

LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SERVICES AS TOOL FOR SUSTAINING TRUE DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

By

KATAMBA ABUBAKAR SAKA (PH.D)¹

RITA OTIBHOR SALAMI (MRS)²

PHILIP U. AKOR (PH.D)³

OMALI ISA ABU (MR.)⁴

Federal University of Technology, Minna, Nigeria

07038706880

s.katamba@futminna.edu.ng

Abstract

The paper provide highlight on the role of information in decision making which enhances full participation of citizens in democracy so that they can choose the leader they like through voting. Nigerian libraries (schools, academic, public and national) are expected to acquire, stock and provide current materials relevant to political information, civic duties and democracy in Nigeria. Libraries generally should collect materials made up books, posters, pamphlets, video, computer disc, online resources reflecting political information, civic duties, etc. They are to provide public enlightenment, adult literacy programme for citizens, help in conflict resolution by providing adequate political and legal information to judges and lawyers, etc. Internet services can also be offered in libraries. National Library of Nigeria collects information materials which should include those of democracy from publishers and compile bibliography. Inhibiting factors to the provision of libraries and information services include: inaccessibility to information by Nigerians, inadequate ICT facilities, inadequate public and school libraries in Nigeria. Recommendations are proffered amongst include, librarians should establish relationship with their parent institutions; full approval of the freedom of information bill; legislation on public and school libraries, societal re-orientation and information services in the current democratic culture among Nigerian societies.

Keywords: *Information, Libraries, Nigeria, Democracy*

Introduction

Every organization, institution society or country consists of abundant resources which further consist of

human and material resources. Basically the set objectives of any institution or country can be attained only if these two categories of resources are well-mobilized and managed. This entails

that the development of any nation depend on how well the human resources are well taken care off in terms of economic, social, political, education etc. Thus there is great relationship between the government and the governed. It is therefore expected that the government of any nation should not only inform the citizens or governed about its development and activities but also the citizens should be given the opportunity to participate in the affairs of the country as they affect their lives. This opportunity can be termed as participatory democracy. According to Ngoli, Obinauji and Bethel (2014) states that participatory democracy is a democracy whereby people are given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making that affects their lives.

The truth of the matter is that the Nigerian populace particularly the governed and the rural dwellers neither knew much nor be allowed to exercise their power in the democratization processes. This situation is associated with the fact that Nigerian libraries especially public and schools are not adequately equipped to perform the expected roles that will keep the electorates abreast of the democratization culture/processes such as conflict resolution, voter education, expected roles of legislators, etc.

The concept of government as an institution in any country is concerned with the formulation and implementation of policies and laws for the citizens, provision of social amenities and protection of lives and properties of citizens. As an institution of a country more especially in Nigeria,

there exist three (3) organs or arms of Government – Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. Each of these organs or arms functions according to the constitution. Thus, the functions of modern government include those of law making, provision of social amenities, economic activities, maintenance of law and order, defence of the country, protection of lives and property and employment etc (Dibie, 2012; Amended Constitution, 2011).

Since 1960 there are various systems of government and their mode of operation varies from one country to another. Thus, some of these systems practiced in Nigeria since 1960 include:- federal, presidential, parliamentary or cabinet, republican, military-in-government (Dibie, 2012), democracy as well as civil-military rule. A civil-military rule is a system of government where civilian and military administration is being practised side-by-side e.g. The state governors are elected while the Head of State, Service Chiefs and Supreme Military Council are military personnel in uniform e.g. This system of government was practised by president Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. From the above listed systems of government, democracy is the best and being practised in most countries of the world today.

In Federal system of government there is division of power among the three tiers of the government. Presidential system of government is one whereby the president of a country is also the head of state e.g. President Shehu Shagari 1978 -1983; President Olusegun Obansajo 1999 -2007. In Parliamentary or Cabinet System head of state is

different from the head of government. The first Republic in Nigeria (1963 - 1966) operated this system of government.

Republican government is the one by which a country headed by a president with a fixed term e.g. in Nigeria we have Alhaji Shehu Shagari 1979 -1983 and Olusegun Obasanjo 1999 -2007 etc. Military in government is a system of government by which Military take over the affairs of a country such as in 1966, 1983 and 1985 respectively.

Concept of Democracy

The concept of democracy according to Dibia (2012) originated from two Greek words "Demo" people and "Kratia" government. The two words "Demo" and "Kratia" developed into the word, democracy. Some of the characteristics of democracy include: right to vote or be voted for; right to choose own candidates/support political parties; secret balloting; consideration of the right of majority and minority, decision making and above all provision of opportunities. The term democracy can be defined as government of the people by the people and for the people i.e. government on behalf of the people; representative government, people of high principle. The only way by which democracy can be exercised by citizens of any country is through free and free election. It is therefore essential for all qualified citizens to exercise his/her power through voting the right candidates of choice or be voted for. It is right that every qualified voter should exercise their rights by voting the leaders they like (Dibia 2012). For the sustenance of true democracy, the electorates must be allowed to have full participation i.e. to have a say and above

all have free access to political information. Thus, Akin (2005) as cited by Madumere (2013) was of the view that true democracy can be possible where there is free press, an independent judiciary and free and fair election, appreciable wage, good affordable housing, etc.

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Democracy has been considered as the best form of government because of the principle of separation of powers, with corresponding checks and balance that is being exercised by arms of government. Democracy could be direct or indirect from time to time to discuss issues affecting the community. Direct democracy is an idea of government by which people meet regularly to discuss issues affecting the community. Indirect democracy is a type of democracy by which citizens are free to choose their own candidates that will represent them at the government (Dibia, 2012).

Nigeria has attached importance to democracy such that since 29th May 1999 and 29th May of every year is now considered as the democracy day. This was initiated by the then head of state General Abdulsalam Abubakar as he handed over to democratically- elected President Olusegun Obasanjo.

However, the only way by which citizens can exercise their right is through free and fair election and ensure participating democracy whereby citizens are involved in all decisions affecting their lives. Thus

government discharges its function according to the mandate of the citizens (electorate). (Ngozi, Obinauju and Bethel, 2014)

Elections into local, state and national levels are usually conducted by State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) respectively, and according to Madumere and Eze (2013) different appointment levels exist in Nigerian democracy. The Federal, State and Local Government political appointment levels have different characteristics. At the federal level, there are the President, Vice-president, National Assembly (upper and lower chambers) as well as ministerial appointment level. At state level, we have governors, deputy governors, House of Assembly members and commissioner appointment level. At local government appointment level, we have chairman, vice-chairman and councillors appointment level.

As at 2003, Nigeria was able to witness three republics (1960s, 1970s/1980s and 1990s/2000s) and with seventeen years of active democratic experience being characterised by military coup. This makes Nigerian state ineffective especially with the executive arm of government. The ineffectiveness was caused by the fact that the executive arm of government could not obey the constitution; judiciary was not allowed to function independently and there was corrupt practices on the part of public officers and legislatures; poverty and lack of accountability, etc (Ojiakor, 2012).

From the above mentioned weaknesses and short-comings surrounding the Nigerian democratic culture, there is the urgent need for Nigerian populace particularly the electorates to be well-informed on the activities of government, democratization culture and processes while libraries discharge their roles of being custodian and disseminator of current and reliable political information on voter education, conflict resolution.

The Objectives of this paper are to

- Review the expected roles of information in Nigerian democracy
- Examine the expected roles and services offer by Nigerian libraries in sustaining the true democracy in Nigeria
- Identify the inhibiting factors to the provision of libraries and information services in sustaining true democracy in Nigeria.

Information and Nigerian Democracy

The concept of information can be seen as processed data from which meaning can be derived; it is an essential ingredient to decision-making; it reduces uncertainty; conflict resolution and enhances higher productivity level. For true democracy to be sustained, there is the need for freedom of information; thus Kareem (2014) as cited in Davis (2007) maintain that democratization process will include among others "free movement of information flow, quick access to information and wide use of updated information for the needs of education, science, culture and economic" P.153. To ensure true democracy in Nigeria,

information and libraries cannot be ignore because of their dormant position in the society as the 21st century lay emphasis on the information, infact being called "information age".

In the last century, four factors of production (land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship) exist. In this 21st century, the concept of information was added while information and entrepreneurship were accorded high priority. Therefore, for true democracy to be sustained in Nigeria, there should be easy accessibility to updated and relevant information in whatever format they exist. For example, the last Presidential/National Assembly elections that took place, results were announced "live" through television. Results were also accessed through internet.

Political information can be accessed through library resources, internet while information obtained from these sources can help resolve political conflict. However, the freedom of information law as observed by Osaigwe (2011) will help to reduce corruption thereby enhances transparency as the law guaranty every Nigerian access to information on mandate, roles and responsibilities of public institutions.

Libraries and Nigerian Democracy

Libraries since the time in memorial are charged with the responsibilities of selecting and acquiring; processing, storage and make information/information materials for users who need them. Libraries are charged with numerous roles which will help to sustain true democracy in

Nigeria. Kareem (2014) as cited in Davis (2007) opined that democratization process will include free movement of information flow; quick and easy access to information and wide use of updated information for the needs of education, science, culture and economics. It is therefore the role of librarian to acquire collections made up of books, posters, audio cassette technology, video, compact disc not only reflect or contain political information but those information resources should be loan out to users so as to educate them on electoral process and democracy. The public libraries should rise up to this challenge (Madumere and Eze, 2013).

The political education or voter education should begin at both primary and secondary schools. The curriculum should include civic education, social studies and should be taught to pupils/students. On the other hand, the school libraries must be well-equipped with adequate but relevant collections in civic education, social studies and popular newspaper collection. Whenever pupils/students are able to consult these resources, they will get to know/identify their civic roles (Ijatuyi and Adebayo 2006; Bitagi and Saka, 2011).

Public libraries are open to every citizen regardless of tribe or gender and hence are charged with the responsibilities of making available publications on political information emanating from INEC as well as providing archival materials that are relevant to the present Nigerian setting (Bitagi and Saka, 2011). Public libraries can from time to time display videos, films of past premiers, prime ministers to the defunct

regions. This is to keep citizens awareness of the roles these past leaders played in the democratic culture of Nigeria.

Since majority of Nigerian population and about 75% of Nigerians resides in rural areas whose major occupation is agriculture (farming), there is the need to establish libraries in various wards/district headquarters. These libraries should be equipped with publication emanating from INEC (voter education) but such publication should be translated into major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo). The rural libraries should be equipped with electronic gadgets (films, television and video) whereby films containing the activities performed by our past regional leaders (Sir, Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikwe, etc) can be shown to rural dwellers. This can give them sense of direction in electing the right candidates to represent their interest in given constituencies.

It is well known fact that most of the committee chairmen at National and State House of Assemblies are people with higher qualifications who are university graduates. The general studies department or unit of various institutions of higher learning should include civic/ political education into their curricular (Ijatuyi and Adebayo 2006) while libraries attached to them should acquire current materials to include those of political science, politics INEC, voter/political education. In university libraries where library of congress classification is being used, schedules such as - political science, public administration should contain

relevant documents in Nigerian political scene. Undergraduates can learn from the GST courses taught and the information materials consulted would enable them have focus on future political ambition.

There are three arms of government (executive, legislative and judiciary) and publications emanating from them are called executive, legislative and judiciary publication). There is no doubt that each of these arms of government have library with the associated documents (Saka, 2010). The legislative libraries are usually located or housed within the State House of Assembly and the National Assembly. The legislative libraries are expected to collect or acquire process, store and provide documents emanating from legislative debates, proceedings and deliberations (bills, debates, constitutions, etc). These libraries are expected to provide these collections to parliamentarians or legislators to enable them consult and have more ideas on how they are to ensure that the interest of their electorates/their constituencies are catered for in the dividends of democracy.

The National Library of Nigeria is charged with legal responsibility of acquiring published materials by Nigerians wherever they live. To this end, it is expected that the National Bibliographic Centre collect and record all the published materials including those of political science, politics, e-government, INEC and other related collections. The soft copies of these collections can be made available through internet or virtual/e-library.

General Roles of Libraries in the Democratization Process in Nigeria

Although one of the characteristics of democracy is the provision of opportunities for all individual particularly in the access knowledge and free education, have a say in work place, safeguard against slavery, fair working conditions

Information Service - Libraries are expected to provide information services such as circulation, reference, user education, internet services, bibliographic, referral services to the generality of mankind in order to meet their information needs (Kareem, 2014).

Public Enlightenment - Libraries need to enlighten the public on the political and social activities of the society and government on the need to cultivate reading culture. Public libraries should be mandated to display list of political parties, their manifestations, posters as well as the candidates' citations.

Adult Education - The public and rural libraries should provide adult literary class for adults in public and rural libraries. This is to enable them read and write. For illiterates, the librarian should teach them simple arithmetic and English language in the areas of writing numbers, 26 alphabetical letters, spelling and identifying some letters. Live cinema, film and video show could be offered to all library users on past and recent voting or democratization processes in Nigeria.

Conflict Resolution - Libraries and information services need to be provided to reduce conflict if possible to resolve conflict. It is believed that conflict can arise due to "inadequate information on the electoral process" and to resolve the conflict, lawyers and

judges need adequate legal information (Kareem, 2014).

Internet Services - Libraries can create internet so that the Nigerian populace can be connected to the entire world. The political activities that took place recently were viewed by people through internet. People can effectively derive benefit from internet services if internet section/café are created within libraries. The National Library of Nigeria for example renders a cost effective access to wide ranges of information on the web and on the VSAT powered system whereby 14 users can make online bibliographic information search; scanning and printing documents is another internet services offered (Amen, 2007)

E-mail: Electorates can stay in their doorstep with personal computers and send inquires, (e-mail on democratic process, election results, etc and receive feedback in few minutes). Video conferencing can be organized whereby communicators can exchange views on computers (Adegboye, 2012)

Inhibiting Factors to the Provision of Libraries and Information Service

Libraries can play vital roles in ensuring true democracy in Nigeria though there are inhibiting factors such as:-

1. **Inaccessibility to Information:-** Despite emphasis laid on information in the 21st century, rural dwellers and if some urban dwellers lack easy access to political information.
2. **Inadequate ICT facilities and Internet Services:** Because of erratic power supply poor network services; capital intensive nature of ICT and technical know-how; most

Nigerian libraries and Nigerians can neither establish internet nor respectively have access to internet services. The ICT facilities are not adequate to meet the information needs of users (Ngozi, Obinaiju and Bethel, 2014).

3. Situation analysis of public and school libraries: Public and School libraries in Nigeria cannot meet up with the information needs of users. For example, Eze (2013) reported that public library in Nsukka was turned to a filling station, while part of the building was re-build and turned to a senatorial office. The only public library in Imo state was demolished and replace with a church part. The research conducted by Saka and Mohammed (2009) showed that some school libraries in Minna metropolis were converted to class/staff rooms simply because the school run shortage of classrooms; while the private primary schools have neither adequate libraries nor acquire information resources due to the un-awareness about the collection development policy (Bitagi, Saka and Umar, 2014).

Conclusion

True democracy can be attained only if Nigerian libraries are well equipped

with both the print and internet facilities. Nigerian libraries are expected to provide information resources on civic and voter education, conflict resolution, public enlightenment programme; activities of government with free access to all as these would ensure full participatory democracy thus given equal opportunity to contribute towards true democracy in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the aforementioned roles of libraries and inhibiting factors in the provision of library and information services, the paper suggests that:

1. Public relations and advocacy: Librarians should establish relationship with their parent institutions by lobbying for fund and for adequate library services.
2. Freedom of information bill be fully approved and implemented so that there should be full public access to information.
3. There should be legislation on public and school libraries so as to commit government in the areas of funding, accommodation, services, staffing, etc.
4. There should be societal re-orientation on the need for information and libraries in the current democratic culture within Nigerian societies.

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