revitalization. It should also approve:

- A budget and funding plans for the reform programme
- Policies and guidelines on minimum standards on library funding, resources and services
- The urgent establishment of a National Commission to coordinate library services in Nigeria
- The urgent review and amendment of the National Library's statute to refocus its responsibilities in line with its new role as the hub for the national network of library and information services.
- The National Commission for Libraries and Information Services would be responsible for carrying forward the plans and policies approved at the reform meeting and for advising the appropriate governments and agencies on their implementation. Thereafter, it should, among other things:
  - Monitor the implementation of standards of funding and services set for various libraries
  - Establish an Endowment Fund to solicit grants and donations, to be utilized for supporting the execution of strategic projects
  - Plan, formulate, develop and recommend national guidelines on library services and advise governments on their implementation
  - Encourage private sector partnership in library development programmes
  - Collate, analyze and publish information relating to libraries in Nigeria.
  - Appraise continually the inadequacies and deficiencies of information resources and services in Nigeria.
- \* The National Library of Nigeria will be the hub of the national network of libraries and information services and would be responsible for developing appropriate networking tools and services. Therefore, public and public libraries connected to the network would be able to conserve their scarce resources by devoting it to satisfying the primary needs of their user community while the resources for satisfying their secondary needs are sourced from within the network. It is crucial that the importance of a viable public library system should be emphasized in the reform policies, in view of their importance in nurturing early reading and information handling skills. Appropriate recommendations should therefore be made to Federal, State and Local Government education authorities in this regard.
- \* Similar emphasis should be given to the urgent need for the reform of public libraries because of their unique role as the most accessible gateways to information and democracy for the vast majority of the people. Special funding should be procured to ensure that they are able to provide access to the internet and offer internet skills training to the public
- \* Librarians of the new information era would require skills in handling information on paper, electronic and digital formats and will be required to act as change agents. Library schools need to adjust their curricula for training new entrants to the library profession. Appropriate capacity building courses should also be arranged for the existing library manpower.

- \* The President, NLA and the Director/CEO of the National Library of Nigeria would have a busy time employing state-of-the-art marketing, lobbying and advocacy skills to initiate and promote this reform agenda in the months

## **CONCLUSION**

Ideally, national development is dependent on the quality of information in a given contract and the role of public and public libraries cannot be over emphasized. This paper clearly shows the role of librarians in re-engineering public libraries for sustainable development through the national level.

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