LIBRARY SERVICES FOR THE DISADVANTAGED: PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA, A CASE STUDY OF MINNA, NIGER STATE.

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Abstract

The paper examined library services for the disadvantaged: Panacea for sustainable development in Nigeria, a case study of Minna, Niger state. The research design used was survey. The researcher designed a self constructed questionnaires tagged "Library Services For the Disadvantaged Questionnaire" (LSFDQ). The questionnaires were administered in the Federal University of Technology Library, Niger State College of Education Library, state Library Board and National Library, all in Minna. It was revealed from the data gathered that the stated four (4) libraries woefully failed in the provision of different library services to the disadvantaged users. The study concluded amongst other things that of all the four libraries that \were used for this research only the National Library took the full cognizance of the disadvantaged users in their library building plan. Plausible recommendations were given amongst which include the training and employment of personnel with empathy for the disadvantaged users in the various libraries all over the federation.

Introduction:

Libraries have always been a community's portal to information, knowledge and leisure. Beyond their shelves, libraries are a community's gateway to information from many sources nationally and internationally. Libraries provide professionals trained to distinguish and verify content, build collections and provide a reference and information service. Today, more libraries rely on electronic sources for collecting, organizing and distributing information.

The information age has created unprecedented opportunities to acquire electronic content from many sources including existing digital content in many different types of libraries. The concept of a "world library for the blind" rests on the ability of digital libraries to share and coordinate collection-building resources and to use digital technology to share content. It requires designing these system and services with interoperability in mind and using common standards. It begins with shared understanding that technology does not fundamentally change library service, but rather the way in which it is organized and delivered. Therefore, guidelines for the development of the digital libraries must begin with the assumption that the libraries remain a collection of organized content reflecting works of imagination and information necessary to facilitate life long learning, career development and an informed citizenry. Its digitization is a means of ensuring that its collections are preserved and accessible to all regardless of disability.

Akinpelu (1998) contended on the unique and peculiar characteristics of the disabled folk that provide justifications for providing them with special educational

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programmes, facilities, services and teachers with specialized training. She argued further that education has been one of the major tools in rehabilitating the handicapped all over the world. She affirmed that today, handicapped persons are known to have made significant contributions to the development of the society so much so that they are accorded first class status in most developed nations.

Special education is the education of children and adults who have learning difficulties because of their different sorts of handicaps, blindness, deafness, mental retardation, social maladjustment, physical disability, health problems or accident in later life. It is also seen as an area within the framework of general education that provides: appropriate facilities, specialized materials and methods, and teachers with specialized training for children considered to be handicapped. (National policy on Education 1977, 1981, 1998, 2004)

Olubadewo (1993) opined that the Federal and State governments, individuals, philanthrophic organizations, voluntary agencies and foreign aids, are expected to make their contributions towards educating all exceptional persons in Nigeria. Olubadewo (1993) while quoting Akpa argued further that the rural areas have a preponderance of disadvantaged folk than urban areas. Hence, the need to make adequate planning to provide equal education for the rural exceptional persons

Libraries are established in any given community to perform different functions amongst which are: the provision of information, education, recreation, and preservation of the cultural heritage of the society. They are classified into different groups depending on the purpose of their establishment and the patrons. We have the public libraries which consist of local or village library, town, state and national libraries. They are supposed to cater for the information needs of both old and young in their various communities. School libraries are found in primary and post-primary institutions. They are supposed to cultivate reading habits in the school children. Academic libraries are found in tertiary institutions such as colleges, polytechnics and universities. They are to provide for the educational /research needs of both students and staff. Finally, we have special libraries that are established in special settings like research institutes. They are to fulfill the objectives of their parent body.

The fact that no nation can experience any sustainable development without a breakthrough in education remains incontestable. Provision of relevant, accurate and current library services to the disadvantaged groups are a veritable means of accentuating sustainable development. All the hues and cries about bridging the educational gap between the educationally advantaged and the educationally disadvantaged states and regions in Nigeria will not only be unfair but also incomplete without giving adequate and proper care to the disabled. Moreover, the policy of the government to provide equal educational opportunities for all children and to make this country a land of bright opportunities for all citizens will be an exercise in futility, if the disadvantaged folk are not adequately taken care of in terms of provision of relevant information (National Policy on Education 1977, 1981, 1998, 2004). Provision of the library services for these less-privileged people with a view to making them to be better informed and be more useful and productive in their fatherland is mandatory, if the much envisaged sustainable

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development is to be realized within the shortest possible period in our nation. Neglecting the disabled who constitute an integral part of our population is tantamount to underutilization and wastage of human resources. This is counter-productive and according to Babalola and Babalola (2004) such negligence of the disabled is capable of plunging the nation back into era of darkness, retrogression, poverty, misery and other vices. The Director General, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Social Development, Otunba Fatai Olukoga as quoted by the Daily Trust contended on the need for parents to empower their disabled ward vocationally and never to abadon them to fate or use them for commercial purposes.

In other words, neglecting the disabled and failure to take care of them by not providing awareness and information services for them will unwittingly add to the weight of ignorance and knowledge destitution in our nation which will make sustainable development an unrealizable dream for our nation Nigeria. To make the disadvantaged formidable in our nation is to free them from the shackles of ignorance and knowledge destitution (impoverishment). Hence, the clarion call for the moment is to provide the disadvantaged folk with necessary and useful information which are obtainable through different library services that match their peculiarities.

The choice of Minna for a study like this is not accidental but appropriate for the following reasons, one, Minna is a state capital whose proximity to the national capital, Abuja is marginal. Also, the city is blessed with some institutions like the Federal university of technology, Niger State College of Education, a branch of National Library of Nigeria and the headquarter of the state library.

The researcher designed a self-constructed questionnaire tagged "Library Services for the Disadvantaged Questionnaire" which were administered at the Federal University of Technology Library, Niger State College of Education Library, State Library headquarter and the National Library of Nigeria, all in Minna. To enhance the validity and the reliability of the instrument, it was given to experienced colleagues for necessary moderation and correction. Then, the researcher was convinced that the instrument would measure what it purported to measure.

The following research questions were asked:

1. To what extent do libraries in Minna take cognizance of the disadvantaged in planning library building?
2. To what degree are library services provided for the disadvantaged in terms of material provision in Minna Libraries?
3. To what extent are personnel with empathy provided in Minna Libraries?

The research was based on the following assumptions:

1. None of the libraries in Minna take cognizance of the disadvantaged in planning for the library building.
2. Library services to the disadvantaged are lacking in terms of materials and methodology for the disadvantaged in Minna Libraries.
3. Personnel with empathy and love for the disadvantaged are not provided in Minna librarie

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Statement of the problem

In spite of the huge investment in library services by the governments in all tiers and chief executives of various institutions, the disadvantaged groups are not accorded any priority in the scheme of things. The disadvantaged are treated as nobody and as second class citizens who can only be attended to when there is nothing else to do. Negligence of the disadvanged group who constitute an integral part of Nigerian population poses a great threat to a country that is in dire need of sustainable development.

Who are the disadvantaged?

The disadvantaged are the vast untapped library clientele of the handicapped, the aged, the institutionalized, and the shut-in-those that are literally locked up in mental hospitals and prisons, or because they are just actually locked into their own immediate environments by physical or mental disabilities.

Classification of the disadvantaged

According to the Libraries Services to the Disadvantaged (1996), the disadvantaged can be classified as follows:

1. Those with physical disabilities like the blind, the lame, the deaf and the dumb.
2. Those with mental (sickness) disabilities like the mad people, the epileptic and the imbeciles.
3. The prisoners that are locked up in different prisons all over the country.
4. Children without a reading culture (background) as a result of their upbringing.
5. Those that are in remote areas, country sides, shut-up areas who are not easily accessible due to physical barriers in terms of distance, bad road, broken ferry e.t.c.
6. The aged whose age constitute barrier to receiving library services.
7. The sick people in different hospitals

Types of library services and materials for the disadvantaged:

According to Library Services for the Disadvantaged (1996), the following library services can be provided for the disadvantaged.

1. Braille library services for the blind.
2. Mobile library services to the shut-in in hospitals, prisons and remote areas.
3. Relaying music trough video and audiotape as therapeutic measure for the mentally (disadvantaged) disabled people.
4. Shooting of film, video messages and audio message to the prisoners as a correctional or reformation library service.
5. Reading Bible, Koran and other religious books into the ears of patients as aid to recovery.
6. Planning library building for easy accessibility for the crippled, the blind etc. For example, providing lift for the crippled as an aid to climb library storey building.
7. Grouping the disabled into discussion and story telling groups. This type of library services is applicable to almost all categories of the disadvantaged group.

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8. Providing vocational information services for the disadvantaged like the blind, the deaf and dumb, the lame, the prisoners and those that are locked up in remote areas.
9. Making the disadvantaged to recite poems as a way of sharpening their memory.
10. Taking the disadvantaged folk out on field trips. Field trips are invaluable ways of stretching young people's view of the world beyond their neighborhood.
11. Providing different library lecture series to students with absence of reading culture (background).
12. Providing the disadvantaged groups with personnel that have empathy and love for the pitiable condition of the disabled. Such personnel will act as counselors to the disadvantaged.

Data presentation

The following data are presented from the responses that are elicited from the distributed questionnaires. The data are presented in form of tables as follows:

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Table 1- Types of library services provided for the disadvantaged at FUT, Library, Minna

TYPES OF DISADVANTAGED USERS	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICES NEEDED	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED
1.The blind	Braille library services	None
2.Mentally disabled	Relaying music that have therapeutic value	None
3.Prisoners	Film, video and audio messages	None
4.Sick people	Reading Bibles and Korans into their ears	None
5.The lame/ the blind	Planning library building for easy accessibility for the lame and blind	Partial provision at bungalow section of the library
6. The lame/blind, the sick, the prisoners	Grouping them into discussion and story telling groups	None
7.The blind, deaf and dumb, prisoners, those locked up in environment	Vocational information	None
8.The blind, the lame and the locked-ups	Recitation of poems	None
9.The lame and those locked up in remote areas	Taking them out on field trips	None
10. Student without reading cultuure (background)	Providing library lecture series and providing books in their local language	Partially provided through lectures on the use of library
11. All the disadvantaged group	Providing them with personnel that have empathy and love for the disadvantaged condition	None

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Table 2- Types of library services provided for the disadvantaged at Niger state college of Education Library, Minna.

TYPES OF DISADVANTAGED USERS	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICES NEEDED	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICES PROVIDED
1.The blind	Braille library services	None
2.Mentally disabled	Relaying music that have therapeutic value	None
3.Prisoners	Film, video and audio messages	None
4.Sick people	Reading Bibles and Korans into their ears	None
5.T he lame/ the blind	Planning library building for easy accessibility for the lame and blind	Partial provision at bungalow section of the library
6. The lame/blind, the sick, the prisoners	Grouping them into discussion and story telling groups	None
7.The blind, deaf and dumb, prisoners, those locked up in environment	Vocational information	None
8.The blind, the lame and the locked-ups	Recitation of poems	None
9.The lame and those locked up in remote areas	Taking them out on field trips	None
10. Student without readi ng culture (backgroud)	Providing library lecture series and providing books in their local languages	Partially provided through lectures on the use of library
11. All the disadvantaged group	Providing them with personnel that have empathy and love for the disadvantaged condition	None

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Table 3-Types of library services provided at State Library Board, Minna.

TYPES OF DISADVA-NTAGED USERS	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICES NEEDED	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICES PROVIDED
1.The blind	Braille library services	None
2.Mentally disabled	Relaying music that have therapeutic value	None
3.Prisoners	Film, video and audio messages	None
4.Sick people	Reading Bibles and Korans into their ears	None
5.The lame/ the blind	Planning library building for easy accessibility for the lame	Partially provided through lectures on the use of library
6. The lame/blind, the sick, the prisoners	Grouping them into discussion and story telling groups	None
7.The blind, deaf and dumb, prisoners, those locked up in environment	Vocational information	None
8.The blind, the lame and the locked-ups	Recitation of poem	None
9.The lame and those locked up in remote areas	Taking them out on field trips	None
10. Students without reading culture (background)	Providing library lecture series and providing books in their local languages	None
11. All the disadvan taged group	Providing them with personnel that have empathy and love for the disadvantaged condition	None

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Table 4. Types of library services provided at National Library, Minna.

TYPES OF DISAD-VANTAGED USERS	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICES NEEDED	TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDED
1.The blind	Braille library services	None
2.Mentally disabled	Relaying music that have therapeutic value	None
3.Prisoner	Film, video and audio messages	None
4.Sick people	Reading Bibles and Korans into their ears	None
5.The lame/ the blind	Planning library building for easy accessibility for the lame and blind	Full provision of bungalow building for all users
6. The lame/blind, the sick, the prisoners	Grouping them into discussion and story telling groups	None
7.The blind, deaf and dumb, prisoners, those locked up in environment	Vocational information	None
8.The blind, the lame and the locked-ups	Recitation of poems	None
9.The lame and those locked up in remote area	Taking them out on field trips	None
10. Student without readi ng culture (backgroud)	Providing library lecture series and providing books in their local languages	None
11. All the disadvan taged group	Providing them with personne that have empathy and love fo the disadvantaged condition	None

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Data analysis:

From tables one (1) and two (2),it is clear that of the 11 library services that are itemized for the disadvantaged users, only two(2) - provision of bungalow section of the library and giving lecture on the use of library -are partially provided at the Federal University of Technology library, Minna and the Niger State College of Education library ,Minna. The other nine library services were outrightly ignored.

The only library service that is partially provided for the disadvantage users at the state library board is the bungalow unit of the library. The other 10 services were outrightly neglected (Table 3) .

The National Library's building (which is just a bungalow) has been planned in such a way to serve all users-advantaged and
Disadvantaged (Table4). But, the remaining 10 srvices were neglected.

Discussion:

From the data gathered and presented in tables1-4, it is incontestable that the identified libraries have failed woefully in the provision of library services to the disadvantaged. At the Federal University of Technology Library, Minna and the Niger State College of Education Library, Minna, two services were partially provided which means

$$\frac{1/2+1/2}{11} = \frac{1}{11}$$ which is (9.1%)

At the State Library Board, one of the eleven (11) itemized services was partially provided. That is

$$\frac{1/2}{11} = \frac{1}{22}$$ which is (4.5 %?)

At the National Library, a single service was fully provided which represents

$$\frac{1}{11}$$ which is (9.1%)

It is believed that the ugly provision of library services that are evident in all the libraries that were selected for this research in Minna would re-echo in many of the libraries across the country.

Failure to take care of the disadvantaged library users who form an integral part of the Nigeria population is tantamount to drawing back the wheels of progress of a nation that is in dire need of sustainable development. Moreover, failure to provide library services for the disadvantaged users contravenes the National Policy on Education (2004) which stated that equal educational opportunities should be provided for all citizens irrespective of gender, racial or any other consideration. If the country is going to experience breakthrough in economic, political, technological and socio-cultural spheres, the freedom of the mind of the citizenry from the shackles of ignorance and knowledge destitution is a necessary pre-requisite. Hence, the need to arm all the citizens-advantaged and disadvantaged with the right type of information that will enable them to contribute their own quota to the socio economic development of the country is mandatory. This can only be realized by the provision of library services to disadvantaged users.

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Finally, since disability is not synonymous with inability, the disabled group, the disadvantaged, the lock-in and the less privilege people are men and women of ability who should be allowed to contribute their own input to the country's march towards sustainable development. Neglecting the disadvantaged library users is akin to destroying the fabrics and the foundation of this great nation. A lot of vices and social maladies that are offshoots of ignorance and knowledge destitution will be curbed to the barest level if not completely eradicated if library services are provided for the disadvantaged group. The welfare, the comfort, the happiness and the peace of the disadvantaged group is in the overall interest of the nation at large and vice-versa.

Conclusion:

From the foregoing discussion, the following conclusion can be reached. One, of all the four (4) libraries that were used for this researched, only the National Library took full cognizance of the disadvantaged users in their planning for the library building. The remaining three libraries made partial provision in form of bungalow section for the disadvantaged users. Two, of the four (4) libraries have failed woefully in the provision of library services to the disadvantaged users. This is an index of negligence of the disadvantaged group in the country.

Recommendations:

In view of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. All libraries in Nigeria including Minna Libraries should as a matter of urgency make full provision for the disadvantaged users in their library buildings. Where there are storey buildings, lifts should be provided for the lame and the weak to go to the sections of their interest. All obstructing features should be taken away in view of the blind users.
2. The Federal, State and the Local governments should help to equip libraries within their jurisdiction with various materials that can be used to provide library services to the disadvantaged users. For example, Braille materials should be provided for the blind, film and video messages to the prisoners as correctional library services, equipping the libraries with books that can spur students with poor reading background into reading, and equipping the libraries with materials that contains vocational information for the disadvantaged users. Different philanthropic group and private individuals and organizations should also join the government in equipping libraries with relevant materials for the disadvantaged folk.
3. The government should as a matter of urgency embark on the training and employment of personnel who have empathy for the disadvantaged users in various libraries all over the country such personnel will be in good position to bear with the disadvantaged users, assist them where necessary and give guidance and counseling services too. This will go a long way in ensuring that the disadvantaged are given if not equal but similar treatment with the normal (free) people.

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