

STAGNATION OF LIBRARY SERVICES IN NIGERIA: Immediate and Remote Causes

Introduction

The major objective of libraries is the provision of reading materials to meet the requirements of users. The fulfilment or otherwise of this objective depends, to a very large extent on a number of factors, ranging from the degree of financial support, commitment of library workers, availability of competent professional staff and a host of other variables.

Information is needed by both government and individuals and there is a strong correlation between information available and decisions made by recipients of such information. The quality of decisions made depends on the amount and quality of available information. Government needs vital information to enable it make decisions and formulate policies which will bring progress, happiness and self-reliance to its citizenry.

Individuals also need information and like government, their reactions to life problems and the decisions they make are determined to a very large extent, by the level and nature of information at their disposal.

Libraries are social institutions which could be affected by political, cultural, economic and intellectual forces operating in the society. Whether they flourish or wither in neglect depends upon a complex of factors. Libraries, however, have tended to flourish in those societies that have achieved a certain level of cultural and political maturity; in societies where emphasis is on self improvement; where there is economic prosperity and where governments are willing to commit the necessary funds to the development of libraries.

Libraries have flourished in societies in which the governments have realised that National progress is bound up with scientific and technological development based upon research, and of course, the place of libraries in relation to research cannot be overemphasised.

Nigerian libraries have four major responsibilities:-

1. To sustain the increasing complex operations of the governments, thus facilitating the decision-making process,
2. To provide opportunities for continuing self-education and retraining,
3. To support formal education from kindergarten through post-graduate studies.
4. To provide materials for the public at large, either for study or research or for cultural intellectual and personal growth.

Nigerian libraries will therefore not only aim at advancing the general cultural level of the people through provision of high quality information resources that will enrich the individual experience, but also to enhance the advancement of scientific and technological knowledge and managerial effectiveness.

Presently there is almost an uncontrollable upsurge of interest in higher education among Nigerians to be pursued either within the walls of traditional universities or independently through correspondence courses. Today, information available in Nigerian libraries are not sufficient both in quantity, quality and correct format to satisfy the bibliographic needs of governments and people of Nigeria. The reasons for this ineffective, librarianship in Nigeria is the focus of this paper.

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As indicated in the title of this paper, there are remote and immediate causes for this ineffectiveness.

REMOTE CAUSES:

(a) Low productivity of the average Nigerian Library Worker.

The productivity of the average Nigerian Library Worker, like his counterparts in other work situation is very low. Surveys in the productivity of the Nigerian library worker have been carried out in some university, college of Education and public libraries in Nigeria. Table I presents the productivity of Library workers in three academic libraries in Port-Harcourt area of Nigeria, within the last two years'.

The results showed that while Heads of Sections stated that the productivity of their staff was falling by 55.6%, the senior staff members of the library generally, felt that productivity of the workers was falling by 61.5%. The results are, however, likely to represent the perception which these senior members of staff hold of the productivity of the junior staff and not their own productivity.

Be that as it may and since the junior workers are more in number and they do a greater bulk of the operational jobs in the library, the rate of unproductivity discovered is on a high side and gives cause for concern.

TABLE I

STATE OF PRODUCTIVITY OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF STAFF OF THREE LIBRARIES AS PERCEIVED BY STAFF MEMBERS

Productivity Levels	Perception of Staff Members					
	Heads of Libraries and Heads of Sections in the libraries		Other Senior Staff		Junior Staff	
	N = 18	%	N = 13	%	N = 35	%
Rising	2	11.1	1	7.7	5	14.3
Same	6	33.3	4	30.8	18	51.4
Falling	10	55.6	8	61.5	12	34.3

$$X^2 = 3.88 \quad P_{0.20} = 3.21$$

$$X^2 \text{ is therefore significant at } P_{df} = 2 \quad 0.20$$

NOTE: The chi-square calculation was done with absolute figures, not percentages. The 'Rising' and 'Same' rows were merged during the calculation in order to avoid having any value in any of the cells less than 5.

SOURCE: Data obtained from Ahiazu's survey of three academic libraries in Port-Harcourt Area in 1986 - See Reference No. 1.

In his productivity survey of some academic and public libraries in Bendel State of Nigeria Ojo-Igbinoba discovered that on a daily basis, three hours representing 37.5% of library workers time, and on a yearly basis, a total of 19 weeks representing 36.5% of the years working period were wasted in an unproductive manner².

Tables II and III show that precious time was wasted on sundry visits amongst colleagues, vehicle repairs, break periods, sick leaves, maternity leaves, casual leave, compassionate leave, christmas holidays and a host of other holidays.

TABLE II

TIME NOT WORKING PER DAY		
Deduct:	Break periods.....	1 hour
	Sundry visits	½ hour
	Discussions etc	½ hour
	Pay days	½ hour
	Hanging about.....	½ hour
TOTAL		3 Hours
		or 37.5%

N = 8 statutory working hours per day

SOURCE: Data obtained from Ojo-Igbinoba's productivity survey of workers in some institutions of higher learning in Bendel State, Nigeria 1986 - See Reference No. 2

TABLE III

TIME NOT WORKING PER YEAR		
5 weeks	statutory leave periods	9.6%
1 week	sick leave	7.7%
5 weeks	obituary, vehicle repairs etc. .	9.6%
2 weeks	idle time	3.8%
3 weeks	awaiting repairs	5.8%
19 weeks	Total	36.5%

N = 52 weeks in the year

SOURCE: Data obtained from Ojo-Igbinoba's survey of some higher Institutions of learning in Bendel State, Nigeria 1986 - See Reference No. 2.

The two emperical studies of both Ahiazu and Ojo-Igbinoba are based only on four university libraries, two colleges of education, and a few other types of libraries in Nigeria, and as such, these investigations can hardly represent the true situation in all libraries in Nigeria.

However, the results give valid indication of what is likely to be the situation in majority of the libraries in Nigeria. There are other testimonies to the apparent unproductivity of the Nigerian library worker. J.A. Ifechukwu has this to say of the Nigerian worker generally:-

"...the productivity of the Nigerian worker tends to be

generally low; the Nigerian worker to be working productively when closely supervised: displays a feeling of dissatisfaction, seems to lack a sense of commitment a sense of urgency and is not public relations conscious³.

Ifidon's summation on the quality of the Nigerian library worker is even more down to earth. He has this to say:-

"...Hardly is a full's days job put in for a full days pay, let alone working for extra hours. Some report very late for work take over two hours break and close early, while others spend their time reading newspapers, servicing and repairing their cars during office hours"⁴.

Adedeji in the same vein observed that Nigerian librarians have consistently paid lip service to research which would have brought originality to some of what we do⁵.

Two major factors are responsible for the unproductivity of the Nigerian Library worker and indeed Nigerian wage earner generally. These factors include (a) His misconception of what wage employment is and (b) pressure from members of his village, age group and religious organisations etc. The first factor affects the junior staff more than the senior staff and the second factor is predominantly the problem of senior staff, particularly library chief executives.



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To the Nigerian worker, particularly the junior worker as said earlier, has an erroneous conception of wage employment and this has affected his work behaviour. There are results of studies that have demonstrated that the Nigerian and indeed African worker generally depends on wage labour as a spring-board for the realization of a more cherished engagement.

For example, Peace in his study of industrial workers in Nigeria, found that the shop floor worker sees his wage employment as a means to accumulate enough capital for another engagement⁶. Young school leavers take up wage employment to save money to pay their fees on admission into higher institutions of learning and as soon as admissions are got, they leave their jobs.

This is the type of orientation Nigerian workers, including library workers, have towards wage employment. This has

greatly affected their attitude and behaviour pattern and their total degree of attachment and commitment to work. Very often one finds that most library workers own and maintain large farms, bookshops, food centres etc.

To them these extra engagements are more important than their paid library jobs. As a result, the Nigerian library worker has not become what the Webbs have described as "life long wage earner" or what Kerr et al described as a "totally committed worker".

The other factor that has affected the productivity of the Nigerian library worker is that he is under series of pressures from kiths and kin, friends, religious organisations etc. The Nigerian library worker is operating in a complex socio-cultural, interpersonal environment. At work he is conscious of the role expectations of these various extraneous distractors.

For example, it has become fashionable for library chief executive to employ very many of his kiths and kin and family friends into the library without regard to laid down criteria for employment as for example geographical spread and requisite qualification.

Worse still, these relations cannot be reprimanded, nor queried by library chief executive when the latter transgress, for fear of being carpeted in the village. These types of chief executives who work under pressure are the types Melson has described as "cross-pressured workers".

These two factors have partly been responsible for low productivity of the average Nigerian library worker and this has greatly affected services to users. Shelf reading is haphazardly done- daily issues are not properly filed; readers wanting to get books out, wait on end by the loans desk, new materials are not processed on time, they take

upwards of two to three months to get onto the shelves.

The Chief Executive cannot issue these lazy workers with queries thus leading to favouritism and double standards. Eventually, this will result in loss of confidence in the leadership and authority of the library.

(b) Shortage of Professional Staff

Another remote cause for the stagnation of library services in Nigeria is the shortage of professional staff both in number and quality. Table IV shows the total number of professional and para-professional library workers in Nigeria by the end of 1981/82 academic session.

TABLE IV

Professional and Para-Professional Librarian - 1981/82 Session

Professionals			Para-Professionals		
1. A. L. A.	-	16	1. Certificate in Library Studies		42
2. BLS	-	264	2. Diploma in Library Studies		972
3. PGDL	-	250	3. National Diploma in Library Studies		24
4. MLS	-	143	Total		1,038
5. M. Phil/PhD	-	66			
Total		659			

TABLE V
STAFFING SITUATION IN THE THREE LIBRARIES

LIBRARY SECTIONS	STAFFING SITUATION																				
	Required Staff									Actual Staff on Ground									Total Shortage of Staff in the three Libraries		
	Library 1			Library 2			Library 3			Library 1			Library 2			Library 3					
	P	SNP	J	P	SNP	J	P	SNP	J	P	SNP	J	P	SNP	J	P	SNP	J	P	SNP	J
Cataloguing	4	1	8	2	2	8	2	1	4	3	1	4	2	2	6	1	-	-	2	1	10
Circulations	1	1	27	1	2	16	2	1	-	1	1	20	1	1	12	1	-	5	1	2	6
Serials	1	-	2	1	1	8	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	7	-	-	-	1	1	3
Reference	1	-	2	1	1	6	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	4	-	-	-	1	1	3
Acquisitions	1	-	4	1	2	6	1	-	2	1	-	2	1	-	5	1	-	-	-	2	5
Bindery and Reprographics	1	-	4	2	1	6	2	-	2	1	-	4	2	-	5	-	-	1	2	1	2
Archives and Special Collections	1	-	-	1	1	2	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	2	1
Subject and Special Unit Librarians	9	-	15	6	-	18	2	-	6	5	-	10	1	-	8	-	-	11	-	-	21
Librarians Office	1	1	19	2	1	6	1	1	5	1	1	18	2	1	5	1	-	2	-	1	5
TOTAL	10	3	81	17	11	76	13	4	21	14	3	60	12	5	54	4	-	8	0	10	56
Percentage of Staff Shortage to Total Staff Required																			40	55.6	31.5

NOTE:

- P - Professional Staff
SNP - Senior Non-Professional Staff
J - Junior Staff

SOURCE:

Data obtained from Ahiazu's survey report on productivity level of three academic libraries in Port-Harcourt area of Nigeria, administered in June, 1986.

In the 1981/85 4th National Development Plan, it was estimated that 900 additional librarians would have been produced during the plan period. By that projection library schools in Nigeria should be turning out more than 180 librarians each year. But from available statistics all library schools in Nigeria could not meet up with this projection.

This situation has given libraries, especially academic libraries some concern. Many academic libraries in Nigeria are understaffed. Survey report of some academic libraries in Port-Harcourt area of Nigeria mentioned earlier shows acute shortage of professional staff. Table V shows the staffing position of three academic libraries in the area just mentioned - two University libraries and one college of education library.

From the Table, it can be seen that the "required" number and category of staff are not the same as the "actual staff on ground". The results in the table show that the percentage of staff shortage of total staff required in the three libraries put together was 40% for professional staff, 55.6% for senior non-professional staff and 31.5% for junior staff.

The situation has further been exacerbated by the present economic crunch in Nigeria, since libraries do not have enough money to employ more professional staff, even when it would have been possible for professionals from other countries to come to Nigeria. The vogue now is to appoint more para-professionals and other support staff than real professionals because it will cost less to do the former.

Rogers and Weber have advised that professional staff ratio to other support staff should be in the range of 33 to 40 per cent.¹⁰ In other words, the support staff needed should not exceed 60% of the total staff strength.

Many libraries in Nigeria do not meet these requirements. For instance in the 1984/85 and 1985/86 academic sessions, the average ratios for the two years was 27% for the University of Port Harcourt and 30% for the Rivers State University of Technology and these figures are below the ideal requirements.

TABLE VI

Professional Staff Ratio in Universities in the Port Harcourt Area for the periods 1984/85 and 1985/86

	1984/85	1985/86
	%	%
University of Port Harcourt	26	29
Rivers State University of Science & Technology	35	25

Source: computed from Library Estimates.

The immediate danger of this disproportionate ratio in favour of support staff is that, most highly professional duties are assigned to the support staff particularly the para-professional category, and the adverse multiplier effect of this arrangement to library service generally need not be over emphasised.

Perhaps the seriousness of the shortage of staff, particularly professional staff can better be appreciated when it is realised that in 1985, there were about 186 libraries in Nigeria comprising 40 college and polytechnic libraries, 25 University libraries, 15 public and State libraries, 1 National library and 85 special libraries and to render the required services were only 750 librarians and about 3,500 para-professionals and clerical staff¹¹.

And because of the present economic difficulties in the country, vacancies are not filled; there is total embargo on promotions and new appointments and even outright retrenchment of professional staff.

(c) DEPRECIATED SKILLS

Closely related to shortage of staff, is the fact of depreciation of skills of Nigerian librarians. Most Nigerian librarians have been, and are still being trained in the ordinary conventional methods with little or no knowledge of how to apply modern technology to library operations

Their training has fallen short of the present demands of readers. The awareness in Nigeria today of the social and economic importance of information is growing fast and people in their thousands are needing information quick in sophisticated formats.

But librarians in Nigeria are not responding to this demand in the most efficient manner due to lack of modern skills and knowledge. Librarians of today should for example be doing information analysis, packaging and dissemination.

They are supposed to be information analysts with a high level of subject expertise than is the situation in Nigeria today. What is needed now are intellectually and technologically competent personnel who can link knowledge with individual problems.

Today's Nigeria librarians need to be retrained in line with new methods and approach to librarianship. Most Library chief executives have not been paying enough attention to the need for personnel development. Personnel development is the process of gradual and systematic improvement in the knowledge, skills, attitudes and performance of the individual in an organisation.

Instead of thinking of how to use their professional staff for more challenging, academic, intellectual, research functions, most Nigerian library chief executives make high professional staff do intermediate functions like filing of catalogue cards, shelfreading and other minor jobs.

Social and technological factors are already redefining the roles and responsibilities of librarians and so library chief executives should aspire to create and shape the future in which these high calibre professionals should operate to meet the present needs of society which has assumed more dynamic and sophisticated characteristics.

(d) Low Priority Given to Librarianship

Another remote cause of stagnation of librarianship in Nigeria is the low priority given to the development of libraries by governments and their agencies. By governments, the writer means, Governors, Ministers, members of the Armed Forces Ruling Council, members of the legislative bodies, civil servants, Chief Executives of Universities and other institutions of higher learning and so forth.

Almost every type of library except a few special, industrial, and private libraries in Nigeria are largely financed by government. In some countries, separate bodies or agencies have been created to liaise between government and libraries.

For instance, in the Scandinavia countries, there are the "State Library Offices" to advise government on library development. In Britain there was the "library advisory council" since 1966 and now there is the "Libraries and Arts"

branch of the Department of Education and Science to advise appropriate Ministers.

In Nigeria, the library is lumped with schools in the Ministry of Education, and the fate of libraries depend on the whims and caprices of the Education Minister or Commissioner as the case maybe. The attitude of our educationists, administrators, Ministers and Commissioners of education towards library development in Nigeria is nothing to write home about.

They do not seem to appreciate the importance of libraries in the social, economic, cultural and technological development of a nation. Legislation for the provision of public library services is not vigorously executed; only government secondary schools have libraries and they are poorly stocked with books and materials that have little or no bearing with the children's culture or background.

All other primary and post-primary schools in the country have little or no library facilities at all. This accounts for the reason why students in Nigerian universities find it very difficult to use the library.

Lester Asheim sums up the attitude of government and its functionaries towards library development in the third world as follows:-

"... library needs carry a very low priority in the competition with other demands upon the limited budgets of the university; the city or the national government. There is no question about where to put the available funds as between a science laboratory or a library; a public administrator, professor or a librarian; a computer or a collection of books. Those in a position to make decisions on such matters have probably never seen a library from which they could derive any service or benefits. Those with some library training and a knowledge of the library's potentials are not in a position to present the case"¹²

Ironically, university chief executives in Nigeria are even more indifferent to the plight of libraries and librarians, and this bitter truth beats all figments of imagination. Most of them, if not all, have had the opportunity to visit and use well established libraries in Europe, America and other advanced countries, only to return and pay lip service and accord low priority to library development in their universities. The current trend now in Nigeria is that the place of library development depends on the disposition of the Vice-Chancellor.

Because of this low priority given to libraries in Nigeria, library services have stagnated a great deal. Public libraries are grossly inadequate and the few provided are established in rented ramshackle buildings and they are poorly stocked.

Except in a few states of the Federation, nearly all the few public libraries are concentrated in the cities. Funds are not provided to extend library facilities to rural areas. Thus for about 100 million people of Nigeria, there are less than 90 public libraries to provide library services.

In the universities the picture is also gloomily. University Vice-Chancellors prefer to spend the little available funds on the provision of hostels and cafeterias rather than making funds available for books.

IMMEDIATE CAUSES:

(a) Inadequate Funds:

A good library needs funds to acquire new titles of books, and research publications. A major problem facing libraries

in Nigeria is inadequate funds. The Federal and State governments are the main sources of funding of virtually all types of libraries in Nigeria. As earlier mentioned, because governments and their agencies give low priority to library development, the funding of libraries has been grossly inadequate.

Although the National Universities Commission has recommended that 5% of the recurrent university budget be allocated to the university library, this recommendation is usually not complied with due to either irregular supply of funds from government or/and due to the decision of the Vice-Chancellor to ignore it.

Worse still, as the year rolls by, cuts and a withholding of funds are arbitrarily decided upon by university administration and the library funds are often an attractive source of funds to slash or borrow from. Enough research has not been made to determine the factors responsible for the low priority Vice-Chancellors give to library development in the universities in Nigeria.

However, Ifidon is of the view that university chief executives have always been tempted to regard the library as a "grey area" whose subventions can be reduced at will and in periods of economic emergencies without fear of outward consequences like student disturbances or industrial actions¹³.

Apart from the 5% recurrent budget supposed to be allocated to the library, the National Universities Commission also recommended that an additional N400,000.00 be granted annually for five years to all the new universities in the country for the rapid provision of book stock.

Again this recommendation has been flagrantly flouted by government and its functionaries. For the new Federal Universities, this recommendation would not have been much of a burden for the federal government. But for the new State Universities, the amount recommended is out of proportion to the total financial grants available to the Vice-Chancellor to establish the whole university.

In such a situation, any librarian who sought to press the recommendation would not only be considered unrealistic, but would be laughed out of order by other principal officers in the university.

Apart from these two major areas of funding university libraries, there are no other significant sources worth mentioning. Gifts and bequests are so desultory and meagre that they are best regarded as minor, insignificant alternative sources of funding. Whether it is academic, public, special or research library, the problems of funding are the same.

The funds are not sufficient; are irregular and grudgingly given out. The fact of inadequate funding is further exacerbated by a host of other related problems, like inflation, problem of foreign exchange, scarcity of locally published books and administrative costs, to mention but a few.

Nigeria is experiencing a spiral inflation and libraries have been caught in the ~~inferno~~ inferno. Library budgets like other budgets in Nigeria are based on historical costs or past performance. In inflationary times, historical costs become almost useless in the determination of current and future costs.

As a result of this, budget allocations for library materials are not enough nowadays to meet library expenses and management do not take such unfavourable budget variance into consideration in making either supplementary or contingency allocations. The result has been that virtually all

libraries in Nigeria for the past three to five years have not been able to acquire budgeted items.

Whereas in more advanced countries like the United States, France and the United Kingdom, library budgets have been drawn to make allowance for inflationary years in the U.S., Harvard University used to allow an annual increment of 10% in the budget solely to compensate for rising prices and to maintain relative purchasing scope¹⁴.

Scarcity of locally published reading materials both in quantity and quality is another area that has worsened the budgets of libraries. As a result, about 80% of Nigerian book needs are imported. The Nigerian government has placed books on licence with the objective of compelling our local book industry to publish enough for local consumption, and to stem the drain of foreign exchange abroad.

But this decision has placed libraries in a serious disadvantage as more money is now paid for books and other materials. Also, printing materials have been placed on licence and the duty on them raised to as much as 40%. This measure has had a negative effect in that it has raised the price of locally produced books very high and in fact sometimes, they cost more than imported books.

In either case, whether by importing all its book supplies or by purchasing them locally when available, the library has found itself in a quandary as its meagre funds are no longer able to cover all these pressures.

Administrative costs also help to deplete library funds. Such costs include - repeated travels to the Central Bank and Ministries of Finance, photocopying in multiple copies of proforma invoices, annual expenditure on inter-library charges, cost of courier and transport service, postage and telex charges etc.

The effect of inadequate funds for the library are legion - drastic cut in staff disposition, total embargo on promotions and freezing of vacancies, reduction in annual book purchases, reduction in journal subscription, complete scrap of user education programmes, excessive fines for library offences and high rate of charges for photocopying and binding services etc.

The user at the receiving end suffers it all in the form of a steady drop in the quantity and quality of library services to them. For instance in 1985, there were about 186 libraries in Nigeria and these were poorly stocked with about 6 million volumes of books and 250,000 periodical titles. As against this 6 million, Nigerian book needs during the same period was conservatively estimated at 218 million volumes and by 1986, the figure has risen to 300 million¹⁵.

Lack of Cooperation among Libraries:

Another immediate cause of stagnation of Nigerian librarianship is the low level or complete non-existence of co-operation among libraries. In the face of reduced budgets, a high rate of inflation, acute shortage of locally published books exponential growth of information and literature, individual libraries find it difficult to purchase, process, store and retrieve reading materials.

In a situation like this, inter-library co-operation and resource sharing would have been necessary if not mandatory, but Nigerian libraries are not taking advantage of this. Library co-operation is the pooling together of the resources of two or more libraries to satisfy the needs of users. In Nigeria, a considerable evidence exist to show the desirability for cooperation:-

- (a) Most materials needed for learning and research, especially at the tertiary level, are not locally available. Today about 80% of book needs of Nigerian libraries are imported and in the face of devastating effect of foreign exchange and import licence, many libraries in Nigeria have in the past three to five years had difficulty in renewing their subscription of books and journals from overseas.
- (b) There is an uneven development of library and information resources in Nigeria. Between 1970-1980, well over sixteen new universities were established when the country had begun to experience a high rate of decreasing national income. As a result, the libraries in these new universities had been adversely affected.

On the other hand, however, the older universities set up before the economic crunch were lucky to have their libraries well stocked. Although the acquisition potentials of these older libraries have been drastically reduced, they could afford to satisfy most of the needs of the younger universities if a satisfactory resource sharing scheme could be worked out.

In spite of these apparent need for co-operation, the extent of resource sharing and inter library loans in Nigeria is not impressive. The idea of co-operation between libraries has existed in Nigeria for over 20 years now. There was the initiative taken by the National Library of Nigeria which culminated in the meeting of working group on inter-library lending held at Ile-Ife in 1974 and which led to the establishment of a National Bibliographic and Lending Centre at the National Library of Nigeria.

In 1980, there was a move on co-operative acquisition scheme under the aegis of the National Library of Nigeria. Indeed a number of studies have been focused on this vexed issue of library co-operation since the early sixties.

All these efforts to co-operate have not been successful. For example during the period of 1972 to 1983, the picture of inter-library lending in Nigeria showed a desultory 3,270 and 1,365 respectively¹⁶. Since then, there has been a steady decline in co-operation. Osundina made the same observation on the issue in 1980¹⁷.

Viewed against the background of the needs of users in this country, within the context of reduced ability of libraries in Nigeria to acquire new reading materials, this lack of co-operation among libraries is lamentable.

A number of factors have been responsible for the inability of Nigerian libraries to cooperate:-

- (a) There is an absence of tools with which to co-operate. The National Library of Nigeria has not been able to produce the National Union Catalogue in book form, while the much needed revised edition of its National Union Catalogue of Serials produced since 1979 is still not ready.
- (b) The proposed nation-wide courier service has not gone beyond the drawing board, while the state of postal and tele-communication services have not shown any sustained level of improvement.
- (c) The absence of any meaningful computer application in Nigerian librarianship is another factor. Computer application to library operations could have the advantage of improving inter-library lending by way of easier access to the resources of other libraries and better records. Even joint acquisition and cataloguing, an aspect of co-operation and resource sharing has not been possible because of the manual and traditional nature of our library operations.

- (d) Many Nigerian librarians adhere to the old philosophy of librarianship which equates size of collection with strength, thus they seek solution to their problems within their own libraries, rather than in collaborative efforts. They are hesitant about making a commitment in favour of collaborative and resource sharing activities, particularly where this involves giving up some local autonomy.

All these factors have militated against co-operation among libraries in Nigeria. Apart from reducing operational cost, co-operation would have facilitated standardization and the widening of the resource horizon of smaller libraries by putting the resources of bigger libraries at their disposal.

Non-Automation of Library Operations:

Perhaps a more important immediate factor responsible for the decadence of Nigerian librarianship is the complete non-application of automation in the operation of the library in Nigeria. By automation, the writer is considering only the non use of computers in Nigerian libraries. Technologies have affected libraries for good and libraries that have embraced technology are performing better.

According to Williams and others, "among the most powerful forces affecting libraries of all types are the development and widespread adoption of new technologies for dissemination of information". They further stressed that technological advances will drastically change the nature of library operation and possibly even the basic social role of libraries¹⁸.

Nigerian librarians are slow to embrace information technology and they have not been able to develop the capacity to relate technology to library services. Most Nigerian librarians shy away from automated operations because they lack the necessary skills.

Literature on Library automation show that librarians all over the world, even in developed countries, at first reacted negatively to automation and any systems that seemed to alter the status-quo of the library. They resisted computer systems for example because they felt it was dehumanizing.

But when the socio-economic climate of the time dictated a change, libraries in advanced countries became receptive to the advantages of automation and used it and are still using it today. But Nigerian librarians have behaved differently even when such socio-economic climate that called for the change in advanced countries is already existing in Nigeria.

For example, there is an aggressive desire for knowledge and quest for information by the Nigerian citizenry; the governments also are in a hurry to catch up with the advanced worlds and need a lot of information for major revolutionary decision.

There is a considerable amount of technological base already in the country - for example there is enough computer infrastructure in Nigeria. All these would have been sufficient to stimulate the use of computers in Nigerian libraries.

Many librarians in Nigeria feel that the time has not come to computerise library operations. But this is not true because there are lots of computer infrastructure already on the ground. For instance there are:-

- (1) Several professional bodies in Nigeria to serve the interest of computer use - Computer Association of Nigeria (CAN), Computer users Association (CUAN), and MICRO CLUB Nigeria Ltd. These bodies promote and protect the interest of the profession,

organise conferences and seminars and advise on the use of computers.

- (2) There are electric generators of all types and sizes available in Nigerian markets which could be purchased and used during power failure.
- (3) Some universities in Nigeria have computer installations - Ahmadu Bello University has the CYBER 72 processor and an ICI 1901A, University of Ibadan has the IBM 370/135 and IBM 1620; Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife has the IBM 360/25 and the University of Lagos has the IBM 1620 and IBM 370/145. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) has virtually computerised almost all of its operations and has latest Computer components.
- (4) The federal and state governments are prepared to encourage computer use and computer tradition in Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it is therefore clear that there is an appreciable degree of infrastructural base needed for effective use of computers in Nigerian libraries. There has been a rapid proliferation of computer technology in other spheres in Nigeria - Individuals, governments, private industries are all going computer.

But Nigeria libraries are either dragging their feet about the issue or they are not able to overcome some other obstacles inhibiting the use of computers.

While there are approximately 186 libraries operating in Nigeria, the number of libraries that have made attempts at all to computerise some of their operations is insignificant, and these few libraries tried computerization not as a deliberate action but as a spin-off reaction to the existence of computer centres in their parent institutions. Thus the Universities of Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello and Nnsukka libraries computerised their serial holdings in 1973, 1976 and 1977 respectively.

With the exception of the Institute of International Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the Federal Institute of International Research (FIIR), almost all the few libraries that tried to computerize had one problem or the other, ranging from shortage of skilled manpower, computer breakdown, low level of electricity supply, and scarcity of funds.

Apart from many other factors, the failure of most Nigerian libraries to use computers can be attributed to the following factors:-

Shortage of skilled Manpower

- (a) In most of the libraries in which computers have been tried, consultants were employed from abroad to design information systems for them. This has not been successful because after feasibility studies and recommendations had been made, the consultants leave the stage. The recommendations cannot be sustained because Nigerian libraries lack the required manpower to implement them. There is therefore an urgent need to train Nigerians in library automation.
- (b) The cost of computer hardware and their processing costs in Nigeria are astronomically high. This situation has been worsened by import tariff, high installation and maintenance costs. The result is that the computer is out of the reach of most librarians.
- (c) Although electricity supply in Nigeria has considerably improved, incessant power cuts and power fluctuations are still much around. A lot of electronic

equipment and gadgets have been damaged as a result of these fluctuations and the prizes of electric generators in Nigeria today are prohibitively high and out of reach of librarians.

- (d) Management constraint is another obstacle. The library is a sub-system of a larger system and within this larger system, all other subsystems are bound to made conflicting demands in terms of monetary allocations. Given the low ranking position accorded library development in Nigeria, librarians find it difficult to convince university authority of the desirability and viability of automation in the library.

All these factors have rendered the use of computer in the library extremely difficult¹⁹. The obvious advantages associated with computer technology are lost to Nigerian libraries. The objectives of use of computers in the library among other things are to reduce operational cost, enhance high productivity and service extension, pave way for a much wider co-operation through resource sharing and better management control in the way of consistency and standardization of operations²⁰.

The use of computers in the library also facilitates library housekeeping operations like orders; accessioning, cataloguing and classification. Also in the circulation area of the library computers have been shown to be very useful with regards to loan recalls, overdue notices, updating and prompt response to users needs during peak periods.

All these advantages inherent in computer usage have eluded Nigerian librarians and the effect of this is that library service is slow, ineffective and users are generally dissatisfied. If Nigerian librarians are trying their best to respond to users need presently, they would definitely perform better if they can embrace computer technology.

From the foregoing, it has become clear that there are many factors responsible for the stagnation of libraries in Nigeria. Apart from the ones mentioned here, there are a host of other inhibitions which, due to time and space, cannot be discussed here. Such other problems include underdeveloped state of the book trade; the inadequacy of bibliographic services; cumbersome administrative procedures and settlement of invoices, and poor communication facilities.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

The Nigerian society has changed considerably in terms of the quantity, quality and sophistication of information needs of the citizens and governments. The awareness in Nigeria today of the social and economic importance of information is growing fast and people in their millions are needing information quick.

The Nigerian government is in a hurry to catch up with the

advanced nations and so needs vital information to enable it make decisions and formulate policies, which will bring progress and self reliance to the nation. The quality of information given to government and peoples of the nation and the speed, accuracy and precision with which the information is given predicates the quality and accuracy of decisions taken. The quality of life and the survival of a society depends on the accurate and reliable information available to the people and government.

Unfortunately Nigerian libraries are not responding to this upsurge and thirst for information, in the most effective manner. The problems confronting libraries in Nigeria at the moment are legion and they include: insufficient funds, worsened by a high rate of inflation and high tariffs; the average Nigerian library worker is not committed and therefore is highly unproductive.

Other problems are: shortage of competent, experienced professional staff; low priority accorded to libraries; lack of co-operation among libraries resulting in a dissipation of energies and scarce resources; the inability of Nigerian librarians to embrace automation like computer application to libraries, and the conservatism of the Nigerian librarian.

Recommendations:

The following recommendation are being humbly advanced. There is need for a purposeful programme for retraining most Nigerian librarians, particularly in the area of automation. No librarian trained in the conventional method can cope effectively with today's demands. This retraining will enhance gradual and systematic improvement in the knowledge, skills attitudes and performance of the individual librarian.

There is need for workers, particularly library chief executives to be conversant with computer technology. They need to look at a number of literature on computer systems and visit sufficiently computerised libraries in Nigeria as a prelude to incorporating computers in their library operations.

As a matter of policy, all library schools in Nigeria should incorporate in their curricula, new elements and training in line with library automation.

The Nigerian Library Association to revive seminars, and workshops on library co-operation.

The Nigerian government should immediately abrogate some of its measures in which it has placed books and paper on licence. Government cannot in one breadth call for free and qualitative education at all levels, scientific and technological development, and in another breadth, introduce measures that impede the easy acquisition of the necessary materials needed for the realization of such lofty goals.

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