CHAPTER EIGHT

ACTUALIZING THE NIGERIAN CHANGE AGENDA THROUGH ACCESS TO INFORMATION: THE ROLES OF LIBRARIES

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Abstract
The paper explores the concept of access to information as being crucial to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in which the change agenda policies of the Federal Government of Nigeria is rooted. The role of libraries as global information infrastructure in meaningful and inclusive access to information for sustainable development is discussed. It covers a wide range of issues bordering on fighting corruption, poverty eradication, employment creation, security against Boko-Haram insurgency, economic development through diversification, price control, justice and the rule of law, and reformation in the oil and gas sector. It then concludes with recommendations that borders on declining financial support, inadequate infrastructural facilities, low levels of information development, obsolete materials and limited access to a variety of information in the form of stored data; as well as legislation on privacy of information to be addressed to help libraries fulfill their role of digital services, social and information access infrastructure for sustainable development.
Keywords: Nigeria, Change Agenda, Access, Information, Libraries

Introduction

About three decades ago, information was described as a crucial determinant of the pace of social and economic change (South Commission, 1990). A competitive market economy requires that economic actors have access to relevant, timely, and reliable information. The less available or credible the information, the greater the uncertainty and risk; and therefore the higher the cost of committing capital or labour. In all countries, governments are a primary source of information, and it sets many of the requirements for other providers as well. Information about the

economy and about market conditions is central to private sector calculations, and is either provided by the government or greatly influenced by what it requires other entities to make publicly available (IBRD, 1992). For decades, government agencies, practitioners, and researchers have applied information and communication technology (ICT) to solving community-level and national-level problems (Castells, 1996; Melkote, 2000; Wilkins, 2000; Castells, Fernandez, &Sey, 2009; Toyama, 2011; Heeks, 2010; Burnett & Jaeger, 2011). Over the years, they have amassed extensive evidence on how information and communication resources can be leveraged across highly diverse contexts, and a wide variety of domains (e.g. education, workforce development, gender equality, health care, and governance) while employing a range of technologies (e.g. community radio, mobile cooperatives, software applications, and television viewing centers). Yet despite the lessons learnt, we are still far from achieving a truly inclusive information society. It would be a mistake and a paradox to assume–in a world increasingly driven by interconnectedness, immediacy of information, and ubiquitous communications – that everyone can get online. Just as there is no guarantee that broad access to so much information will ensure that it is used in ways that lead to more desirable social goals.

It is precisely in this complex information landscape that the United Nations agreed in 2015 on a new comprehensive framework: the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. To achieve these aims, the agenda outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in areas including poverty, health, agriculture, gender equality, innovation, and youth employment, with specific targets for each goal, and 169 targets in total. Within the SDG framework, access to information and communication technologies underpins the achievement of the development goals. Eleven targets present access to information as a key tenet for achieving the targets aims (see Table 1). The agenda differs dramatically from its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, in that it takes a rights-based approach to sustainable development. It acknowledges that sustainable development is multifaceted and that all its constituent components are interrelated. Therefore, to address development challenges, it requires addressing all types of rights – social, economic, cultural, political, civil, and informational (Gigler, 2011; Souter, 2016; Esterhuysen, 2016). As the agenda for sustainable development progresses, the need to address the underlying factors holding back development in our societies becomes more and more pressing. Few are as pernicious as information poverty – the lack of access to, or the ability to use, the information necessary to foster economically and socially inclusive societies. IFLA President Donna Scheeder stressed:

"There is no sustainable development without access to information. And there is no meaningful, inclusive access to information without libraries."

Libraries, as trusted public centers, with both a global perspective and strong understanding of local needs, are essential partners for governments in achieving the SDG. If adequately supported in terms of connectivity, resources and legal frameworks, libraries can make real contribution to development by providing access to information. At the global level, they are the backbone of innovation systems, supporting the research that allows for better decision making in governments, and in international organisations. At the local level, they provide a safe, community-focused space for users to access and put information to work in a meaningful way.

Literature Review

Access to information

Odoemelam (2016) in Ajayi and Ogunyemi (2016) asserts that with the advance in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development towards information based economies and globalization is considered critical if individuals, businesses and national economies are to gain comparative advantages. Access to information was conceived as part of the Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development, which calls on global institutions and associations to "ensure that everyone has access to, and is able to understand, use, and share the information that is necessary to promote sustainable development and democratic societies (Lyon Declaration, 2014). Garrido and Fellows, (2017) in Development and Access to Information (DA2I) Report (2017) rhetorically asked: Can access to information create more socially and economically inclusive societies? Given the unprecedented ability we have today to gather, use, create, and exchange information, how can we capitalize on the strengths of the information society to help combat poverty and inequality, make governments more transparent and accountable, improve gender equality, increase youth's social and economic participation, and promote civic life in our communities? Access to information according to Development and Access to Information (2017) is "the rights and capacity to use, create, and share information in ways that are meaningful to each individual, community, or organization." Around the world, every day, libraries are giving people access to the information they need to live, learn, create, and innovate. From the grandest institutions in the world's greatest cities, to the mobile libraries plying rural back roads, they know that this access empowers individuals, communities, nations and organisations to make better decisions, and live better lives. Access to information (A2I) is not an end in

itself, but rather a driver of progress across board. It empowers people and communities, laying the foundations for equality, sustainability, and prosperity. It provides a clear illustration of the rights-based, holistic approach taken in the 2030 Development Agenda. Access to information, as codified in the SDG targets, has eleven targets as key tenets for achieving the targets aims.

Table 1: Access to information as codified in the SDGs targets

Goal 1: No Poverty
1.4. By 2030, ensure that all men and women,
in particular the poor and the vulnerable,
have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic
services, ownership and control over land and other forms of
property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new
technology and financial services.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger
2. c. Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food
commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate
timely access to market information, including on food reserves,
in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being
3.7. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care
services, including family planning, information and education,
and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies
and programmes.

Goal 4: Quality Education
4.4. Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who
have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills,
for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Goal 5: Gender Equality
5. b. Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular
information and communications technology,
to promote the empowerment of women.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
8.5. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for
all women and men, including for young people and persons
with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

9.5. Enhance scientific research; upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries

9. c. Significantly increase access to information and communications technology, and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the internet in least developed countries by2020.

Goal 12: Responsible Production and Consumption

12.8. Ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

16.10. Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

17.6. Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on, and access to, science, technology and innovation.

Source: Development and Access to Information (DA2I) Report, (2017)

The Change Agenda of Nigerian Government

In 2007, the Yar' Adua administration came up with a 7-point agenda for national development. In 2011, the Goodluck Jonathan administration came up with a transformation agenda. Again in 2015, the Buhari-led administration came to power with the change agenda, with policy thrust of curbing public sector corruption as a panacea for better economic transformation. The policy thrust of all these reforms is that Nigeria would be ranked one of the 20 most developed countries of the world by the year 2020. One of the major challenges which Nigeria had to contend with in her struggle for rapid development is how to change from bad attitudes, such as corruption and lawlessness, to a corruption free, and a just and egalitarian society . The way forward is the formulation of appropriate policies. The essence of synergistic roles of policy is to provide standard guideline which would stimulate the required change. To Oranusi (2014), a national policy encompasses a course of action that has a mandatory force of implementation in a geographical or political territory called a nation. The nation in question is always specified in the policy. Policy guidelines are necessary to create the necessary unified focus of all the different groups involved in a venture within the nation. Policy ensures standard

and a near semblance of outcome (Oranusi, 2014). The policy revolves around a general philosophy and its aims and objectives are common to all the sections of the policy implementation. According to Oranusi (2014), deviation from the policy is not allowed. This is not meant to stifle creativity, though. While useful innovations are permitted, such innovations, must not contradict the spirit of the policy in question. In policy interpretation and implementation, changes are expected, but not significantly enough to cause a derailment of the general course of action or thrust of the policy.

The Anticipated new Dawn in Nigeria Brought by the Change Agenda of The Buhari Administration.

President Muhammadu Buhari occupied the Aso Rock Villa at a critical period in Nigeria when there is high level of corruption, and trillions of Naira had being looted from the national treasury. Unemployment had become the order of the day as it was growing at geometrical progression, regardless of the educational attainment of the youths. Fuel shortages, caused by the fuel subsidy removal policy of the previous administration were rife. Also, there was incessant blood-letting in the northern part of the country, as the Boko-Haram insurgency became intractable. Internationally, news of kidnappings, such as in the case of Chibok-girls, ranked Nigeria among violence prone zones across the world. These negative trends informed the change agenda of the Buhari administration that was enunciated as a remedy for the myriad of problems facing the people. According to Umar & Babalola, (2016), the noticeable components of change agenda of the federal government, judging from its activities, include the following:

1. Fighting corruption
2. Poverty eradication
3. Employment creation
4. Ensuring adequate security, including tackling the Boko-Haram insurgency
5. Economic development through diversification
6. Price control
7. Justice and the rule of law, and
8. Reformation in the oil and gas sectors

Locating Nigeria's Change Agenda in the Global Sustainable Development Agenda

The benefits of meaningful access to four of the focus of the SDG are clear, and the change agenda of Nigeria can be rooted in them. These benefits were clearly stated at the 2017 UN High Level Political Forum, as reported in Development and Access

to Information (DA2I), (2017). In the field of agriculture (SDG2), better information can support farmers throughout the cycle of choosing which crops to grow, which techniques to use; to when, and at what price, to sell their products. Farmers being deeply rooted in the often inaccessible rural areas, with strong yokel characteristics, the need to tailor access to solutions to their needs is particularly important. With climate change leading to less predictable weather patterns, the gains in crop resilience and productivity that come from improved access to information will be essential for ending hunger. Access to information will also improve decision-making on health (SDG3). At the global level, wider and easier sharing of medical research information has been a key pillar of the response to the Ebola outbreak, for example. At the local level, investments in public health information have been shown to repay themselves many times over. Given the sensitivity of the subject of health, the confidential environment provided by libraries can prove indispensable for those who might otherwise be shy to seek information or ask questions, particularly amongst the more vulnerable communities. Women in particular stand to benefit from improved access to information (SDG5), both in terms of taking their place as equals in economic and civic life; and in fulfilling their more traditional roles in families and communities. In many cases, they have not had the same educational opportunities as men; and need additional support in getting online, and making use of the resources available there. In male-dominated societies, libraries may indeed be the only place where they can access the technology and training necessary, as in the case of Chile's Infocentros.

Finally, access to information can contribute to more effective infrastructure and innovation systems (SDG9). With a growing number of active researchers in the world, and ever more powerful analytical tools, once information is made accessible it can become the catalyst for new ideas, products and services. The experience from the Human Genome Project shows that openness is a driver of, and not a threat to, investment in innovation. Similarly, enhancing access to, and use of, information on the use of public infrastructure is providing solutions to congestion and poor quality of life in the world's cities. In all of these areas, access to information can create a vicious circle. An information-empowered society is better placed to create and share data, which can further drive improvements in agriculture, healthcare, economic empowerment, efficient infrastructure and innovation. But delivering meaningful access itself will need to be a team effort. Laws, regulations, investments

and infrastructure will need to align; and global, national and local efforts will need to be coordinated. A well-supported library sector will play a major part in delivering success.

Libraries as Global Information Infrastructure for Sustainable Development

The library is an institution that meets people's information needs. That has been its role historically: providing a place for people to visit, ask questions, and access and use information resources. In doing so, libraries have long played a role as an enabler of individuals in their paths for lifelong learning. The public library is a community institution, and has the added role of meeting community-wide needs. By applying their inherent resources-including technology infrastructure, knowledgeable staff, and social space-public libraries are able to offer a range of services that address the economic, health, educational, and civic needs of their communities. In doing so, libraries can support the SDG by acting as agents of change at the local level.

On a technical level, libraries are part of the physical infrastructure necessary to ensure everyone can obtain the kinds of information they need. On a human level, libraries work to ensure that their communities have the ability to find, use, create, and share information to their greatest benefit by providing resources, opportunities for the cultivation of expertise, and social spaces for people to discuss, test, and apply ideas. For instance, many libraries provide access to government services (online or offline), act as laboratories for civic innovation, and assist patrons who are learning to use new technologies. This services that libraries provide would impact the entire sustainable development agenda, including maternal and ante-natal healthcare, entrepreneurship and business and agricultural development (Jowaisas and Fellows, 2017). Libraries exist in nearly every country. Although reliable data is difficult to obtain, there are an estimated 1.4 million libraries across more than 200 countries. The majority of these libraries have been established in primary and secondary schools. Public libraries, which serve a broader section of society, number around 300,000, with approximately two-thirds located in less-developed countries. Another 100,000 or so libraries worldwide are composed of academic libraries, national libraries, and special libraries (Online Computer Library Center, 2016). The value of this huge infrastructure is not to be underestimated, particularly when 4 billion people remain unconnected to the internet. One study that examined publicly available computers in five less-developed countries found that nearly half (48 percent) of people who use computers in public libraries, internet cafes, or other community internet points

reported that the computer and internet connectivity being offered was their only means of access (Sey et al., 2013). Yet this connectivity infrastructure does more than serve people whose households are unconnected. Studies have shown that countries with higher proportions of the population using computers at public libraries also have higher rates of home internet access. For instance, in a survey of 17 European Union countries, the proportion of people who had used a computer in the public library in Finland and Denmark (both 19 percent of the population) was more than double that of the next highest countries (Lithuania and Latvia, both at 9 percent), while Finland and Denmark also enjoy some of the highest home internet access rates in Europe (84 percent and 90 percent respectively) (Quick et.al, 2013). In the above mentioned study surveying people in five less-developed and emerging countries, the figures were equally revealing. A substantial number of surveyed users of public libraries and other community internet points have internet at home–and in many cases well in excess of their country's average rate of home internet access. In Brazil, for example, 41 percent of people who used a public internet point also had internet access at home, compared to a national average for home internet access of 24 percent at the time of the study (2009). Similar patterns were seen in the Philippines, Ghana, and Bangladesh (Sey et al, 2013).

Development and Access to Information (2017), conceived public libraries as a type of information access infrastructure. It is important to remember that libraries are more than the buildings they occupy. First, the geographical footprint of a public library is often much larger than the physical footprint of the building. For instance, many public libraries have mobile libraries–buses and other vehicles that penetrate into rural and remote communities, offering books, services, and in some cases, internet access. In Namibia, a country with one of the world's lowest rates of population density, mobile libraries travel hundreds of kilometers from the country's regional libraries to loan out books, provide Wi-Fi access, and give visitors an opportunity to use a computer and printer. Second, a library's footprint can also extend beyond the walls of the library through its digital services. Libraries of all types subscribe to digital resources – including e-books, specialized databases, and e-learning tools–that users can access from their home, school, work, or other places outside the library. Third, a library can also be conceived of as a social space, where community members meet, participate in programmes together, and learn from each other. From children's story times to cultural events, libraries offer a wide variety of programmes that leverage their physical spaces as part of a community's social infrastructure.

Barriers to Access to information

Emmojoroh (2000) and Opara (2008) have observed that libraries are confronted with numerous challenges. These include declining financial support, inadequate infrastructure facilities, low levels of information development, obsolete materials and limited access to a variety of information in form of stored data. Additionally, factors identified by (DA2I, 2017) include access to education, fair housing, decent jobs; affordable healthcare and cultural norms around gender and minority groups. These not only determine the ability of people to access information, but most importantly their capability to use it in ways that are meaningful in their everyday lives. Furthermore, the myriad policies that regulate information access – such as the rights of citizens to freedom of expression, association, and discussion – set up the rules of engagement for different actors. This strongly influences whether, and how access to, information materializes for positive social ends.

Methodology

This paper relies wholly on past papers and literature, and secondary data collected from official documents, reports and other publications of local and international non-governmental agencies. Content analysis method was adopted in analyzing transformational effect of access to information in advancing the Nigeria change agenda in relation to the roles of libraries.

Discussion

In order to fight corruption to a standstill, eradicate poverty, considerably close the unemployment gap, win the war against insurgency, bring about economic development and diversification, bring prices down, maintain justice in the rule of law, and have the downstream oil sector reformed, access to information is crucial, and the importance of the roles of libraries cannot be understated. Corruption will be eradicated with the illumination of the mind. That is to say, an ill-informed person is bound to take wrong decisions. But with the access to the right information, an individual is expected to act accordingly. For example, a public office holder without exposure to the required information about fund appropriation is more likely to be found guilty of misappropriation. Consciousness in every individual, that he or she has equal right to economic resources, basic amenities; capability to harness natural resources at his or her disposal for economic prosperity, manipulation of emerging technology for economic growth and access to credit facilities is a move towards poverty eradication. Also, the wide gap of unemployment can be considerably closed when citizens are intimated with relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs

and entrepreneurship opportunities. Libraries have been in the fore front of creating this consciousness through awareness campaigns. Combating and winning the war against insurgency do not wholly rest on modern anti-terrorism equipment and gadgets, but also require access to information on activities and mode of operation and movement of insurgents across the globe. This information is being published in information resources acquired and domiciled in many libraries. Significant increase in access to information and communications technology and the provision of universal and affordable internet access by libraries will enhance scientific research; and thus upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors of the nation.

This in turn will accelerate economic development through diversification, instead of wholly relying on crude oil. Public access to information in libraries and networked information centres will help protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements which in turn will snowball into justice in the rule of law. In a bid to enact price control regime, access to information will foster measures that will ensure the proper functioning of commodity markets and their derivatives; and facilitate timely access to market information on foreign reserves, in order to help limit extreme price volatility. Reformation in the downstream sector can be made possible through access to relevant information acquired and available in libraries and information centres for the sector's management team's decision. For instance, the campaign for green and cleaner environment necessitated by climate change can be made possible in the Ogoni Land clean-up, if the government will not allow propaganda (false information) and politics to hold sway in the implementation.

Conclusion

As the nation drives towards implementing the change agenda for economic recovery and sustainable development, an adequate provision of infrastructures, including standardized libraries will ensure accessibility and use of information sources. This will hasten the transformation of the Nigerian socio-economic system and develop it to the level of those driven by the forces of highly networked information sources. Barriers of declining financial support, inadequate infrastructures, low levels of information technology development, obsolete materials and limited access to varieties of information in form of stored data, as well as legislation on privacy of information should be addressed to help libraries fulfill their role of digital services, social and information access infrastructure providers for sustainable development.

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