STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING SUFFICIENT DELIVERY OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN NIGERIA BY THE YEAR 2020

BY

ABUBAKAR MOHAMMED BITAGI*

Abstract

This paper highlighted the need to provide improved library and information services in Nigeria by the year 2020. The extents to which the Federal and State Governments have tried to provide such services are discussed. It was however, observed that the efforts made so far have not yielded the desired results and therefore, library and information services, as at present are still at its very low ebb. However, basic strategies for positive results such as massive establishment of libraries, library cooperation, adequate funding, training of professionals and utilization of Information and Communication Technology were advocated. The paper concluded that in order to achieve the objective of providing adequate Library and Information Service in Nigeria by the year 2020 funding among others, must be given due priority that it deserves.

Introduction

The need to provide library and information services to all nooks and crannies of the country by the year 2020 apart from achieving self reliance in information creation, provision and utilization is also aimed at realizing the Millennium Development Goals, an eight point agenda which according to Ochogwu (2007) was declared in September, 2000 and of which 190 countries of the world including Nigeria subscribed to. According to him, the eight points agenda include to:

*ABUBAKAR is from Federal University of Technology Library, Minna, Nigeria; and currently a Ph.D. student at University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development (P.16)

A casual look at the above objectives which were meant to be achieved by the year 2015 shows that there is no specific mention and emphasis on the provision of library and information services. This is a reflection of the fact that it is not only in Nigeria or development countries, even the developed world sometimes treat library and information services as a secondary or even tertiary objective. However, the realization of this serious omission, according to Ochogwu (2007) may have prompted the organisation of two World Summits on the Information Society and in ICTs held in Geneva in 2003 and Morocco in 2005 to enhance the delivery of information services to society aimed at creating the information or knowledge society.

In Nigeria, some efforts have been made by the Federal, States and Local Government Areas throughout the country and by organisations and individuals to provide library and information services, but the efforts have not achieved the desired goals because of the basic fact that libraries and information centers so far established are not enough to meet the information needs of the entire population of the country which is about 140 million. This could be because the enabling laws such as the National Library Act of 1964 (Omolayole 2003) and various states laws which provide that in addition to the board headquarters, there shall be established   branches of those libraries in each state capital and local government headquarters respectively, have not been implemented to the letter. Also, not adequately implemented is the National Policy of Education (2004) provision that proprietors of schools (be it government, organisations or individuals) shall provide functional libraries in all educational institutions in accordance with established standards.

From the above analysis, it could be observed that the level of library and information services in Nigeria is still at its very low ebb. This is to say that the library and information user communities, such as those in the professional lines or disciplines –medicine, law, agriculture et.c; educational institutions like Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, Secondary and Primary School etc; geographical locations – towns, Local government Areas, States, zones etc; and the disadvantaged user communities - prisons,

hospitals, women in purdah; physically handicapped "(the deaf, the cripple the blind and dumb)' (Ochogwu, 2009 P.3) are currently not provided with adequate library and information services that could meet with the expected ideals of 2020, the year which Nigeria hope to be among the world's 20 best economies. The question to be asked therefore is what strategies need to be put in place in order to realize or achieve adequate library and information services in Nigeria by the year 2020. This paper is dedicated to providing answers to this question.

Basic Strategies for Positive Results

Massive Establishment of Libraries

The library, either as an institution in itself or integral part of another institution or organisation, from the early ages is strategic in collecting and preserving historical documents and facts that are made available to people not only to know their past but also what the present has in all ramifications of development. Okojie (2007) supported this notion when she observed that libraries are an integral part of the development process and therefore essential for attaining agreed development goals and objectives. In view of this therefore, the establishment of libraries by the Federal, State, and Local governments, organisations, professions and individuals etc. has become imperative if Nigerian citizens are to have access to and utilize the information resources and services provided by libraries. This follows that since the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) provides for a Federal Capital Territory with six Area Councils, thirty six states and seven hundred and sixty eight Local Government Areas, there should be one National library headquarters at Abuja with forty two (42) branches in the area councils and all state capitals. Additionally, there should be thirty six (36) state library headquarters with seven hundred and sixty eight (768) branches across the country. This will bring the total to eight hundred and four (804) public libraries across the country. It is also expected that the local government areas will contribute their quarter in the development of libraries by establishing information centres in each of their wards so as to provide needed information service to the rural populace. By so doing, it is assumed that by the year 2020, not only will there be a good network of public libraries and information centers across the country but also most Nigerians will be kept informed about issues that affect them in their professional and other practices.

Mobile library services which are supposed to be a function of both the Federal and State Governments should be introduced to enhance services from one part of the state to the other.

In addition to the above network of libraries, libraries in institutions of higher learning should be expanded and equipped to provide more efficient services. Additionally, the unavailable school libraries must be built and equipment in all primary and post primary institutions to enable the teachers and students benefit from library and information services.

Furthermore, libraries should be built in hospitals, social welfare centers and related places to facilitate easy access to library and information services by the sick, prisoners, the handicapped, the women in purdah etc.

Meanwhile, to achieve the efficiency expected of all types of libraries and information centres proposed above, there should be consortia of libraries that have similar or same objectives. Thus all national libraries; state libraries; academic and special libraries should not only be automated but also networked to enable them share their available facilities and services.

It is the belief of this author that by the time these steps are taken, no one in the society will be left in doubt of what the library is, what it has to offer and where to get the desired information.

Library Cooperation

Library cooperation or cooperation among people generally so as to achieve given objectives is as old as the profession of librarianship and indeed the existence of mankind on earth. Ojo- Iginoba (1995) argued in the same direction when he said cooperation is a social activity which is as old as human history. According to him, from time immemorial, man has always sought cooperation from his neighbors to achieve what he could not do alone himself. Thus man co-operated with neighbors to build e.g houses for themselves.

Cooperation among libraries becomes necessary because of the basic fact that no single library, however big and owned by whosoever has the capacity of providing the needed resources and services expected from the user community. The complexity of modern librarianship, in terms of the resources to be provided, accessibility of needed information, the mass of available literature in individual disciplines, the financial resources needed to provide resources and services, the quality of human resources needed for such services etc. have all gone along way to re-emphasize that if most Nigerians are to access quality library resources and services by the year 2020, then all the libraries must cooperate by making available their resources and services to each other.

Currently, library cooperation, because of its complexity is referred to as resource sharing. Resource sharing is as a result of what Ejimofo and Ohaji (2007) termed as the revolutionary journey from traditional libraries to the digital libraries. Resource sharing is thus an activity which makes it possible for present day libraries to share their resources, including materials and services using Information and Communication technologies (ICT). However, when we talk of the gains by the local citizens of Nigerians living in typical villages through the ICT, we may be talking of another century due to lack of infrastructural support for such services. Under normal circumstances however, library cooperation; as itemized by Ojo-Igbinoba (1995) should embrace interlibrary lending, joint publications, interlibrary study facilities, cooperative acquisition scheme, cooperative storage scheme facilities, cooperative and centralized cataloging (and or general processing), transfer of materials, regional cooperation, library research and professional associations. All those activities, including those that may be identified by other researchers have to be embarked upon if library and information services are to be delivered adequately in Nigeria by the year 2020.

Funding

The provision of reliable library and information resources and services in Nigeria by the year 2020 is no longer the problem of policy making, as provisions establishing our various libraries have spelt out the terms under which these could be achieved. The major problem is provision of adequate funding to implement polices that have been put in place. Funding for providing physical facilities such as library building, printed and non-printed information resources; supportive facilities such as comfortable tables, chairs, lighting and employment of experienced and qualified professionals are necessary impetus in the realization of this noble objective. Certainly, it will not be out of place to assume that the exercise will be a total failure if desired funding from parent organisations is not provided.

Training of Professionals.

Training and retraining of professionals make it possible to up-date knowledge in various shades of activities in the profession. For librarians to meet with current demand of the services that they have to offer and efficient use of library equipment, such as ICT, they must be trained continuously through acquisition of higher degrees, attendance to conferences, workshops and seminars within and outside the country. It is only when this is achieved that librarians will be equal to the challenges of meeting the goals of vision 2020.

Training on the other hand, has to do with the type of knowledge acquired in library schools. To support the purpose of vision 2020, library schools in Nigeria must reorganize their curricula to cover current trends in the profession. Mohammed (2008) once observed

that there is lack of adequate training of librarians to meet the needs and current challenges in information management. According to him, most library schools only offer the theoretical types of knowledge to potential librarians and information scientists. More sympathetically, Oketunji (1999) has earlier observed that up till now, there is no deliberate policy of ensuring that Information Technology forms part of library schools curricula"

It is reasonable therefore, to argue that for adequate delivery of library and information services to Nigerians by the year 2020 librarians must be adequately trained while the library schools should be equipped with modern ICT facilities to train potential librarians.

Reducing Literacy Level to the Barest Minimum

Despite all the efforts made by all the tiers of government to ensure that every member of the society is literate through various programmes such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) of the 70s, Universal Basic Education (UBE), Adult Education programmes and pastoral or Nomadic Education for Fulanis, majority of Nigerians, especially in the rural areas remain stack illiterates.

Illiteracy is one of the factors that will hinder the effective delivery of library and information service in Nigeria by the year 2020. In view of that, more proactive effort need to be put in place to ensure that every member of the society becomes literate before the magic year so that the proposed library and information services could be adequately utilized throughout the country.

Among efforts to be adopted throughout the country in ensuring that majority of Nigerians are literate by the year 2020 is to introduce an informal education system to be known as Rural Education Scheme (RES). This scheme should be aimed at providing an opportunity for people in the rural areas, especially farmers, to be taught at convenient times either in the early mornings ort late evenings before or after the farm work. This calls for mass recruitment of qualified teachers with minimum qualification of National Certificate of Education (NCE).

Marketing Library Services

Linked with the literacy level of Nigerians is the ignorance exhibited about the availability and use of library and information services by the greater population of Nigerians. In fact, even the literates or elites sometimes wonder what role the library has got to play in the socio-economic, political, cultural, scientific and technological upliftment of the society. To change this negative perception of the role of the library, there is need for massive

advertisement and or marketing of the profession and its services. This is what proactive librarianship should set out to achieve, bringing knowledge and services to the entire populace. In this direction Eze (2010) identified six strategies for marketing library and information services in the information age. According to him; these include:

1. Effective customer relations management – all libraries and information centres should have dedicated staff at the public area to be engaged in customer relations.

2. Total commitment to customer (user) satisfaction – all personnel of the library should gear effort towards satisfying the information needs of the library users.

3. Effective public relations management – the library needs to build goodwill, reputation and better public image which are necessary for its continued existence.

4. Constant user analysis – to help librarians know the users, their likes and dislikes, their information needs, how and where they want information and in what format.

5. Application of marketing concept – instead of just trying to get users to read what the library has, a marketing oriented library tries to offer the users what they need and desire.

6. Commitment to Total Quality Management (TQM)- TQM should guarantee that activities within the library system happen the way they have been planned in order to meet corporate objectives of the library (pp.8-10).

In addition to the above, Hassan (2010) also identified that library and information services that could be fee based are categorized into production, organisation and retrieval of information. According to him, production of information includes research, abstracting, bibliographies, Current Awareness Service (CAS), directory compilation, publishing, translation services and writing/editing/reviewing. The second category, organization of information include consultancy service, collection organisation, record management, free lancing, cataloguing and classification and data base design. The last sets of services on which fees could be charged, information retrieval include document delivery and literature searching.

From the findings of the duo above, it could be deduced that with their implementation, library and information services will not only be brought to the knowledge of most Nigerians but also there will be improvement in the financial base of libraries and information centres in Nigeria come the year 2020.

Monitoring Committee on Library and Information Services

In order to ensure that the needed library and information services are provided and received in all the nooks and crannies of the country, all tiers of government should establish monitoring committees charged with the responsibility of supervising and making sure that all library projects in public places, institutions and organizations are adequately funded and funds used according to expectations. The committee should also other areas where library services should be provided and identify how each should be successfully carried out, including sources of funding.

Change of Attitude Towards the Profession by Professionals

Ochogwu (2007 P.19) quoted Ochogwu and Gwarzo (2002) as having identified three types of library and information practitioners. These according to them are the passive, reactive and proactive professionals. They argued that the passive professionals are more concerned with gathering of information resources without caring whether they are used or not. The authors observed that a good number of our professionals belong to this group. The reactive type of professionals are said to react to users information need if they care to visit library. If they don't, the librarians remain in the library as redundants. Also, many professionals are said to belong to this group. The third groups of professionals belong to the proactive group and are said to be in the minority and often concerned with diagnosing the needs of the communities and customize services to them. From the above analysis, the situation calls for all or most of the library and information services professionals to realize the need and actually belong to the group of proactive professionals if library and information services are to reach most Nigerians by the year 2020.

Research in Librarianship

Research into the profession, at this point in time has become imperative to pave way for its growth. This is simply by identifying those problems that have nearly stagnated the practice of the profession as it should be and proffering solutions to them so that majority of Nigerians could have access to library and information services. In trying to highlight the importance of research to the profession, Busha and Harter (1980) broadly defined it as the systematic quest for knowledge. However, our Nigerian situation begs for a more comprehensive definition which is provided by Best and Kahn (1998) in Aina (2002). According to the authors, research is the systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development of generalizations, principles, theories resulting in prediction and ultimate control of many events that may be consequences or causes of specific activities. This is what librarians in Nigeria need to do for effective preparation for service to all by the year 2020.

User Education

User education or library orientation is s major aspect of librarianship that makes it possible to inform the users what the library has in its collection, where they are to be found in the library and how to use them effectively. For efficient utilization of library and information resources therefore, it is imperative that the actual and potential users are adequately informed. Librarians should endeavour to give in their best to the users to ensure that the aims for which the library is established are achieved. The programmes of the user education should be embracive to also include how to find desired information and evaluative method so as to meet objectives for which information is sought. User education is therefore necessary for all Nigerian citizens if library and information services are to be provided to most Nigerians by the year 2020.

Repackaging of Information

It is the belief of this writer that different communities in Nigeria need different information to perform their respective duties. Since most rural people, who are the majority are illiterate, it becomes necessary to repackage information in various forms for their maximum utilization. Typical rural farmers probably need a practical demonstration through posters, bill boards and films on how to even plant their crops to achieve maximum production etc. Igbeka (2008) argued that Information Repackaging (IR) in a library and information service customized information to meet the specific needs of users. For effective library and information services by the year 2020 in Nigeria, libraries must repackage relevant information in various forms for target population it is expected to serve.

Utilization of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) in all Ramifications of Our Productivity

From the beginning of the 21st millennium societies all over the world have increasingly become dependent on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the conduct of their professional practices. In that direction therefore, the employment of ICT in our national activities is needed to give the necessary support to our economic, social cultural, scientific and technological development. However, since the rural populace are also targeted, there is the need to recognize the importance of our cultural and linguistic diversity. Most of the rural people in Nigeria are either illiterates or semi-illiterates and therefore conscious steps must be taken by the authorities to remove all the barriers that will hinder access and participation of the citizenry on the internet. These steps include providing the ICTs and related electronic gadgets in all libraries and information centres, provision of constant power supply, trained library and information professionals who could impart ICT knowledge to the masses at all levels and as suggested earlier,

drastically ensuring that majority of the people are literate through various educational *programmes etc. Through this, a knowledge society that will cope with sustainable* development in individual areas of specialization such as farming (agriculture) will be created.

The World Economic Summit on the information society (2005) in its Plan of Action supported these ideas when it requested all stakeholders to encourage the use of ICTs by SMES to foster innovation, realize gains in productivity, reduce transaction costs and fight poverty. The summit, in its bid to achieve these objectives highlighted the importance of helping countries overcome digital device; develop the information and communication infrastructure that will enable universal, sustainable, ubiquitous and affordable access to ICTs by all, and allow people, anywhere in the world, to access information and knowledge. Thus, to facilitate the implementation of this noble objective, "Ubiquitous Network Society" which will enable connection anytime, anywhere, anything and anyone is said to be spreading. This is the opportunity Nigeria is probably waiting for to enhance its library and information services to all parts of the country by the year 2020.

Conclusion

In order to provide adequate library and information services to all parts of Nigeria by the year 2020, emphasis must be given to funding of libraries by the sponsoring bodies while yet, the librarians must reorganize their priorities and be more proactive in the provision of needed resources and services. Thus, with the establishment of libraries and information centres and provision of information services on all sheds of activates, the MDGs will also be attained since people will become aware or informed about not only their rights but also what to do, how to do it and the right time to do it so as to derive the maximum benefit from their conducts.

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