

THE ROLE OF LIBRARY IN MEETING INFORMATION NEEDS OF LEGISLATURE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discusses the roles of libraries in meeting the information needs of the legislature in Nigeria. The paper established the indispensability of legislative libraries in meeting the information needs of the legislature, especially in the National Assembly's bicameral legislature, and the individual State Houses of Assembly.

It went further to establish the fact that there will be no meaningful legislation without information gotten from the resources of the libraries.

The paper equally analyzed the concept of information and shows the various formats into which the legislative libraries captures it for effective organization, preservation and dissemination to its clientele, who are the members of the parliament.

Introduction

Libraries stock print and non print or book and non book materials in any format. These materials must be organized for easy retrieving and must be administered by professionally trained librarians. According to Bengé (1970) the library is an agent of social organization of knowledge. Libraries in the broadest sense of the term here existed almost as long as written records themselves. The instinct to preserve and passion to collect have been the determining factor in their establishment maintenance and development. What the library does is to gather in one place a portion of the stocked through humanity.

In recent times it could be in any format, that is book form, audio, visual or audio-visual form, and this brings us to the concept of the digital / virtual libraries." According to Aina (2004) a digital library consist mainly of digital materials and services. The items in a digital library are stored and processes using digital devices".

Furthermore, Aina (2004) citing Ojedokun (2000) opines that a digital library possesses electronic data bases on the internet e.g world wide web www compact disk read only memory (CD ROM) and proprietary services as dialog, Info America e.t.c.

Thus a digital / virtual library is perceived as collection of full text and bibliographic information sources, rather than building and incorporates human services and information technology tools. The sources of virtual libraries have been identified selected described and evaluated. They are organized along topics. There are different types of libraries namely National, public, special, school and academic libraries. The functions of each of them are to collect, preserve, organized and disseminate information for their various clientele.

In the light of the above the legislators are the clientele for the special library called the legislative library. Their special information needs can only be met by their libraries

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which is the legislative library. For the Nation, this information needs are met by the National Assembly Library while for the state, their legislative information needs are met by the State Assembly Libraries. With information these libraries give their members of parliament, at the different level of Government, their information needs are met and they make inform. decision which govern our daily lives.

Libraries and Information Provision for Legislature

Aguolu (1988) defines Libraries as a collection of records of human culture in diverse formats and languages, preserved, organized and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of individuals for information, knowledge, recreation and aesthetic enjoyment.

The ultimate product of a clientele's need in the library, traditional or virtual is information. Information, according to Lexicon Dictionary Encyclopedic edition is news or intelligence communicated by word or in writing. It could be facts or data derived from reading, instruction or gathered in any other way. Information can equally be gotten from non verbal gestures, or body communication. Some professionals advance that information is knowledge obtained by personal study or investigation. Information is also the semantics of a message. It is the result of modeling, formatting, organizing or converting data in a way that increases the level of knowledge of the recipient. In other words, when you process, format or organize data, it become information. Information equally could be a stimulus we receive through our senses. It is material from which knowledge is derived. It has an effect on its recipient, and any information that does not change its recipient is not useful, hence it needs to be communicated accurately and timely. Accuracy means that it must be free from bias, errors and mistakes.

There are two types of information; they are called formal and informal information. Formal information is planned or written and it includes legal requirements, governmental legislations, unions' contracts, accounting procedures and organizational budgets etc. Informal information includes opinions, intuitions, hearsays, grapevines, personal experiences, gossips etc. Informal information complements formal information and may be used as a substitute in the absence of formal information.

Uses of Information

Technically, information could be regarded as data of value in decision-making. Information is useful to society because it helps people reduce their level of uncertainty while making decisions, which affect their lives. It is the availability of relevant information that enables an individual or groups to make a decision that they will not regret.

Information has now been universally accepted as a vital resource in any organization. A well-organized system of information is a prerequisite for effective decision making and planning. Consequently, the possession or awareness or use of appropriate information ensures organizational or societal and even individual functioning.

The major function of information is to increase the knowledge of the user, reduce his level of uncertainty or to reduce the variety of choices available to him. When this

happens, the user is either more educated or gets his problems solved. Access to the right information is important for the smooth running of every organization, or institution, both public and private. Formal and information organizations, government at all levels and their agencies need information for functioning. Business enterprises of all types, public and private, educational institutions, medical institutions all need information. It is now said no information, no society. The developed countries of the world now recognize the importance of information that it is now regarded as a vital economic resource or another factor of production like manpower, capital, land and energy. Information is considered very important for economic development and for improving the quality of life.

Due to developments in information technology, libraries are now engaged in digital/virtual library services. This involves using computer terminals to have access to windows of databases and accessing information through the CD ROMS.

The library has an advantage over other sources of transmitting information like the mass media because the mass media is noted for being sensational and often attempting to distort facts in order to create excitement for headline/front-page news. The library has a multimedia approach by communicating information through any medium or many media. Thus, in libraries, you find books, magazines, phonographs records, Audio-visu-als, computers, motion and still films, Audio-tapes etc. These are suited to different audiences including the handicapped.

Library Services for Legislation

The National Assembly Library was founded to meet the information needs of the members of the parliament. It stocks records in all formats to meet the information needs of the Federal Legislators and these are information that enable them carry out their legislative roles. The National Assembly Library has been growing from strength to strength and doing well in its services to its clientele in terms of personnel, facilities book and non book resources.

Library as an agency of communication is a medium through which information is produced and preserved for use. The library encompasses intellectual and physical outputs of the society. The happenings of the time determine the type of information preserved in the library at that particular period of human development, in the history of man, therefore give the right information to the right user at the right time and in the right personal way. This can bring about the development of technical, perspective and characteriological skills. This is why libraries play a paramount role of providing information to the legislators for successful democracy. Library and society implies using the library to develop the society and that is why for the lawmakers to pass worthwhile bills, information must be sourced. From the library, for example, the chairman of the **committee for environment and ecology** will support his argument with newspaper pictures from erosion stricken areas when he wants to move a motion that ecological fund should

be increased reasonably. In the process of such motion and its arguments, the library will immediately support them with concrete facts from slides transparencies micro films, recorded tapes and video tapes. This means that without a library there will be no meaningful law making.

They need information to make informed decisions about National laws and laws that need to be changed. The library is the major source of information for good legislation, or making good laws.

The information needs of the legislators are met by the legislative libraries in parliament and other libraries generally. The legislative library does not only supply books but also other reference services, helping the legislators to find answers to questions by searching publications, abstracting and indexing and review services to keep member aware of latest developments in their fields.

Each of the bicameral legislatures of the National Assembly is made up of several specialized committees, whose work focus on aspects of National life. These committees are health, agriculture, communications, environment and ecology, petroleum matters, information, finance, corruption, national disasters, education, Local Government Affairs, works, housing, financial and economic crimes, discipline, etc. The committees have chairmen who preside over their activities and ensure that matters concerning their areas of official jurisdiction are properly handled, and comfortable legislation made for their committees. These chairmen of these committees among other responsibilities go out, read, and sniff out information from the library and other places about their committees. Sometimes they get information through the grapevine, which of course is subject to confirmation through concrete facts and figures from the library. When they get all these information about their committee from the library, it is usually authentic. They now look for solution to these problems. By doing so, they make good laws for the good governance of the federation.

Newspapers that are stored in the legislative libraries are produced daily and retrospective papers are equally stored. The current ones are current in their news items and information. They carry information on local as well as international matters focusing on politics, government- policies, socio-economic affairs, sports with occasional features on arts, music and drama. Newspapers carry book reviews or articles on topical issues. Newspapers are invaluable sources of information for educational, cultural, social, political, economic purposes and since they are current, they help house committee chairmen in working for their committees. When they work well for their committees, pass good bills and make good laws, through information from the legislative library, directly they are working for their constituencies or keeping faith with their electioneering promises.

The power of the National Assembly to make laws is exercised through bills. All members of the Assembly in accordance with the constitution are required to sit for a minimum of 181 days in a year. The power of National Assembly to make laws is through bills, passed by both arms of the legislature that is both the Senate and House of Repre-

sentatives, and then assented to by the President. The constitution stipulates that the President shall within 30 days after, assent to it or withhold assent. If he withholds his assent and the bill is passed by two-thirds majority in each house, such a bill becomes law, requiring no further assent.

In the light of the above considerations, it is necessary for the Federal Legislators to have access to good and reliable information from the legislative libraries in particular and all libraries in general to be well the Nation.

In summary this write-up had elaborated on the concepts of Information, and libraries, and their roles to the legislature. For instance it was necessary to understand what information means before the library acquires preserves organizes and disseminate it. Conclusively, we have seen from this write-up that libraries and their roles of information provision are vital to the development and growth of the legislature being one of the important arms of government in Nigeria.

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