



Impact of State Branches of the National Library of Nigeria on Library and Information Services Delivery in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

National Library of Nigeria is unique among the national libraries in the world. It is about the only national library that is known to have branches in nearly all the states of the federation. This paper discusses, very briefly, the various roles the state branches of the National Library of Nigeria play to make the country achieve its educational, recreational and entertainment goals and in facilitating research activities targeted at bringing peace, progress and development to the country. The activities include basic library and information services, enabling informal educational opportunities for library users; bibliographic control, documentation and information services, attending to subpoena, reprography and translation services; and reactivating cultural and current awareness among Nigerians. The paper concludes that the nation's quest for readership promotion and cultural awareness can easily be achieved by spreading library and information services to all parts of the country.

INTRODUCTION

The Decree (no. 29 of 1970) that established the National Library of Nigeria clearly states that "it shall be the duty of the Board so far as its resources permit to assemble, maintain and extend a collection of books, periodicals, pamphlets, newspapers, maps, musical scores, films and recordings and such other matter as the Board considers appropriate for a library of the highest standing and to make the facilities of the National Library available to members of the public and other on proper terms." The National Library is the legal depository in the country for all United Nations (U.N.) and African Union (A.U.) publications. It is the only library in the country that is invested with legal deposit powers in respect of all published materials in the country. This in practical terms means that the Federal Government must by law deposit twenty-five copies of everything that it publishes; ten copies of State Government publications and three copies by every commercial publisher.

The national library that has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the National Bibliography and for rendering national bibliographical and documentation services throughout the country.

The National Library is the agency for the international Standard Book Numbering for all publications and libraries throughout the country. It is also designated by UNESCO as the Centre for International Serial Number,

At its Annual Conference in November, 1974 in Washington, D.C., U.S.A. the IFLA-(International Federation of Library Associations) designated the National Library of Nigeria as the regional centre for a pilot scheme for one collection, coordination and evaluation of Library Statistics in all countries in West Africa.

In fulfilling the above provision, the state branches of National Library of Nigeria were established. The branches are stocked with relevant materials for the use of the general public on proper terms. In the last thirty two years the number of branches so far established by the National Library of Nigeria increased to twenty-two. The establishment of state branches of National Library is by a statute. Therefore, budgetary provisions are made for the running of these branches annually. Plans are underway to establish branches in the states that are yet to have one.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA LEADERSHIP ROLE

The word "Library" comes from the Latin word. (Liber) meaning books. This is so because libraries traditionally were collection of books. Today, Libraries contain not only books, but also a wide range of other materials that educate, entertain and of course, communicate. State branches of the National Library in this context means any outfit of the National Library in any of the States of the Federation. The purpose and function of the branch library is to provide library and information services to the people in the state. (Ndaej, 2013)

Among the objectives of establishing the National Library of Nigeria is to serve as the giant memory of the nation and to set standards for library and information services in the country. Therefore, National Library should be responsible for public library development policy in the country.

Omotola (2012) said that we all know what it means to lead. To lead is to carry others along a course of achieving specific objectives. Libraries and Information Centres in Nigeria must have the same common objectives that will lead the country to the desired level of literacy and well informed citizenry. The higher the standard of library services in the country, the more the need for National Library of Nigeria to provide sound leadership. Also the greater the impact the state branches want to make, the greater the influence it would have on library and information services rendered by other libraries in the country. Whatever other libraries will accomplish will be greatly influenced by the type of leadership provided by the nation's number one library.

The importance of leadership role of the National Library was again stressed by Nigerian Library Association Public Libraries Section when it stated in its communique issued at the end of their national workshop on ICT in Lafia in 2002 that: "There should be established committee on "Public Library Research" the National Library should give leadership here¹, But the people who are known to be committed to the Cause of Public Libraries and especially those with Competencies in ICT should be appointed to serve a Committee" While talking about leadership role of National Library we- may need to list some of the library services primarily undertaken by National Library for the benefit of other libraries and information centers. They include the

following:

- Collection of library statistics: This involves survey on library resources in the country. The National Digest of Library Statistics is therefore being published by National Library of Nigeria.
- Setting up a national interlibrary -lending centre. This involves the establishment of a National Bibliographic Lending Centre (NBLC).
- National Readership Promotion Campaign (NRPC). The National implementation committee on Readership Promotion Campaign of Nigeria was inaugurated by the National Library Board on 12 November, 1980.
- National Union Catalogue (NUC) this is a record of the holdings of all the major libraries in Nigeria. The NUC is a national cooperative venture under the legislature of the National Library of Nigeria. The objectives amongst other are to provide information on library holdings and locations in Nigeria in order to promote and facilitate better sharing of resources.
- Provision of Cataloguing in Publication Data (CIP). Through the CIP programme, the National Library provides Cataloguing Information for publications in advance.
- The clamour for more leadership role by national library from professionals and libraries and information centres across the county is on the increase daily. It is more likely National Library will be able to meet these challenges through better funding and establishment of state branches where non-exists at present. The leading role expected of National Library will bring about rapid development of library and information services in the country.

Library authorities in the country had recommended that to change the direction of library and information services in the country, the National Library must be in the fore front. Efforts are being made at federal level to ensure that the National Library plays the same role to professional librarians as the office of Accountant-General is playing to all Accountants in the Federal Civil Service. This also explains why the various State Library Boards are setting up library branches in the Local Government Areas (LGA), similar to what obtains at the National Library of Nigeria. The various Local Governments in the country should be encouraged to develop libraries and information centres in the rural communities.

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES DELIVERY IN THE BRANCHES

A good collection of books and other information materials have been developed at the branches and necessary arrangements and procedure have been put in place to ensure service delivery. The State Branches are image makers of the National Library. The focus of the state branches really, is the provision of effective and accessible information.' The state branches therefore perform mainly reference services and a wide range of other services. However facilities are rendered directly to library users to enable full access to the resources by the general public. These services are provided, to amongst others:

- Unable informal educational opportunities for the user.
- Enrich the knowledge of the users in the various subjects of particular interest.
- Support and encourage constructive use of leisure time.
- Provide recreational opportunities and encourage creativity.

The branches also serve as depository for legal materials. For effective bibliographic control activities, the branches have seriously embarked on legal deposits drive.

The branches also assist publishers to obtain International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) for monographs and serials respectively. Within a reasonable time, publishers can now obtain ISBN/ISSN for their publications in the state where the branches are located. The branches also acquire some information materials through purchases and gifts. Displays and Exhibitions are organized on relevant and important national topics regularly. The branch library maintains a database on relevant information to the state; including indexing of newspaper articles.

In response to the need for timely information, the branches are gradually placing serious emphasis on the use of modern information technologies. The National Library of Nigeria management plans to provide internet services in all the branches in addition to reprographic services which are also available in the branches. Provisions are also made for conferences in purpose-built halls in the prototype buildings.

In-house-training of staff is given due attention in the branches and consultancy services are rendered to other libraries in the states, particularly on the training of library staff and management of public and private libraries.

To achieve the goals set for the branches, four operational sections are established to carry out specific duties. The four operational sections are:

- i. Reference
- ii. Sends and documents
- iii. Special services
- iv. Legal deposit

Each section is headed by a professional librarian who has the knowledge, experience and wherewithal to perform the assigned duties. These officers are assisted by other trained library personnel of the ranks of Library Officers and Library Assistants.

SUBPOENA

Subpoena is another important service being rendered to the public by National Library of Nigeria and the State Branches have been fully involved. Subpoena simply means the tendering of legal deposit document in evidence to a court of law within or outside the country that has to do with a case pending in the court. The branch library attends to subpoena matters in the various courts of law in their domain. As the nation's depository institution, publications deposited in the library are tendered as legal deposit materials in cases pending in the law court by National Library staff. Such documents must be the certified true copy of any such publication and must have the legal deposit stamp of the National Library before they can be tendered in the court. The ability of National Library of Nigeria to serve all the judicial divisions in the country is further enhanced through the establishment of the state branches. (pampam, 2010)

DUTIES OF THE PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS IN THE BRANCHES

Libraries all over the world are places where information materials are acquired organized and retrieved for use. One of the major tasks of the librarian is to aid in the use of the collections. Quite a lot of efforts and professional skill go into the preliminary work of acquiring and organizing collection of information materials and providing access instruments to them. The librarian is the one who decides on the contents of a collection, on the ways in which documents are to be retrieved by potential users. on devices of physical arrangement and auxiliary access instruments. If these things are not done, the library would be an unusable heap of information materials.

The assistance offered to library users by librarians in the branches can be categorized into three; these include: bibliographical assistance; question-answering and selection assistance. Librarians offer assistance in the use of bibliographical access tools such as catalogues, quick identification of needed documents. Through enquiries the librarian makes direct provision of information needed rather than bibliographical assistance. This mainly consists of short answers to specific, clearly stated enquiries. Questions and the answer sought is nothing more than a name, data, title, statistics, fact or figure. The Librarian does not undertake to engage in computations, analysis, and criticism of sources, evaluation, interpretation, inference, synthesis and application of information to particular problems. What he does is to quote from sources and identify the source of the quotation. Hence, the main focus of the librarian is the discovery rather than the criticism of information,

Selection of useful information materials is a job offered by librarians to information seekers. As far as the search for information goes, selection of relevant materials to patrons serve a useful purpose as the patron has the final judgment to make. It must be realized that the librarian does not in any way influence the choice of information to be used. Users of National Library in the state are having a good time particularly in states where other types of libraries do not exist.

INFORMATION PROVISION TO LIBRARY USERS THROUGH THE INTERNET

Brendar, Devlin and Mary (2013) posit that the coming of the internet has brought about some fundamental changes in the reference activity of the librarian. The information that was once provided at the reference desk has now been transferred to an internet home page. Users can now make direct connections to information sources via the new media networked databases, e-mail, etc. The introduction of internet has decisively altered the user culture. National Library branches are currently being installed with internet facilities since the internet has become the ultimate reference tool.

Librarians use the internet and its multimedia component, the World Wide Web, to answer reference questions and provide access to materials not previously available to the users. When the internet was first introduced in Nigeria, access to computer networks was limited almost exclusively to top government and company functionaries. The trend has since changed over the years when availability of computers networks and data communication lines increased tremendously. However, the cost of accessing information through the internet is still very high and outside the reach of the common man,

Nigerians who cannot afford access to the internet in Private Cyber Cafe are gradually turning to the state branches of National Library of Nigeria to bridge the information gap between the poor. National Library is trying to meet that challenge by making internet access a top priority Particular in the state branches. As a result, the state branches are being funded to provide low-cost computer access to on-line resources such as government, consumer, medical and legal information. The advantages of internet facility in the state branches to the users are too many and any effort towards equipping state branches will be fully appreciated by the users.

At present, most examination registration in the country are done on-line and vacancies in the various government offices and big companies are taking the same process. By the time National Library will have branches in all the states of the federation with internet facility, the people of this country will be guaranteed cheap and affordable access to needed information at all times. At present necessary facilities such as generators, air conditioners, computers P C and other necessary equipment are being put together in the state branches to facilitate quick provision of internet services in the branches where they are not yet available. (Alegbeleye,2000)

BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL ACTIVITIES AND INFORMATION SERVICES

The increasing importance of information in society was stressed by Bell when he said: "A post-industrial society is basically an information society. Exchange of information in terms of various kinds of data processing, record keeping market research and so forth is the foundation of most economic changes. As far back as 1960s industrialized nations were aware of the importance and value of information in all human endeavour and the necessity for quick access to the needed information.

Nigeria is at present witnessing a revolution in the use of electronic medium in providing information services to the people. The revolution going on in the education sector is facilitated by easy access to information through internet services. It provides current information and can be updated quickly. It is easy to use and does not require any equipment beyond the round modem. It has the advantage of hypertext capability (ability to link to other web sites and bring together information in one location). Furthermore; it can add graphics, photographs, sound, video and animation to a web site, National Bibliographic Control and Documentation Services.

In order to ensure easy access to knowledge in the country, the National Library is involved in the proper recording and analysis of knowledge, through bibliographic control activities. Bankole (1981) described bibliographic control as a concept made up of ideas and schemes for the control of publication. Igboah (2012) opined that national bibliographic control has two different facets; on the one hand, it is concerned with the records of those publications which cultivate to make up the national bibliography. Its purpose she further explained "is to serve user by making available the knowledge of where information can be found and how publications can be acquired". National Library branches are involved in bibliographic control activities in the following ways:

- Legal deposit collections of materials produced in the state where each branch is located.
- Assisting in obtaining ISSN/ISBN for publishers in the state.
- Arranging workshops and seminars for publishers on bibliographic control standards
- Compilation of enumerative descriptive bibliographies-these give details of intellectual work, which may carry careful connotation and are arranged in some sort of order in order to facilitate their use.

Bibliographies are very essential tools of research in any country. For Nigeria to attain its educational goals, the National Library branches are involved in the compilation of bibliographies relevant to the needs of the various states of the federation. Thus, the various state branches are lending great support to intellectual efforts in all activities directed towards human progress and development in Nigeria through efficient and effective library and information services.

NATIONAL VIRTUAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA (NVLN)

The most important thing about library and information services is easy access to needed information. And today, we are talking of globalization, use of ICT and direct access to the internet 24 hours of the day, as well as subscribing to databases. Developed countries all over the world are shifting emphasis from book library to paperless library. Nigeria as a developing country is making necessary efforts to join other developed countries in globalization efforts,

In 2002, the Federal Ministry of Education initiated the National Virtual Library of Nigeria and placed the supervision under the National Universities Commission. The idea was that the Nigerian Universities would be the target users of the virtual library because of their peculiar situation. Most universities in Nigeria found it difficult to operate a standard Library due to shortage of funds. Realizing the recent achievements of National Library of Nigeria and its capability to operate network of Library Services in the country through the state branches, the Federal Government took a decisive step by transferring the management of the National Virtual Library of Nigeria to the National Library for proper administration.

The establishment of National Virtual Library is consistence with the ever changing world where migration from print to electronic (on-line) is now the in-thing. People are no longer content with books in print. Once an idea is formed and the manuscript ready, it is almost immediately available to users using electronic means. And this can be done quickly through e-library approach. The National Library has state branches in many parts of the country which can serve as information and resource centers. The purpose of developing and installing a Virtual Library which shall be accessible from headquarters and all state branches including university libraries throughout the Federation shall be easy. The assessment of facilities available in the existing prototype buildings of the state branches confirms the readiness of the National Library to shoulder the responsibility of managing the National Virtual library for the whole country. The only thing that will be necessary is the capacity development for staff of the virtual library which commonly takes a short time. The present management of National Library of Nigeria already has a clear vision of what virtual library represents and how to go about it.

CONCLUSION

The National Library of Nigeria was established in 1964 to serve the people of the country like in the country. The founders realized the need to take library services to all parts of the country through the establishment of a branch in each of the States of the Federation.

As much as the branches of National Library are catalyst to rapid library development in Nigeria, it is also provision effective and efficient library and information services to the nation. Other libraries in the country are benefiting -from the services of National Library in so many ways. These are services peculiar to the National Library alone which no any other type of library performs.

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