Research Paper

Libraries as a Pivot for National Development of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *A nation is said to be developed when its citizens attain high standard of living. Building an ideal nation requires a holistic approach. All facets of human activity must be harnessed while all indices of nation building must be taken care of. This in turn requires well equipped Libraries and information resource centres in tertiary institutions to improve the educational system. Libraries and information resource centres are institutions that are well established to take care of the information needs of all segments of society- students, lecturers, researchers and scholars. The library is continuously bringing man in contact with the world in the fulfilment of its functions as a repository for knowledge in all forms and shapes. In doing this, all academic and professional disciplines are involved. Libraries and information resource centres are not exception. This paper looks at different types of libraries and information resource centres and their basic functions. The study also x-rays the roles of libraries and information resource centres in national development as well as exposes the challenges facing library and information resource centres services in Nigeria, such as inadequately trained staff to meet the increasing demands of library and information resource centres users.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

The word "development" has hitherto mocked efforts at a concise and generally acceptable definition. This has resulted in a myriad of definitions by scholars. While some scholars see development as normative and synonymous with progress, others regard it as multi-dimensional, involving changes in structures, capacity and output. Still, others view development in terms of the growth and mastery of the natural environment by man. Thus the development of any society today is said to be measured by the strength of its military, socio-economic, political as well as technological advancement. Mimiko (1998, p.101), asserts that development is a process implying deep and double changes in social structure in the functioning of institutions and in the cultural values of great masses of people. Aremu (2003) sees development as a process of enhancing the productive forces of a country for the actualization of more prosperous and meaningful life for all its citizens. Thus, development emphasizes growth or advancement, with a positive cultural and socio-economic tendency towards a self- generating and self-perpetuating utilization of people's potentials. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, "national" refers to a whole nation. National development, therefore, can be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political and religious advancement of a country or nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as a country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government. The English word "library" is derived from the Latin word "librarium", in which "liber" means " book, paper, parchment" (Online Etymology Dictionary) and "-arium" means " a place associated with a specified thing". In the present world, "book" could be defined as a collection of written, printed or other graphic materials, including films, slides, phonograph records and tapes, housed, organized, and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of people for information, knowledge, recreation, and aesthetics (Ikegbune, 2003). Experts have qualified the term library in different ways, such as; the heart of an institution, the mind of a society, the only effective repository of knowledge, the racial memory, a live depository of cultural past, sustainers of the intellectual activities that anticipate the future, and so on. (AbdulKalam, A.P.J, 2001 and Kumar, K, 2000). In principle, the mission of all types of libraries, such as academic, public, school, special, research, and national as well as related information centres, is to carry out information management responsibilities in the areas of acquisition, organization, preservation and dissemination of information to users. The users on the other hand, are expected to utilize the information

resource provided by the libraries to satisfy their information needs. The convergence of this demand and supply ultimately leads to national development since a popular African says 'knowledge is power'.

Types of Libraries and their Basic Functions

It is important to note that libraries are not only repository of knowledge but also play an active role as catalysts to national development. It opens up people's minds and inspires them to see vision which is a key ingredient in the achievement of progress and indeed, development, because the mind is the centre point of progress for you can only aspire to the height you visualise. Libraries are responsible for feeding the mind to enable it dream. There are different types of libraries and they have their core functions.

National Libraries

These are libraries established to collect and preserve publications of a country. According to Encyclopaedia of Library and information Science, "a library is called a national one when it is the official repository of printed works, a general access library, an information - bibliographical centre and a centre of coordination, planning and stimulation of the entire library system of the nation". In relation to other libraries, national libraries occupy an independent and exceptional position.

Public Libraries

In contrast to national libraries, public libraries are established for a region or a local community and supported substantially by public funds. The main purpose of public libraries is to make it possible for members of the community to meet their information needs. These types of libraries collate materials of value to the community. Their duties are not only to meet existing demands but also to encourage and facilitate demands from more people. They have wide and varied responsibilities, ranging from promotion of individual development, commerce, technical progress and social and cultural advancement.

Academic Libraries

Academic libraries are libraries in higher institutions of learning. They are varied and distinctive as the institutions they serve. These include college libraries, polytechnic libraries, and university libraries. Academic libraries are a place where students, lecturers and researchers can seek for themselves information needed for their academic pursuit, which is the ultimate goal of education. The basic function of academic libraries is to aid the academic and research programmes by acquiring and making available books, journals and periodicals as well as other materials and services needed.

Special Libraries

Oti (2000, p.2), defines special libraries as those libraries in big corporations and industries which have become an integral part of their organization. They are to serve the information needs of their parent organization, to enable them achieve their aims and objectives. Special libraries are distinguished by their characteristics such as; narrow subject interest coverage and nature of services provided. They provide exhaustive and expeditious service to their users through selective dissemination of information and current awareness services.

School Libraries

School libraries are libraries in pre-tertiary institutions such as nursery, primary and secondary schools with the mission of contributing to the intellectual development of pupils and students. They contain a collection of books and other learning materials, organized by trained professionals and placed in one or two big rooms in the school for the use of the pupils and teachers for learning, recreational activities, personal interest and interpersonal relationships of children in school. School libraries encourage the development of skill in reading, support the school curriculum and inculcate intellectual development in school children.

Rationale for National Development

Development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is classified as developed when it is able to provide qualitative livelihood for its citizenry. A large majority of the world's population are in the developing world. The problems of urban population, rural stagnation, unemployment and growing inequalities and so on, seem to be an unending dilemma of developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. Hopes of accelerated development are difficult to realize. This gloomy situation is of great concern to stake holders and the concerned citizenry. Nigeria has not been able to engender meaningful development in spite of her huge human, material and natural resource endowments. This has greatly affected her quest for improved quality of life of her citizens. Poverty, unemployment, and starvation still pervade the

nook and cranny of the country. National development is essential and critical to the growth and Sustenance of a country in order to successfully enhance the meaningful standard of living among the populace.

Library and Information Resource centres as the Engine of National Development

Development has to do with qualitative and sometimes quantitative changes in the life of a people or an individual. At the national level, there is an improvement in the general well-being of the people while at the individual level, development implies activity, increased skill and capacity building, self-discipline, greater freedom, responsibility as and material well-being.

For some people, libraries are so abstract that it cannot have any impact on their practical life.

Consequently, such people believe that libraries are irrelevant to development. This misconception persists because of ignorance of people about what libraries are all about. They fail to realize that libraries are one of the most (if not the most) useful enterprises ever undertaken by man. This is evidenced by human development, which shows that libraries have been the greatest force that has contributed in shaping human civilization. Hence, Owen Meredith, as quoted by Ireland (1884, p.89), argues that "It is, however, not to the museum, or the lecture-room, or the drawing-school, but to the library that we must go for the completion of our humanity. It is books that bear from age to age the intellectual wealth of the world."

There have been enormous advances in human knowledge since the last century. Every field of human endeavour has had a quantum leap in advancement, leading to many discoveries and inventions, two of which are the internet and cloning, with their use and abuse. Along with the new knowledge have come new challenges. Additionally, these new developments have presented to the average citizen with a spectacle of the greatest confusion. People seldom stop to ponder that it is the business of libraries to bring order, clarity and consistency into all this confusion. Here, libraries become "instruments used to organize knowledge, provide a focus and then give the individual a sense of direction out of a maze of confusion" (Anyika 2005, p. 131).

Even at the individual level, libraries are a tool for the satisfaction of man's curiosity. There is a great desire by man to know things. This urge motivates them to search endlessly for answers in order to satisfy his curiosity. Man's curiosity is extended everywhere and into everything. It is bounded only by the limitations of his imagination. As Anyika (2005; p. 131) succinctly puts it:

Sometimes, one makes a breakthrough and finds answer to one's enquiries but human progress does not consist in finding the answers and so ending the search, rather, it is in adjustment to the search itself. Life becomes nothing but a perpetual enquiry. We live by the results of the enquiry but we are never satisfied with them, and so while we accept them in order to exist, we also endeavour to continue the enquiry.

And library is "the working tool of inquisitive men. This then gives credence to the Socratic dictum that 'an unexamined life is not worth living" (Anyika, 2005; p. 131). Library makes people more rational in their actions because one who knows the rational means will usually act in accordance with that means. "This is equally in tandem with the Platonic maxim that 'knowledge is virtue'' while vice is due to ignorance" (Anyika, 2005; p. 131). Therefore, the presence of libraries in a society will certainly enhance positive human activity in that society.

Libraries are also germane in educational development of a nation. This is done through their services and programmes; introducing children to the develop the habit of reading, helping them to experience the joy of reading and aiding scholarly researches, all lead to national development. Students are supported through books and other relevant information to excel in their academic work while teachers and lecturers get teaching aids from libraries to prepare useful lesson notes that will help them pass useful knowledge to their students.

Similarly, library service has been in the business of championing the provision of relevant information materials to different communities through the establishment of rural libraries with a strong mandate to support adult literacy as well as helping in the establishment of an altogether, informed society. To this end, Achitabwino (2007, p. 81-82), asserts that:

Through such libraries people who were deprived of information are now capable of reading and writing, above all, having come across a wide range of information pertaining to issues affecting their societies, they have been able to make informed decisions that have been helping in implementing socio-economic growth. In the same vein, the role of libraries in promoting the marketing of the tourism sector cannot be underestimated. Libraries as reservoirs of information are the most reliable information reference centres where tourists can seek information on hotels, national parks, land marks, mountains, and other interesting places.

Libraries also play a vital role in the health sector. A vibrant health sector needs well - documented and organized health information meant for dissemination to users and potential users in order to consolidate health records, planning and management. Libraries provide people with appropriate information on diseases and prevention measures, health care, side effects of premarital affairs, dangers of early pregnancies, and any other health related information.

Furthermore, Anyika (2005, p. 134), reveals that "libraries aid in the propounding and propagation of political ideology for national development and cohesion". Effective citizen action is possible only where

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citizens know how to gain access to information of all kinds and have the skills to become responsible and informed participants in democracies. This is especially so as e-government evolves. Libraries offer real and virtual civic spaces where citizens can speak freely, share similar interests and concerns as well as pursue what they believe are in their public interest. Ultimately, free discourse among informed citizens assures civil society and civil society, in turn, provides the social capital necessary to achieve common goals. Lady Bird Johnson, as quoted by Ogbonna (2013, p. 70), observed that "Perhaps no place in any community is as totally democratic as the town library. The only entrance requirement is interest". Wright (2001), as quoted by Bhatti (2010, p.201), opines that:

Information promotes and empowers citizens' participation in the democratic process; it maintains the Rule of Law and creates a viable outlet for the injection of public opinion. Information informs the policy-making process of political leadership, all of which nurtures the building of sustainable peace for the enhancement of the state.

It is equally incontrovertible that libraries have the greatest impact on agricultural development of a nation. Libraries provide relevant information on agricultural improvement to all agricultural officers, extension workers, researchers, peasant farmers, policy makers, etc. on the new method of improving livestock and better farming practices that will meet the increasing need of the population. Libraries make such information available and also provide positive steps towards improving the declining food security of a country.

II.   CONCLUSION

Information "is a vital tool in all facets of human endeavour. It is the link pin of national development" (Achitabwino, 2007). In order to grow more efficiently in all aspects of society, developing countries must collect and provide access to adequate and up – to - date "information on food security, health, democracy, population, education, family planning, youth empowerment, gender equality, environment, etc."(Achitabwino 2007). In this regard, it is imperative that all hands must be on deck toward establishing effective libraries for the proper management, provision and dissemination of information.

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