

CHAPTER SIX

THE ROLES OF PUBLIC AND NATIONAL LIBRARIES IN
THE ATTAINMENT OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN
NIGERIA

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Abstract

The relevance of library and information services in the attainment of national development cannot be overemphasized. Public and national libraries, as institutions saddled with the responsibility of catering for the information needs of the general public, play vital roles in the realisation of these objectives. This paper takes a cursory look at the roles of public and national libraries in the promotion of national development in Nigeria; with emphasis on the educational, recreational, information and research-support services rendered in those libraries. Appropriate recommendations are made on how to improve the activities of those libraries.

Introduction

Libraries have remained an integral part of human societies over the different phases of human existence. Islam (2004) defined a library as a learning institution equipped with treasures of knowledge maintained, organized, and managed by trained personnel to educate children, men and women continuously, and assist in their self-improvement through an effective and prompt dissemination of information embodied in the resources. Libraries are compendiums of human knowledge in different disciplines and areas of specialization which are consciously acquired, organised, documented and made available for the consultation and use of members of society. Library and information services are very important in all aspects of human life. As repositories of knowledge in diverse fields, libraries have undergone tremendous transformation from the era of ancient library to the present information age. Libraries have been affected continuously by technological changes, but yet continues to adapt for the benefit of humanity. roles of libraries in any society, community or organization cannot be over emphasized, as they are crucial to the attainment of national development, especially of third world countries such as Nigeria. Owing to the significance of libraries in Nigerian societies, different libraries are established with the aim of providing services which are

crucial to the development of the citizens. Public and national libraries are saddled with the responsibility of rendering services geared towards meeting the information needs of the general public and promoting national development in Nigeria.

Public and National Libraries

According to Olanlokun and Salisu (1993) public libraries are libraries set up to provide free but traditional library and information services to everyone. The Library's Glossary Dictionary (1997) defines a public library as a library established by local, state or central governments for the use of the general public. Public libraries can therefore be defined as libraries that offer vital services to the general public free of charge; and also provides educational, social and political information to people in a particular community. A national library refers to the foremost library which serves as repository of all the intellectual outputs of a nation. National libraries represent the apex library of a nation. They are thus providing leadership roles for other libraries within their geographical locations. Lor (1997) conceptualized a national library as follows:

"an institution, primarily funded (directly or indirectly) by the state, which is responsible for comprehensively collecting, bibliographically recording, preserving and making available the documentary heritage (primarily published materials of all types) emanating from or relating to its country; and which furthers the effective and efficient functioning of the country's libraries through the management of nationally significant collections, the provision of an infrastructure, the coordination of activities in the country's library and information system, international liaison, and the exercise of leadership. These responsibilities are formally recognised, usually in law."

Generally, public and national libraries are accepted as public good; because their services are geared towards the satisfaction of the information needs of the general public- without consideration to age, sex, occupation, class, religion and ethnic affiliations.

The Concept of National Development in Nigeria

National development is an important goal which countries all over the world aim at achieving in order to improve the welfare of the citizens, and ensure overall progress in all sectors of the economy. Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) defines national development as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. National development involves economic growth, modernization, equitable distribution of

income and national resources, and socio-economic transformation for improved living standards of the people of a nation through the use of a human, natural and institutional resources (Mohammed, 1996). National development can be achieved through adequate planning, increased investment in human resources through quality education and training, and sustenance of viable economic goals in a stable political environment. Opeke (2004) conceptualized information as the gateway to other resources - be it social, economic, technological or educational. Availability of accurate information and its optimum utilization are preconditions for national development. Effective library and information service must be available to the citizens in order to foster national development through quality information. Information is now the key to development, and it is an essential tool for developmental activities (Rafiu and Sodiq, 2015). Information is a vital ingredient in the developmental process as individuals and organizations rely on the use of public and national libraries to obtain information needed for their day to day activities. Wali (1991) described a public library as a key source of information to citizens and, to a lesser extent, to politicians and businessmen.

Public and National Libraries and the Attainment of National Development in Nigeria

National and public libraries play vital roles in the attainment of national development in Nigeria. They maintain collections that include not only printed materials, but also electronic resources such as art reproductions, maps, photographs, microfiches, CD-ROMs, computer software, online databases, internet, electronic books, e-journals and other media. In addition to maintaining collections within library buildings, libraries often feature telecommunications links that provide users with access to information at remote sites (Halsey, 2006). Libraries play certain roles which are crucial to the attainment of national development in Nigeria.

Information Roles of Public and National Libraries in Nigeria

Information is an essential ingredient which is crucial to the sustenance of human beings. Adeyemi (1977) describes information as a basis to the life of man; just as air, water, food, and shelter. The provision of adequate and timely information is vital to the successful completion of every human endeavour, especially educational programmes. With the development of information and communication technology it has become easier to share the vast amount of information available in different disciplines. Public and national libraries have the capabilities to identify and acquire information resources in different disciplines through purchase, legal deposit and

exchanges. They have valuable information on various aspects of literacy programmes in Nigeria, abound in journal publications, and information in the form of research reports and bulletins. They also have vital information resources on cultural practices and socio-economic activities of different sections of the Nigerian populace. Public and national libraries could also develop local economic capabilities by making available necessary information on income generating projects, self-employment activities, credit facilities, state assistance schemes, etc. This type of information is needed by adult educators, community workers, researchers, politicians, educational planners, teachers, supervisors, evaluators, civil servants and policy makers who are involved in the implementation of national development programmes. Therefore, public and national libraries render services which are crucial to economic and overall the development of Nigeria.

Educational roles of Public and National Libraries in Nigeria

Education is a powerful tool used in building the minds of the citizenry for meaningful participation in developmental activities of a nation. There is direct connection between investment in education and national development; as the human resources required for the attainment of national development are trained through the educational process. Education today is not only a basic human right but also an essential tool for national development. The role of public and national libraries in this regard cannot be over-emphasized. Public and national libraries acquire relevant educational materials in line with the demands and the needs of different categories of users, and make the materials available and accessible to the users. Therefore, public and national libraries can be termed as information agencies which provide assistance and guidance to the citizens of a country. Public and national libraries also serve as links between their user community and the global village, as regards acquisition of knowledge. Through the services of public and national libraries, the citizens of Nigeria have the opportunity to acquire learning experiences at little or no cost, thereby enriching the intellectual activities required for national development.

Research Roles of Public and National Libraries in Nigeria

Research is an intellectual activity which is crucial to the development of societies. It can be defined as a scientific inquiry into identified problems, with the aim of solving them and extending the frontiers of knowledge. Public and national libraries in Nigeria facilitate scientific studies, teaching and self-learning process (Dorothy, 1977). They also serve as repositories of knowledge obtainable in diverse fields of human endeavours, and disseminate materials of research values in the modern

society to their users. They encourage the habit of scientific investigation in their users, and also enable them to develop skills and resourcefulness useful for the conduct of quality research in different disciplines for national development.

Recreational Roles of Public and National Libraries in Nigeria

Public and national libraries are also known for the promotion of recreational and relaxation activities to members of the Nigerian society. They enhance the mental welfare of the citizens through the provision of information materials designed to sustain the reading interest of their users in their leisure periods. This is done through special exhibition of materials that serve as reading resources in both print and electronic resources (Wali, 1991). Public and national libraries also provide an avenue for in-house story telling hours and other extension services, such as the establishment of book clubs, book services, organized debates, symposia, drama, and poetry. Through this service, they improve the mental welfare of the citizens and enable them to perform optimally in activities required for national development in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Public and national libraries are public institutions which play crucial roles in the sustenance and promotion of national development of Nigeria. They provide accurate and relevant information needed to enhance the daily activities of the citizens in a timely manner. Public and national libraries are also known to perform educational, recreational and research-support roles to the members of society at no cost. In order to enhance the activities of public and national libraries in the attainment of national development in Nigeria, the following steps should be taken. Government and non-governmental organizations should invest more in public and national libraries in Nigeria to enable them improve on the acquisition of information resources and appropriate facilities.

- Concerted efforts should be made by the appropriate authorities to ensure that trained and competent librarians are employed to manage public and national libraries in Nigeria.
- Library personnel working in public and national libraries in Nigeria should improve on their services and sensitize the members of the public on the importance of services rendered in those libraries, and how the services can contribute to national development.
- Qualified library professionals should be more involved in the planning and implementation of public and national libraries' programmes, so that they

would have inputs into the programmes, and ensure that they are structured in a way that national development will be promoted.

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