GLOBALISATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has affected all spheres of life including information access, storage, retrieval, and exchange. Libraries, being custodians of this great resource are repositioning themselves to meet the demands of its users and remain relevant. Public libraries need not be left out of this trend. This paper discusses the state of public libraries, their level of preparedness for global information exchange, the challenges facing them as well as the opportunities that they stand to benefit should they embrace the trend. Data were collected from a sample of seven public libraries through questionnaire and analyzed. Public libraries are found to be ill-prepared for globalization due to challenges facing them. Improved funding, staff training, and others have been suggested as a way of repositioning them.

INTRODUCTION

The entire world has been collaborating together in areas of trade and commence, education, information and technology. In fact with this collaboration, national cultures, national economies, and national boundaries are said to be dissolving (Hirst and Thompson. 1996.1) Thus the concept "global village" is commonly used. This is the situation whereby information about other parts of the world is easily obtained, documents and money change hands in great volumes and in a short time. Values are also changing. Information of all kinds is generated and shared on the internet and World Wide Web (WWW) to enhance national integration.

Libraries are information-based organizations are fast embracing information and communication technology (ICT) in order to achieve their objectives of meeting information, educational, recreational etc needs of their clientele better worldwide.

Public libraries are described as "peoples university" having unlimited patron. Their users "extend from the youngest child to the oldest adult, from the wealthiest citizen to the most economically disadvantaged, and from the most highly educated to the stark illiterate." (Edoka, 2006:18) In fact, every body is welcome. If "globalization can and must benefit the people, it must

ensure a faster world and a better life for all" (Solarin, 2005:21). A study as this that exposes the challenges is important in assisting public libraries to handle the challenges and take advantage of globalization

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS

Public libraries are centres of information and knowledge; repositories of culture and recorded history; a place to conduct free search for information; centres for self education and providers of recreation/pleasure for all. Important as their mission is, public libraries in Nigeria are suffering from under-funding. Iorhuna (2007:B5) describes the condition of public libraries in Nigeria when he wrote on their poor allocations and the resultant consequences. He said, "infinitesimal as these allocations usually are, they are seldom released as appropriated. The resultant consequences have been the sorry state of structures, facilities, materials, and services including disenchanted workforce"

There is therefore need for public libraries and stakeholders in the public library project to understand the challenges and opportunities available in order to make public libraries alive to embrace globalization.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The study intends among other things to achieve the following set objectives

a. To highlight the condition of public libraries in Nigeria in terms of availability of information resources.

b. To investigate their level of readiness for global information exchange through information and communication technology (ICT) resources available.

c. To understand the obstacles militating against their efforts to fully embrace and be part of global information superhighway.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions are set to be answered in the course of the research:

i. Are public libraries in Nigeria still predominantly using printed materials that limit global information exchange?

ii. Are they really prepared for "globalization" in terms of availability of ICT resources?

iii. What are the challenges militating against the desire of public libraries to embrace globalization?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization has become a commonly used term that cuts across all disciplines. The term "global village" seems to be one of the best and shortest expressions that give an explanation of globalization. Distances and barriers between countries have been reduced to nothing and the world is seem as a mere village where information, goods, services etc of other countries can easily be accessed, used and exchanged. Every aspect of life is affected. The entire length and breathe of the globe is affected, every aspect of life is involved, every profession is embraced and all resources, services and activities are covered in the process.

Purkitt (1998:64) discribed it more effectively thus "In globalization process, states are joined by multinational corporation, non-governmental organizations, international political party and labour associations, international communication media, immigrants and refugees, artists and entertainers, athletes, educators and tourists as well as narcotics, traffickers and others." Economically, Hull (1996) in Ige (2005:139) says "it describes the growth of international exchange and interdependence" where "there is the possibility of moving beyond an international economy in which national economies are subsumed and rearticulated into the system of international process and transactions." It is seen in the light of ICT as "the ability to access information using telecommunication based internet resources." (Jimba, 1998 in matthews, 1998:128).

OPPORTUNITIES

Though expensive, the following opportunities aboud, should public libraries embrace globalization in ICT terms.

- Its objectives of meeting information needs of "everybody" will be achieved better.

- "One can easily access any part of the globe right on the street, in the farm, in the kitchen, in the garden and even inside the toilet to either collect or disseminate information and have an immediate feedback." (Omoniyi, 2005:114).

- It provides a very good interaction between two persons in distant places (that should have been separated by distance).

- Virtual Library (networking of many libraries and library resources) can also be enjoyed in public libraries for better service delivery.

- Space and time of public libraries can be saved

- Many of its clientele will utilize the opportunities of applying and getting jobs and carrying out meaningful trade on the internet.

- The benefit of global dependence on information resources for research and dissemination of such research results will be harnessed by public library patron

- Their users will also join academic institutions worldwide that use ICT worldwide to deliver degrees and other qualifications though distance learning.

The Public Library

The public library is unique among its counterparts for its characteristic of free provision of information to all members of the public. Shidi (2008:26) posited that "public libraries can best be defined in terms of services rendered and catchment areas" Nwakaohu (1999:69) presented the services rendered by public libraries in this way, "The modern library collects the printed and audio-visual materials needed to conduct the individual and group life of its community. It organizes and makes accessible its resources to be convenient and easy to use." Regarding its catchment area, Nwakaohu (1999:69) said, "it interprets and guides the use of materials to enable as many people as possible to apply in their daily lives the records of what is know."

Despite the array of services rendered by public libraries and its unlimited patron, it has been described as one of the most poorly funded of libraries in Nigeria. Allocations to it have been described by Iorhuna (2007:B7) as "infinitesimal" leading to "sorry state of library structures, facilities, materials and services including disenchanted workforce." Utor (2008:2) captures this in a very pathetic manner when he wrote, "directors in various public library boards often than not go cap in hand begging to collect an imprest as low as fifty thousand naira (N50,000.00) per month to run the system. In Edo State, the public library receives as low as "two hundred and fifty thousand naira (N250,000.00) for maintenance of 24 branches" (Imosi, 2008:7). In Imo state, the situation is lamentable as the subvention received is said to be used to pay staff salaries with little or nothing left to "maintain our facilities and maintain only rickety vehicle the board has." Ndukwu, 2008:5). The situation is similar across board. However, acquiring and maintaining ICT equipment and software for global information exchange is capital intensive and require highly skilled and trained personnel which in public libraries are in the words of Ikpaahindi, 2008:5) are "cyber phobia."

METHODOLOGY

The method used for data collection is the survey method. Thirty-six (36) questionnaire was administered by the researcher to the respondents in March, 2008. Of the 36 state public library headquarters in the country, 9 (nine) were surveyed. Two (2) each from each zone were chosen at

random from the 6 (six) geo-political zones as sample population. The difficulty involved in the administration of the questionnaire made it possible to have only 9 (nine) returned.

All respondents were either directors of public libraries, their representatives or senior staff of the libraries involved. The libraries covered include those of Rivers and Delta States for South-South zone; Oyo and Edo States for South-West zone; Enugu and Imo for Sough-East zone, Benue and Nassarawa for North-central and Adamawa State Library Board for North-East. Simple percentages were used to analyze the date.

DATA ALALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Below are tables showing the response level of respondents in its raw and percentage forms which from the basis of the analysis.

S/N	Items	Options and Response Rate							
		a		b		c		d	
1	Stock type	Books	9	Periodicals	9	Pamphlets	9	Realia	6
2	Visual Materials	Wall charts	7	Posters	5	Pictures	7	Slides	2
3	Audio Visual Materials	Audio tapes	4	Discs	2	Video tapes	5	CD/VCD	5
4	Form of use	Inform-ation Proce-ssing	5	Commercial	4	Official	8	-	-
5	Information Access	Online D-base	3	CD-ROM	1	Website	3	Porter	0
6	Extent of Digitization	All	0	Ref. materials	0	Serials	0	None	9
7	Obstacles	Funds	9	High cost	5	Inadequate Staff	4	Power	6
8	Greatest Obstacle	funds	8	High cost	0	Inadequate staff	1	power	0

YES OR NO RESPONSES

	Items	Yes	No
9.	Internet connectivity	5	4
	Digitization	0	9

S/No	Items	Responses			
		a	b	c	d
1	Stock type	100	100	100	67
2	Visual materials	78	56	78	22
3	Audio visual materials	44	22	56	56
4	Form of use	56	44	89	-
5	Information Access	33	11	33	0
6	Extent of digitization	0	0	0	100
7	Obstacles	100	56	44	67
8	Greatest obstacle	89	0	11	0

Table 11: Percentage responses (Multiple choice answers.)

YES OR NO RESPONSES			
	Items	Yes	No
9.	Internet connectivity	5	4
	Digitization	0	9

Table 111: Percentage responses (yes or no answers)

Table 1 shows the sum of data collected from respondents. While the upper part of the table is made up of questions with three or four options, the lower part is made up of yes or no responses.

Research question i. Are public libraries in Nigeria still predominantly using printed materials that limit global information exchange? (Condition of public libraries in resource availability).

Item 1 of table 1 (stock type) shows that all the libraries have materials in print format. The responses to this effect are 100% for all the sampled libraries with only 67% of the sampled population having realia.

While 78% have wall charts, 56%, 78 and 22% respectively posses posters, pictures and slides. The percentage of libraries having audio-visual materials is just 44, 22, 56, and 56% for audio tapes, gramophone discs, video tapes and CD/VCDs respectively.

The above information shows that most of the public libraries have their information on books and other printed materials

Research question ii. Are the (public libraries) really ready for "globalization" in terms of ICT resources? (readiness for global information superhighway).

The lower part of table 1, item 9 on internet connectivity shows 56% of respondents claiming internet connectivity while 44% are not connected. Of the 195 computers available in the sample, only 29% have internet connectivity. The rest are dedicated either to commercial use in business centre or for official use. For the few that are connected, accessing information through online database and website both account 33% while 11% use CD-ROM database. None of the libraries assenting to internet connectivity has digitized any of its collections. Readiness for ICT and globalization is therefore at a low level.

Research question iii. What are the challenges militating against the desire of public libraries to embrace globalization? (Obstacles against efforts towards globalization). 100% of the libraries are constrained by inadequate funds. About 56, 44 and 67% respectively are faced with high cost of ICT equipment and software, lack of adequately trained manpower and inadequate power supply. The greatest challenge among all these, 89% of respondents is lack of funds. This therefore explains that lack of funds, high cost of ICT resources, inadequate trained manpower and power supply are big challenges facing public libraries attempt towards joining the global trend in information management.

CONCLUSION
Globalization has the ability to bring the world together and shorten distances between nations. Like other types of libraries and public libraries in other parts of the world, public libraries in Nigeria need to embrace globalization.

The study has revealed the fact that most of the public libraries in Nigeria still engage in the traditional practice where printed materials make up library holdings without ICT equipment.

It shows that, their level of readiness to participate in global information exchange through availability of ICT equipment and software is very low as most of the computers available are not connected to information superhighway. This condition is made possible by a number of factors including poor funding, cost of equipment, inadequate manpower and poor power supply situation.

These findings agree with the following situational analysis of Ikpaahindi (2008:5) about public libraries in Nigeria.

"   Public libraries are poorly developed and funded.
"   Many lack qualified staff
"   They contain obsolete resources
"   Non-deployment of ICT in the management of most of the public libraries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can help to reposition public libraries in Nigeria in order to brace up to the challenges of globalization so as to reap the benefits that about in it.

?   State governments whose responsibility it is to fund public libraries should give special attention to them in their budgets.

?   On the part of public libraries management, solicitation of funds from donor agencies and individuals should be explored as suggested by Ikpaahindi, (2008:6,7). This will increase the funds coming to public libraries and as such, will take care of high cost of ICT infrastructure.

?   Sensitization of workshops should be organized by state library boards for their staff especially in the area of ICT. (Ikpaahindi, 2008:6,7) also suggested retraining of staff in the best practice of modern librarianship and the development of curricula that is relevant to needs of Nigeria and the development of ICT in the courses.

?   High powered generating plants should also be installed to augment public power supply in public libraries. This will enable them to provide for and maintain ICT equipment in their possession and meet their community needs better.

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