

The Role of The National Library of Nigeria in National Information System (NATIS)

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Introduction:

Information has become the essential basis for the progress of human civilization and society. In advanced countries of the world with huge investments in research and developments, complex information systems have been created to meet the special needs of scientists, engineers, administrators and workers in socio-economic fields.

In developing countries where resources are more limited there is a growing trend to give high priority to information services.

A nation that can provide better information service will be in a better position to cope with the problems of everyday life, improve human relationships in her own community and between diverse cultures and traditions, and thus contribute to better understanding and world cooperation. Access to information must be a major feature in the improvement of the quality of life for each individual.

Information Service - defined:

Information services, for the purpose of this paper include many relevant forms concerned with storage, processing and dissemination of information for specific users - all types of library (national, university, special, school, public, governmental etc.) documentation services and archives.

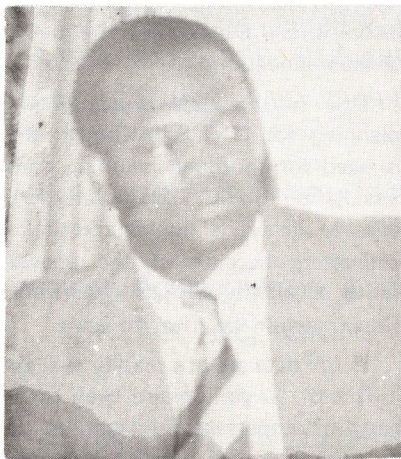
Planned national information system:

In the past two decades the need for the formal planning of the various aspects of national life - economic, social, technical and educational - has become generally accepted as a necessary prerequisite to the wise use of resources.

So far in formulating national development plans little attention has been paid to the systematic organisation and dissemination of information which is one of the vital resources of

a country.

As the idea gains ground that international collaboration should be achieved in the field of information, national planning of this vital resource becomes a necessity, and the need becomes the more pressing as international co-operative programmes such as UNISIST and Universal Bibliographic Control are developed.



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Many countries, however, have been examining the need for more systematic planning of their present information infrastructures in view of the rapid development in "information industry" based on modern techniques that provide a means of channelling knowledge and spreading it more easily.

Such planning will enable these countries to utilize fully information, accumulated at the national level and also be able to participate in and benefit from existing and future world information systems in various fields of activity, like those set up by agencies of the United Nations family.

The concept of NATIS

The concept was promoted by UNESCO through a series of four regional conferences in Latin America, Asia, African and the Arab States on

the specific problems of archives planning. These meetings studied the problems of archives planning in the light of specific conditions of each region and recommended action to be taken at the national and international levels.

The UNESCO Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures, held in Paris in September, 1974, was the first intergovernmental conference to be organised concerned exclusively with the problems in national planning relating to Documentation, Libraries and Archives (DLA) services.

The purpose of the conference was to provide a frame-work for governments of member states in various stages of development and with different social and political structures, to exchange views and experience on the coordinated planning of national documentation, library and archives policies, methods and services over the whole range of human activities, that is, the humanities, culture, sociology, economics, law, pure and applied sciences.

A further aim of the conference was to recommend guidelines for the creation and development of national information infrastructures and their links with the different sectors of national development plans.

The NATIS concept implies that governments should maximize the availability of all relevant information through documentation, library and archives services just as, in principle, it takes responsibility for the basic education, at primary and secondary levels of its citizens.

As governments invest more and more money and personnel in the development of all types of libraries as well as documentation and archives services, they begin to insist that over-

lap among certain types of services must be eliminated and serious gaps in the provision of information be filled by planned action. This is much easier for developing countries to achieve than advanced countries of the world.

"The precise form and character of the national information system (NATIS), composed of a number of sub-systems, will vary in different countries, but co-ordination of all its elements must be the goal".

"The elements that should constitute NATIS are all services involved in the provision of information for all sectors of the community and for all categories of users. The task of NATIS is to ensure that all engaged in political, economic, scientific, educational, social or cultural activities receive the necessary information enabling them to render their fullest contribution to the whole community".

The conference accepted the concept and made a number of recommendations to assist effective implementation of it.

The concept was subsequently considered by the 18th General Conference of UNESCO which invited the Director-General:

"(a) to promote the general concept of overall planning of national infrastructures of documentation, libraries and archives and to invite member states to take appropriate steps to create or improve their national information system;

"(b) to assist member states, especially the developing countries, to plan and develop their national infrastructures or national information systems (NATIS) in such a way as to ensure co-ordination at the national level and to prepare the basis for active participation in world information systems;

"(c) to draw up a long-term programme of action to this end, and submit it to the nineteenth session of the General Conference;

"(d) to take into account, in drawing up this programme, the recommendations approved by the Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of

National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures, the UNISIST programme, and other relevant programme developed by UNESCO and other international organisations, taking the necessary measures to avoid the development of overlapping activities:

"(e) to take all necessary steps to ensure the most effective implementation of action in support of NATIS within the Programme and Budget for 1975/1976".

(a) The requirement of NATIS
A National information policy:

The planning and implementation of NATIS will take place simultaneously nationally and internationally, and where possible, regionally also. There should be a survey of existing resources, physical, financial, institutional, technical and human, and the method of their allocation.

This is the first prerequisite of planning for NATIS. Although there is need for thorough planning before installation of NATIS, it will be unwise to delay its implementation inordinately because of the unavailability of all the background information it would be ideal to have.

If full data are not readily available, it is best to go forward even on the basis of imperfect information, and to correct, in the light of experience, any errors that may have been committed. It should be noted, however, that in the building up of NATIS valuable existing programmes and services are not endangered.

(b) Stimulation of user awareness and promotion of the reading habit:

These two objectives are interrelated. The former is involved with instruction in the use of libraries - University, special and public. Appropriate authorities should include in their programmes systematic instruction in the use of information resources available in all the elements of NATIS.

It has also been established that user awareness starts in the first place with inculcation of such awareness by the national encouragement of reading habit.

In order to foster and maintain reading habit the network of schools and public libraries within NATIS,

in co-operation with appropriate educational institutions, should develop programmes specially designed to attract and sustain the interest of a wide potential clientele.

(c) Assessment of users' need:

A detailed analysis should be made of the information needs of government for its tasks and of the various groups of users in such areas as industry, research and education to ensure that the national information system (NATIS) is planned to meet these needs.

(d) Analysis of manpower resources:

A continuous survey and assessment of manpower is very necessary. The problem of manpower evaluation in terms of quantity depends on variables such as economic changes, the national plans of government and the priorities that are determined and the manpower needs of DLA services into the national plan.

Planning the Organisational Structure of NATIS:

The functions of all documentation library and archives services should be co-ordinated through a central body to form the national information system (NATIS), so as to ensure the optimum use of available resources and the maximum contribution to the cultural, social and economic development of each nation.

National institutions and programmes of professional education for information manpower, should be established as integral parts of the national educational structure at universities or equivalent institutions of higher learning, as principal means of supplying adequate numbers of professional staff to meet the demand for qualified personnel to operate the national information system (NATIS).

The national information plan should include adequate provision for the application of information technology, as appropriate, in the various components, of NATIS with the aim of achieving maximum utilization of existing resources and of reaching compatibility and standardization.

Legislative action should be taken at the earliest possible stage in support of planning and implementation of the national information system (NATIS). This legislation should cover the conceptual basis of the system, and of its constituent elements including all