

# The Contribution of Public Libraries in Eradicating Poverty in the Nigerian Society in the 21st Century

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## Introduction

The growth and development of any nation depends largely to the extent of access, availability and utilization of information by its citizens. Access to timely, accurate, current, and reliable information is very crucial. It raises or elevates the status of an individual advancement as well as corporate overall development. The public library serves as the centre in achieving this goal. It provides educational, socio-economic, cultural and political information services to its customers in a particular community (Ko et al, 2012). It is established to serve the entire community, and, as such, Saliu (1999) views it as the "layman's university." It is a service-oriented institution usually owned or funded by governments, responsible for fulfilling the information needs of the community. Indeed, the ultimate goal of any library is to select, acquire, process and provide timely, accurate, and reliable information at the right time, in the right format to customers. It is strongly believed that library services, especially

those provided in public libraries, are an integral part of the national socio-economic development and improvement of the general quality of life" (Kibat, 1990).

The IFLA/UNESCO public library manifesto (1994) stressed that the public library provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. It therefore, provides unrestricted opportunities for individuals to get informed and inspired, as well as encouraging the love of reading and providing entertainment for the betterment of the citizenry (Abubakar, 2012).

Henderson et al (2010) regard a public library as an entity that is established under state enabling laws or regulations to serve a community, district, or region, and that provides at least the following: (1) an organized collection of printed or other library materials, or a combination thereof; (2) paid staff; (3) an established schedule in which services of staff are available to the public; (4) the facilities necessary to support a collection, staff, and schedule; and (5) that is supported in whole or in part with public funds.

Poverty can be seen as a situation or condition whereby an individual cannot get the basic necessities of life. According to the United Nations (1995) it is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services. It is characterized by absence of basic amenities like food, shelter, water, hospitals and electricity, good roads and good schools to absence of security and access to productive resources including education, working skill and tools, political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions. Poverty in Nigeria is at an alarming rate, more than 70% of Nigerians lack the usual or socially acceptable amount of money, in fact they are living on less than one dollar per day or material possessions needed to live a happy life (Ajakaiye and Adeyeye 2001 in Gbosi, 2004).

## Public Libraries

The public library is an institution established, supported and funded by the community either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization (Sauri, 2001). It is regarded as a public university where every member of the society goes in, to search for information. Ahmad (2010) defines public library as the type established to serve the generality of the residents of a given community regardless of their race, tribe, religion and or political affiliation.

## Functions of Public Libraries

Public libraries functions as an intellectual powerhouse aspiring to meet the intellectual, educational, recreational, informational and cultural requirements of the people. Information is invaluable at all times and in all circumstances as well as a vital tool for development. For any country to develop it needs to have and provide relevant and updated and adequate information on food security, democracy, health and gender equality etc. Public libraries can provide such access to information that will enable people lead gainful lives as they are skilled at acquiring, organizing, offering for use and publicly preserving materials irrespective of the form in which it is packaged in such a way that when it is needed it can be found and put to use (Karki, 2006).

The various objectives and functions of the public library according to Philips (2001) IFLA/UNESCO guidelines for development serves as:

- a. Center for self-education
- b. Center for lifelong learning
- c. Information center
- d. Recreational center
- e. Society Cultural center
- f. Center for support and economic development

- g. Center for communication skills development
- h. Center for strengthening democratic spirit

## Poverty

The prevalence of mass poverty reflects the poor management and performance of the nation's economy. The level of economic performance of any country depends primarily on two factors. These are the level of resources available relative to the population and the level of productivity (Kehinde, 2015). The term poverty is a relative term; Taiwo (2016) opines that there is hardly a universal way of defining poverty because it affects many aspects of human conditions. Poverty can therefore be regarded as a condition in which people live below specified minimum income level and are unable to provide the basic necessities of life needed for an acceptable standard of living. Uffort (2007) cited in Taiwo and Agwu (2016) views poverty as perceived by many as not just lack of money, food and assets but also as lack of access to education and health care and lack of security, dignity and independence. Therefore, poverty is massive, pervasive and chronic, and engulfing a large proportion of the society. Poverty has diverse economic and social dimensions that explain its manifestations in lack of income and insufficient productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihood.

Poverty can manifest itself in many forms, however, poverty indicators include among others hunger and malnutrition, limited or lack of access to quality education and basic services, increased morbidity and mortality which occur as a result of illness, inadequate housing, homelessness, unsafe environment and social discrimination (Agumagu, (2000) cited in Ebenehi, et al, 2015).

## Poverty Eradication

It is a process of minimizing/reducing the impact of a negative condition of poverty. Poverty eradication is the total elimination of poverty. It is a set of economical and humanitarian, measures that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty in the Nigerian society, however, poverty can only be alleviated but not eradicated because chronic poverty has transmitted from generation to generation, and if poverty is not alleviated, Nigeria won't be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Kehinde, 2015).

### Poverty Eradication Programmes in Nigeria

In order to free people from poverty or reduce it to the lowest level there is the need for empowerment. Abadzi (2005) conceives empowerment as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform with these choices into desired actions or outcomes. He is of the opinion that empowering the poor should have a closer relationship with improving project performance and governance and growth that is pro-poor. This led to the establishment of diverse poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, which includes the following:

- ADP: Agricultural Development Project
- Operation Feed the Nation
- SAP: Structural Adjustment Programme
- PAP: Poverty Alleviation Programme
- Rural Banking Scheme
- SMEDAN: Small and Medium Scale Enterprise development agency in Nigeria)
- NDE: National Directorate of Employment
- PHC: Primary Health Care
- DFFRI: Directorate of Road and Rural Infrastructure
- NAPEP: National Poverty Alleviation Programme in January 2001

The following sectors were integrated

- YES: Youth Empowerment Scheme (providing unemployed youths with skills acquisition, employment and wealth generation. To achieve this, it was further subdivided into
- CAP: Capital Acquisition Programme
- MAP: Mandatory Attachment Programme
- CDP: Credit Delivery Programme
- SOWESS: Social Welfare Scheme
- NEEDS: National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy established in 2004 with priorities to wealth creation, employment generation, poverty alleviation, corruption elimination and general value re-orientation.

### **Contributions of Public Libraries in Eradicating Poverty in Nigerian Society in the 21st Century**

Public libraries are agents of social, political, cultural and economic revolution in our societies as well as custodians of knowledge and information for present and future generations. Their doors are open to the generality of the members of the society. Basri et al (2012) affirms that the establishment of informatics of information provision stems out from the library as it has the expertise in acquiring, disseminating, organizing and administrating information. Libraries and information center, as well as information and knowledge are tools and aspects that steer the eradication of poverty. Libraries through adoption of more community based approaches can be eradicate poverty systematically and totally (Mbabaali, 2016).

Hence, public libraries in Nigeria can play a greater role in eradicating poverty through the provision of the following library and information services:

- i. **The provision of Special Collection:** Agreements, charters, charts, white papers and legislations on poverty eradication can be acquired, processed and made available to library customers, these collection, if properly maintained and preserved can be presented to customers. Abubakar (2012)

- suggests that to eradicate poverty in the Nigerian society, the public library should create a special collection for poverty alleviation programmes display to customers.
- ii. **Public Libraries Should Serve as Entrepreneurship Centre.** This library should organize conferences, seminars and workshops on entrepreneurship programmes with the aim of educating and informing people, especially the rural dwellers, on the need of being entrepreneurial and productive. This according to Abubakar (2012) could likely minimize the rate of poverty and too much dependence on the government. Saliu (1999) posits that "public libraries can develop local economic capabilities by making available necessary information on income generating projects, self-employment activities, credit facilities, state assistance schemes, etc."
- iii. **Indexing and Abstracting Services:** An index is a systematic guide to the text of any matter or to the content of entries with headings arranged alphabetically or other chosen order with references showing where each item indexed is located (Harrods, 1972). Indexes therefore, are a pointer or a guide to the actual text and location in a literature. Indexing is one of the ways of disseminating information by the librarians. Information on poverty eradication programmes can be indexed from newspapers, magazines and text books. and made readily available to the public library customers. Abstract is an intellectual summary of the content of a material. Public libraries can form their book of abstract on poverty eradication programmes in Nigerian society by extracting the right and relevant information on poverty eradication strategies and techniques from newspapers, journals, magazines, conference papers, proceedings, annual reports, text books, internet and other sources of information and disseminate to library clients especially community members.
- iv. **Use of Audio Visual Materials:** Every functional Public library should establish and maintain a media unit/section containing films, animations, CDs, DVDs, cassettes, decoders, players, videos etc. these resources combine both the sense

of seeing and hearing. Most of the people prefer what they see and hear particularly the children and youth. These information resources contain valuable information on poverty eradication strategies and techniques. Oyeronke (2012) stresses that documentary CDs, DVDs, audio tapes or video cassettes on how to start and maintain small businesses should form part of the public libraries audio-visual collections. The biographies of successful entrepreneurs, governmental and nongovernmental organizations programmes on poverty eradication and many more can be shown to the public library customers in the Nigerian society from time to time by the libraries so as to equip them and improve their knowledge, skills and understandings on poverty eradication techniques.

- v. **Photocopying Services:** Periodicals/serials collection such as newspapers, journals, magazines, bulletins, digest etc contains current, educative and valuable information on poverty eradication programmes. Information on entrepreneurship programmes and schemes with the aim of educating and informing customers on the relevant and required poverty eradication practices, entrepreneurial skills and productivity like saving practices, collective bargaining powers through formation of saving and credit cooperatives (SAACOs) and unionized markets or associations (Mbabaali, 2016). Hence, Nigeria public libraries, after acquiring and processing these information resources, can photocopy current, relevant and valuable information on poverty eradication strategies and techniques and place it on the notice board and bill boards. They can also reach their target customers through the use of selective dissemination of information (SDI) via social media platforms. (Carba, 2010).
- vi. **Newspaper Scraps:** It is also a very attractive and interesting way of disseminating information by libraries. Information on poverty eradication strategies and techniques, can be cut from dailies and placed on an album. Nigerian libraries particularly public libraries should adopt this library and information service since it is simple, cheaper, and easy to

- use and save the time of both the librarians and customers.
- vii. **Exhibition:** This is a process of displaying the works of art, history and culture, subject of special interest etc. to the public for a limited period of time. It will assist the public libraries to publicize the information resources available in them. Book titles, journals, periodical/serial collection, conference papers, annual reports and any other relevant information resource on poverty eradication strategies and techniques can be displayed and made known to the Nigerian public library customers by the libraries through various ways such as bulletin board, radio, television, social media etc.
- viii. **Pictures:** According to Garba (2010) pictures are valuable information resources acquired, processed and maintained by libraries. Nigerian public libraries can acquire such pictures; an album can be created from such pictures on various types of entrepreneurial skills and strategies to educate and enlighten the society.
- ix. **Interlibrary Loan:** Various types of interactions and exchanges can exist between libraries particularly those of similar interest, cooperation between them is highly recommended for the maximum use of stock. A library can visit or borrow from the stock of another library to satisfy customers information needs. This can best be achieved via the internet. Hence libraries can visit the stock/website of other libraries to satisfy users' information need on poverty eradication strategies and techniques.
- x. **Social Media:** such as twitter, wiki, Facebook, WhatsApp, Flickr, RSS Feeds and Blogs can be used by the public library in dissemination of information on poverty eradication strategies and techniques to their customers.

## Conclusion

It is strongly believed that provision of the right information in the right format at the right time to the right people to make a better decision and/or choice and live as responsible citizens is

an important function of the library. The ultimate goal of public libraries is to satisfy the information needs of the serving community and to make great impact on them positively. Evidently, to eradicate poverty in the Nigerian society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public libraries have a greater role to play in equipping the public with entrepreneurial skills needed to overcome these challenges and make a top priority to provide the right, complete, relevant and current information on poverty eradication, youth empowerment, entrepreneurship etc to the society.

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