

# THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN NATION BUILDING

## TEXT OF AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT A MEETING OF THE ROTARY CLUB, IKERE-EKITI

To many Nigerians, a library is a mere **storehouse** of recorded knowledge; in most cases just a collection of books, magazines and newspapers, most of them outdated and worn-out. The librarian himself is seen as a passive custodian and gatekeeper of the library. However, such a conception is completely out of tune with modern day realities.

The modern library not only stores recorded knowledge in the form of printed materials, but also collects such non-printed items as microforms, video cassettes and cartridges, slides, records and even computerized records. It should be emphasized that a collection such as the above does not in itself constitute a library.

To be a functioning library, the collection must have been specially selected, processed and organized and the contents, made easily accessible both within and without the library. In other words, the library should constitute a knowledge and information centre where the sum total, or a considerable chunk, of human civilization in recorded form is assembled for the use and benefit of all citizens in the course of their search for knowledge, information, recreation and entertainment.

### TYPES OF LIBRARIES

There are different types of libraries viz, national, public, school, academic, research and special libraries. A national library, usually established and fully funded by the national government, is normally regarded as the apex of the nation's library systems and services.

Its functions are specialized and geared towards promoting and standardizing library services throughout the country, collecting and conserving the nation's intellectual heritage and wealth, making available a good proportion of the intellectual products of other nations, serving as the national bibliographic centre, providing reference and research facilities and documenting and disseminating vital information to high government officials and key policy-makers. The National Library of Nigeria was established by the National Library Act of 1964 but actually came into existence in 1966.

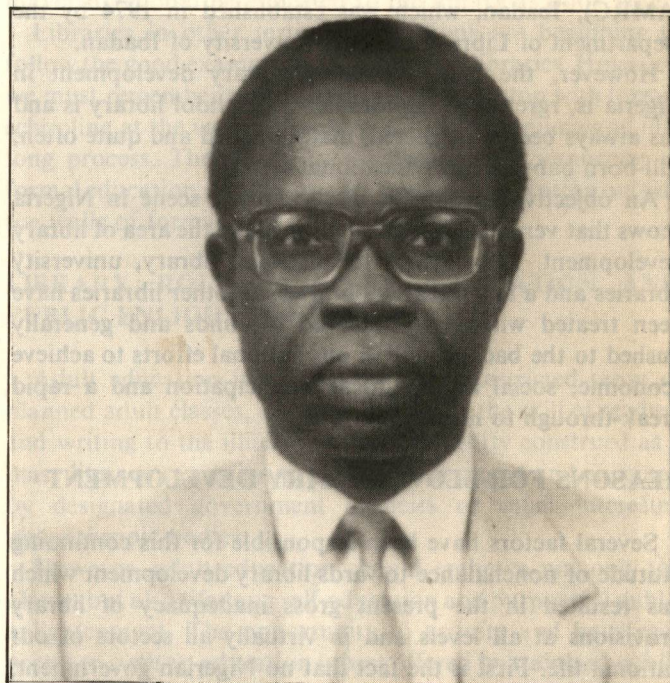
A public library, is a library established by the government, in many cases, state or local, for the use and benefit of the citizenry. It is, normally, fully funded by the government from tax money and its services and facilities are offered free to all citizens. Ideally, the collections should span virtually all fields of knowledge and the library should serve not only as a book-lending centre, but also as a centre for information, culture, entertainment and enlightenment.

Its services should extend beyond the walls of the library and reach out to people in the locality, the outlying areas, the penal institutions, the schools and also to semi-literates and illiterates. In short, its aim should be to serve as the 'university of the people', where all could seek and acquire knowledge and information that are vital to the fruitful pursuit of individual and societal goals and where every one is assisted to participate fully and meaningfully in the life and progress of the society.

Academic libraries are the libraries of tertiary institutions, that is, the universities, the polytechnics, and the advanced colleges of education. These libraries are primarily committed to providing such library resources, services as would facilitate the achievement of the goals of their parent institutions. In other words, they assemble, organize, document and disseminate such literature backups as are necessary for the learning, teaching and research activities of the staff and students of the institutions.

Closely associated with academic libraries are the research libraries. These are normally libraries attached to research institutes such as the Nigerian Institute for Social & Economic Research (NISER) Ibadan, and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (I.I.T.A.), Ibadan.

These libraries usually have homogeneous and comparatively small clientele, with the same or related research interests. They are normally funded by the parent body and their collections are often limited to a clearly defined area or areas of knowledge.



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Quite often, special libraries and research libraries are regarded as one and the same thing and the terms tend to be used interchangeably. However, they are, in fact, two different, though related, species of libraries. Special libraries are more normally libraries set up to serve the special information and knowledge needs of their parent bodies, such as government departments, parastatals, learned societies and associations.

Since the objectives of the parent body may not necessarily include the extension of the frontiers of knowledge, the library collections do not have to be of the same depth of scholarship or level of comprehensiveness in a limited area of knowledge, as in the case of research libraries.

It should also be pointed out that there is a second type of special libraries. These are libraries that house materials recorded in one particular form. Examples are maps library,



audio-visual library, gramophone records library, manuscripts library etc. The subject coverage of such a library may be limited or multifarious and the clientele may be heterogeneous or defined.

Last, and perhaps unfortunately the least, at least in Nigeria, is the group known as school libraries. There are the libraries of primary schools, secondary schools, teacher training colleges, schools of arts and science. Ideally, their primary objectives should approximate, to those of academic libraries, minus the research aspect; that is, they should strive to be in the mainstream of the academic activities of their schools and function as indispensable teaching and educational agencies.

They should form the hub around which all learning and teaching efforts revolve. Their collections should include not only pupils' textbooks and teachers' texts, but also good fiction books, suitable reference materials, a variety of teaching and learning audio-visual items etc.

The school library should constitute more of a learning resource centre, with its multifaceted activities such as are exemplified in the Abadina Media Resources Centre (AMRC), Ibadan, which was established in 1974 by the Department of Library Studies, University of Ibadan.

However, the state of school library development in Nigeria is, regrettably, deplorable - the school library is and has always been a neglected, malnourished and quite often, still-born baby of our educational system.

An objective assessment of the library scene in Nigeria shows that very little has been achieved in the area of library development. Apart from the national library, university libraries and a few research libraries, all other libraries have been treated with levity, starved of funds and generally pushed to the background in our national efforts to achieve economic, social and political emancipation and a rapid break-through to modernity.

## REASONS FOR SLOW LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT

Several factors have been responsible for this continuing attitude of nonchalance towards library development which has resulted in the present gross inadequacy of library provisions at all levels and in virtually all sectors of our national life. First is the fact that no Nigerian government, either colonial or indigenous, has so far shown any concrete awareness or demonstrated any substantial appreciation of the vital role of libraries in the society.

Our economic and educational planners have never seen library development as one of the basic infrastructures on which depends other forms of development in a nation. Consequently, libraries usually receive passing and only token attention when funds are being allocated to the 'productive' sectors of the economy.

To politicians and policy makers, the effect and value of libraries cannot be concretized, neither are they quantifiable. Therefore, in a predominantly illiterate and materialistic society such as ours, libraries do not readily win votes for politicians or attract applause for government officials and decision-makers. Library development can therefore wait, particularly in the face of more vote-catching and competing national needs.

There is also the fact that, in spite of the ever-widening influence of western education, reading is still basically foreign to the Nigerian culture. While nearly all Nigerians, irrespective of age or level of education can readily enjoy and

relate to oral literature, and consequently succumb to the influence of the radio and television, the self-imposed discipline and seriousness that are normally required in reading are rather burdensome and intolerable even to us so-called educated Nigerians, a predominantly pleasure-loving people.

There is, therefore, no general clamour or enthusiasm for library development. Hence, nearly all governments have conveniently and with increasing impunity, relegated library provisions to the background. It is, however, a manifestation of short-sightedness to seek to achieve worthwhile national development without placing due premium on the inestimable contributions that libraries of all types can and should make to such efforts.

## LIBRARY ROLE IN FORMAL EDUCATION

By formal education, we mean that form of education and training given at the three levels of educational institutions, viz. primary, secondary and tertiary. There is no doubt that the various Nigerian governments, particularly since independence, have recognized the centrality of education to all development efforts and they have, therefore, always striven to give educational development the pride of place that it richly deserves.

Substantial amounts have been allocated year in year out for the educational sector and, according to Babs Fafunwa; 'the various states of the federation, as well as the Federal Government, spent between 30 to 40 per cent of their annual recurrent budgets on education at the four levels - primary, secondary, higher and adult education - during the first decade of independence.'

We would remember that Universal (Free) Primary Education (UPE) was first introduced in the then Western Region in 1955. This was briefly emulated by the then Eastern Region in 1957, even though abandoned shortly afterwards. The Obasanjo military administration was to follow the good example of the Western Region several years later when it announced the launching of the Universal Free Primary Education Scheme (UPE) in 1976.

Its predecessor, the Gowon administration, had earlier made generous allocations of funds for the scheme's successful take-off, earmarking N300 million for school buildings and facilities and N200 million for crash programmes in teacher training between 1974 and 1976.

The importance of education in our national life was given a further boost and more pronounced official recognition when section 18 (3) of the presidential constitution of 1979 made it mandatory for all governments in Nigeria to provide free education "as and when practicable." We are all witnesses to what happened in the educational arena in Nigeria, following the advent of the second civilian administration in 1979. At least, the five states of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Bendel and Oyo, introduced free education at all levels.

With the launching of the Universal Primary Education in 1976, the Federal Government assumed the responsibility for the payment of teachers' salaries and the grant was calculated at N35.00 per pupil a year. This was later increased to N40.00 in 1978. In anticipation of the introduction of the scheme, the Gowon government had earlier in the Third National Development plan, earmarked the sum of N3.2 billion or 12% of total public sector allocation of N30 billion for the education sector.

By the year 1980, the Federal Government had actually



spent a total of N2.5 billion on the Universal Primary Education Scheme alone. The various State governments also invested huge sums of money on education. For example, the Ondo State government increased its expenditure on education from N12.7 million or about 4% of the total budget in 1978/79 fiscal year to about N151.5 million or over 25% in 1983.

Consequent upon the governments' huge investments on education, the number of educational institutions increased phenomenally and enrolments at the various levels rose by leaps and bounds, at least up to 1984. The number of primary schools rose from 21,221 in 1975 to 39,000 in 1984 and primary school enrolments, which stood at a modest 200,000 in 1960 rose to over 15 million in 1984.

The year 1976 alone, the take-off date of the UPE, witnessed an intake of a whopping 3 million, a figure that meant that one out of every two African children attending primary school in Africa then was a Nigerian!

The rise, at the other levels was no less remarkable. Enrolment in our secondary schools jumped from 400,000 in 1973 to well over 3 million in 1984, while between 1975 and 1984, the number of colleges of technology, now commonly referred to as polytechnics, increased from 5 to 28 with student population of over 60,000. In 1962, Nigeria had only two universities with a student population of barely 3,000, but by 1983, the number had increased to over 27 and total enrolment had reached 115,333 in the 1985/86 year.

Even though we would be right to say that today and particularly since the advent of the Buhari/Idiagbon military administration on December 31, 1983, this strong emphasis on education and steady rise in both school enrolments and number of educational institutions, have, unfortunately, been arrested, but a substantial proportion of our national budget is still being spent on education.

Regrettably, however, no Nigerian government has so far shown any appreciable awareness that these huge investments on education can never yield maximum results without commensurate investments on libraries of all types and particularly on school and public libraries. Libraries form the bedrock on which the foundation of lasting, fruitful and qualitative education is built and as someone once put it:

'The real importance of libraries in education is that they are places where one finds out and where one learns how to find out ... It is essential to education that everyone is brought into contact with a good library throughout his whole period of tuition, that he is taught to use it until it becomes second nature to him to do so, and that he carries this characteristic through with him into later life.'

Since independence, no government has shown sufficiently **positive and dynamic attitude towards providing the resources and facilities necessary for libraries to play their rightful role, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels of education.**

Good school libraries not only enrich the quality of the tuition offered to our children, but they provide an invaluable opportunity to inculcate in them, very early in life, the love of books, the spirit of individual enquiry and self-education, the habit of reading for pleasure and recreation and a consciousness of the invaluable importance of relevant information in every sphere of human endeavour.

So important is the potential contribution of school libraries to the total educational effort that any government which neglects library services to schools would find, in the

long run, that it has built its educational system on a very shaky foundation.

Of course, this section would not be complete without a brief mention of libraries in tertiary institutions. Happily, one could assert with some degree of confidence, though not complacency, that library provisions at the tertiary level are relatively better catered for than those at the lower levels.

Since the earliest beginnings of tertiary education in Nigeria and particularly starting from the establishment of the then University College, Ibadan in 1948, University libraries in Nigeria have been accorded due recognition and have been relatively well-funded. No one has ever been in doubt about the indispensability of a high-quality library if a **university must successfully fulfil its objectives of teaching research and community service.**

Apart from generous capital grants for physical and other developments, at least up to the end of the era of oil boom in the early 80's, **Nigerian university libraries have enjoyed a proportionate share of their university budget, particularly following a directive by the National Universities Commission that at least 5% of the recurrent vote of a university should be allocated to the library as book vote.**

Libraries in other tertiary institutions are beginning to follow the good example of the university libraries. However, we must remember that education does not stop with formal schooling at the various levels, but it is a continuing and life-long process. Therefore, just as libraries are important to formal education, so also are they crucial to education outside the walls of formal educational institutions.

## **LIBRARY ROLE IN ADULT EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ENLIGHTENMENT**

Adult education is often used in the restricted sense of planned adult classes, aimed at imparting the skill of reading and writing to the illiterates. It is frequently construed as a mass literacy campaign programme, designed and executed by designated government agencies or other interested philanthropic bodies.

However, adult education should embrace not only the above, but also life-long self-education and purposeful public enlightenment. The opportunity to acquire and have easy access to such an education is best offered by standard public libraries with commodious and functional physical accommodation, up-to-date and comprehensive collections, well-trained and properly motivated staff and unflinching adequate funds.

Since the education or at least the literacy of the generality of the citizenry is crucial to national development, the establishment of good public libraries is a sine qua non. When we remember that, invariably, a large proportion of our population comprise either stark illiterates, semi-literates school drop-outs or people who end their formal education at the primary or secondary school level, it should be obvious that if we must prevent the few literates and semi-literates among us from relapsing into total illiteracy, then avenues of continuing self-education and general public enlightenment should be widely provided.

The most potent agency for such adult education as envisaged here is the public library. Unlike the public libraries which now exist, even then, only in a few states of Nigeria and most of which are mere book-lending centres, a good library must be equipped to provide an aggressive book service throughout its area of operation, help adult education



organizations by making suitable accommodation available for the use of adult classes and groups of students.

It must be in a position to act as an invaluable centre for individual self-teachers and information seekers. Additionally, it should be able to function as a communal, educational and cultural centre by arranging lectures, discussions, film shows, dramatic performances, concerts, recitals, exhibitions, etc. Any nation, therefore, can neglect public library development only at the peril of its educational, economic, political, technological and other programmes.

## **LIBRARY ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The main pillars of rapid economic growth and development include adequate well-trained and skilled manpower, a predominantly literate populace, appropriate technology to explore and exploit the various natural resources of the country, and also a conducive political and social atmosphere. We have earlier on dwelt at some length on the latent contributions of libraries to some of the factors of economic growth and development enumerated above.

At this juncture, let us turn our attention to the part that libraries can play in our efforts to develop indigenous technology or adapt imported ones. A corollary to this is the role of libraries in promoting rapid industrialization and fruitful commerce.

As rightly pointed out by Professor Jimmy Olufeagba in an address carried in the *Guardian* of Wednesday, December 24, 1986, no lasting or meaningful development can be attained without sound technology, because any economic restructuring without reinforcement of indigenous scientific and technological capabilities is doomed to yield only minimal results, if any.

Today, the Nigerian economy is still largely dependent on those of the developed countries, who, with their advanced technology, exploit our raw materials and natural resources, for which we have no appropriate technology or know-how to utilize. For a long time and up till very recently, most of the industries and big commercial enterprises that existed in the country were mere branches of multi-national organizations, whose headquarters were usually based outside the country.

Invariably, the bulk of the required capital, the high level technical and professional manpower, the machinery and the industrial and commercial information necessary for the enterprises were supplied by the parent body. Consequently, the local subsidiaries served merely as convenient outposts for acquiring cheap raw materials and marketing expensive finished products.

The country has, therefore, had to expend huge amounts of scarce hard currency on imported goods, most of which, with proper industrialization, could have been more cheaply produced locally. Starting with the promulgation of the indigenization decree of 1973, which was amended in 1977, some feeble attempts have been made to reverse this situation or at least reduce our level of dependence on foreign economies.

It must be emphasized, however, that if we must develop our own technology or/and gainfully harness existing ones and thereby achieve and sustain appreciable standard of industrial and commercial growth, relevant information and data must be generated locally and disseminated rapidly to key functionaries of the enterprises. Information is a vital ingredient of a successful industrial or commercial endeavour and the most effective agency for collecting, documenting and

disseminating such information is a good special library.

To be successful, an industrialist requires the most current product information, company information and market information. All these forms of information are usually made available by the special librarian in the form of summaries, abstracts and bulletins. The library will also aid research on raw materials and other items that directly affect the operations of the parent organization.

It is, therefore, a matter of great importance for the industrial and commercial sectors of our economy to devote substantial amounts of money to the establishment and maintenance of their own special libraries where relevant information will be readily available at all times.

## **LIBRARY'S ROLE IN GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

Professor Aiyepoku<sup>2</sup> affirmed, at a public lecture in 1982: 'information is as indispensable in national planning as, say, personnel and funds. It is important, therefore, for our policy makers to appreciate the vital nature of information resources management in all sectors and at all levels of public policy in Nigeria'.

He went further to define information as 'man's cumulated knowledge in all subjects, in all forms, and from all sources that could help its users to make rational decisions'. According to him, information could be defined as data of value in planning, decision-making and the execution of government programmes.

He, therefore, rightly opined that policy-makers in Nigeria needed maximum information support at the planning stage in a four-phased, linear progression of their decision tasks and responsibilities from ideas formation/rejection to planning to execution/monitoring to evaluation.

Can we, in all good conscience, say that our policy formulators and decision-makers, either now or in the past, have manifested any appreciable awareness of the importance of information to their decision-making processes? Is it not true that both at the governmental and administrative levels, most decisions are based on political expediency and the rule of the thumb?

How many of our law-makers and political leaders, particularly during the civilian regimes, were literate enough to seek and acquire information relevant to sound decision-making? It is also doubtful that many of the top civil servants who are the immediate advisers of our national leaders ever consciously make adequate information part and parcel of their policy planning and decision-making process. This utter neglect of the information element of our planning process is a strong contributing factor to our slow pace of development, and the failure of many of our national policies and programmes.

In order to improve on our performance in governance and administration, our policy-makers and their key advisers must change their strategy by placing due premium on information input to the decision-making process. This they can do by establishing and supporting libraries that are well-equipped to supply the information needs of government leaders and top officials.

It should be a well-established policy for all government ministries and parastatals to have their own departmental libraries where most information, relevant to the activities of the particular ministry or parastatal, would be made available at short notice. Also, the resources of the national library and



some good public libraries should be resorted to from time to time to satisfy some of the information needs of government.

However, perhaps the most ideal though expensive, policy is to establish, in addition to departmental libraries, a special library specifically charged with the responsibility of assembling and disseminating all forms of information necessary for the good governance of the country. A classical example of such a library is the Library of Congress in Washington D.C., U.S.A.

This library was established as part of the legislative branch of the U.S. federal government by an act of Congress in 1800. Even though it has since metamorphosed into a national library, its primary responsibility still remains service to the Congress and it discharges this responsibility through one of its arms known as the Congressional Research Service (CRS) which works for Congress exclusively.

The Congressional Research Service has, in addition to providing reference information and research services and to preparing summaries and digests of public hearings and of bills and resolutions, the duty to supply Congressional committees with experts to prepare objective non-partisan analyses of legislative proposals, evaluating these proposals and alternatives and estimating their results.

Additionally, these experts are expected to prepare and present to each committee at the beginning of each congress a list of subjects and policy areas that the committee might profitably analyse in depth; to make available to each committee a list of programmes and activities scheduled to expire during each congressional session; and to prepare histories on measure to be considered in hearings on request of member.

It is clear from this list of duties that the business of government is largely conducted in an objective and well-informed manner. Any country aspiring to achieve good government and sound national planning should be prepared to invest on an information agency, similar to the one described above, even if on a much more modest scale.

## CONCLUSION

The sum total of what we have been saying so far is that information is a critical and strategic resource at institutional, national, regional and global levels; that if Nigeria must catch up with the technological age and achieve true economic emancipation and independence, greater emphasis must be placed on the development of libraries of all types and at all levels. It is important for us all and particularly for policy makers to start regarding libraries as a crucial part of the 'productive' sector of the economy rather than as a luxury.

At this juncture, it is relevant to emphasize that one important element in the promotion of library development is the availability, at affordable prices, of relevant books at all levels. Unfortunately, today in Nigeria books have become one of the scarcest and most expensive commodities. Several factors are responsible for this deplorable situation.

First is the fact that more than 90% of books required within the country have to be imported and they reach the Nigerian market at highly inflated prices, even before the introduction of SFEM. The prices have skyrocketed beyond imagination ever since the advent of SFEM.

Unfortunately, the situation has been further aggravated by the very high cost of book production locally. Local publishing industry have to depend on foreign sources for practically everything required, that is paper, ink, film, blankets, plates etc., all of which are very expensive.

Even though three paper mills exist in Nigeria, located at Jebba, Oku Oboku, Itu and Iwopin in Ogun State, their production is far below capacity and their products are much more expensive than imported ones. The government should quickly look into this problem of paper and newsprint supply in the country and rectify the anomalous situation of nearly total dependence on foreign sources.

It is my view that part of the recurring problems that have kept us in this gloomy state of underdevelopment and economic dependence may be traceable to our continuing contempt for the value of information and the important role of libraries in all aspects of nation building.

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