

Engaging the Government in Library Services for Sustainable National Development: The Case of Public Library and Information Systems in Nigeria

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Abstract: Government involvement in Public library and information systems services has been observed to be minimal in Nigeria. Consequently, sustainable national development appears to have been adversely affected. For this, the paper examines the concepts of sustainable national development, library services, and takes a look at library services for sustainable national development and the ways to engage government in library services for sustainable national development and conclude that indeed government has not really been involved in library services soon after their take off. Because of this the required utilitarian information for sustainable development is continuously lacking. Some ways to engage government in public library services have been identified such as using library services to propagate government programmes, organizing public lectures on library's role in governance, organizing workshop for government officials among others and the time to do it is now than ever before in the face of depleting resources.

Key words: Sustainable National Development, library services, government, engaging.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable national development is a collective effort of all stakeholders such as institutions, organizations, individuals and the government. It is a serious business that should not to be left alone in the hands of only a few. Unfortunately this has been the case in Nigeria where only some institutions, organizations and individuals are involved while the government does not show any demonstrable interest. This is in spite of the existing supportive structures it has in this regard such as government established public libraries and information systems at national, state and ministry/parastatals levels. Mngutyô (2011) asserts that public library and information systems establishment anywhere is for developmental purpose in society. Their primary purpose is to supply information that supports the cause of government ministries, institutions as well as the general public towards sustainable national development.

In Nigeria however, soon after public library and information systems are established, their significance is loss on government and the public for which they are established for before they take off. It would appear that they are established for the sake of it not because of what they can do. For that reason most of them are abandoned. Funding becomes an

issue and they become nonfunctional as an archival center collecting documents alone without any conscious and deliberate efforts to support the institutions and people they are meant to serve. Again, it can be observed that their services are not positioned to provide utilitarian information for the daily activities of their parent institutions. Although among all types of libraries in Nigeria, special libraries enjoy little attention (Mngutyô & Ngushin 2018) over other categories of libraries that have resulted into little national development. Certainly this cannot be said of public library and information systems of sustainable national development in Nigeria. Consequently sustainable national development has been slow and difficult and persistence because there is no impetus from the government of any kind.

This paper therefore seeks to examine the concepts of sustainable national development, library services, and identify as well as examine library services for sustainable national development and the ways to engage government in library services for sustainable national development.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Concept of Sustainable National Development

National development is the goal of any society. It is achievable with all hands on deck. According to Brooks in Afolabi (2009) national development involves economic growth, modernization, equitable distribution of income and national resources and social economic transformation for improved living standards of people through the use of a country's human, natural and institutional resources. It is the transformation of the various (political and socio-economic) aspects of the life of the nation that leads to a progression from a low undesirable state to a high desirable one or vice-versa (Ikpaahindi 2009). Corroborating Ahmed (2009) assert that it is a situation in which a nation, state or country gradually grows until it becomes advanced, stronger and prosperous in all aspects of life.

Literally, national development is a country's development. Aghadiuno in Mbachu (2011) states that it include improvements in materials welfare of the people as well as eradication of mass poverty and its correlates of illiteracy, diseases and short life expectancy. Adeniyi & Landu in

Mbachu (2011) further describe it as the process of nation building which brings about national unity and enhances the quality of life of people. National development therefore is a state of improvement a country attains where people's basic needs are met. It is also the process of achieving a country's cohesion and giving the people a better life. Hence the concept sustainable national development by Brundtland Commission is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Alao & Alao 2013). Sustainable national development is therefore national development attained in the present in meeting people's needs without compromising the abilities of future generations in attaining their own development. This is possible by information supplied steadily at every stage in society's life through library services.

Concept of Library Services

These are activities carried out by library personnel for the benefits of library users. The activities are designed to ensure the use of library resources (staff and materials). According to Hameed (nd) library services are services provided to satisfy the information, educational and recreational needs of the library users. The services are provided to users through direct and indirect contact. The services are grouped into two major type; readers' services and technical services. According to Uganneya & Agoh (2013) in providing library services to the users', books and other literary materials occupy a pre-eminent position because they form the tools of the librarians. They further admit that some library services common to all libraries include loan services, reference services, inter-library cooperation, current awareness service, exhibitions and displays and library publications. In addition to these common services, academic libraries offer photocopying, translations services, study facilities, library instruction, telex services and internet services. For special libraries, in addition to the common services listed above they offer variety of additional services which include translational services, photocopying services, selective dissemination of information and internet services. While in public libraries, besides the common services, they offer photocopying services, children services, rental of premises/rooms, mobile libraries and internet services. Furthermore Eze (2008) admit that the most important services in satisfying users of public library are loan services, references services, electronic services, school library services, library services to children, mobile library services, library services to rural dwellers, exhibition display, and interlibrary loan or cooperation, serial services, current awareness services (including other information services) photocopying services and rental of premises/reading room. The users of public libraries extend from the youngest child to the oldest adult, from the wealthiest citizens to the most highly educated to the stark illiterate.

It is worthy to note that library services are run by laws and principles. Assoh (2004) and Hameed (nd) stated the guiding principles of library activities as contained in Raganathan's

five laws of library science to include library/books/information is for use; every user his book/information; every book/information its user, don't waste the time of the library user and the library/information is a growing organization/organism. To the individual user, the philosophy that guides library service provision is to provide the right book /information, to the right reader at the right time and in the right manner. This suggests information service which is the provision of definite or specific information to users (Mngutyô 2011). According to Ochogwu (2007) information services are elusive in Nigeria due to internal and external factors. Jam in Mngutyô (2011) posits that a country's standard of living is determined by the library and information services it provides. The high the standard of living, the good the library and information services provided. Aguolu & Aguolu (2002) supporting this assertion states that the extent to which a society positioned her information systems at all operational levels of the society in achieving it socio-economic and political objectives determine the development and developmental status of the society. However, library services in Nigeria are therefore far from being good hence the low standard of living.

Government in library services means their diversity, sustainability and effectiveness (that is improvement). It also means the provision of information in appropriate manner to all categories of people in society such as individuals, organizations and institutions for personal and institutional development culminating into national development. This means library services being replicated at all operational levels of the society in achieving it socio-economic and political objectives. Moreover it also means constant funding and enabling policy on library services in all public library and information systems hence it sustainability, continuity and effectiveness at all operational levels in society.

It is unfortunate that government in Nigeria has been involved in library services at almost all operational levels of society for quite some time now except with less seriousness. The public library and information services are located at national, state, local government areas and ministries. However they are not positioned to serve government and the general public effectively for lack of attention. The mandates of these library services are therefore affected in Nigerian society. It should be noted that there is no time that they were notably involved in any kind of development as we see in developed countries not to mention now.

III. LIBRARY SERVICES FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

These are activities that provide information for sustainable national development. The resultant effect is the provision of pinpointed utilitarian information for the daily needs of individuals, organizations and institutions for the production of goods and services in society culminating into national development.

National development lies in the hands of the government and her agencies as well as associations, corporations, institutions, individuals and so on (Mngutyô & Ngushin (2015). The extent to which it is achieved depends on available information. The world around has been described and is being observed to explode with information (Dike 2000). Yet developing countries such as Nigeria are in critical information famine or lack (Ochogwu 2007). Incidentally, public libraries that are responsible for the provision of information to the public in Nigeria have been written off. Mngutyô (2011) reports how for instance in Benue State of Nigeria some top government officials were heard calling for the closure of public libraries especially the state library board while the structure should be converted into a commercial hotel. This suggests public libraries irrelevancy to both government and the general public due to lack of utilitarian information for daily needs.

Although information is abound, developing countries such as Nigeria continue to wallow in information poverty (Ochogwu, 2007). Perhaps it is in this regard that a renounced librarian in person of Professor Michael Afolabi about twenty-six years ago or more indicated in one of his lecture series in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria that for information glut and lack indexing and abstracting is the answer. Other library services that provide specific information necessary for sustainable national development include selective dissemination of information, bibliographies and document translation. In the same vein, Utor (2006) propose that public library service in Nigeria should provide Information and Referral (I&R) services to rural people. I & R is a service that involves facilitating the link between a person with a need and service activity. Utor further explained that it is information or advice outside the library which can meet the need of the people. Information and referral services may consist of live individualized response to a person's inquiry and it may involve the development and maintenance of resource files that state clearly list of resources available and information about them. The activities of information and referral service are information advice, steering, referral, personal assistance, case finding, follow-up, outreach, feedback and advocacy.

Another library service for sustainable national development is the provision of mobile library services. This kind of service covers remotest areas of the society (Utor, 2006). By this the public library is brought to the people than the present arrangement where only very few literate people access and benefit from its services.

Rural information system is yet another service for rural people through the public library service system (Utor, 2006). This library service takes the form of partnering with government extension workers in all areas. The library can serve the rural and non-literate society through the assistance of the film units of the information division of the ministries of education, health, Agriculture, trade and industry and so on. Library officers can be used as extension library workers in liaison with the extension workers from ministries of health,

agriculture, education and so on so that their efforts will not be duplicated.

Furthermore, is the provision of adequate information service delivery in public library and information systems on all subjects to users'. Bopp and Smith (1995) admit that whenever information and referral services are introduced in public libraries, it proves to be extremely helpful and is invariably used extensively. Information service is not only the provision of specific information but also of definite documents, answers or information to users' questions or information needs regardless of its complexity (Mngutyô, 2011). He further state that the delivery of such answers or information or documents through bibliographies, indexes, abstracts or any other channel, media or form appropriate to the user is known as information service delivery. Information service delivery in public libraries therefore means their diversity because of the heterogeneous nature of the users and their information needs and demands. The role of public libraries in this communication link is to serves as an avenue through which a universe of communication links appropriate in supplying information to the different categories and levels of users in the society can be met efficiently and effectively.

The range of public library services covers translational services to transferring services, abstracting to compilation of special bibliographies and to SDI to displaying, etc. It is carried out in consideration of users such as government functionaries, legislators, researchers, students, illiterates, semi-illiterates etc. which constitute the community of users of the library. Mngutyô (2011) assert that the methods of information service delivery in public libraries are determined by the kind of information services offered. Edoaka in Mngutyô (2011) further state that generally, the methods to be considered after information service (i.e information is selected and a systematic record is prepared) include telephone call to individuals. This may take the form of passing it on or a request to call at the reference desk for it; message notification either by messenger or post to call at reference desk for information; pertinent information can be sent to the user at his office through Selection Dissemination of Information (SDI); routing of periodicals (or automatic loans and other documents); Selective dissemination of documents; preparation of a library bulletin. This can take variety of forms such as indexing or abstracting service or a table of contents of periodicals received in the library or list of recent publications or acquisition; Display and View data.

In addition, bibliographies, indexes, abstracts, review journals, current contents and other alerting reporting journal literature for the use of specialists can be instituted. Mngutyô (2011) corroborating state that diversity of information services in public library and information systems with appropriate methods of information service delivery should be considered, taken into cognizance the different categories of users ranging from children to the adult, literate to non-literate, advantaged to the disadvantaged (Such as those in prison, the blind etc), the government and the governed and so on. It is by so doing

that the public libraries will be seen fulfilling their mandate. The delivery of information in usable forms in public libraries and information systems add value to the information systems in the eyes of its public.

IV. WAYS OF ENGAGING GOVERNMENT IN LIBRARY SERVICES

The word engaging according to Longman (2002) means attracting some one's attention and interest. While the word government in the same dictionary means a group of people that govern a state or country. To govern means to officially and legally control a country and make decisions on taxes, laws, and so on including policies on what should happen and should not happen. Engaging government in library services simply means attracting government in the provision of library services. This involves committing the governing authority in the provision of library services. This has to do with their involvement in decision taking on library management, library resources and creating enabling environment as regards the provision of library services.

Libraries for years since they were introduced on the shores of Nigeria like other places, have been noted to provide relevant information for the development of the society. The information they provide is comprehensive, balance and current to all spheres of life. This supports and encourages personal and societal development. Obviously both governments and libraries as can be seen are involved in development of the people. They are partners in progress. With this, it is easier to evolve ways for government and public libraries and information systems to partner together to bring about the desired development in society. Some of the ways government can be made to be interested and attracted in library services for sustainable development include:

Reviving the propagation of government programmes

From early times the libraries in Nigeria were reading rooms. They later metamorphosed into regional public libraries. While as reading rooms they were used in propagating the activities of colonial masters such as justifying the need for British and colonies participation in the Second World War. Soon after regional government took over, their uses were abandoned. Today they are replaced by state library boards which can be repositioned to propagate government programmes and policies. The libraries can float activities to support these government programmes and policies and communicate through their own outlets as well as through the communication media such as big giant televisions and on social media. In addition, translational services can be floated by the library to translate these government programmes and policies from English language to vernacular and Pidgin English in audio, visual and audio-visual formats and put in cartoon too for televising regularly to call public attention with details found in the libraries. By so doing government will be attracted as well as her attention and interest drawn to support library services.

Provision of information services to government activities

Government is involved in many diverse activities that require information to execute that it does not have time to sieve through documents to use immediately. The library can fill the gap by providing government with such comprehensive, balance, current and objective information through research activities of information services. Information services provide pinpointed information on any subject. The provision of such relevant information will no doubt attract government attention and interest and may also attract government to identify with the library and its services.

Organizing seminar/workshop for government officials

Government's appointees without requisite knowledge and skill at governance can be made to acquire them. There are those that have never worked before and there are those that have worked before but have lost touched of modern act of governance after several years of leaving governance. The library can capitalize on this to organize refresher workshop for these group of government officials in conjunction with government approval. A proposal to initiate such action can first be sent to government for approval and other stipulated guidelines the government might want to be followed. The workshops search light can be on such issues as government communication, public relation and so on, strictly meant for government officials. The purpose will be to make the appointees understand the mechanism of governance, know how to relate with one another, conduct themselves and relate with the public and know public expectations of them. This among several similar workshops is certain to attract government attention and interest in library services.

Organizing public lecture on library's role in governance

It is expedient for public lectures to be organized by the library for its public from time to time. Library's role in governance is yet to be known especially on this side of the world. Organizing regular public lectures by public libraries and information systems should be a way of bringing the government up to speed on the use of library in governance like is obtained in developed nations. Public lectures are lectures intended to educate the people generally on the activities of certain things. People from all walks of life are invited including government officials. These are opportunities that serve as eye openers on certain important issues in society. Public lecture on library's role in governance ensures that government and the people realized the importance of library in governance. By so doing government can engage the services of the library like it does in developed countries for sustainable national development.

Conducting of public library orientation/education

Library orientation is a way of introducing the library, its resources and services to the public or its users. The education serves to expose users on how best to explore and exploit library resources and services. Library orientation/education can also cover study skills and how executive summaries of

documents can be carried out for government officers. It can also take the form of information literacy programmes for different categories of people in society such as civil servants, traders, illiterates, semi literates, school children and so on in society. The organization and conducting of public library orientation and education should be widely publicized, in doing so government interest and attention would be attracted.

Actual execution of government activities

There are certain information oriented projects of government that the library can undertake. This can take the form of compilation of directories, bibliographies, indexes; abstracts etc on many issues. Special adult education can be organized and carried out for certain groups of people in society including campaigns for certain government projects and programmes meant for the good of the people and so on, on any issue.

Continuous repositioning of the library to be relevant to government

The library's fifth law is library is a growing organism. This suggests dynamism and change to be relevant to parent institution. Public libraries by their mandate therefore have the right to always position themselves in a manner that they would be continuously relevant to government and its public, the users. This is by aligning with government programmes and policies as well as those of the public such as organizations, institutions and individuals through the provision of enlightenment, publicity and information. They could also provide analysis, prediction and research among others on any subject of great importance to government officials and the general public at any given time. This could be in times of war, literacy programmes, farming and so on.

V. CONCLUSION

It is a welcome development and high time for government to be engaged in library services. Although this has not been so in Nigeria soon after they are established, consequently this has adversely affected sustainable national development. Information required through library services though abundance, is lacking hence little sustainable national development. It is therefore imperative for the status quo to change with government involvement in library services which would mean diversify, sustainability, effectiveness and appropriateness of the services at all operational levels in society. Some of the ways to engage government in library services include propagating government programmes, organizing public lectures on library's role in governance, organizing workshop for government officials among others. The time to do that is now because of the depleting resources and other factors militating against public library and information systems for sustainable national development.

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