

Path To Economic And Technological Development In Nigeria: The Role Of Libraries

Being a paper presented at the Senior Staff Seminar held in Lagos on Wednesday December 4, 1985

Certain assumptions implicit in the title of this topic need to be clarified and emphasized in order to relate the two parts of the title more closely. The title assumes:-

- (i) That economic and technological development are vital to this country as a sovereign nation. There are conditions for the economic success and technological take-off of the country.
- (ii) That libraries as social institutions have a role to play in the economic and technological advancement of Nigeria and its contributions to national development efforts can be isolated, measured and evaluated.

There is, therefore, a need to demonstrate convincingly to the governments that libraries of any type and size, are not only vital but indispensable institutions to the nation's economic and technological progress.

A thorough review of literature on the role of libraries in economic and technological development in Nigeria shows clearly that libraries have not yet been recognised as vital and indispensable institutions in achieving the nation's economic and technological objectives. Nigeria's efforts to develop since independence shows no serious commitment to the establishment of effective and well organised library services.

The ability of the nation to develop economically and technologically is seriously doubtful without a free access to records and vital information through effective library services. It is important to distinguish between the terms 'economic development' and 'technological development' along with the concepts that apply to each.

Essentially, economic development is a generic term. It embraces all forms of economic activity that serve to further the development of a given political or spatial unit. Technological development on the other hand is that aspect of the applied sciences that has practical value or industrial use to the society. In a simple term it suggests technical means and skills characteristic of a particular civilization.

A library as used in this context is any apparatus/institution which is specially designed or established to perform specific functions of information, education, conservation of culture, acquisition and organisation of knowledge in form of book and non-book materials for the purpose of dissemination of information and knowledge for the benefits of mankind. In essence, a library is a place where all records of human knowledge and experiences are stored and made available for useful exploitation.

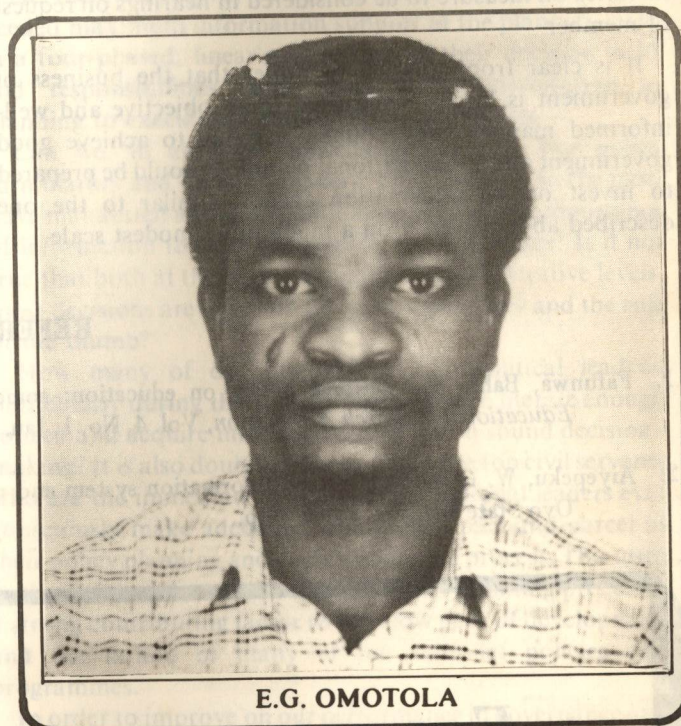
All over the world, libraries provide education and enlightenment which form the basis for full development of individual talents required for economic and technological development.

LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

"Information" is used to describe man's accumulated knowledge in all subjects, in all forms, and from all sources

that could help its users to make rational decisions. It is a data of value in planning, decision-making and the execution of federal government programmes in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Information is collected through a variety of sources which includes books, research reports, research papers, periodicals, maps, reprints, technical literature etc. The information collected through these various sources have to be stored in a form which makes it easily accessible when required at a future date. No meaningful economic and technological progress can be made without these information materials. The country's technological and scientific efforts will be greatly hindered if most of what have been achieved in the past can not be retrieved for use in the future. The responsibility for storage and retrieval of information has traditionally and conventionally rested with the librarian/documentalist. Libraries have been identified with the storage and retrieval of information materials. Methods of easy retrieval systems have been designed and put to use in the libraries. The use of various classification schemes, the card catalogue, aid easy retrieval of stored information.



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Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) using a computer for retrieving relevant information is another modern and fast method. Another channel of dissemination of information to users is through abstracting services. The efficiency of information management in Nigeria will well determine the pace of planning and the success of economic and technological development.

Many nations both in developed and developing worlds, have come to the realization that science must be cultivated, planned and that clear-cut policies have to be laid out in its

approach. Consequently, organization of research and development activities became imperative. It is a universally accepted fact that research and development activities lead to innovation and that a number of factors determine the degree of activities in any country.

It is important to note that the business of any library is information, that is, making available to users the desired items of knowledge. Information improves the capacity of a country to take advantage of existing knowledge and "know-how" achieved elsewhere. It makes for the realization of systemitization of a country's research and development efforts in the light of knowledge already available. Information also provides wider knowledge base for the solution of problems. With information, new alternatives and approaches are provided to the solutions of technical problems and options for minimizing future ones.

Decision-making in all sectors and at all levels of responsibility becomes easy with availability of information. To facilitate research and development, the following roles are played by various types of libraries.

(a) Provision of question and answer service:-

The librarian or information scientist makes data and specific information available to an inquirer or gives him a retrospective search service; he can provide answers to specific and technical questions.

(b) Reference Service role:-

A good reference library stocked with an adequate collection of information materials will be able to offer reference service effectively. This will be possible because of the rich collection it will have in many areas of the arts and sciences.

(c) Provision of documents:-

Libraries usually provide on request whole books, periodicals, government reports etc.

(d) Current awareness role:-

Libraries provide current awareness service to research and development workers. It is an information alerting service through the provision of short articles on current technology or abstracts literature as may be contained in journals of general science and technology, bulletins and periodicals. Libraries also perform other roles like translation of foreign literature.

Information must be scouted for in aid of research and development activities and a library must ensure regular access to information sources, provide continuous access to itself and repackages its resources into products and services for easy dissemination. Information is absolutely required if the knowledge industry must grow. It is necessary for a developing country such as our's to look beyond its boundaries for scientific and technical information if it must improve its research and development activities.

LIBRARIES AND EDUCATION

Libraries are considered an essential part of modern society and play a very important role in education. The provision of

well equipped libraries is important to any educational programme that intends to achieve its objectives, because lack of them could vitiate the best educational plans.

Effective library service is not only vital but indispensable to the success of any academic and research programmes. Libraries also ensure that the products of educational programmes do not lapse to illiteracy after leaving school by making facilities for continued reading available through effective and efficient library services.

Education contributes to economic and technological development, Americans are the most generally educated populace on earth, and the level of their economic and technological development has reached enviable height. They are known not only, to have the best equipped library in the world (Library of Congress), but the largest network of library services is to be found in America.

The introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 was done to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria. The 6-3-3-4 secondary education recently introduced by the Federal Government is another bold step to achieve certain educational objectives. The establishment of universities of technology in the country is aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in technical manpower. Well conceived as the educational plans may seem, if it fails to include libraries as a working element, it would ultimately fail in achieving its major objectives.

Although the extent to which lack of adequate and effective library services has adversely affected our development efforts (particularly education plans) to date, remains unassessed, may be the example of other developing countries should suffice as a yardstick.

For instance, in Latin America (a developing country), in an investigation on reading habit and levels, it was observed that "despite the fact that one of the primary and permanent objectives of primary education is to teach reading, a large proportion of the children leave schools without being able to understand what they read, or use reading for obtaining knowledge." It was found to be so because library services were not included in the bold plans to educate the children. Educational plans, particularly the UPE, may suffer the same fate in Nigeria because of lack of adequate library provisions.

Library extension services in Nigeria may take the following forms; organisation of reading circles - reading circles are formed with special facilities provided for the purpose. Arrangement of public lectures and talks by eminent persons. Arrangement of musical concerts, drama, film shows etc. Organisation of library exhibition relating to events and arrangement for celebration of local festivals. With these extension service, illiterates will thus get education, information, entertainment, inspiration and enlightenment.

RESOURCE SHARING

No library in the world has been able to acquire all it needs to satisfy its users. The importance of information materials has been highlighted. Educational objectives cannot be achieved without reading materials. There can be no technological progress without records. Successive development plans will continue to fail without accurate and adequate statistics. Individuals will continue to decay intellectually without books.

It is practically impossible financially and spatially for any single library/information unit/documentation centre to

acquire and possess all the publications required by its users. The solution to this hinderance is resource - sharing. Libraries all over the country including their counterparts all over the world could share their resources to meet the ever increasing demands of their users.

The areas of co-operation one has in mind include inter-loan of documents, co-operative acquisition, photocopy, translation service and bibliographic service. In Nigeria various forms of cooperation exist among libraries of various kinds and sizes. These co-operation should be expanded now that the economy is bad.

At the international level, there are now UNESCO programmes aimed at the development of national and international system based on the philosophy of international co-operation. One of such programme is UBC (Universal Bibliographic Control) - a system for the control and exchange of bibliographic information. The purpose is to make universally and promptly available basic bibliographic data in a form internationally acceptable, on all publications issued in all countries.

Other similar projects are:

- ISDS - International Serials Data System.
- DEVIS - Development Science Information System.
- PADIS - The Pan-African Documentation System.
- INIS - International Nuclear Information System.

The big idea behind all these projects is to provide for awareness and access to world's information resources.

Knowledge is power, ignorance is a disease. The popular saying that "he who has information has the power" proves itself correct when one reflects on the industrialized and economically advanced nations' monopoly of information and their technologies.

In summary, the major problems facing this country among which are poverty, high level of illiteracy, scientific and technological backwardness, heavy economic dependence, fewness of qualified personnel accompanied by low productivity and inadequate physical facilities, could be reduced to the barest minimum by establishing effective and well co-ordinated libraries all over the country. The funding of libraries should be the responsibility of the various governments.

At this stage of our development, there is a need for a national policy on scientific and technical information (STI). Economic and technological poverty can be eliminated if the barrier to relevant information is removed through effective library system. Information poverty is a national disease which sustains economic and technological backwardness, and this could be successfully fought through a well-planned and effectively prosecuted library system.

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