

BRINGING BACK THE BOOK: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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ABSTRACT:

This paper discusses in detail the roles of libraries and information centres on the revival of reading culture of the Nigeria populace in relation to Mr. President's Agenda of "Bring Back the Book". The paper also discusses what a book policy, is roles of books in the lives of people, similarly attempt has been made to discuss the Nigeria's Book policy as well as what the policy is all about in the life of the nation. The paper also concluded by discussing what librarians and information disseminators could do in order to be able to revive the reading habits of our people. The issue of the importance of book chain in the revival of reading culture and as well as books provision were also highlighted in the paper.

INTRODUCTION

A book is like gold buried in the rubles. It is the miner (reader), who brings the nugget to the surface and utilizes it. The great advantages of book reside in the fact it furnishes us with knowledge, and imbues us with the power of the intellect. The book, which is the main product of publishing is a passport to the world, an indispensable vehicle of science, a store house and converter of culture and information for development, and national unity which are actually being propagated in libraries and information centres.

The book is an aid in the acquisition, development, and inculcation of the proper value orientation for the development of the individual as well as his intellectual capacity in order to understand and appreciate the potentials and limitations of his/her environment. It facilitates the acquisition of physical and intellectual skills necessary in assisting the individual to develop into useful member of his community and also to acquire an objective view of the local and external environment. It is an effective instrument for the dissemination of knowledge, information, and promoting unity in the nation, which as a matter of fact are kept in libraries, and information centres.

It is tragic to see that most youths in Nigeria do not read and as such are not exposed to the wonderful world of books. This has resulted in youth restiveness, which gives rise to militancy in different forms and manner in Nigeria. For example, Nigeria Delta

Militancy, Boko Haram, as well as Jos crises. It must be observed that President Goodluck Jonathan, in December 2010 kicked off a book revival policy aimed at encouraging Nigerians to return to reading, especially the youth. At the launching of the Bring "Back the Book", the President opined that "Books could widen peoples horizon, as well as take them to places they might never have the opportunity of visiting". The President hoped through such programs and activities, reading habits can be revived.

1. **WHAT IS A BOOK?**

The Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary (3rd edition of 2010) defined book as "a set of printed pages that are fastened inside a cover so that you can turn them and read them. It also went further to define a book as a written work published in printed or electronic form (e-book)"

There is no one universally accepted definition of the term "book", therefore it could be variously described. Apotiade (2008) stated that physically, one can call any object a book that is an assemble of leaves held together along one of the four edges and protected on front and back with a cover of more durable materials". Furthermore, one can describe the book as a more or less coherent body of graphic communication assembled into one or several units for the purpose of systematic presentation and preservation and creative expression of casting value of more transitory communication. Furthermore books could be defined as a written or printed message of considerable length meant for public circulation and recorded on materials that are light yet durable enough to afford easy portability.

The importance of books as the main source of intellectual, cultural, and educational advancement has long been recognized. There are different types of books. We have:

- (a) Illustrated/children books
- (b) Textbooks/educational books
- (c) Tertiary/scholarly books
- (d) General books
- (e) Reference books

Books play vital role in individual and national development. The role of books in the development of any society can hardly be over-stressed. Since the time when man started writing, books have come to be accepted as an indispensable foundation upon which any sound educational development is built.

Adesanya (1995) at "Ife Conference on Publishing and Book Development" stated that, the Nigerian Government recognizes the place of books as:-

- (i) The hub of the educational wheel and potent agent in the overall-development of its citizenry;
- (ii) A basic instrument for the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage and or the development of scientific and technological knowledge of skills, social-political and economic awareness;
- (iii) An instrument of enhancing national interaction, co-operation, and understanding;
- (iv) An agent for promoting the growth of well informed and well adjusted individual.

If government recognizes the importance of books in National integration, one however wonders the sincerity of government in really tackling the problem of book publishing industry.

ROLES OF BOOKS IN HUMAN LIVES

Books shape our life. We use books in schools in educating the mind to acquire new knowledge. It is said to be man's best friend. At times, when we are sad, depressed or angry when we read a book, our mind seems to calm down. Books take us to a world where we find ourselves relaxed, sometimes, thrilled or even crying. Certain books show our ancestral customs which we hesitate to follow now. We have to read books to develop our knowledge for our future. It teaches us moral value for happy and peaceful life which every human being requires. Books improve one's communication abilities by teaching one on how to talk and carry oneself in the society. It improves qualities such as **honesty, kindness, friendship, loyalty, bravery, etc.** among others. Books shape one's character in life in its entirety. Books serve as inspirations to present, past, and future generations economic, social as well as cultural well being of the society.

THE NATIONAL BOOK POLICY

According to Wikipedia, "policy is typically described as a principle or rule to guide decision and achieve rational outcome" The term may apply to government, private sector, organizations and group, or individual. Presidential executive orders, corporate privacy policies, and parliamentary rules of order are all examples of policy. Policy differs from rules or law. While law can compel or prohibit behaviour, policy may guide actions towards those that are mostly likely to achieve desired outcome.

UNESCO (2005) stated that, national book policy is a political commitment to consider a part of a cultural, economical, strategical, sector. A global conception of the book industry which constitutes in itself an articulated chain, and therefore is aimed at achieving the following:

- Supporting policy formulation and decision making through the provision of Information Resources and services for national development
- Promoting life-long education and information literacy for human capacity building and a better citizenry;
- Supporting cultural rebirth and national orientation.
- Supporting educational development at all educational levels.

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES

These are found to be performing significant functions which include the following:-

- Provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in various medium and languages through book provision;
- Contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help to safeguard democratic values and universal civil rights;
- Commit to offering access to relevant resources and services without restriction or any form of censorship;
- Acquire, preserve, and make available the widest variety of materials; reflecting the plurality and diversity of a society;
- Select and provide library materials and services with regard to professional considerations and also for policy formulation and execution;
- Procure, assemble and disseminate knowledge and information to various library clientele;
- Support the school curriculum in the area of research and dissemination of knowledge;
- Serve as the repository of knowledge and information;
- Make materials, facilities and services equally accessible to all users;
- Avoid discrimination for any reason, including race, national or ethnic origin, gender or sexual preference, age, disability, religion, or political beliefs;
- Protect user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired, or transmitted.

- Stimulate literary creation.
- Create a fiscal and financial environment favourable to the Publisher and the publishing industry;
- Favour trade and distribution of books to foster these:
 - Preferential postal rate and elimination of custom taxes or other import taxes;
 - Strengthen distribution mechanism
 - Adoption of the sector code of conduct in the field of commercial practice.
 - Measures to encourage export
 - Providing a legal framework on all issues concerning the book industry.

Similarly Ezekwesili (2007) succinctly wrote that:

The book policy is a national guide on the provision and effective management of books and other relevant resources geared towards the implementation of education at all levels in Nigeria. It is a statement of intent and purposes as well as prescription, requirements and indeed a bench mark for quality education in Nigeria through the provision of adequate and relevant books and other educational resources.

In view of the near endemic nature of problems of book development in Nigeria, it was conceived and popularly believed that the missing link and the last resort is a well articulated National Book Policy which will adequately address problems plaguing the book industry in Nigeria. Book production and consumption level of a country is a reflection of its development index. The Federal Ministry of Education, through the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), constituted a committee in 1990, to produce a draft National Book Policy for presentation and ratification by the government of the day. The efforts and input of that committee, after a lot of review workshops, led to the preparation of a draft National Book Policy which was approved by the Federal Executive Council in 1999.

However, that book policy could not be implemented due to intractable problems of poor role definition and basic infrastructure defects. Thus it was practically impossible for the take off of the National Book Council as prescribed by the policy. Again that policy did not adequately address the problems of tertiary institutions. These contradictions and gaps led to the constitution of another committee to revisit the policy document and address these issues.

In view of the prevailing situation, NERDC, in concert with other core stakeholders reviewed and upgraded the previous draft to a new Draft National Book Policy (NBP), 2007. This draft eliminated the contradictions and gaps through streamlining and

explicit definition of roles. Other inputs were derived from the National Workshops on Eradication on Poor quality books in schools as well as the annual book assessment workshops conducted by NERDC. This draft is presently with the National Assembly for ratification and passage. One wonders when will this legal backing of the National Book Policy will see the light of the day!!!

OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL BOOK POLICY (NBP)

In full recognition of the role of books in National Development, the Draft National Book Policy (2007) states in section 1, subsection 1.2.1 that Government shall:-

1. Promote and reward local authorship of educational books;
2. Create an enabling environment for publishing as well as provide support services needed for manuscripts generation;
3. Seek, where necessary, the purchase of right of published works in high demand in our educational system;
4. Make books available and affordable at all levels through a sustainable system of distribution and use;
5. Support and encourage investigation and research into book development;
6. Encourage the publication of all professional works.
7. Encourage the production of books in specialized area (e.g. Braille for the visually impaired);
8. Support the establishment and growth of libraries at all levels of education;
9. Create and foster a reading culture among all age groups, especially the youth through establishment of such programmes as reading/library periods in schools, Young Readers Clubs (YRC) etc;
10. Promote awareness of book needs through promoting the organization of book fairs, workshops, children's book week, library week and advertisement;
11. Develop and promote national, state, and local based training in all areas of the book industry;
12. Establish minimum production standards through sustainable quality control and assurance of textbooks and instructional materials to be implemented nation-wide;

1. Remove constraints (e.g. taxes, duties, levies) on printing materials that militate against efficient and cost effective development and supply of books at all levels;
2. Foster policy implementation and co-operation between different ministries and other organs of government namely culture, (Book Exhibition, Printing & Paper) Trade (import policy), Finance (Taxes, duties and levies) Central Bank (foreign exchange) information (copyright);
3. Identify sources of funds to implement the National Book Policy in respect of the above fifteen (15) stated objectives of the NBP. It further identifies areas of impact and how they will Impact on reading habit to improve our reading culture.

PARTNERS IN THE WORLD OF BOOKS (BOOK CHAIN)

Ojo (2006) in his keynote address stated that: Team work is needed to produce a book and put it in the hands of readers. Each member of the team has necessary part to play, and none of them can be eliminated no matter what stage of development a country may have reached or how simple or complex its economy, five basic elements must exist or be created if there is to be a book industry.

The five elements are:

1. The Author who writes the manuscript
2. The printer
3. The publisher
4. The Book seller
5. The Libraries
6. Reader

1. AUTHOR:

The author is the creator or formulator of the ideas to be given to the world through a book; he is the arranger of the word, pictures, charts, tables, etc in which the ideas are to be presented. The author is the first owner of the right to publish the work he has created. Normally, he sells that right or leases it or assign it to a Publisher to reproduce the manuscript in some way for distribution to the world under one or another of the business arrangements. Protection of the right of the author is the purpose of copyright laws of many book trade practices.

2. **PRINTER**

The Printer is the manufacturer. He receives the manuscript from the Publishers, composes and prints and binds an edition, and sends the manufactured books back to the Publisher. Under all normal circumstances, he plays no part in deciding who prints, but merely does the job requested by the Publisher and gets paid for it. The Printer is not a risk taker on any specific book project.

3. **THE PUBLISHER**

It is the Publisher who receives the manuscript from an author, enlists capital from its own or other resources; engages the services of artist, translators, and other editorial specialists; commissions and supervises the work of printers; and then directs the distribution to the potential market of the books publishing process in motion.

4. **THE BOOK SELLER**

The Book seller receives the book directly or indirectly from the Publisher, buying them at a discount and selling them at a higher price to purchasers in his bookshop or in other ways.

5. **THE LIBRARY**

The fifth major partner in book development is the library. Libraries are the major buyers of books which they make available on loan to as many readers as possible. In addition to increasing book sales by Publishers, libraries also help to promote readership thereby increasing the number of book users.

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION PROVIDER (LIBRARIAN)

Okojie (2011) in her welcome address delivered at the second induction ceremony of Registered Librarians in Abuja noted that Librarians are the major stakeholders in the transformation agenda of any government. Through the Management of Information Resources and Services, Librarians, are able to provide information on:-

- Knowledge sources of human capital development in the country;
- Ensuring availability and access to information and knowledge to promote accountability and transparency in our national life;

CONCLUSION:

It is the considered opinion of the authors of this paper that Libraries the world over have been and are still the reservoir of knowledge, and information; as well as the intellectual power house of the nation's educational, cultural, economical, social, as well as political development. A nation without good, effective, and vibrant libraries of all types/categories cannot boost and harvest its potentials positively. It is in the light of the above therefore Governments at all levels must ensure adequate and continuous funding of these social institutions in the overall interest of the nation.

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