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CONSTRAINTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE IN NIGERIA¹

Anthony Olden²

Despite much development since its introduction into Nigeria in 1946, public library service is used today by less than 1 percent of the population. This article, based on a review of the literature and on eight years of library experience in Nigeria, attempts to explain why. The main constraints have been the irrelevance of the service offered to the illiterate, who compose up to two-thirds of the adult population, and the fact that those who are literate and have access to libraries rarely use them for other than educational purposes and stop using them when their educational goals are achieved or given up. Other constraints include the redivision of Nigeria into smaller internal units; lack of professional leadership, government legislation, backing, and financial support in certain states; staffing problems; and the difficulty of extending service outside the urban areas.

Introduction

“There are no libraries here except the Lagos Public Library which I have just opened”³ [1], replied the British Council’s Kate D. Ferguson to an inquiry from the American Library Association in 1947. Today each

1. I would like to thank Ronald Bengé, Lalage Bown, Dennis Gunton, Spencer S. Marsh and Linda C. Smith for their comments on the first draft of this article; and my former students and colleagues at Ahmadu Bello University for clarifying many of the issues for me.
2. University of Illinois Library, 1408 West Gregory Drive, Urbana, Illinois 61801.
3. Ferguson means libraries in the modern sense of organized collections and services administered by qualified librarians. Nigeria had private libraries built up by such individuals as Henry Carr and Herbert Macauley, a subscription library in Lagos, and agricultural, veterinary, medical, and legal collections serving research station and government department staff. There were also private collections of Arabic manuscripts in the Islamic north [2].

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of the nineteen states that make up Nigeria has a state or public library,⁴ though the level of service and the percentage of the population served vary tremendously. The public library development that has occurred in parts of the country is due mainly to professional leadership and hard work, to the backing of certain people in the government and, particularly during the late 1940s through the 1960s, to encouragement and financial aid from abroad. Yet the service has had little impact on illiteracy and on the rural areas and is used by less than 1 percent of the Nigerian population, currently estimated at over 90 million.⁵ Those who do use the service are the "examination-hungry school boys and girls" for whom the libraries are "mostly glorified classrooms and reading shelters" [6, p. 29]: the would-be future members of Nigeria's professional and administrative elite or, more accurately, the would-be future members fortunate enough to live near a service point.

The history of Nigerian public libraries divides into pre- and post-1967 periods, 1967 being the year in which the federal government, in a vain attempt to halt the slide to civil war, abolished the four regions and the Federal Territory of Lagos and substituted a twelve-state structure.⁶ The early period can be reconstructed from the pages of *West African Libraries*, *WALA News*, and *Nigerian Libraries*; from annual reports; from articles written for overseas journals by Nigeria-based librarians and by visitors to the country; and from subsequently written theses and dissertations. The post-1967 period is much more difficult to piece together because progress-report-type notes and articles appear less often, and little or no printed information has been produced about some of the states' library services—usually, although not always, because the services themselves hardly existed.⁷ Yet the same problems continue to be mentioned in the literature. The main problem is the difficulty of providing a service purporting to be for all but accessible only to some and, in fact, made use of by only a few in a country where the culture is oral, not written. Most of the adults are not literate, and literate and illiterate

4. Public libraries, controlled and funded by state governments, are also known as state libraries. Before the creation of states in 1967 they were known as regional libraries.
5. Nigeria's National Population Bureau estimates 94 million for July 1984 [3], the World Bank 90.6 million for mid-1982 [4, p. 218]. According to Unesco, Nigerian public libraries had 205,678 registered borrowers in 1979 [5, p. VII-16]. The number of users is certainly higher because many go to public libraries to read rather than to borrow. In addition, universal primary education, introduced in 1976, must have boosted public library statistics since 1979. Even so, it is probably safe to assume that public libraries are still used by less than 1 percent of the population.
6. For a bibliography on Nigerian public libraries see [7, pp. 94–103].
7. According to E. A. Daniel, Cross River has an excellent service, its main inadequacy being "lack of publicity in and outside the state" [8, p. 136].

alike want public spending priority given to improving the water supply and health care, the schooling their children receive, the access roads to their towns and villages, and the provision of electricity.

This article is based on my review of the literature and eight years of library experience in Nigeria. Occasional reference is made to other English-speaking African countries. Much more public library development has taken place in Britain's former colonies than in those of France, Belgium, or Portugal. In the words of one Nigerian librarian, "It is perhaps the British government which has, more than any other outside government, aided the development of public library services in Africa" [9, p. 180]. Yet the British model, developed in another continent and culture over a period of one hundred years and more, has not been transplanted with total success. Discussion on how to make it relevant to more people is even more important now with Nigeria in an economic recession and the government reducing expenditure than it was back in the pioneering, preindependence decade of the 1950s, when so much seemed within grasp.

Illiteracy

"At a recent conference in Ibadan, when a speaker asked what should be done about all those illiterate people I heard a senior librarian muttering to himself—'shoot them.' He was only joking of course—but . . ." [10, p. 98]. The main constraint on the development of public libraries in Nigeria has been their irrelevancy to the illiterate, who form the majority of the adult population. The *Fourth National Development Plan, 1981–85* admits that "in spite of commendable government intentions . . . concrete action continued to lag behind words and our high illiteracy ratio has more-or-less persisted. The high pre-occupation with the expansion needs of the formal school system during the Third Plan period undoubtedly diverted attention from the requirements of adult and non-formal education" [11, p. 256]. This has been true of the entire period since independence in 1960. Formal education has expanded greatly, informal has declined. The Northern Region launched its *Yaki da Jahilci* (campaign against ignorance) in 1952. Within ten years this governmental enthusiasm had declined. There was, in the words of Mark Bray, "total lack of reference to adult education in the 1962–8 northern development plan. . . . The second national plan (1970–4) merely included it with scholarships/loans and miscellaneous items under the heading of 'others', all of which, in the Kano State section, were allocated only 0.5 per cent of the total education vote" [12, p. 52]. There is now a ten-year (1982–92) national literacy campaign, but its progress is affected by Nigeria's current economic difficulties.

For adult illiterates and new literates public libraries have done little, although their potential to help was recognized early on. The introduction to the proceedings of Unesco's 1953 seminar on the development of libraries in Africa pointed out that

people are being helped by mass education programmes to emerge from illiteracy and ignorance, and they need continued access to suitable publications, stimulation of their reading interests and expert reading guidance to sharpen their new skill into an effective instrument of self-education. Only a few new literates are now served by public libraries, and if the others do not in the near future have access to such services, most will probably stagnate or slide back into illiteracy, thereby wasting the efforts expended by themselves and their teachers. [13, p. 14]

Dennis Gunton, one-time head of the Northern Regional Library Service, says that what fascinated him when, later on, he had time to look back and study the 1950s and 1960s, was

the way that early enthusiasm for libraries as a means of eradicating illiteracy . . . gradually dissipated. Libraries got under way but never tackled illiteracy. . . . There simply was no correlation between stated aims and policies pursued. As someone on the spot at the time it was not my impression that this was done knowingly. Rather that the sheer enormity of the task was intuitively recognised and left to Universal Primary Education to tackle. The qualifications, experience and training of the small body of professionals did not equip them for the work. [14]

The librarians, already overworked in their efforts to initiate and provide service for the category of users that clamored for it, must also have been affected by the government's preference for formal rather than informal education programs. According to Bray, who contrasted the universal free primary education (UPE) schemes launched in the 1970s by "capitalist Nigeria" and "socialist Tanzania": "In Nigeria UPE was only part of a massive overall formal educational expansion and a high proportion of primary leavers could proceed to post-primary education. But in Tanzania UPE was launched in conjunction with a large-scale, ongoing adult basic education project at the expense of post-primary training. There was much greater emphasis in Tanzania on primary education being a self-contained unit and on orienting school leavers towards the rural societies from which the majority came" [12, pp. 4-5]. The Nigerian UPE scheme, launched in September 1976, aimed at enrolling each year, free of charge, all children aged six, so that within a few years most children of primary school age would be enrolled. UPE has been a success in terms of increased enrollment, although the quality of instruction has not always been high. Its momentum was affected by the reintroduction of school fees by some state governments, who maintained that their funds were inadequate to keep the scheme going free of charge. Even so, its impact has been immense. Its child beneficiaries will

gradually increase the proportion of literates in the adult population and thus the pool of potential library users.

According to Unesco, 66 percent of Nigeria's population aged fifteen and over is illiterate [5, p. I-17]. Literacy figures are not necessarily reliable, and one adult education authority, Lalage Bown, believes that the number of illiterates has always been less than official figures show. Only those literate in the roman script are counted, which excludes some in the Muslim north who read and write *ajami*, Hausa in Arabic script. "The real problem," states Bown, "is the uneven distribution of literacy in the adult population—probably 80% in urban areas of Bendel and less than 2% in remote rural areas of some northern states" [15]. Not all illiterates are poor: some are successful business people and traders whose natural abilities and drive have overcome the disadvantage of little or no schooling.

More women are illiterate than men. Female education lags behind because marriage is nearly universal in Africa, and families know that when a girl marries her first responsibility will be to her husband and his people. Nigerians invest in people: their savings go toward the education of younger members of their extended families, who, with luck, will one day acquire the certificates that secure the well-paid jobs, and when, with luck again, they will remember their earlier benefactors. This is a form of insurance in a country not wealthy enough to be able to afford government-organized social welfare for all. Boys are safer investments than girls, hence the disparity between male and female public library use and achievement levels in literacy and formal education.

An assessment of the Enugu Central Library in 1961 showed "a heavy preponderance of male members on the library register, in the proportion of eleven males to one female, but children's membership is more even (seven to four) and this gives promise of more balanced membership in the future" [16, p. 244].⁸ Enugu is in the eastern part of Nigeria, to which European missionaries introduced Christianity and elementary

8. This is still, in the 1980s, no more than a promise. What the author (unnamed but presumably S. H. Horrocks, an English librarian who worked with the Eastern Region Library Board under Unesco auspices) may not have realized is that the higher the level, the more difficult it is for girls to stay in the race. The records of the Ahmadu Bello University library school illustrate this, though allowance must be made for the particularly disadvantaged position of women in the north where the university is situated. Of the 268 nongraduate diplomas awarded from 1970 (the year the first awards were made) up to and including 1979, eighty-four (or 31 percent) went to females; of the 239 B.L.S. degrees awarded from 1971 (the year the first awards were made) to 1979, forty-four (or 18 percent) went to females; of the twenty-one M.L.S. degrees awarded from 1972 (the year the first award was made) to 1979, only two (or 10 percent) went to females [17, pp. 171-72].

Western-type schooling in the nineteenth century. The majority of the population is Christian. In the north the majority is Muslim, a religion which—at least as interpreted by many of its northern Nigerian male adherents—keeps women more firmly in the background:

The exceptionally sluggish pace of the growth of female education in the Muslim north has been attributed to a number of factors, the most significant of which are (i) the peculiar Islamic marriage customs that permit girls to be married off between the ages of eleven and twelve, and then allow them to be confined, under the purdah system of *kulle* in a state of almost total isolation not only from the mainstream of formal school education, but also from any significant participation in the social and economic life of their community; and (ii) the lukewarm support for the education of women by the political decision-makers, reflected in their own personal examples . . . and in the paucity of post-primary institutions for women. [18, p. 593]

In 1958 the first person to be enrolled as a user of the mobile library that Unesco supplied to Enugu was Flora Azikiwe [19, p. 67], wife of Nnamdi Azikiwe, the then premier of Eastern Nigeria, and a Christian. During the Second Republic (1979–83) the vice-president, Alex Ekwueme, also a Christian from the east, was often accompanied on public occasions by his wife. But the president, Shehu Shagari, a Muslim from Sokoto in the far north, always appeared alone.

The Purposes for Which Public Libraries Are Used

Recently, it has been pointed out that the long-standing belief that Africans do not read does not hold up any more [20, p. 18]. It is true, however, that reading in Nigeria is still mainly utilitarian, a way of acquiring the information necessary to pass the examinations that permit one to continue to the next stage of schooling or to take employment at a more highly paid level. The main purpose of the public library is educational, the Unesco Public Library Manifesto proclaimed in 1949. Public libraries in Nigeria are educational: they are used chiefly as quiet places to study and as sources of books that are otherwise unavailable or are beyond the means of those who wish to read them. "The people of Enugu read mainly for 'self-improvement' and to 'gain knowledge' rather than to amuse themselves" [16, p. 244], according to a report from the early 1960s. Most recently, a survey showed that "school age youths of between 15 and 24 years constitute the bulk of library users. Most of them use the library for their school work" [21, p. 430]. Young Nigerians use the library to study because their homes are too sociable and crowded to permit concentration. R. C. Bengé, recalling how in Trinidad "many young people . . . used to study for their examinations

at night by reading at the foot of the public lamp post," stated that in Africa there was "an obvious professional library duty to provide very large reading rooms simply for study purposes" [22, p. 211]. In the opinion of the Commissioner for Economic Development and Reconstruction in the post-civil war East-Central State government, "the sedentary reading room is more valuable than the mobile library" [23, p. 18]. In 1976, North-Central State was making plans to attach a reading room to each new library "because of our realisation of the fact that throughout the country the demand for reading spaces—pure and simple—is great" [24, p. 4]. But not all librarians have been sympathetic to reading space and those who make use of it: "African public libraries tend to be filled with what are unfairly called 'dropouts' from the formal education process: they use the library to study their textbooks. Yet their presence is often deplored and discouraged since it is alleged that they are not really using the library for reference purposes but only as a reading room. . . . If national development is to mean anything," Bengé concluded, "these are the young people who should be catered to" [25, p. 212].

Nor have all librarians shown enthusiasm for supplying the material their users would like. In 1954 Joan Parkes (later Joan Allen), Northern Nigeria regional librarian, said that she was not prepared to buy textbooks for her library, but that she would "buy and sell to readers, at cost, textbooks which she considered did not warrant the expenditure of public money" [26, p. 30]. The Unesco consultant to Eastern Nigeria cautioned that there was "a very great need indeed for the reading of imaginative works among educated Nigerians. *Alice in Wonderland*⁹ or Jane Austen are more important than Simon's *Local Government* at this juncture. I am therefore more than pleased with the decision that . . . no special attention will be paid to the provision of textbooks, nor will such borrowing be encouraged" [28, p. 14]. Bengé showed more understanding. In 1963, when most of Britain's former colonies had gained their independence, he wrote: "At the present time many African countries are involved in a revolutionary situation which strains human resources to the utmost. Great emphasis has to be placed on acquiring technical knowledge and new skills. It will be readily apparent that textbooks and practical manuals must be the main essential reading matter" [22, p. 210].

9. It is an example turned ironic by this recent comment from a Nigerian librarian: "The temptation is irresistible to suggest that wherever Nigerians (and indeed other predominantly oral-aural cultures) function in situations requiring some record-keeping, or the manipulation of graphic records, there are chaos, inefficiency and confusion. It is like finding oneself in that strange part of Alice's looking-glass country where it takes all one's strength to remain on the same spot" [27, p. 180].

In addition to space and material for study purposes, what should public libraries provide? The obvious answer would seem to be multiple copies of the books, magazines, and newspapers that Nigerians buy and borrow from each other to read for pleasure and for information on politics and current affairs.¹⁰ Hans M. Zell suggests that, for school leavers (that is, high school graduates) at least, book reading has become a habit even if book buying has not [20, p. 19]. There are a great many African publications to buy nowadays. Publishing in Nigeria, and overseas publishing for and about Nigeria, has expanded tremendously since the 1950s, when the books supplied by the Northern regional headquarters were sardonically described by J. A. Faseyi as "quite suitable for a Public Library in the suburbs of London" [30, p. 69]. This was no doubt true, but it was not the fault of the librarians: a comparison of the size and contents of the volumes of the Nigerian and British national bibliographies for the 1950s puts the matter in perspective. But the days when "literature was just another marvel that came with all the other wondrous things of civilisation, like motor cars and aeroplanes, from far away" [31, p. 547] are gone. The Heinemann African Writers series now has 270 titles. Macmillan Pacesetters, novels written by Nigerian authors for young adults, are a commercial success. Fourth Dimension and other companies have published best-selling memoirs of the civil war. The Northern Nigerian Publishing Company continues to produce material in Hausa, for which there is much demand. Apart from Yoruba and Igbo, other Nigerian languages are less well served. The numbers of people literate in them are too small to interest commercial publishers; little exists in print other than bibles and religious pamphlets.

Children are less affected than others by the constraints on public library service. The significance of encouraging them to make use of libraries, with the probability that some at least will continue this use as adults, is obvious when one realizes that over half of Nigeria's more than 90 million people are estimated to be under fifteen years of age.

10. Bown points out that Naiwu Osahon, author and publisher of *Sex Is a Nigger*, claims to have sold a quarter of a million copies in Nigeria: "Soft porn is not what one goes to libraries for, but if Nigerians read that at least they can't be accused of not reading for entertainment" [15]. This brings to mind a Kenyan publisher's conclusion: "Better to read local trash than imported trash" [29, p. 87]. Nigeria has enjoyed remarkable freedom of expression under both civilian and military governments, but the official stance on morality is strong. Librarians would run into opposition in their communities and lose some of their clientele if they were unwise enough to stock works that many would term "immoral," especially if the immorality had a contemporary setting, was inexcusable on literary grounds, and did not meet with retribution.

State Creation: The Division and Redivision of Nigeria

"The book stock—and the staff—have now been divided between the six states in an operation so hasty, ill-conceived and arbitrary as to constitute one of the most curious episodes in library history" [32, p. x-4]. Public library development in Nigeria has been greatly affected by the division and redivision of the country into smaller internal units (fig. 1), divisions made not with public libraries in mind but in order to keep the federation peaceful, stable, and unified. The first division occurred in 1963, when part of the Western Region was carved out and became the Midwest. This had no effect because the Western service hardly extended beyond Ibadan, the capital, and the new region, if it inherited anything from the west, inherited its lack of action on public libraries. The political turmoil toward the end of the First Republic (1960–66), the military coups of 1966, the outbreak of civil war, the invasion of the Midwest by a force from Biafra in 1967, and the recovery of the area by the federal troops, precluded action on libraries until the war was nearly over.

The next redivision was in 1967, when the four regions and the Federal Territory of Lagos were abolished and twelve states established. This had an enormous effect on the north, where one region was broken up into six states. Buildings had to stay where they were, but books and staff were shared out.¹¹ Asked whether the decision to share the library's assets could not be reversed, the permanent secretary of the interim administration in Kaduna declared:

There could be no going back and no "going through the motions" whilst retaining the old power-structure. The Regional Library was one of the many regional institutions being broken and scattered; there would be waste, confusion, the misery of dislocation for staff and their families and little hope of any of the nucleus collections functioning in the near future. However, in the tense period of the civil war, every priority was given to removing sources of political

11. Gunton, who several years earlier had been Northern Regional Librarian, refutes the story that the army divided up multivolume sets of reference works so as to share out the volumes between the states. The reference collection remained intact in Kaduna, "virtually the sole exception" [33, p. 138]. Rank and file soldiers in Africa do not have much education and, when in control, are not necessarily respectful of those who do or concerned with the books and libraries through which they received it. This is illustrated by what happened to libraries retaken by federal troops during the civil war [34]. More recently, in Uganda, the headmaster of a school that had been used as a barracks showed a visitor the remaining volumes of an encyclopedia, all he had left because "the soldiers took the books for cooking" [35, p. 38].

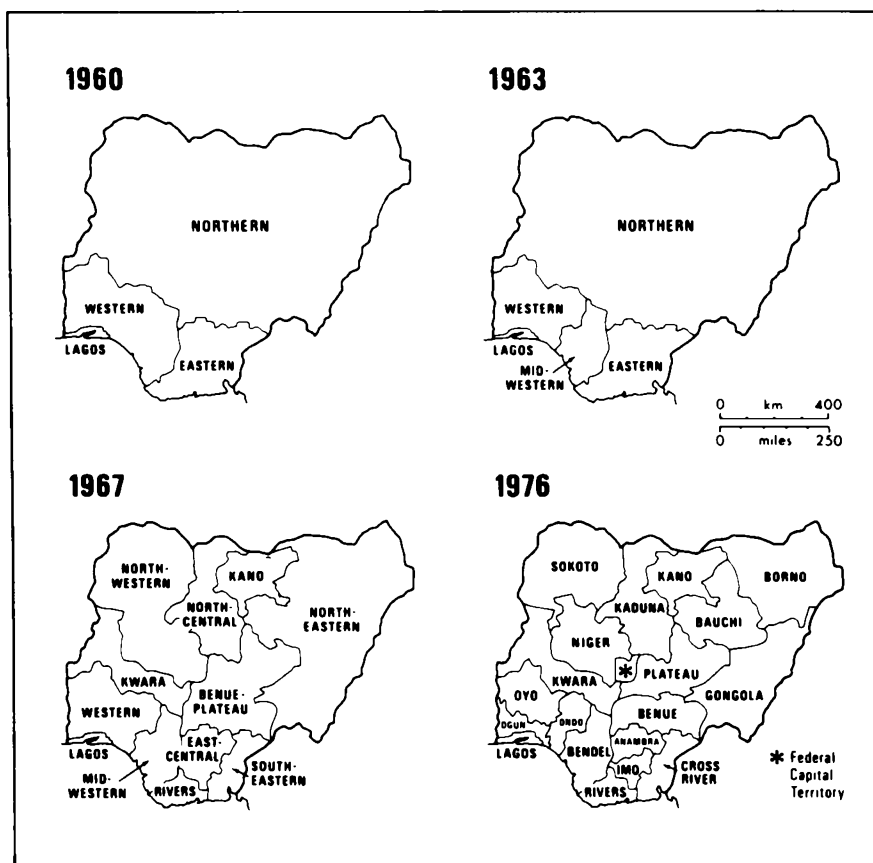


FIG. 1.—The division and redivision of Nigeria into smaller internal units. (Ieuan Ll. Griffiths, *An Atlas of African Affairs* [London: Methuen, 1984], p. 81. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.)

and tribal unrest; the Regional Library was one innocent and unfortunate casualty among many.¹² [33, p. 138]

Each of the six northern states received one qualified librarian: in most instances the one who had happened to be born within its borders.

12. This is the explanation for what John Harris termed the "hasty, ill-conceived and arbitrary" division [32, p. x-4]. Harris's verdict is correct but oddly lacking in perception from the man who, toward the end of his twenty years as librarian at Ibadan, acted as vice-chancellor and kept the university going at a time when it, like the entire country, seemed about to split apart because of ethnic tensions. Perhaps what he had in mind was that the Northern Regional librarian should somehow have managed to keep the library service together. Had Harris been regional librarian he might have pulled off this feat, but it is hard to imagine anyone else doing so.

Faseyi, who stayed in Kaduna, suggested in 1968 that "the staff deployed to the states will perhaps form the germ of the state library services" [30, p. 73]. In most instances the germination process never took place. Some of the new state librarians had been raised far above their level of competence simply because they happened to be the only qualified indigenes from their areas. M. S. Onye has complained that "newly created states inherited not only staff and stock, but also the lack of policy which had existed with the former order. Public libraries in the six states went to sleep in either the Military Governors' offices or in the Ministries of Education and Information" [36, p. 41]. This was not true of North-Central (later Kaduna), where considerable progress was made under Faseyi. But not many of the others in charge of the new state libraries were capable of putting together a policy or of convincing those with power to allocate public funds that public library development was worth spending money on.

Three days after May 27, 1967, the day on which Yakubu Gowon, the army officer who was federal head of state, announced the abolition of the regions and their replacement by twelve states, Emeka Ojukwu, military governor of the region which Gowon's announcement had just split into three, responded by proclaiming the former Eastern Nigeria independent as the Republic of Biafra. The state creation exercise could not be fully implemented in the east until January 1970, when what remained of Biafra finally gave in and surrendered to the federal forces. The former region had the best public library service in Nigeria prior to 1967. The three new states (East-Central, South-Eastern, and Rivers) worked hard to overcome the ravages and setbacks of the war. By 1974, one of them was "well on the way to providing, once more, the best public library service in the country" [37, p. 24]. This was East-Central, directed by Kalu Okorie, who in 1951 had become the first Nigerian to gain a professional library qualification. Ironically, in the next state creation exercise (1976), when the twelve were replaced by nineteen plus the new Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, East-Central was split into two: Imo and Anambra. Okorie became director of libraries in Imo State, an area roughly one-sixth the size of the region into which he had introduced public libraries some twenty years earlier in preindependence Nigeria. Not only did the division and redivision of the federation into smaller internal units bring to the top a number of people with no capacity for leadership, but it reduced by a third, and then again by a half, the area under the direction of one exceptional public librarian.

The setbacks caused by state creation in Nigeria have not been shared by other African countries, where the organization of the public library service on a national rather than regional or state basis is the norm. The Kenya National Library Service, the Tanzania Library Services, and the

Ghana Library Board all serve or attempt to serve entire countries. The decision that public library service in Nigeria should be based on smaller units goes back to 1952 when the Council of Ministers took the view that "it must be Regional, local and private organisations, which increase library facilities throughout the territory" [quoted in 38, p. 3]. Given the size of Nigeria's population, one service for the entire nation would appear to be out of the question, but the present situation, where the quality of service ranges from reasonable (for example, Anambra, Bendel, Cross River, Imo, Kaduna, Rivers) to nonexistent (Sokoto) and there is no coordination at the federal level, is far from satisfactory.

The National Library of Nigeria, which commenced service in 1964, does take an interest in public library development and, since 1975, has organized an annual conference of state librarians. It must be unique among national libraries in that legislation requires it to set up a branch in each state. Several branches have been set up so far (in Anambra, Kaduna, Plateau, and Rivers), the intention being that by assisting with research and reference they should complement the public library service [39]. It could be argued that this must result in a certain amount of duplication and the money expended on setting up these branches would be better spent developing public libraries.

Leadership, Legislation, and Finance

In any programme for library development, two essential factors are necessary. There should be in the first place enthusiasm on the part of the government for such a programme and secondly there should be the right leadership at the professional level capable of executing such a programme. If the library service in the former Eastern Nigeria made any impression, it was due largely to the presence of these factors. . . . If the West had at least one of these factors in the fifties, the story . . . would have been different. [40, p. 18]

Professional leadership, government support and funding, and legislative backing are usually intertwined and mutually dependent factors. Perhaps the most important of these is leadership. Most public library development has occurred in areas with higher than average literacy and educational levels, backing from one or more civilian or military ruler or senior civil servant and, above all, a dynamic regional or state librarian with the capacity to "present a strong case for the library's existence in the first place" [41, p. 2]. It is true that if money is not available even the strongest leadership can achieve little, but under less limiting circumstances much can and has been done. The success stories of the former Eastern Region and of Bendel (formerly Mid-Western) and Kaduna (formerly North-Central) States are well known. The stories of the areas

where progress has been slow are less well publicized and documented, but no less instructive.

The former Western Region, which pioneered free primary education in the 1950s, proved a great disappointment as regards public library development. Money was available, but leadership and backing were not. By 1960 the West was "the only region not to have received a capital grant under the British Council's Public Libraries Development Scheme, simply because it could not produce a viable plan. In December 1961 a grant of £27,000 by the British Council was made to the Ministry of Education, toward the capital cost of a building, a move which did nothing to promote development for both money and plan were inert throughout the decade" [33, pp. 117-18]. At the 1970 Nigerian Library Association conference, S. B. Aje, who was then deputy director of the national library, castigated the West, remarking that it "had remained the profession's talking point over the last decade as exemplifying inertia and apathy in official quarters" [42, p. 46]. Britain's gift was "rediscovered" during the administration of an "enlightened and library-enthusiast Commissioner for Education" [43, p. 188], and the foundation stone of the Western State Central Library was finally laid at Ibadan on March 2, 1972. Another area where money might have been made available had professional leadership been demonstrated was Sokoto, location of a "State Librarian . . . but . . . no State Library" [44, p. 48], in the words of a librarian at the local university. Kedem Agbemetsi describes the state library's accommodation as small and temporary and puts question marks against the size of the collection and the system by which it is classified. Sokoto is the home state of Shehu Shagari, president of Nigeria from 1979 to 1983, and Nigerian politicians are no more likely than any other politicians to neglect the interests and development of their home bases while in office. The formal education system received much financial assistance; the public library did not.

The leadership of Benue State libraries has come in for much criticism. Benue was one of the new states created in 1976; its state librarian had held the same position in Benue-Plateau until the split, when he was deployed to the part from which he originated. Benue-Plateau had its headquarters in Jos; the building in which the library was housed collapsed in June 1975, putting an end to service in the capital for some time. The new Benue State capital, Makurdi, already had a library, but office accommodation in the town was scarce, and the "mother ministry" (Information and Internal Affairs) improvised by evicting books and staff and taking over the library building for itself. The first move was to a college laboratory, the next to a bungalow. In January 1977 the bungalow was allocated to Benue State Television Service, and books and staff were dispersed throughout the state. "The public library ser-

vice in Makurdi had temporarily come to a halt. . . . All these movements of one library took place within twelve calendar months and this situation did not allow for continuous service nor did it give encouragement to the library's clientele" [45, pp. 36–37; 46].

Library Legislation and Library Boards

The combination of professional leadership and government encouragement generally results in the enactment of library legislation and the establishment of a library board, if such are not already in existence. A Unesco study found "no example of a country which has successful, effective and nation-wide public library service without a foundation and encouragement in general law" [47, p. 11]. The same holds true for Nigerian states. The East, drawing its inspiration from Ghana, was the first part of Nigeria to pass legislation. In 1955, the Eastern Nigeria Library Board Law established the Library Board, which represented the first authoritative confirmation that public libraries had an important role to play in community development and well-being [48, p. 101]. In 1962 the Eastern capital, Enugu, was the venue for another Unesco-sponsored seminar on public libraries in Africa; one of the main topics was library legislation.¹³ Soon after the end of the civil war the libraries in two of the three states (East-Central and South-Eastern) into which the East split ensured that their governments enacted legislation. Other states whose public libraries had progressive leaders, such as Midwestern (later Bendel) and North-Central (later Kaduna), did likewise. The process can take a long time. The military governor of the North announced that region's intention to form a library board when he opened the new Northern Regional Library in Kaduna in 1967 [30, p. 72]. The law was not enacted in Kaduna until 1976 and then, of course, it applied only to Kaduna State. The board was not inaugurated until 1978 [49].

Legislation gives a basis in law for the existence of the library service. It establishes a board composed of members who have usually risen to some eminence in the professions, business, or the civil service, are interested in library development, and are willing to back the state librarian in his plans and budget proposals. Public libraries in states without library boards may languish in the bureaucratic labyrinth; the Western Regional Library, particularly unfortunate, was a "sub-branch of the *Students' and Services' Branch of the Education and Administration Division of the Ministry of Education*" [50, p. 96]. According to the Deputy Director of the Imo State Library Board, "It is a well-known fact that states with library legislation have good library services" [51, p. 164] or, at any rate, better library services than those that have not.

13. The proceedings of this seminar were never published by Unesco.

The Income-earning Public Library Authority

Public libraries compete for public funds with other services whose benefits are easier to quantify. They do not bring in any money. "The current attitude," wrote S. B. Aje in 1956, "is that the library is non-revenue-earning and accordingly should not claim any significant portion of the funds" [52, p. 79]. This attitude remains: according to Njoku Ukaonu in 1978 "the idea that public libraries do not yield revenue has been primarily responsible for the poor provision for library development in the country" [53, p. 27]. One Nigerian public library authority has earned money: the Bendel State Library Board (until 1976, the Midwest State Library Board). Concerned about the condition of libraries in the postprimary institutions in the state, the library board set up the Book Depot in 1972 to act as a central purchasing agency. School principals were required to deposit in the depot's account 75 percent of the small sum intended for library development which each pupil paid as part of the school fee. Schools could then select from the depot publications up to the value of what they had paid in [54]. Since 1972 the bookselling side of the Bendel State Library Board has expanded greatly; through its headquarters, branches, and mobile bookstore it now serves the public and other libraries in the country as well as Bendel schools. The director told a Nigerian Library Association conference in 1979 that "but for the funds generated from this venture, the Bendel Library . . . would have declined in the quality of its services. For example, in 1974, with a staff strength of about 44, the subvention for the Board was ₦1 million. For the 1979/80 financial year, with a staff strength of 514, its subvention is still incredibly ₦1 million. The only way it has been able to maintain the existing services and open new branches is as a result of the revenue from the Book Depot" [55, p. 46].

The suggestion that, because of the absence of good bookstores, "national or public libraries should themselves undertake either publishing or bookselling or both" [56, p. 194] had been made by Bengé a few years before the Bendel Book Depot got underway. Indeed Max Broome had pointed out that back in the 1960s some Tanzanians were actually treating the library as a bookstore: "When we started first we had a tremendous problem with people taking books and coming in the following day saying they had lost them [and offering money in payment]" [57, p. 76]. But the first library authority in Africa to engage in bookselling in a big way was the Bendel State Library Board, and its success has put thoughts of following its example into the minds of others. "To survive in the Nigeria of the future," advised the Imo Deputy Director in 1983, "public libraries will have to . . . engage in revenue-yielding ventures such as publishing, bookshop services, bindery and printing services" [51, p. 167].

Staffing Problems

Staffing is perhaps the most complex of all the constraints on public library development in Nigeria. In the beginning the problem was simple: there were not enough librarians. Then there were not enough Nigerian librarians, not enough Nigerian librarians of northern origin, not enough librarians from, for example, the Borno part of the north. Now, with the expansion of library education,¹⁴ each state has at least a handful of indigenes who hold professional library qualifications. But even those with many find them unenthusiastic about working for the state. Public library development throughout the country has been retarded by the fact that librarians employed by universities (almost all federally funded) enjoy better conditions of service than those employed by state governments. Public library development in the north has been retarded by the shortage of people from the area who have library training and by the reluctance of some state governments to employ any Nigerian not born in "the right state"—by which they mean their own.

Ethnicity and "State Consciousness"

Ethnicity—or tribalism as it used to be called—gives preference to people from one's home area, people who speak the same language and on whom one ought to be able to depend with some certainty. It exists in varying degrees in most parts of the world, and its existence in Nigeria is perfectly understandable in view of the fact that the country's huge population is made up of many different peoples, speaking different languages, all living together within national borders determined by outsiders in Europe less than one hundred years ago. The main drawback of ethnicity—or "state consciousness" as it is often referred to in Nigeria—is that it hinders the development of the nation by causing jobs to be given to people on the basis of where they were born rather than their ability to do the work. Recruitment practices have for many years "reflected undue sensitivity about extending state employment opportunities to personnel of different states of origin," with top appointments "reserved for the 'sons of the soil'" [58, p. 29].

The origins of today's unequal supply of trained manpower within the country go back at least as far as the early years of the century, by which time the British had achieved full control over all the area that they named Nigeria. Christian missionaries from Europe had established

14. One university (Ibadan) offers the M.L.S. as its basic professional program, three others (Ahmadu Bello, Maiduguri, Bayero) offer the undergraduate B.L.S. or B.A.(L.S.). A number of other institutions offer library science at minor or at various certificate and diploma levels.

schools in parts of the south in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Under an agreement between the governor, Sir Frederick Lugard (later Lord Lugard), and the traditional rulers of the Islamic north, missionaries could enter an emirate only with its ruler's consent. The north had Koranic schools and a tradition of Islamic scholarship stretching back hundreds of years. But in the years following the Second World War, as pressure in the south brought independence nearer, the north realized that it did not have the Western-trained manpower to take over the positions which the British would vacate on or shortly after independence and that the south did—thus, the Northernisation Policy,

intended as a means of developing the educational (i.e., manpower) needs of the region and increasing the professional competence of its human material in order to facilitate its recruitment into top positions in the Northern services. An unavoidable concomitant of this obviously praiseworthy effort was the systematic exclusion of southern Nigerians from the region's public service, and the expressed preference for non-Nigerian expatriate officers for appointment on contract basis. Not surprisingly, the policy was seen by Nigerians outside the region as a gigantic government programme deliberately embarked upon to breed nepotism, favouritism and tribalism. [59, p. 1]

The policy did not cease with the splitting of the region into states.

The imbalance in the supply of trained and experienced public librarians within the country is best illustrated by specific examples. When South-Eastern (later Cross River) State appointed a director of library services toward the end of the civil war, it was able to offer the post to a Nigerian qualified since 1953—E. E. Oku, who had served as city librarian of Lagos from 1955 up to the time she decided to return to her home state. When, in the early 1970s, Bendel State wanted someone to continue the work begun by Priscilla Harris, it chose Winifred Onyeonwu, who had years of professional experience in Canada. When Imo and Rivers advertised for directors of library services in 1978, each specified ten years of postqualification experience, knowing that their states had the indigenes who could fulfill this requirement. When A. H. Ningi was given charge of Kano State Library early in 1975, he had less than twelve months' postqualification experience,¹⁵ having graduated from Ahmadu Bello University in 1974. Fortunately for Kano, Ningi made an excellent state librarian, doing much to expand the service, but it is a fact that other, similar, appointments in the north have not been a success and have done little to advance public library development. According to Adeyemo Aderinto, "the practice of what some people term as 'apartheid' in Nigeria has thus constituted one of the important hurdles militating against free interstate flow of human resources which is a

15. He is actually an indigene of the adjoining Bauchi State, not of Kano.

necessary condition for even development" [58, p. 29]. A few of the better state libraries have made an effort to recruit outside their borders. Onyeonwu, when director of Bendel State Libraries, would visit library schools to speak about the importance of public libraries and to encourage students from any part of the federation to apply for posts in Bendel. Reluctance to and difficulty in getting work outside one's home state are hindrances to public library more than to university library development. Up to the late 1970s, when some states began to establish their own, all universities were federal institutions. In each, obviously, the local people or "sons of the soil" had the advantage, but nonlocals could not be discriminated against too blatantly. As a result, librarians would consider, and be considered for, employment in universities outside their home states, but not in public libraries.

Poor Conditions of Service and Prospects

The disappointing level of public library development in some states is not necessarily due to a lack of qualified indigenes. According to the records of Ahmadu Bello University, of the 225 B.L.S. degrees awarded to Nigerians between 1971 (the year the first degrees were awarded) and 1979, seventy-one, or almost one-third, went to people of Kwara State origin [17, p. 176]. Yet despite this abundance of qualified librarians from within its borders, Kwara does not have one of the better-staffed public library services in the country. Benue also has an abundance of librarians but poorly staffed public libraries. One reason for this is that younger librarians prefer to work in universities, where they will receive higher salaries and more frequent promotions. As university senior staff, they are eligible for campus housing at a nominal rent, and their children can attend the campus school, in which the standard of teaching is likely to be higher than in other elementary schools in the area. Also, they may be able to use their university bases to enhance their own qualifications by registering for higher degrees and to assist family and friends seeking admission to programs of study.

Other drawbacks are what the younger librarians view as the low qualification levels and poor achievement records of some long-serving state librarians. Many of the present state librarians do not have degrees but are associates of the British Library Association (ALAs). They gained this qualification in the 1950s and 1960s and, like others elsewhere in the British Commonwealth, have been adversely affected by the development of librarianship into an entirely graduate profession in Britain. Their qualifications and attainments have come under increasing fire from those younger and more qualified. "As a result of the poor image created by these [ALA] librarians the number of new graduates willing to take up appointment in public libraries has dwindled" [51, p. 165].

Recurring Gaps

The filling of a top library post with a suitable appointee does not necessarily mean that the staffing problem thus resolved will not recur.¹⁶ Vacancies may be caused by retirements and deaths, by transfers and promotions. In a public library service staffed by a number of qualified, experienced people, this may not cause much of an upheaval. When Winifred Onyeonwu was appointed permanent secretary in the Bendel Ministry of Education she was succeeded as state librarian by her deputy, D. O. Oboro. When, early in 1984, A. H. Ningi was made commissioner of works and transport in Bauchi, he left behind him in Kano State Library a number of qualified librarians, at least one of whom had by then postqualification experience as long as his own. But when Umaru Alk moved to Government House as principal assistant secretary (and soon after was made secretary of the National Population Bureau, Bauchi State), Bauchi State Library was left in the charge of a non-graduate diploma holder. Many paraprofessionals do excellent work, but they are intended for middle, not top, management in Nigerian libraries, and are "small boys" by comparison with senior state officers with whom they are in contact. No state would ask a draftsman to act as chief architect. No public library service in the charge of a paraprofessional is likely to make progress.

The Difficulty of Extending Service Outside the Urban Areas

The people who inaugurated public library service in the three regions in the 1950s started by setting up headquarters in Kaduna, Ibadan, and Enugu, capitals of the North, the West, and the East, and commencing service to the residents. By 1967, when the regions broke up, the West had not extended its service beyond Ibadan, where it occupied temporary premises. The North, by far the largest region, had a fine library building in Kaduna, built with British aid, "a light, pleasant branch library" [33, p. 98] in Bida (200 miles away in Niger Province), and "the nucleus of two Provincial Libraries" [30, p. 71] in Sokoto (300 miles from Kaduna) and Maiduguri (500 miles): four professionally controlled service points in an area more than three times the size of England, Scotland, and Wales. The much smaller Eastern Region had achieved most: a new headquarters and lending library in Enugu, four new

16. Public library staff shortages are a problem not only in Nigeria: "Out of the seventeen professional staff recruited in the [Zambia library] service since 1975 none has remained on the job. The last three resigned during the year [1981] under review" [60, p. 23].

divisional libraries at Port Harcourt, Ikot-Ekpene, Umuahia, and Onitsha, and bookmobile service for parts of the region. The funds for much of the equipment in the Enugu building and for the bookmobile that went into service in that area came from Unesco [61, p. 184; 19]. The British Council paid for the construction of the Port Harcourt Library and for its stock and bookmobile [48, p. 101].

Bookmobiles might seem the best way to extend service outside the cities and towns, but mobile service is not easy to operate in Africa. The regional librarian for the North observed: "Primitive servicing, punishing corrugated dirt-roads, long distances, a rain season that closes many roads, a dry season that sends up choking dust, all go to keep mobile libraries in abeyance until there are more roads of tarmacadam" [62, p. 153]. "Perhaps Land Rovers would have produced better results" [63, p. 247], was one Tanzanian's conclusion on the attempt to establish a rural bookmobile service in parts of his country. Rivers State had the initiative to commission and put into service two boat libraries, each with a capacity for 2,000 volumes.

Kaduna State was more successful than most in extending service from the capital to the main towns at least, if not quite into the "bush": "We observed the wave of thinking of economic planners and since they were closer to the source of Finance, we danced to their tune. The development of Rural Areas was the key word and we, therefore, corrected our submissions to suit. We pleaded, however, that while our main intentions were to develop the rural areas, we needed a strong base/headquarters in Kaduna to achieve our goals" [24, p. 2]. By 1975 the state had six small branch libraries, manned by paraprofessionals, in the six administrative area headquarters. By 1980 the state had divisional libraries in Zaria and Katsina.

Native Authority/Local Council Reading Rooms

"A mere jumble of books locked up in glass faced cupboards with dustridden tables and chairs carrying dingy and tattered periodicals. . . . [Their attendants] wear away in time with dejection and become mentally rusty" [52, pp. 80-81]. Much of the time that might have been devoted to extending public library service outside the capitals was actually spent trying to improve the native authority (later local council) reading rooms. These had been set up by the colonial government during the Second World War. They contained radios, newspapers, maps, and pamphlets, and their purpose was to publicize the Allied war effort. According to Allen, "Books crept in when Europeans going on leave decided that the reading room would make a better repository than the dust bin for their unwanted books. Later on, as a result of literacy drives all over Nigeria and frequent scares about the alleged

circulation of Communist literature, it was decided that books were good things and should form a part of reading room equipment" [64, p. 5]. In the 1950s, Allen and other librarians hoped that some of the reading rooms might be raised to the standard of public libraries. They visited, they advised, they assisted with ordering of materials, they organized short courses for attendants in their own headquarters. But the majority of reading rooms resisted the stoutest of efforts and, over the years, drew forth the most caustic of comments from almost everyone.¹⁷ By 1961 Allen had concluded that it was "quite impossible to bring about lasting improvement under the present set-up" [64, p. 5]. This conclusion was also reached by F. A. Sharr, state librarian of Western Australia, who visited Northern Nigeria in 1962/63: "The attempt to develop N. A. Reading Rooms into public libraries has failed and should be abandoned. They could, however, serve a valuable purpose if they were clearly devoted to the needs of new literates and illiterates as an adjunct of Public Enlightenment" [66, p. 6]. Sharr's report on the library needs of the north was accepted by the regional government, but its recommendations were never implemented. One of the reasons for this, according to the permanent secretary of Northern Nigeria's Ministry of Information (the ministry responsible for public libraries), was "our failure to recruit a suitable head for the Regional Library,¹⁸ who would guide the implementation of future development" [67]. By 1976 Kaduna State Library had "written off the former reading rooms because their administration made it impossible for us to convert them to libraries. The functions they were created to serve are in direct conflict with our ideas of a public library service" [24, p. 3]. Despite their disappointment, public librarians must have derived consolation from the fact that their efforts surely brought improvements to at least some reading room users.

Conclusion

"To fulfil its purposes, the public library must be readily accessible, and its doors open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, language, status

17. One exception was N. O. Oderinde: "The Zaria Reading Room situated near the Sabongari market and the C. M. S. Church served me much more during my primary school days than the Regional Library, Kaduna did later after the completion of a Teacher Training Course" [65, p. 153].

18. Allen left in 1959 when her husband took up a post in Sokoto. Gunton, her successor, left in 1961 to work for the British Council.

or educational attainment" (Unesco Public Library Manifesto) [68, p. 130]. "It is a public library," the Eastern premier told guests at the official opening of the Regional Central Library, Enugu, on March 9, 1959, "and in the true tradition of the service, the books will be issued not to *some* people, but to all *people*, regardless of their race, their condition or circumstance" [quoted in 61, p. 185]. This admirable intention is still far from being realized. Taking the country as a whole, the books are available to under 1 percent of the population: those would-be future members of the professional and administrative elite fortunate enough to live near a public library service point: "90 per cent [of users] are people who are preparing for examinations and in eight cases out of ten they cease to require our services once their battle is fought and won" [69, p. 16]. Even professional people and higher-level federal and state civil servants who have benefited from public libraries in earlier years rarely continue using them, perhaps because the libraries do not stock enough copies of the publications they want to fulfill the demand. Rather than wait, and now having more money, they prefer to buy for themselves or to borrow from friends.

Following his study of Northern Nigeria, Sharr suggested that "the public libraries to be developed should not aim to meet the needs of illiterates and new literates for reading matter. Their needs should be handled by a separate service based on the present Native Authority Reading-rooms. . . . the public library service on the other hand should be designed for the educated, i.e. those who have completed at least primary education" [70, p. 261]. A public library for the "educated" is not a public library at all: illiterates in bush villages are also members of the public. In 1982 B. Olaimpe Aboyade, who was then head of the Ibadan library school, started an experimental project to bring library and information service to one such community. Aboyade and her team made weekly visits to Badeku village, seventeen miles from Ibadan. They brought posters, comic strips, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, books, and cassette recordings, mainly in Yoruba. The people appreciated being read to. The posters in particular stimulated questions and discussion on such topics as malaria control, pit latrines, and the whereabouts of the long-promised, long-awaited supplies of government-subsidized fertilizer. The project fulfilled one role that had not been anticipated: it provided an opportunity for the villagers to complain to sympathetic outsiders, to express their frustration at being neglected for so long by those in power. It was asked whether the government austerity measures were "directed only at the poor or affected the rich and educated as well" [71, p. 257].

Much development took place in parts of Nigeria from the 1950s to the 1970s, including, in certain areas and under the leadership of certain

librarians, much public library development. A good deal of the financing in the early period came from Britain. Then, by the mid-1970s, the oil boom made everything seem possible: "Whilst the First and Second Plans envisaged capital expenditures of ₦2.2 billion and ₦3.2 billion respectively, the original size of the Third Plan was ₦30 billion. The public sector share of this . . . was later revised to ₦43.3 billion" [11, p. 3]. Several occurrences make the future of "development" in Nigeria look much less rosy now than it did ten years ago: the oil glut and reduction in market price and production level, and thus in Nigerian foreign exchange earnings, that resulted from the Western countries' cutback in their demand; the world recession; the fortunes spent on the building of a new federal capital, Abuja, in an isolated, sparsely populated part of the interior; and the public money that went into private pockets during the 1979-83 period of civilian government. "Good men, no policies" [72, p. 22] was the *Economist's* summing up of Gowon, Muhammed, Obasanjo, and Shagari, the country's rulers from 1966 to 1983. All were well intentioned; none showed much ideological commitment. None would have gone as far as the former prime minister of Tanzania, Rashid Kawawa, who said that his country would rather be the one with "the most extensive Adult Education system and public library system in Africa, than the one which has the highest statistical Gross National Product as statistics of average national income per head are not by themselves a real measure of a nation's development—it depends on how much inequality the averages conceal" [quoted in 73, p. 222]. Universal free primary education, introduced in 1976, is no longer free throughout Nigeria. A country that cannot, or will not, afford primary education for all is not likely to be in the forefront of public library development. Nigerian public libraries have concentrated on serving those who already have some education and are striving to get more in order to get further in life. Given the present economic difficulties, whether they will continue to receive the same level of public funding for this purpose is open to question. Whether continued funding can be justified for a public service that serves such a small percentage of the public is even more questionable.

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