

## DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTENANCE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR ALL IN NIGER STATE BY THE YEAR 2025

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### **Abstract**

*The paper began with the definition of the variables of the article such as library, development and library services. The role of the librarian in providing library services such as acquiring, processing, storing, and dissemination was highlighted. Light was shed on the need for the provision of library to all citizens of Niger State. Types of libraries required to provide such services were identified. Efforts made by the Niger State Government, Nigerian Library Association (NLA) Niger State Chapter and librarians to ensure that the provision of library services in the State were treated. The paper maintained that despite all the efforts, there is inconsequential impact on the development of library services in the State, especially from the State Library Board. This is because the foundation upon which library services such as funding, functional libraries experienced and qualified staff among others seem to be lacking. In view of that, factors inhibiting the development of library services in the State such as lack of willingness on the part of the State Government to provide sufficient funding, high level of illiteracy, lack of awareness on the part of Nigerlites on the role libraries could play to enhance their professional and private activities among others, were identified. In a similar direction, light was shed on the factors that could enhance library services in the State. These among others, include creating awareness among the masses, providing sufficient funding, combating illiteracy and establishment of a Library Development Monitoring Committee, The paper concluded that while efforts have been made in terms of policy formulation for library series development concerted efforts have not been put in place to implement such policies. Consequently, it was recommended among others, that funds for library development must be budgeted for every year, librarians must be prepared to accept and meet the challenges of library services provision and Nigerlites must also give the needed support and cooperation.*

**Keywords:** Development, Library Services, Niger State, Progress, Sustainability,

### **Introduction**

The term library has been defined variously by different authors. For example, the New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia edition (2007) defines the library as a collection of books used for reading or study or the building or room in which such a collection is kept. It must be emphasized however, that irrespective of the way the library is defined by earliest scholars, their definitions indicated that libraries were most often limited by

use to particular group of people and possibly those residing in a particular geographical area. Thus utilization of library and information resources and services was not such that benefited everybody in the society.

Later definitions were more embracing and point to the fact that library and information service should be available to everybody in the society irrespective of region, profession, status, age and experience etc. In this regard, the New Encyclopedia Britanica: Macropaedia edition (2007) further state that libraries once known primarily as store houses for books and periodicals have changed dramatically since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, from their historical beginnings as places to keep the business, legal, historical and religious records of civilization, libraries have emerged as a far-reaching body of information resources and services that do not even require a building. This idea correspond with the current role expected of libraries in that they also stock computers, telecommunication gadgets and other technologies which facilitate easy storage, retrieval and dissemination of information in different forms, from and to different places without much geographical barrier.

The term development has recently been defined in a variety of ways. For example, Hornby (2015) define it as an act of improving by expanding or enlarging or expanding. Bitagi and Idachaba (2016) were of the view that development is the extent to which library and information resources and services provided and utilized have improved within the period of the establishment of various libraries. In the context of this paper, development has to do with how libraries and especially public and school libraries have been established and sustained effectively for the benefit of the user in Niger state. Niger state library services began from 1976 when the state was created. Efforts made to construct a functional library complex did not however materialize until 1990. This is an indication that from inception up till 1990 the impact of library services on the people of Niger state was at its lowest ebb as only very few professionals were employed to provide services from inadequate and outdated books which were mostly inherited from North-Western state where the state was carved out. Similarly, attempt was only made to establish three branch libraries at Agaie, Suleja, and Kontagora in addition to the existing one at Bida which was also inherited from Northern Nigerian Government of the 1960s. An observation carried out by these authors reveals that all the branches, up till today are inadequately staffed and ill equipped for library services that could meet with the needs of the targeted users.

From this clarification, sustenance of library services has to do with continuous provision of adequate funds, staff and information resources and services by the state government and their utilization by the intended or anticipated users. Unfortunately however, the foundation upon which adequate and reliable library services such funding, functional library headquarters, branches in all the Local Government Areas, experienced and qualified staff and sufficient current and relevant information resources could be provided seems to be lacking.

Library and information services, in the context of this paper are the functions performed by the librarians to ensure that users of the library are satisfied with their information needs. These include, but not limited to selection, acquisition, processing, storing and dissemination of information to the right user at the right time.

The role of the librarian has equally been viewed differently by different writers. To some, he/she is a professional who is concerned with the collection, storage, processing and dissemination of recorded knowledge in a library. To others, the librarian is a facilitator charged with responsibilities ranging from selection, acquiring, processing, storing of library and information resources and making such facilities available to the user community.

The need to provide library and information service for all in Niger State emanated from the gap that was created in the provision of such services from inception. Thus, the era of generalization of service such as provided in public libraries in some other states should be reinforced by that which library and information services in the state are provided to different groups of people in various communities based on their needs. Therefore, while public (National or State) libraries are established for the use of virtually every individual in the community without discrimination to usage, special libraries are also supposed to be established for people sharing the same interest, profession, activity, ability and or even disabilities. Special libraries according to Hammed (2010) are those that are maintained by an individual, corporation, association, government agency or any other group for the collection, organization and dissemination of information and primarily devoted to a special subject and offering specialized service to a specialized clientele.

In addition to the above mentioned types of libraries, there are academic libraries which are devoted to providing services for communities in higher educational institutions such as Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education etc. Furthermore, school libraries are supposed to be available to provide necessary resources and services to children in both primary and secondary schools. The idea establishing these libraries follows the intention of government that all literate adults and children must have access to and utilize library and information resources and services. This idea is reinforced by the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2013) where it is provided that the library is at the heart of the education enterprise and one of the most important educational services. In view of that, the NPE went further to make it mandatory on States/FCT and Local Governments, as well as proprietors of schools to establish functional libraries in accordance with the established standards.

On the other hand, the Niger State Library Board by an unpublished Law (2010), provides that in addition to the library board headquarters, there shall be established branches of this library at each of the twenty five (25) Local Government Headquarters. The idea is to bring library and information resources and services much closer to the grassroots to the extent that everybody will be entitled to access and utilize them in the state.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) also added an additional but heavier weight when it makes it a fundamental human right for all citizens of this country to have a right to freedom from discrimination, among others of the use of resources and services provided by all tiers of government.

The professional body of librarians in Nigeria, the Nigerian Library Association (NLA)

which existed decades before it was decreed in 1999 (Obilade, 2003) and its Niger State Chapter have respectively through their Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and conferences discussed and demonstrated the need to spread library and information services to the generality of Nigerians and Nigerlites in particular. This, the NLA has done through resolutions and communiques at the end of each AGM and conference.

On individual basis, librarians in various types of libraries in Niger State have sought, from their parent organizations, the need for recognition and desired funding so as to provide needed library and information resources and services for either the entire community or area of their influence. Unfortunately, these needs have to some extent not been adequately provided by Niger state government, institutions and organizations and thus has left provision of library and information resources and services to the targeted community in limbo.

The essence of highlighting the efforts of Niger State government, organizations, institutions, Nigerian Library Association, Niger State Chapter and individuals is to reveal the extent to which attempts have been made to reach everybody in the state with library and information resources and services.

It has however, been observed that these efforts have not impacted positively on the provision of library and information services in the state. Consequently, not everybody or majority of Nigerlites especially those who live in rural areas have benefited from library and information resources and services in the state.

The question therefore, is what strategies could be put in place in order to realize or achieve library and information services for ALL Nigerlites by the year 2025? This write-up is dedicated to providing answers to this question.

### **Factors Inhibiting the Development of Library Services in Niger State**

Niger State, as currently constituted, is faced with myriads of inhibiting factors against its development in terms of library and information resources and services provision.

Prominent among these factors are:

- Lack of willingness on the part of the state government to provide sufficient funding for erecting functional libraries across the state talk less of equipping such libraries with adequate and current information resources and services that could match the information needs of Nigerlites and especially, the rural populace. Bitagi (2014) concur with this position when the author posit that funding is the mother of all problems facing library development everywhere since it is a major requirement at all levels of activity.
- High level of illiteracy especially at the rural areas. It is important at this juncture to mention that library and information resources that could easily be comprehended are mostly in print format and in English language. To benefit from their contents, the user or reader must not only be able to read and write in English but also interpret it to his/her understanding. Ability to read and write therefore, becomes a primary objective for an effective user of library resources and services. Majority of the rural people in Niger State are still believed to be illiterate in English language.

- Lack of awareness on the part of the Nigerlites generally, both literate and non-literate, on importance of the roles libraries could play to enhance their professional and private activities. Consequently, even when librarians occupy important positions in the state, they do not project the image of their profession (librarianship) both to the government and the governed. For example, when a librarian ever became the Secretary to the State Government (SSG), library services in the state did not record any appreciable development that could be remembered in his professional circles.
- Lack of adequate, qualified and experienced professional and paraprofessional staff to provide library and information resources and services. Despite the fact that so many candidates abound in the state, the state library service or the state government has not created any appointment opportunities for this category of people in the state library. Consequently, many librarians divert to teaching profession hoping to become school administrators, mostly at the secondary school level.
- Unavailability of required information resources locally which could easily be acquired and processed for immediate use. It is on record that most information resources required for the intellectual development of the citizens of Niger State are written and published abroad. Surely, the contents of these publications may most of the time lean towards the cultural background of their authors. Using such materials may lead the user to behave in ways contrary to expectations of our society.
- High cost of library materials/exchange rate of Naira with foreign currencies. With these developments, only very few library materials such as books, journals and computers among others, could be acquired with large amount of Naira.
- Apart from institutions of higher education, functional libraries are nearly lacking in public places, schools and special organisations to impact on knowledge acquisition of the public, students and special people.

### Strategies for Enhancing Library Services in Niger State

Despite the present despondent position of library development in Niger State and especially the public library services, much could be achieved before the year 2025 if concerted strategies are taken to mellow the situation. The most positive steps include, but not limited to the followings:

- **Awareness**

Nigerlites, both literate and illiterate should be in a position to know the extent to which library and information services could impact on what they are doing or intending to do. In order to achieve this objective, numerous campaigns should be mounted by librarians at both urban and rural settings.

- **Funding**

Funding is the basic requirement for the implementation of library policies of the type of building, expansion, acquisition of information resources and provision of required services. Bitagi (2010) in this direction, opine that the provision of reliable library and information resources and services in Nigeria 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. While tertiary institutions in Niger state have been fairly taken care of by Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) and their Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) for the maintenance of their libraries, the state public and school libraries are in limbo, existing on a zero-based-budget. In view of that, the Niger State government should take a pro-active step in providing sufficient funds for the development and sustenance of state and school libraries.

- **Combating Illiteracy**

Efforts should be intensified to combat illiteracy at all levels. When the state government and the Universal Basic Education (UBE) are making efforts to build more schools for school age children, little or no effort is currently made to extend such opportunity to adults. Informal or Formal adult education should be organized for adults more especially in the rural areas to enhance the literacy level of rural dwellers. Subsequently, this will empower them for utilization of library and information services.

- **Appointment of Qualified Staff**

The entire library systems in the state seems to be under staffed from professional to non-professional levels. There is a great need to employ more staff to boost library and information services of the public and school libraries. In response to this, Bitagi and Idachaba (2016) estimate that for the state public library services alone, about 129 professionals are required to go round the whole state. This is in addition to assorted para and non-professionals.

- **Local Publication of Information Resources**

To be self-sufficient in printed information resources for everybody in the state, there is the need to encourage every professional, such as teachers, businessmen, farmers, medical staff etc. to publish books in their areas of specialization. This will go along way to combat the unavailability of required information resources and their very exorbitant prices.

- **Establishment of Branch Libraries**

There is the need to establish branches of the state library board in all the Local Government Areas of the state. In addition to that, the school libraries should be established and equipped to encourage reading and learning among the youths.

- **Training and Retraining of Librarians and Para-Professional Staff**

To enhance professional practice, there is a great need to constantly send librarians for training and retraining others through conferences, workshops and seminars. This will make it possible for them to provide efficient services, compete effectively with their colleagues elsewhere and update their knowledge of the profession.

- **Resource Sharing**

Because of the complexity of library and information services provision in recent times, it has become compulsory for various libraries in the State to share their available resources and services. Zhang in Onuoha (2008), Ejimofor and Ohaji (2007) underscores the need to share library resources because it marks a revolutionary journey from traditional to digital libraries. In that respect, all libraries must be equipped with modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which provide current information without any serious geographical barrier.

- **Establishment of Monitoring Committee**

A monitoring committee to be tagged "Library Development Monitoring Committee" under the chairmanship of the Director of the State Library Board should be established to, among others determine that at any given time, library resources and services are provided throughout the state. The committee should also ensure that funds provided for library development are judiciously utilized.

### **Conclusion**

From the discussions in this paper, it could be concluded that while efforts have been made in terms of policy formulation for the provision of library services in Niger State so as to ensure library and information services reach majority of Nigerlites, concerted effort has not been put in place to ensure that such efforts are implemented to the later.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussions of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Funds meant for the development of the libraries and provision of services in the state must be included in the state's annual budget. Such monies should be released quarterly as work progresses.
2. The librarians must be prepared to accept and meet the challenges of providing library services to all Nigerlites by the year 2025. Attitudinal change in the method of practice is a necessity to attaining this objective.
3. Librarians must move closer to the user communities to establish the information they need for their progress and provide it instantly.
4. The generality of Nigerlites must be prepared to give the needed support and cooperation to ensure that the noble objective of providing library services to all by the year 2025 is achieved.
5. The resolutions and communiques of the NLA, Niger State Chapter after the conferences and AGMs should be forwarded to the appropriate authorities in the state for possible implementation.

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