

# **REPOSITIONING NIGERIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES FOR INNOVATIVE REVENUE GENERATION STRATEGIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Human capital development is greatly linked with the possession of information and knowledge assets which the members of the society harness to achieve social capital and attain sustainable development. The public library is one of the social institutions that provide the basic information and knowledge resources needed by man without any form of commercial and social pressure or restriction. However, the reliance of such libraries on government funding in the midst of global and national economic challenges, and their philosophy of free access have limited the performance of public libraries in Nigeria, and affected their capacity to deliver on their social mandate of information provision for societal development. This paper therefore argues for the repositioning of public libraries for strategic revenue generation to achieve their goals. The adoption of crowd-funding, establishment of business ventures, corporate partnership, publicity, etc have been proffered as strategies that will not affect the philosophy of public libraries. However, identified challenges such as inadequate business acumen of librarians, strict legislations and policies of public libraries, absence of structural uniformity, inadequate staffing among others have posed difficulty towards the engagement of libraries in revenue generation schemes. This paper recommends inclusion of revenue generation courses in LIS curriculum, retraining of practicing librarians, government provision of take-off grants for businesses, relaxation of legal frameworks and policies on libraries, among others, in order to open the floodgate for the engagement of public libraries in revenue generation programmes that can enhance contemporary information services delivery for the development of the nation.*

**Keywords:** Public Libraries, Revenue Generation Strategies, Nigeria

## **INTRODUCTION**

Societies are built upon the collective capacities possessed by their members. These capacities are acquired through the possession of, and use of knowledge and knowledge assets. This knowledge is acquired through the access to information resources in knowledge repositories like libraries and information centres. Therefore information, as a precursor to knowledge, is considered a fundamental resource for human capital development and societal transformation. Habibu and Babayi (2017), note that libraries provide access to information that could help improve communities, civil societies, organizations and governance, thereby setting a platform for the fight to end extreme poverty in all nations of the world. The public library is usually established to meet the informational, educational and recreational needs of members of the public in all spheres of human endeavour. It is an institution established, supported and funded by the government through tax or through some other forms of community organization for members of the immediate and larger society. It provides access to knowledge, information or works of creative imagination through a number of resources and services, and is equally available to all members of the community irrespective of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic status, employment status and educational attainment (Okojie, & Okiy, 2019). Osuigwe and Unagha (2018), state that access to information has been adjudged as a necessity and a major factor in the development and empowerment of the citizenry of any society in achieving economic, political and educational successes.

The position occupied by the public library in the current information society makes it a social institution whose value cannot be over-emphasised in a knowledge-driven economy as it offers information products and services needed by every member of society to execute their socio-economic tasks irrespective of their ability to afford such resources. As noted by Audunson, Aabø, Blomgren, Evjen, Jochumsen, Larsen, Rasmussen, Vårheim, Johnston, and Koizumi (2019) a functioning public sphere is one of the essential preconditions of any democracy, and the libraries have served as institutions underpinning a sustainable public sphere by being providers of knowledge and cultural expressions. The development that access to, and use of information provide for any society is universally acknowledged. That is the origin of the concept of information society. That is why the spread of knowledge and education after the invention of printing is also closely related to the evolutionary trends in scientific and technological

advancements. Possession of and use of knowledge improves the individual and the society, simultaneously.

Libraries and information centres, especially public libraries and information centres have become integral aspect of man's society in providing information services to drive the goals of man. They provide opportunities for a balanced society because they are the information-based institutions that do not discriminate in their delivery of information services (Onyemachi, & Ayandokun, 2022). If information is the principal resource or commodity in an information society, then equitable access to information technologies, information infrastructure, information resources and services is crucial if that society is to be a fair and just one that will attain its developmental goals (Encyclopedia of Communication and Information, 2019). The public library is best positioned to bridge the digital divide that exists between the privileged members of the society and those at the extreme negative end of the digital divide. Thus, it offers an opportunity for an even human and social capital development. The distinguishing factor therefore, between the public library on one hand, and the other types of libraries on the other, is that the public library is an inclusive institution, because its activities are destined to favour all citizens without the distinctions of age, race, sex, religion, or nationality (Talavera-Ibarra, & Vega, 2015).

The acknowledgment of the public library, alongside the value and potentials that its information resources, products and services offer to the general public is not enough to deliver the mandate of public libraries. Observation and literature in the Nigerian context have shown that the public libraries in Nigeria are not at par with their counterparts in most of the developed world. According to Awogbami, Opele, & Adeyemi, (2018) the challenges of information service provision in public libraries which create massive hurdles for the attainment of the goals of the libraries in public enlightenment and having informed citizenry include lack of appropriate laws and policies governing the public library system, inappropriate government support, funding issues, lack of efficient library management and staffing issues. Unlike revenue generating agencies, Nigerian government at different tiers have committed less into the provision of funds for public libraries. Several Nigerian public libraries are in pitiable physical conditions that may not attract any information seeker to the library. In a study of user satisfaction with public libraries in the South East Zone of Nigeria by Nnadozie, Okeke, and Onyekweodiri (2015), it was discovered that users were dissatisfied with the out-dated and deteriorating nature of the available titles, as well as the unavailability of desired information sources, including ICTs. Overall, more respondents were

dissatisfied with available resources, facilities and services. This empirical finding among others, such as that of an earlier observation that Nigerian public libraries are grossly under-funded by their proprietors, and thus, can neither afford computers nor computerization (Aguolu & Aguolu, 2002), point to inadequate government funding as a major cause of these problems affecting contemporary information services delivery in Nigerian public libraries.

As most of the unsatisfactory issues raised above revolve around funding challenges which lead to difficulty in the recruitment and remuneration of qualified librarians, training of librarians, capacity building, staff motivation, aesthetics, and the acquisition of modern technologies and resources to deliver contemporary library and information services to the public, It is therefore based on this negative downward trend that this article argues for the need to reposition Nigerian public libraries for innovative revenue generation strategies to address the funding problems bedeviling public library services delivery in Nigeria.

### **Public Libraries: Definition and Roles**

Public libraries are not-for-profit organizations, established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization (Obinyan, Obinyan, & Aidenojie, 2013). Public libraries ensure that their resources and services are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, political views, or religion, and other distinguishing characteristics (Beth, Charnney & Smith, as cited in Zaid, & Egberongbe, 2020). The IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto (as cited in Abumandour, 2021) defines public libraries as the perpetual source of information and knowledge. Public libraries promote lifelong learning, cultural development, peace and social welfare for the public. They are hubs of information, providing all kinds of knowledge available to users nationally and internationally. Public libraries help communities to develop, improve and carry out decision-making independently at individual and communal levels. The manifesto further states that public libraries deliver different services and materials for various categories of users based on equity and equality. In addition, IFLA/UNESCO recommended public libraries to disseminate special services, materials and reference sources among users who cannot have access to the regular libraries services and materials, such as linguistic minorities, disabled, hospitalized or imprisoned people.

Many individuals use the public library to find information for leisure, study or for work. As hubs of information, public libraries offer a collaboration of space, resources and services that enable and promote vibrant learning environments while free public access to information resources

is often considered a core service (Zaid, & Egberongbe, 2020). Al Marzooqi, Singh, and Muhammad (2018), state that public libraries have always been the source of enlightenment in the communities they serve, as well as being much more. They can serve as parliament halls, science laboratories and social spaces for exhibitions, book clubs, wedding parties and fashion shows. However, the primary value of the library still remains in its role as a stimulating environment for knowledge reception and creation.

Public libraries play a vital role in providing information of all kinds to all categories of clients regardless of occupational, social, economic, educational, political, ethnic as well as religious background but freely accessible to all. Thus, public libraries are regarded as 'information centres for all' because of the large scope of their clients (Awogbami, Opele, & Adeyemi, 2018). These roles make the public library a rallying centre for information and knowledge acquisition for the different members of the society as it offers its services without economic pressure and/or societal restriction.

### **Definition and Justification for Revenue Generation in Public Libraries**

Revenue generation can be described as the actions and activities undertaken to earn income by a business, organisation, institution or any other corporate entity. Hayes, Mansa, and Perez (2022) define revenue as the money generated from normal business operations, calculated as the average sales price times the number of units sold. It is the top line (or gross income) figure from which costs are subtracted to determine net income. Revenue is also known as sales on the income statement. According to Nguyen (2021), revenue generation refers to all the activities a business undertakes to generate funds— these activities include (but are not limited to) sales and marketing. It includes all activities that help create income and profitability, such as operating plans, strategies, and practices that are designed for increasing revenue. This implies that every part of an organization can contribute to the revenue generation process.

Rosenberg (as cited in Zaid, 2008) identifies the benefits of revenue generation in libraries as:

- i. Enhancement of libraries' standing and credibility as financial manager,
- ii. Increase in the visibility and reputation of the library,
- iii. Promotion of a customer-based, competitive approach to the provision of information services, and
- iv. Enabling of new services to be offered which otherwise would be allocated income.

The provision of modern information services comes at high costs. From recruitment to remuneration, and aesthetics to acquisition, massive investments and expenditures are expected in libraries. According to Kumara and Sathis (2013) finance plays a crucial role in all developmental activities of an organization. Public libraries being spending organizations, do not earn revenue for its services rendered. Therefore, public libraries need constant financial support both from the government and non-government agencies to provide its services smoothly and effectively. And when such finances are not forthcoming from government, public libraries need to strategise on how to earn income to support their services and complement those statutory allocations from government without compromising their philosophy of services. A perennial source of finance also strengthens the system to perform in an efficient manner. Adebola-Wilson (2017) opines that to get away from the financial pressures experienced by public libraries, it has been emphasized that public libraries need to diversify their sources of funding and not rely solely of funding through local taxes, state finances and federal grants. Some common non-taxed based sources include user charges, fines, contracts and sales. It also increases community involvement, community participation and visibility of the library.

Agosto (2008) state that the principal funding for public libraries from state and local governments can imply that public library funding can be influenced by political decisions. `New government officials in charge of state, county, or municipal budgets can decide to cut public library funding in order to reduce local taxes or to solve local budget deficits. This is in line with an earlier position by Allen (2003) who iterates that in a public information agency, political processes such as referenda determine the amount of the agency's revenue. Similarly, the services to be supplied to the user community are determined (or at least strongly influenced) by political processes. It is possible, however, that political processes are (at least in part) the expression of market forces. In response to recent public library funding deficiencies, many people both inside and outside the field of librarianship have suggested that public libraries need to rely less on traditional government funding and more on alternative funding sources (Agosto, 2008). These positions are in no doubt, very genuine and adequate attention must be given to alternative revenue generating mechanisms for optimal 21<sup>st</sup> century public library services delivery.

### **Innovative Revenue Generation Strategies for Nigeria Public Libraries**

Having established the need for funding in public libraries, and having realized that the meager conventional government funding, in the midst of biting economic challenges is not

sufficient for the delivery of contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century public library services, it is pertinent to identify innovative and creative strategies that can be used to generate funds for public libraries in Nigeria, in order to complement government statutory budgetary allocations to public libraries. Bennet (2017) explains that as funding for public services continues to be under immense pressure, libraries need to look at ways to diversify their sources of funds: generating additional income streams to help support existing services and to develop new ones. The Art Council England (2014) found that adopting an entrepreneurial approach to developing new purchased products, services or facilities could not only help raise much-needed, revenue, but might also help libraries attract new clientele and improve on services delivery. The Council further concludes that there is no one way to generate income for public libraries - effective solutions depend on local context, demographics and competition - and that it is critical to have a strategic approach, a good grasp of the competitive environment, and the commercial nous to spot opportunities. In support of this, Rosenberg (as cited in Irunegbo, Igbokwe, Nworie, & Omorodion, 2018) state that there is a movement away from total reliance on government funding towards additional sources of library income, therefore the author agreed that income generation is here to stay and that in the future the library will be asked to become more self-sufficient and not only to be responsible for generating income but also to be held accountable for the revenue it generates. The possibilities of this happening are becoming higher since information and knowledge are exponentially gaining prominence as viable factors of production and tools for sustainable development.

Bennet (2017) identifies the following as sources of funding and revenue for public libraries:

- i. Being commissioned via public or private sector service contracts or partnerships.
- ii. Direct trading and retail
- iii. Getting money from charities, trusts foundations or philanthropy.
- iv. Fund raising/ crowd-funding.
- v. Precepts from parish and church councils to support libraries.
- vi. Community infrastructure levy.
- vii. And, looking longer-term into the future, social investment and alternative funding models like social impact bonds and blended funds.

Agosto (2008) identifies corporate sponsorship as a strategic way of generating revenue by public libraries. The library can put corporate logos on public relations materials, provide VIP seating at corporate-funded events, and mention donors in the newsletters. Corporate partnership,

fundraising, expanding user charges, education funding, mergers and privatization are part of the strategies for revenue generation in libraries (Adebola-Wilson, 2017). If selected services such as compilation of subject bibliographies, computer training indexing and photocopying services are developed, they are likely to become reliable sources of supplementary income to the libraries (Ugwoke 2011). The challenge with this suggestion by Ugwoke is that the real targets of public library services, those at the lower base of the digital divide, may be further drifted away, excluded, and denied access to vital information if conventional library services are charged. It also puts to question, the UNESCO/IFLA manifesto on public libraries that recommends that the public library should be free from “commercial pressure” (IFLA/UNESCO, 2001).

### **Challenges of Revenue Generation in Nigerian Public Libraries**

There are a myriad of challenges hindering the diversified generation of revenue for public libraries. The complexities of such challenges are aggravated by the fact that public libraries are traditionally not-for-profit institutions with their own philosophy of free services delivery. More so, generating incomes require certain knowledge and business acumen. Pautz (2014) states that income generation is difficult because it requires skills. According to Art Council of England (2014), several common barriers to the development and sealing up of income generating activities include:

- i. Political and community acceptance of the concept of enterprise in libraries. This is because the main idea behind the establishment of public libraries is information services delivery for those who are less privileged to have access to or afford information-bearing sources.
- ii. Charging and trading restriction upon local authorities.
- iii. The lack of uncertainty surrounding core and non-core services and what can be charged for in the context of public libraries laws. Public libraries are products of states and local legislation in several countries and Nigeria is not an exception. Delineating what services should be charged for and the ones that should be free could generate a lot of confusion.
- iv. Assets-related issues including of changing of planning use, business rate status and limited space for diversification. Some rural public libraries lack the space to engage in commercial activities that would not disrupt core information services delivery. Having a



- hall where parties could be hosted for a certain fee around the library could be counter-productive to the serenity that is expected to characterise a decent reading environment.
- v. A perceived lack of enterprise skills, competencies and experience among staff and volunteers. Since income generation even at government level has proven difficult for financial and economic experts, it may be more difficult for librarians, who are non-professional financial experts and economists to devise and manage sources of income in an organisation that is traditionally not-for-profit.

Other challenges of revenue generation for public libraries as noted by Adebola-Wilson (2017) include:

- i. **Legal consideration:** The implication of sourcing from other means in order to support library activities must be in line with the laws establishing the library since they are also legal entities.
- ii. **Lack of structural uniformity:** This refers to problems that may arise when libraries try to partner. The needs of such libraries may not be uniform, just as their organizational hierarchies may not be.

Most non-profit organizations including libraries that depend on their parent body's funds and donations are finding it difficult to service; as owners are struggling to finance their mainstream business. The visible evidence is seen on the comatose state of public libraries (Iruogbo, Nworries, Igbokwe, & Omoriodion, 2018). The challenges further identified by the researches include:

- i. Library managers lack idea of integrating commercialization on library services. This aligns with the findings of Jestin and Parameswari (as cited in Ajegbomogun, 2010) who identified barrier to operating a profitable information business as lack of business expertise among librarians and information scientists.
- ii. Policy establishing libraries makes it difficult for commercial services in the library.
  - i. There is inadequate fund to establish commercial base resources in the library.
  - ii. The nature of library services makes it impossible to introduce pricing in the library.
  - iii. There are no guided policy frameworks for introducing fee services in the library.
- iv. Library managers shy away from commercialization of services.
- v. Libraries training curriculum fails to impact business entrepreneurship and commercial/marketing knowledge into librarians.

Agosto (2008) notes that funding equity is also a key issue. Seeking alternative funding normally takes a great deal of dedicated number of staff or volunteer time. As a result of this, small libraries, with smaller staff strength and smaller potential volunteer groups, can be disadvantaged in the search for non-tax funds, as can libraries located in impoverished or rural areas with lower tax bases. A lot of public libraries in rural Nigeria fall under this category as they only have a few staff from the main state-run library at the headquarters (state capital) delegated to man the divisional, municipal, or provincial libraries in remote communities.

However, in the findings of Chebon (2005) on public funding of a public library, using the Kenyan National Library Services, indicates that since the public library is one of those institutions tied into legal, economic, educational, social and political processes, the issue of user fees transcends the library. It is a public policy issue. The study indicates that the introduction of fees for specific library services would have a range of undesirable effects, and would not solve the library's funding problems. In addition, the study shows that user fees will negatively affect those who are in most need of the service but may be unable to pay. Taking into consideration the financial implications and staff time needed to implement and manage the scheme, it also became evident that it will not be cost effective for the Kenyan National Library Services to introduce user fees. The researcher therefore declined to recommend the introduction of user fees, but rather the setting up of other sustainable income generating options and cost saving measures which could be adopted by the Kenyan National Library Services. This position aligns with those of Agosto (2008) and Adebola-Wilson (2017), as earlier explained. It is then important to note that while trying to expand the libraries revenue base, caution must be applied in order to avoid discouraging the major targets of the public library from using the library due to the imposition of charges for information services, which may constitute an economic burden on them. The implication of this is that core library and information services should not be charged.

### **Prospects of Revenue Generation in Nigerian Public Libraries**

A major prospect of innovative revenue generation in public libraries in Nigeria is the recognition of the need for such alternative means by public librarians. As discovered in a study by Okiy (2005), funding for libraries and information centers in Nigeria is largely through government allocations to the overseeing ministries or institutions, yet government funding has been acknowledged to be poor, requiring libraries to look for alternative sources of income in order to meet the increasingly sophisticated demand of library users for electronic information services. This

means that librarians at first admit that funding is an existential threat to their services delivery. While the funding is yet to come, the recognition for the need to diversify, and the growing call for innovative funding strategies have contributed to the prospects of alternative diversified funding by public libraries.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The delivery of goods, products and services in every business requires funds. Information is a major product in the contemporary world as it also goes through a lot of processes before its production, provision, and dissemination. The public library is one major social institution saddled with a monumental responsibility of ensuring information and its resources are available to information users. The conventional ideology behind all public libraries is information services for all without economic burden and commercial restrictions on the users. This is why the public library holds the most fundamental position as an agent of enlightenment to the citizenry. What cannot be however taken away is that the public library, like every other government agency, requires massive funding to meet up with its duties. Unfortunately, the statutory funding of public libraries in Nigeria has not been able to provide the needed spine to carry the weight of the responsibilities of the public library system. This has led to years of reported unsatisfactory state of affairs in public library services delivery among librarians and users alike. Therefore, it is essential at this stage, in this knowledge-driven 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution era, where information is now the oil that greases the society, that the public library seeks for innovative revenue generating strategies to expand its income and improve in its services delivery in order to meet up with its mandate of having an informed citizenry that can drive socio-economic development through an improved human and social capital development. Failure to do this will relegate not just the public library to the background, but also the field of Library and Information Science which is mostly seen from the prism of the services delivered by public libraries, in the eyes of the layman. The recognition of, and calls for the need for a viable and expanded revenue base by librarians is a prospect, even in the midst of challenges such as lack of requisite innovative skills and presence of legal bottlenecks. The following recommendations are hereby put forward to address the challenges associated with repositioning Nigerian public libraries for innovative revenue generation:

- i. Incorporation of revenue generation in libraries into the curriculum of Library and Information Science at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Librarians are naturally trained to be service providers with not-for-profit philosophy. Prospective librarians need to

- be trained on innovative strategies to be adopted in generating revenue for their libraries without creating further burden on the users who are still being persuaded to use the library.
- ii. Organisation of in-service training for practicing public librarians on revenue generation for improved services delivery.
  - iii. Use of public space in some libraries having such spaces for affordable services beyond traditional library services. Such services could include multimedia recreational services such as modern virtual and video games that can attract children and young adults to the library premises.
  - iv. Government relaxation of library policies which make it difficult for libraries to generate funds on their own for their services delivery. This will further improve the library services delivery without affecting government's already strained recurrent and capital expenditure.
  - v. Provision of initial take-off capital for libraries to embark on such projects by the government and proprietors of public libraries. This will give the public library the financial spine to start up and engage in business ventures that will free it from overdependence on government meagre funding.

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