

THE ROLE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES (LIS) IN THE SEVEN (7) POINT AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

Successive governments in Nigeria in the last few decades have come up with different national development plans to revamp the economy and ameliorate the suffering of her citizens. From the Economic Stabilization Program of 1981, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of 1986, the Vision 2010 initiative, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004 and now the 7 point Agenda. Unfortunately, none of these programs seems to have achieved the desired results. The major ingredient for the success of these programs lies in the ability of individuals to access and exploit quality information which translates to knowledge. Without information, national development plans remains idealistic and inclined towards failure. The paper examined the role of Library and Information services in the 7 point Agenda vis-avis the knowledge economy.

Keywords: Knowledge Economy, Information, Library and Information Services, (7) seven Point Agenda, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

Information and knowledge are replacing capital and energy as the primary wealth creating assets just as the latter replaced land and labour 200 years ago. Technological Developments from the 20th Century have transformed the majority of wealth creating work from physically-based to knowledge based. Technology and knowledge have therefore become the key factors of production.

The World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) 2003 anticipated a vision premised on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared: "Our common desire and commitment to build a people centered, inclusive and development oriented information society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals and communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life..."

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From the foregoing, it can be surmised that information, knowledge and technology are the engines that drives any economy. The development of any country is adjudged based on the steady improvement in the well being of her citizenry.

Aina, Mutula & Tiamiyu in their work cited Howkins and Valentin (1997) who categorize the human need as follows:

- (i) health and scanned quality of life of citizens, which determine their physiological and mental capacity to function regularly in socio-economic activities in which they are interested.
- (ii) Literacy, education and skills development of citizens, thereby increasing their capacity for informed evaluation of personal and social choices, for gainful and sustainable employment and for effective participation in governance.
- (iii) Steady improving income and economic welfare of citizens, which determines not only their living standards, but also their capacity for independent choice, which participating in economic and political activities...

These human needs have been encapsulated in the Seven Point of President Yar'adua: Power and energy, Food security (Agriculture), Wealth creation, Mass transportation, Land Reforms, Security (Primary focus on Niger Delta) and Education.

The key to the success of these agenda is knowledge. Unlike capital and labour, knowledge strives to be a public good. Once knowledge is discovered and made public, with the Library facilitating, there is no marginal cost to sharing it with more users.

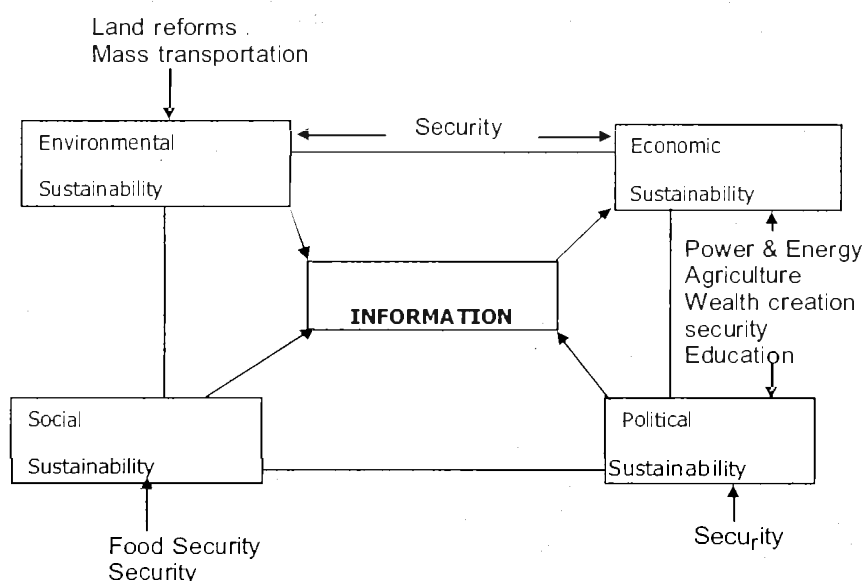
Acknowledging the importance of information and knowledge, Edwards citing Kofi Anan (1997) stated that "Information and knowledge are expanding in quantity and accessibility, in many fields future decision makers will be presented with unprecedented new tools for development. In such fields as agriculture, health, education, human resources and environmental management, or transport and business development, the consequences really could be revolutionary. Communication and Information technology has enormous potential, especially for developing countries and in furthering sustainable development".

There is no doubt that ICT contributes to the knowledge Society, but the focus here is on information and not technology. The contribution of Library and Information services to knowledge society is of utmost importance. The

knowledge economy is one of the fastest growing economies of which the Libraries, Publishers, information providers, content creators and related professionals play vital roles.

The Library's traditional roles include amongst others the following: providing access to information resources, working in partnership with stakeholders, structuring knowledge, imparting skills, preserving heritage and inspiring trust which are all crucial for the knowledge economy.

Sustainable development implies the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The following model shows how information supports the common fields of sustainable development.



At the core of knowledge is the constructive use of information, therefore it can be arguably said that the Library and Information services play pivotal role towards ensuring the success of the Seven point agenda.

The different categories of Libraries in Nigeria can change lives; they open individuals to new experiences that can transform their lives. The quality of life, wealth creation and social cohesion depend on citizens who are empowered. The Library as a catalyst for human development functions in three key areas:

- " Access - both physical access to ICT and the skills support needed to make this access a reality;

- " Content Creation - identifying, acquiring and developing the content that people need.
- " Information management, knowledge management, information planning.

Profile of Types of Libraries

(a) Public Library

According to IFLA/UNESCO guidelines for Public Library Services: "the primary purposes of the Public Library are to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. They have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas and opinions.

(b) National Library of Nigeria

The Decree establishing the National Library of highest standing has in its function inter alia:

- (a) to assemble, maintain and extend a collection of books, periodicals, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, musical scores, films and recordings and such other matters...
- (b) to make the facilities of the National Library available to members of the public...
- (c) to be responsible for the development of the National Bibliography of Nigeria
- (d) to act as the legal depository for works protected by copyright in Nigeria.

(c) Academic Libraries

Academic Library is an integral part of a college, university or other institutions of post secondary education, administered to meet the information and research needs of its students, faculty and staff.

(d) School Libraries

The school Library is a repository of knowledge designed to equip primary and secondary school students with literacy skills that would enable them to access, retrieve, use and evaluate information effectively and efficiently. It also inspires children to be excited about knowledge and works of imagination at an early age.

(e) **Special Libraries**

These are Libraries established and funded by a commercial firm, private association, government agency, non-profit organization, or special interest group to meet the information needs of its employees or staff in accordance with the organizations mission and goals.

The Agenda and the LIS

1. Food Security (Agriculture)

The level of utilization of information resources has become the yardstick to determine a country's economic advancement and strength. Libraries and Information Centers will need to pay particular attention to the information flow in the rural areas. In the 50s and 60s, the Nigerian economy was reliant on agricultural output which has since been overtaken by dependence on crude oil.

The groundnut pyramid of the North, the Cocoa from the West, Kolanut from the South, the Palm oil from the East, have all more or less disappeared. The recent food crises worldwide has necessitated a stringent call for urgent attention on agriculture.

The key to increased agricultural production ultimately lies with the nation's ability to disseminate relevant information to the farming community to facilitate effective adoption of new production techniques, application of agricultural inputs, decision making on markets and prices, methods of conserving water, soil and vegetable resources.

The importance of information to the well being of Nigerian farmers cannot be dismissed. The public Library as agent for local economic change and the research libraries will act as conduit for the dissemination of the much needed information.

Policy makers in Nigeria, the three tiers of government would do well to focus on providing high quality; science based agricultural information to farmers through the LIS. Public Libraries could also organize agricultural fairs dedicated to the exchange of information while the government provides the sponsorship.

2. Wealth Creation

Aina, Mutula & Tiarniyu citing the World Bank (1999) development report stated:

"Poor countries and poor people are left behind by rich ones, not because they have less capital but because they have less knowledge"

The competitiveness of industrial sectors in Nigeria depends on the quality of research and the ability of firms to transform the result of research into marketable products. Researchers therefore need easy access to up to date scientific and technical information as well as opportunities to communicate with other researchers.

The more a human being is endowed with knowledge, the more productive he becomes. The president has said he would like Nigeria to be a diversified economy with agriculture and solid mineral exploited. There is a relationship between Information, knowledge and employment creation (Wealth-Creation) as shown below:
Access to Information => knowledge and capacity=> innovation => productivity => growth => employment=> poverty reduction.

3. Education

Kingibe citing Dewey (1897) asserted that education enriches cultures, creates mutual understanding globally, underpins democratic societies, and builds respect for the rule of law. Education, the enhancement of skills, and the generation of new ideas are essential to the development of human capital and are key engines of economic growth, drivers of market productivity, and sources of cohesion for all nations.

There is no doubt that education is the key to wealth creation which in turn helps to break the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Community industry can be incorporated into the curricular content of the schools. The schools would help improve the quality of their skills through the provision of current information and that is where the school Libraries or academic Libraries come in. Combining trade skills and education would ensure their future employment possibilities and contribute to the economy. The importance of the small and medium scale enterprises have been emphasized by successive government.

In fact, all categories of Libraries contribute to the successful education of an individual, whether it is a structured learning or unstructured because access to quality information resources is vital. Great schools achieve their standing in part because of their Libraries.

Advances in all frontiers of knowledge require the comprehensive collections that only great Libraries supply. Therefore, the Library is a functional and integral part of the total education program of an individual.

4. Security (Niger Delta)

The ability of the ethnic minority, disadvantaged groups accessing timely information will help ease tension always associated with misinformation. In order to avoid widening the gap between the information rich and poor, the provision of access to information (books, journals, Arts, Internet) and the skills to use them becomes necessary.

The Public Library as agent of change promotes social inclusion; they provide services to all whether young or adult without discrimination. They can provide the much needed avenue for the transfer of appropriate and timely information to communities in the rural areas. If individuals are exposed to learning or life long learning, their ability to make informed choices is enhanced.

Learning and motivation are dynamic, cumulative processes. Skills begets skills, learning begets learning. Early disadvantages lead to academic and social difficulties later. Early advantages accumulate, just as early disadvantages do.

Idleness is a breeding ground for the devil, it is a known fact that just as football unites our nation, a brain that is engaged through access to information resources have been found to fire individuals' imagination and stimulation.

5. Power (Energy), Mass Transportation and Land Reforms

There is no doubt that power (energy) is critical to the Nigerian economy which cuts across all facets of life as enunciated by President Yar'adua. The importance of well funded research Libraries cannot be overlooked. A well stocked research Library would be able to provide adequate resource materials for researchers, information on how other countries have been able to achieve stable power supply.

The Challenge for the Government

Borges (2007) in the words of Walter Cronkite "whatever the cost of our Libraries, the price is cheap, compared to that of an ignorant nation"

Libraries, adult education services and health agencies are patrons in economic development. Some people might argue that they could get whatever information they need from the internet, this is misleading. For such individuals they would have access to a very fragmented and incomplete portion of recorded human knowledge. The content of an electronic database remains unstable. A Journal may be available this year and may not the following year.

In Nigeria, you will come across variedly developed libraries, some are moderately developed and equipped, and others are poorly equipped. Public Libraries seem to have suffered more than others. Libraries are known to strengthen the link between education and employment. Libraries are the vanguard for fostering lifelong learning, lifelong learning is about what an individual can do for themselves. Libraries are also tied to a community's quality of life. If libraries are weakened or fail because of budgetary or other constraints, the community's quality of life depreciates and Nigeria is paying the price.

All the tiers of government should endeavor to ensure that libraries are well funded especially the Public Libraries and where there are none they should provide one. Government could partner actively with the private sector in the development of the citizens through the establishment of Library and Information Centers. The Banks and the Telecommunication Companies could do more, not concentrating only on the provision ICT centers in the tertiary institutions but also combining it with resources centers in the rural areas. Prof Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh knowing the importance of access to information to the disadvantaged established a bank solely to empower the less privileged women to establish telephone kiosks. There are many jobless Librarians who could be empowered by industries in Nigeria to establish mini libraries, information kiosks, tele-centers especially for the rural dwellers. This will go a long way to reduce the digital divide between the information rich and the information poor.

In South Africa, Tele-centers are on the increase providing internet and other information services. Some of these tele-centers are community owned. They provide a wide range of information goods and services. South Africa's strong commitment to increasing the availability of information and knowledge for its historically disadvantaged peoples has put its tele-center policy at the forefront of international good practice, Nigeria should do well to follow suit.

THE CHALLENGE FOR THE LIBRARIES

Library and Information Services and her professionals have an important role to play in national, regional, zonal, local development and regeneration. Libraries impart individuals with information literary skills; in fact it should be one of the priorities of all types of libraries. An information literate citizen possesses the ability to know when there is a need for information, how to identify, locate, evaluate and use such information effectively in dealing with a problem or problems at hand.

Information illiteracy is a threat to prosperity and social inclusion in the knowledge society. Helping our communities become critical consumers,

confident learners and accomplished creators of knowledge will be a crucial task for libraries.

National Library of Nigeria for example as a depository library has a responsibility to ensuring that knowledge of the past is made available to users of the future.

National Library of Nigeria's efforts to provide infrastructure to support national resource sharing through the National Union Catalogue (NUC) and National Union List of Serials (NULOS) is commended, although more is expected with the proposed on-line union catalogue which will give a wider access. The Nigerian Library Association (NLA) needs to wake up to the challenge of pushing for the recognition the profession deserves. Libraries are also expected to always align their services to policy agendas, provide strong evidence of success and consistently come up with new delivery solutions. Libraries especially public libraries should step up effort on information literacy campaigns and on establishment outreaches

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Librarians must continue to evolve their skills, services to be at the cutting edge of national issues.
2. Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should take Library and Information Services to the front burner of national discourse so that the society will begin to appreciate their contribution.
3. Nigerian Library Association (NLA) should exploit lobbying and advocacy tenaciously.
4. Government should make policies to consolidate the establishment of solid Library and Information services.
5. Private Sector participation in the promotion of the knowledge economy is recommended via the establishment of Library and resource centers especially in the rural areas.

CONCLUSION

A country's capacity to take advantage of the knowledge economy depends on how quickly it can become a learning economy. The 7 point agenda will thrive in a learning economy, where individuals, firms, etc are able to create wealth in proportion to their capacity to learn and share innovation. It is vital that people are taught how to learn; LIS are partners in imparting this skills. Although this very important profession is yet to be given the recognition it deserves from the policy makers, the professionals should not be discouraged, Library and Information Services must develop continuously to reflect social changes, new policies and new technique

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