

DRIVING SUSTAINABLE NATION BUILDING AND DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Driving sustainable nation building and development are tasks for all and sundry in the society. The actualization of these tasks requires the contributions of different sectors and segments of the society, including the library and information sector. No doubt, the developmental history of advanced climes and emerging economies is not complete without reference to the contributions of libraries, information and knowledge. There are different ways libraries and information services are contributing to the course of nation building and sustainable development. Specifically, libraries are instrumental to educational development, facilitate access to knowledge, enable all forms of literacy development, promote research and development in science and technology and allied areas, champion reading culture, project general societal transformations, among many others. Unfortunately, the nature and pattern of library development in Nigeria for service delivery is nothing to cheer. Apart from academic and special libraries that are receiving some level of attention, school libraries, public libraries, community information centres, and even the National Library of Nigeria and its branches across the nation appear neglected in the scheme of things in the country. This scenario, no doubt, affects the level of contributions of these libraries to nation building and sustainable development. This paper argues that despite the existence of the Internet and other information sources, there are strategic roles of libraries even in the emerging knowledge economy in Nigeria as aforementioned. The article also made case for repositioning library and information services in Nigeria for continuous contributions to nation building and sustainable development.

Keywords

Libraries, Information Services, Sustainable Nation Building and Development, Nigeria

Introduction

The tasks of sustainable nation building and development are the responsibility of all individuals and stakeholders in the society. This scholarly piece explored the contributions of libraries and information services to sustainable nation building and development. Various nations and countries across the universe are strategizing and working towards actualization of true national identity, political and economic growth, sustainable infrastructural development, harmonious relationship among constituent entities, peaceful coexistence among heterogeneous populations, trust and unity among different ethnic groups, international recognition, and the like. Nigeria as a nation fits into this category of countries, considering that factors like trust issue among ethnic groups, politics of tribalism and religion, unending high profile corruption cases, fight against terrorism, leadership questions, perceived insincerity among the leaders, electoral violence and manipulations, poor indices of growth and development, among many others, are visible and at the same time staring at the faces of citizens of the country and the global community. These issues point towards the inevitability of nation building and development strategies that is sustainable so as to reposition the country on the part of progress, trust, sincerity and harmonious existence among the citizens.

Nation building has various dimensions and perspectives with conceptualizations from different standpoints. For instance, Jochen (2005) posits that the creation of national symbols that unite people for harmonious life, development of various national infrastructure and projects as well as putting in place other instruments of sovereignty for governance, is seen as nation building. These symbols like flag, coat of arms, national anthem and languages are usually created when nations started existing, which would be accompanied with establishment of structures of governance and gradual development of national infrastructure. In another perspective, using armed forces and other instruments of law enforcement to enforce transition to democratic system of government is also seen as nation building (Dobbins, Seth, Keith & Beth, 2007). This implies that anything that will facilitate the operation of democratic principles and practices in a nation is a way of building nations, whether legitimate or otherwise. Such stance is related to the submission of Darden and Mylonas (2012) that the act of installing institutions of national government, developing constituted authority and controlling constituent units and the activities of the inhabitants, may be by foreign powers, can also be seen as nation building. Based on the afore-mentioned submissions, there is a key question to address here . . . does it mean nation-building could be actualized through both forceful means including foreign interference as well as via constituted democratic approach?

According to Hoefte and Veenendaal (2019), nation building takes many dimensions including educational policies and infrastructure development to trigger economic growth and political stability. It is expected that nation building should be holistic and all embracing, thereby accommodating all segments of the society. Thus, nation-building entails a deliberate effort targeted at constructing the existence, operations, development and sustainability of nations in political, economic, social, educational, agricultural and allied areas for the benefits of all and well being of the entire citizens. The act of fostering national unity and sovereignty, institutionalization of functional democratic systems, enforcement of due process and transparency culture in running government affairs, formulation and implementation of viable developmental policies and plans in diverse areas of life, absolute respect for human rights, development of infrastructure for the citizens, among others, are all associated with nation-building.

Meanwhile, the task of nation building for sustainable development has been in the forefront of Nigeria's quest for greatness since 1960 she got her independence. Various developmental plan and programmes have been put in place targeted at ensuring the nation is making significant progress. However, that is not the case, as so many indices of growth and development are still lacking in the country thereby raising questions of whether there is commitment to nation-building or not. No doubt, nation-building requires the collective efforts of all inhabitants in the society for sustainable development. These individuals are ordinarily nation builders, and they have different roles towards actualizing the mission of nation building for sustainable development. One of such classes of individuals is librarians who are responsible for information and knowledge management in academic and research institutions, schools, public institutions, corporate establishments, government ministries, departments and agencies, rural communities, and the like. Unfortunately, the policy plan for nation-building like that of Vision 20: 2020 geared towards sustainable development did not factor libraries and allied information institutions (Diso, 2010). What this means is that libraries and information services as championed by librarians are hardly given priority attention in the scheme of things thereby affecting their contributions to nation-building in Nigeria. This paper explores the roles of libraries in nation-building, state of libraries in Nigeria, and made case for library development for advancing the course of sustainable nation building and development.

Conceptual Analysis of Libraries and Information Services

What libraries used to be is fast changing due to the influence of 21st century enablers, digital technologies and the knowledge economy. According to Ajegbomogun and Ajegbomogun (2015), libraries are service delivery institutions, custodians of knowledge and centres for information dissemination in civilized societies. These libraries are responsible for documenting, preserving and providing accessibility to different kinds of information like historical records, health information resources, records of scientific inventions and technological breakthroughs, as well as all documented ideas of man in the society. Libraries and information centres are used interchangeably to mean institutions, which could be physical or virtual, for the management of information and knowledge products of man in the society. Nwokocha (2018) sees the modern library as key to societal transformation with roles that cut across education, communication and governance, science and technology, and also for development of youths, young adults and marginalized population. The products of libraries are information and knowledge which are the life blood of the society and constitute the building blocks for development (Aina, 2013). Information and knowledge as products of libraries enables intellectual freedom, abhors censorship, promotes creativity and innovation, and contributes holistically to overall human development from political, social, economic, and educational perspectives.

There are different types of libraries, such as academic libraries that are found in tertiary institutions, school libraries and media resource centres that are found in pre-secondary and secondary schools, special libraries and documentation centres that are found in specific organizations and establishments, public and national libraries that are found mostly in state capitals, and community information centres that are meant to be found in rural communities for addressing rural dwellers' information needs.

Information services are rendered in libraries for the purpose of addressing the information, knowledge and research needs of library users. Apart from technical services like resources development, organization of knowledge (cataloguing and classification), and indexing and abstracting, that are executed out of the sight of library users, there are other kinds of information services in libraries which are generally known as user'/readers' services because the emphasis is on satisfying the information needs of users. They include reference and information services, circulation services, literature search, current awareness services, selective/strategic dissemination of information, media and information literacy instruction, multimedia services, among others.

Relating Libraries to Sustainable Nation Building and Development

The mission of nation-building presupposes that all sectors, segments and stakeholders of the society have different roles to play. In other words, no matter how a sector may appear or be perceived by societal members, no part or sector of the same society should be overlooked when pursuing the course of nation-building. So far, there is no contradiction to the fact that libraries are contributing significantly towards nation building for sustainable development in Nigeria. Books, information and libraries are captured as triangle of societal development (Nwokocha, 2017). What this symbolizes is that development of nations is tied to accessibility and use of knowledge assets of man, which are found in books and information resources contained in libraries. The value and inevitability of information in executing socio-economic activities of man in the society (Ezekwe, 2018) is worth referring to thereby placing libraries as centres of information provision, accessibility and utilization. Thus, Nwokocha (2017: 71) describes libraries as institutions that build citizens, educate individuals and at the same time foster thoughtful communities and society,

thereby leading nations to information and knowledge societies. However, the sustenance of libraries for continuous contributions to societal development depends on the availability of information, financial and human resources for managing the information and knowledge centres leading to the betterment of lives of inhabitants in the society.

Various types of libraries like academic, public, national, special, and school libraries, including media resource centres are contributing towards the course of nation building. Generally, all types of libraries are central to the development and sustenance of educational systems at all levels in the society. Academic libraries are instrumental to the actualization of the mandate of tertiary institutions like universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and agriculture that leads to the production of both middle and high level manpower for various sectors of the society. Establishment of libraries is a pre-requisite for academic activities to take-off in academic institutions. The resources provided by these academic libraries aid the teaching, learning, research and community development functions of tertiary institutions, thereby placing such libraries as significant contributors towards nation-building through development of human resources.

There are reported findings that justified the relationship between libraries and nation-building. Libraries are contributing to the advancement of innovations and research which are strategic to nation-building and sustainable development. As reported by Shehu, Opele and Owolabi (2017), different types of innovations such as product, process, marketing and organizational innovations are enabled by university libraries through capacity building and resources accessibility and utilization. Similarly, the study of Hussaini and Owoeye (2017) revealed that law library resources like statutes, law reports and reviews, law compassions and digests, government publications and periodicals are very relevant and are advancing the course of legal research for sustainable development.

Libraries enable literacy development for different classes of individuals in the society. Information literacy, media literacy, digital literacy, library literacy and other forms of literacy programmes are facilitated by libraries for the benefit of users. Harding (2008) and Uzuegbu (2019) reported that public libraries have lifelong contact with societal members and are doing well in the course of implementing information literacy programmes leading to the development of information literate communities for participation in sustainable development targets. This depicts that libraries drive media, digital and information literacy programmes that empower people not only for fulfilled life but also for active contributions towards sustainable development of the society. Ekoko (2017) reported that use of libraries have positive effect on the acquisition of information literacy skills which leads to academic productivity and performance among students in Nigeria. No doubt, the delivery of information literacy programmes by libraries empowers individuals in diverse areas of human endeavour, including students in academic institutions for higher academic performance (Solymani, 2014; Banik & Kumar, 2019). Similarly, according to the study of Uzuegbu and Okezie (2019), information literacy programmes as championed by academic, special, public and school libraries enables the acquisition of information use competencies, actualization of information literate status among the citizens, and also contributes to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in areas of economic growth, environmental protection, and social inclusion.

Public libraries are also not left out in the mission of nation-building. Apart from serving the citizens as poor man's university for unhindered accessibility to information, public libraries are also rendering other services that are contributing to nation-building. For instance, Mies (as cited in Ayandokun & Ugwuogu, 2018), noted that public libraries are championing financial literacy

programmes through holding financial literacy webinars, holding tech savvy programmes for teenagers, making financial literacy videos with library users as well as developing websites for training library staff and users on financial literacy issues. This is a welcome development considering that possession of financial literacy knowledge and skills is essential for 21st century life due to economic hardship and high cost of living across the country.

Furthermore, libraries of all types have been advancing the course of reading habits for acquisition of reading culture by different classes of individuals in the society. Although Abdulkadir and Mohammed (2018) highlighted the consequences of poor reading culture to include anti-social activities, delinquency, bullying, cybercrimes and examination malpractices, there are different ways libraries are facilitating development of reading habits for the citizens. For instance, Akidi (2018) notes that the National Library of Nigeria has been organizing readership promotion campaigns since 1981 as a way of encouraging reading culture for enduring positive change in Nigeria. In addition, many school, public and academic libraries organize seminars and lecture periods on reading skills, reading culture and information literacy competence. However, this campaign needs to be supported with establishment and maintenance of functional libraries in all levels of Nigerian educational system, alongside the support of parents and guardians (Akidi, 2018: 86). This would facilitate continuous increase in the reading habits and patterns of students and young adults in Nigeria.

Besides, due to steady increase in aliteracy in the society, libraries are also using conducive learning environment, orientation programmes, workshops, seminars and allied information services for addressing aliteracy challenges in the society (Unagha, Ibenne & Nwajiaku, 2019). Not only that, the implementation of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by ministries, departments and agencies of governments have not actually lived up to the expectations of Nigerians. Fortunately, libraries are at the forefront of championing the implementation of this FOIA law through enforcing the principles of intellectual freedom and abhorring all forms of censorship (Akobundu & Jaja, 2018). This is based on the fact that intellectual freedom, freedom of expression and rejection of all forms of censorship are the core mission of libraries as institutions for advancement of democracy and nation-building.

The descriptions in the afore-mentioned findings reiterated the diverse roles of libraries and their inevitability in all affairs and engagements of man, thus, as Nwokocha (2017: 66) noted, any segment of the society that pretends to do without the library is only deluding itself or at best operating at half capacity. Thus, it can be seen that libraries and their information services as delivered by librarians remain key contributors towards the advancement of nation-building and sustainable development in Nigeria. However, the extents these libraries are rendering services in the country are not really measuring up to expectations due to myriads of challenges and perceived neglect by the government.

Exploring State of Libraries in Nigeria

The state of libraries in Nigeria is nothing to cheer at all. Various scholarly reports, both empirical and conceptual, have shown that the extent of neglect of libraries in Nigeria is really alarming. From the National Library of Nigeria to public libraries, school libraries and even academic libraries, there is hardly any report that explored the extent of development of these libraries with results from positive dimension. As noted by Nwokocha (2017: 25), it is unfortunate that the National Library of Nigeria is still on rented apartment owing a rent of N508 million and the Landlord is threatening to eject the organization except the bill is quickly settled. Sadly, since

the project of the National Library of Nigeria was conceived, nothing significant has been done and the timeframe for completion of the nation's apex library remains unknown (Ejechi, 2019). This is not far from the situation in various branches at some state capitals in Nigeria, which are also operating from rented properties.

Public libraries in Nigeria are usually managed by state library boards with annual budgetary allocations for running and managing the libraries. The public libraries are also facilitating intellectual freedom, ensuring equal access to information, and addressing the information needs of all classes of individuals in the society, including children and young adults. Unfortunately, the poor condition of most public libraries in Nigeria reflects a sector that is totally neglected. The challenges cut across poor funding, inadequate professional staff, outdated and irrelevant information resources, poor user needs analysis, and inappropriate library buildings (Igwebuike, Agbo & Echezona, 2018). Some public libraries are operating in dilapidated buildings with poor infrastructure, inadequate reading desks and general poor learning environment that is not conducive for the acquisition of knowledge and literacy skills. The study of Osuchukwu and Ayeni (2019) revealed that there is lack of engagement from libraries and librarians to user communities on issues related to nation-building, sustainable development and social integration. This may not be unconnected with the poor funding, inadequate infrastructure and absence of motivation of library personnel especially in public libraries across Nigeria.

Community libraries or community information centres (CICs) are also expected to be part of infrastructure that facilitates nation-building and sustainable development of rural areas in Nigeria. Unfortunately, it appears CICs are hardly seen in Nigeria, except few cases that were built and donated by philanthropists or through community self-help efforts. This unavailability of CICs across Nigeria for addressing diverse information needs of rural dwellers from agriculture, health, business, and allied areas led to asking questions of whose responsibility is it to provide information services to rural dwellers (Uzuegbu, 2016; Uzuegbu & Arua, 2018). These CICs as revealed in the study of Adewusi (2013) and Agwuna and Enweani (2018) are making significant impact in their host communities in areas of education, current affairs and government programmes, skills acquisition, financial support and assistance, business opportunities and employments, as well as functional provision of health information to rural dwellers.

School libraries and media resource centres are meant to be found in all primary and secondary schools across Nigeria. Apart from few private schools that have what looks like libraries or better put as reading rooms, all other public schools in Nigeria are hardly operated with what can be referred to as libraries. This runs contrary to the National Policy on Education that is specific with establishment of school libraries, thus:

“since libraries constitute one of the most important educational services, proprietors of schools shall also provide functional libraries in all their educational institutions in accordance with the established standards . . . and provide for training of librarians and library assistants for this service” (FGN, 2004).

The federal and state governments are proprietors of public primary and secondary schools that are violating the implementation of this policy in Nigeria. Not only that, librarians play strategic roles in literacy attainment and academic development of school children, but very little or no consideration is given to the educative role of librarians in schools (Merga, 2019). The issues of poor reading habit, mass failure in examinations, poor language and communication skills, lack of capacity for independent learning, aliteracy, and the like, will continue to ravage the society due to

lack of libraries that facilitate access to learning resources and absence of certified librarians in public primary and secondary schools in Nigeria.

Academic libraries that are found in tertiary institutions are also not left out. For instance, there is a prevailing mandatory regulation by National Universities Commission that 10% of every university recurrent budget should be reserved and spent for library development. Unfortunately, this policy has hardly been implemented by most universities in Nigeria thereby neglecting development of library resources, services and operations in tertiary institutions (Aina, 2013: 33; Nwokocha, 2017: 74). This issue of poor funding is not peculiar to universities alone; many polytechnics, colleges of education and colleges of agriculture are also affected because most of the libraries in these institutions are not encouraging knowledge acquisition. In addition, Abubakar (2020) added poor infrastructure, inadequate information and communication technologies (ICT), poor ICT knowledge and skills, insufficient collaboration and linkages for resource sharing, among others, as significant part of challenges affecting library development and library education in Nigeria. Addressing these issues means that the challenges enumerated should be given adequate attention.

Projecting Sustainable Nation Building and Development via Library Development

As noted in the preceding subheadings, the neglect of libraries in Nigeria is really alarming. Nwokocha (2017: 67) adds that the most intriguing side of this neglect is that some of those who benefitted from the noble services of libraries are not exempted from this practice . . . looking at the nation's public libraries, school libraries, national library, and even academic libraries, librarians are left to believe that all the remarks about the importance of libraries by Nigerian governments are mere rhetoric.

There is no contradiction to the fact that development of libraries is essential for pursuing the course of nation building and sustainable development. There should be sincere commitment by the federal and state governments towards addressing library development in Nigeria. The National Library of Nigeria needs urgent attention and it is the responsibility of federal government to give the nation a befitting apex library that would reflect the core image of the country. Public libraries which are under the care of state governments through their respective library boards need to be given attention. In fact, as nations are battling with the status of knowledge economy, it appears Nigeria is not concerned because the nature of neglect to these public libraries and their branches is something else.

Take a look at the National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) that made provisions for libraries but the reverse is the case in terms of implementation. There is need to implement this policy to the last letter so as to revive the primary and secondary school systems in Nigeria, and at the same time create opportunities for librarians to contribute more to nation-building through education and training.

There is need for a holistic library and information policy in Nigeria that would specify pattern of library development in the country, which is expected to cover all types of libraries. In addition, such policy should include the idea of having standard information and knowledge centres in all the 774 local government areas of the country, with specifications put forward by Shrestha (2013) where such centres would serve as vehicles for social and economic transformation in local government areas, with various facilities like library and information resource centre, information and communication technology (ICT) centre, women empowerment unit, early childhood cum children's section, multimedia and communication section, and hall for training via workshops and seminars.

Conclusion

Libraries of all types are instrumental to nation-building and sustainable development. Academic libraries in tertiary institutions, school libraries in primary and secondary schools, public libraries in cities and towns, community information centres that are for rural dwellers, and the like, are significant stakeholders in the task of nation-building. Neglecting these libraries will not mean well for the development of the country. Unfortunately, as revealed in this article, the pattern of library development and funding in the country is not pleasing at all. This needs to be addressed through policy formulations and implementations as suggested in the work.

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