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YOUTHS, DIGITAL INCLUSION AND LIBRARIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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BY

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Abstract

This paper examined youth inclusion in the digital space as anchored by libraries to bring about sustainable development in Nigeria. It also focused on the positive and negative uses of ICT and the potentials of the digital sector in contributing to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the empowerment of the youths. It concluded that digital inclusion of the youth will guarantee our future and the sustenance of the economy and made recommendations in that direction.

Keywords: Youths, Digital Inclusion; Libraries; Sustainable Development; Nigeria

1.1   Introduction

The youths are the building blocks of leadership succession in our society and therefore must be carried along in the information economy via digital inclusion. In this digital age, for development to be sustained information management in Nigeria must take cognizance of youth inclusiveness in accessing information. The library is a dynamic social institution that exists to meet the information needs of the society. In this connection, the role of libraries in the empowerment of the Youths cannot be overemphasized in the context of a meteoric technological milieu.

Our society today is replete with juvenile delinquency and other social ills like drug abuse and associated crimes by the youths. Therefore, the information environment must be managed to include the youths to bring out the best in them. According to The Lancet Child (2018), "young people who lack digital skills, live in remote regions , or speak a minority language, are also being left behind..." Conversely, Santhiraj (2019) observed this about youths:

While they're fluent in all things digital, teenagers (who are more connected than anyone) now experience greater levels of loneliness than ever before. Social media pundits are naming this phenomenon as "facebook depression", in which teenagers feel alienated. This then prompts them to turn to the online world for connection, but this ultimately enlarge their subjective feelings of loneliness and disconnection from the real world.

The above statement by Santhiraj underscores the imperative of balancing digital access and social relations and the overall development of society. Digital inclusion will mean the safe intermarriage between the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and the wholesome development of the youths to fit into the knowledge-based society and its attendant complications. Society evolves by breaking new frontiers in form of innovations and discoveries, one of which the greatest in this century is the ICT with its profound impact on every aspect of our lives. Every facet of

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our lives is now ruled by Science, Technology and Innovation (STI). We cannot therefore afford to exclude the youths in the digital library space either by design or default.

1.2   Statement of the problem

Development does not happen in a vacuum. Therefore, the cultural and technological environment must be put into perspective in the digital inclusion of the youths in order to achieve sustainable development in Nigeria. There exists a conflict between our traditional information management and sharing (which is largely oral) and the modern print and digital era that needs to be reconciled innovatively without excluding the youths for the benefit of the society. Toffler (1970:14) stated that, "change is avalanching upon our heads and most people are grotesquely unprepared to cope with it." This change is now here with us in the digital and information economy of the 21st Century. The library as the hub of information management and delivery has not effectively factored in digital inclusiveness of the youths as critical element of sustainable development in Nigeria. Thus, there is a seeming lack of appreciation of the ramifications of the different levels of exclusion of the youths in the library digital space that needs to be addressed. For instance, apart from the limitations of physical access to digital equipment, there is exclusion through lack of essential skills and innate and cultural inhibitions which predisposes our youths to more pictorial assimilation rather than textual assimilation in reading because "Nigeria still has a prevalence of oral-tradition mentality" (Ukoha, 2015:661).

Our culture is rooted in oral tradition and visual displays in music and dance; artworks; communication through town criers; market places and village squares (Benge, 1979:149). This has now been taken over by Radio, TV, Newspapers, social media, Computers and ICT generally. This oral tradition is hampering effective information management in Nigeria, as not much attention is given to the youths in the digital space. Thus, there is need for digital

inclusion of the youths for sustainable development in Nigeria.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this paper is to examine the youths, digital inclusion and libraries for sustainable development in Nigeria.

1.4 Objectives

The objective of this paper is to bring innovative ideas into the library and make it more attractive for the digital inclusion of the youths in accessing information for sustainable development in Nigeria. It also has the objective of examining the positive and negative influence of ICT on the youths and the overall development of society.

1.5 Conceptual framework

To put this discourse in proper perspective for greater understanding, we will look at the following concepts:

1.5.1 Youths

Youths are the key ingredients for building any society because they are the foundations of the future. Without the youths no society can grow talk less of development. It is to the youths that the mantle of leadership will always be passed. The UN defines youth as "the age group between 15 and 24 years old and makeup 1.2 billion people or quarter of the world's population." (Trends, 2019). *I*t was also stated that regardless of their socio-economic background or geopolitical circumstances, young people all over the world contribute to creating and maintaining a more sustainable and secure future and have been doing so for many decades (Trends, 2019). Nigeria's population is pu at about 182 million out of this more than half are under 30 years of age (Bloomberg, 2016). While according to the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2019) "The proportion of children under the age of 15 in 2010 was 44.0%, 53.2% was between 14 and 65 years of age."

1.5.2 Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion connotes or implies that there is exclusion which could

be by self-limitations in skills or lack of access to digital assets and contents. According to ITU (2019), "Digital inclusion means empowering people through Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)". It also means promotion of ICT accessibility and use for the social and economic development of people with specific needs, e.g. Persons with disabilities, women and girls, youths and children (ITU, 2019). Similarly, according to Digital Survey (2013), there are 3 aspects of Digital Inclusion: 1.Access   (Availability and Affordability) 2.Adoptation (Digital Literacy) 3.Application (workforce development). In other words, access to digital pieces is one thing and utilization at various levels of skills and context is another for results and outcomes (Abah, 2019).

1.5.3 Libraries

Libraries exist to generate, collect, organize and disseminate Information for the benefit of a given clientele or the society at large. Cornell libGuides (2019) defines libraries thus:

> *Libraries are much more than a place to read books and journals. Libraries also house advanced electronic resources, including the Internet, digital library collections, remote access to a wide range of technology and instruction.*

This is a very apt definition of a modern library which is many things rolled into one. There are five major types of libraries across the globe, which are designed to cater for various segments of the society. These are academic, public, school, special and national libraries. Each of this Library type performs the function of providing relevant and timely Information for sustainable development across different sectors of the economy.

1.5.4 Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development signifies that there is an On-going development that must or should be sustained. In this regard Nigeria's development. Then what is development? According to Israel (2019),

"Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive Change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, Social and demographic components." On the other hand, sustainable Development as defined by Brundtland Report (2019) says, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainable development can then be taken to mean ensuring the societal growth of the moment while making provisions for future generations. It is in this connection the UN came up with sustainable development goals which are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges of poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace and justice. Having examined the conceptual framework, we will now look at digital inclusion of the youths by libraries to achieve sustainable development in Nigeria.

2.0   Youths, Digital Inclusion and Libraries vis-à-vis Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

There is a relationship between youths and digital inclusion by the Library, and sustainable development that must be brought to the fore. Social and economic progress of any nation is hinged on the proper deployment of trained youths who are the human capital that move development in a nation. Therefore, we must nurture and invest in the youths for the success of our future. Thus, the digital inclusion of the youths by libraries, especially academic libraries to imbue them with appropriate ICT skills and facilities becomes paramount. Adeoti and Akpokurerie (2011) asserted that "When library facilities are properly used by users there is every tendency by students or learners to improve on their Performance whereby it will lead to good output on the part of the beneficiaries." To be digitally included is for individuals or groups to have the capability of being online and using technology confidently to improve their day to day lives (Be Connected Network, 2019).

For the library to digitally include the youths for sustainable Development, new contents and context must be identified and understood. According to the Centre for Management Development (2005:20), "The electronic environment represents new frontiers that may not necessarily be physically situated or time scheduled or restricted. Learning can take place in virtual classroom rather than in physical one." Here, the library through provision of e-library section can provide virtual classroom; electronic databases; e-journals; and other e-resources via seamless online Internet services for its youth user community. Rutkowski (1999) as quoted by Centre for Management Development (2005:20) emphasized that, "Internet web Technologies are breaking down walls and helping to redesign learning Structures worldwide." Gbaje in a study (2007:9) identified the Following types of online services provided by sampled university Libraries in Nigeria:

i. Access to resources outside the library

ii. Access to digital resources within the library

iii. Electronic theses and dissertations

iv. Subscribed online Databases

However, the study revealed that none of the sampled libraries provide online information literacy instructions, online course reserve, online reference services, remote access to online catalogue, web blog, Online document delivery. In looking at the factors hindering effective Online information services Gbaje (2007) also identified the following:

i. Lack of web technology skilled staff

ii. Lack of funds

iii. Lack of Basic Information Infrastructure (Internet access, Electricity and web Server)

iv. Limits of network bandwidth and slow transmission

In another study by Baro and Asaba (2010) their findings showed that, "Many University libraries are still operating without Internet connectivity".

The authors also revealed that these are mostly the state-owned and private university libraries. Many of the university librarians and senior library personnel they Interviewed mentioned lack of fund, absence of technical staff to maintain the networks, and lack of maintenance culture as some of the factors hindering Internet connectivity. This situation is still not significantly different from Gbaje's survey in 2007. Therefore, the library at both the university and public levels needs to urgently take measures that will ameliorate the situation and ensure digital inclusion of the youths for sustainable development in Nigeria. In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) thus:

Goal 1: - No Poverty

Goal 2: - Zero Hunger

Goal 3: - Good Health & Well-being

Goal 4: - Quality Education

Goal 5: - Gender Equality

Goal 6: - Clean Water & Sanitation

Goal 7: - Affordable & Clean Energy

Goal 8: - Decent Work & Economic Growth

Goal 9: - Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

Goal10: - Reduced Inequality

Goal11: - Sustainable Cities & Communities

Goal12: - Responsible Consumption & Production

Goal13: - Climate Action

Goal14: - Life below Water

Goal15: - Life on Land

Goal16: - Peace & Justice Strong Institutions

Goal17: - Partnerships to Achieve the Goals.

UN target for sustainable Development is the year 2030 and the goals are

designed to transform our world and be fully inclusive of persons with disabilities. One of the goals that is most suitable to our discourse is Goal 10: Reduced Inequality. If we are to reduce inequality and move the country forward then the youths must be digitally included in the scheme of Information Management for development including those with disabilities. In this regard, the library will innovate in a number of ways to achieve youth inclusivity.

First and foremost, the operations of libraries must be automated (i.e. the provision of computer hardware and appropriate software to drive the entire system). When automation is attained then Internet Access (whether free or fee-based) must be provided by the library for our teeming youths that form the bulk of our university and public library users. Establishment of virtual library (i.e. e-Library) in the physical library is a gateway to access to e-books, journals and databases online via the internet. Thus, academic libraries in Nigeria should use their web pages to point their patrons to these resources in meeting the demands of their online patrons (Gbaje, 2007:11).

Provision of campus or library wide Wi-Fi network for youths' connectivity to the digital world is critical to academic success and development. As pointed out access to Internet ensures digital inclusiveness (Reder, 2015:4).

A cozy library environment is an allure and big attraction to the youths. The traditional graveyard silence associated with libraries should be replaced with modern home-like setting with an aura of freedom, comfortable furniture and laptops made available on carrels for use by the youths with ease and pleasure.

Library architecture should incorporate new designs of discussion rooms (where users can retire to and hold discussions without disturbing others). Similarly, insulated and soundproof rooms for simulation games and instructions should be provided for the youths with appropriate electronic gadgets as part of the academic package. For instance, aviation students can

have their simulated flights in such settings. Also the entrance of library buildings and the interior should incorporate facilities for people with disabilities for holistic inclusivity.

To ensure steady and reliable Internet Connectivity and services, libraries must be well funded to have in-house servers and steady power supply for seamless information delivery. Libraries should also partner with Tech Giants in the area of digital inclusiveness of the youths as a matter of policy. According to Nwachukwu et al (2010) "Since ICT in libraries is a new concept which is fast changing the trend and nature of library services in Nigeria, there is need to embark on result-oriented training practices to both staff and users to enable them and these libraries to effectively and efficiently benefit the potentials of ICT application in libraries, especially in this age of information explosion." This is the ideal to be pursued by every library.

Digital inclusion of the youths is quite important because investing in the youths guarantees our future. However, it must be noted that ICT and digital exposure is also fraught with positive and negative sides as shown in the table below:

Table 1.Uses of ICT

Positive Uses	**Negative Uses**
• Easy & timely access to information	• Easy corruption of the mind
• Greater variety of information	• Loss of our values and culture
• Greater level of awareness • Global Reach to free information • Greater level of literacy	• Disconnection from the real world & slipping into loneliness • Cyber crimes
• Exposure to skills	• Pornography
• More job opportunities	• Cultism
• Networking at national & international levels	• Hate speeches
• Easier & faster business transactions	• Dishonesty in transactions (e.g. lying)

• Faster monetary transfers.	Reduces face to face communication

The positive and negative uses of ICT/Digital facilities are varied and numerous as can be seen from the table above. Therefore, the choice is ours to use them positively. In section 5.4 of the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) of Nigeria, ICT and Digital Technology is said to have potential to ramp up employment, transform labour productivity and create new economic sectors. Related to this NITDA (2016) reported that Nigeria's ICT sector alone attracted over $6Billion dollars in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and has continued to drive inclusive and sustainable growth and development. This is further buttressed by the recent visits to Nigeria by Chief Executives of Global Technology Giants like Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook, 2016), Sundar Pichal (Google, 2017) and Bill Gates (Microsoft, 2018) which all attest to the potential wealth digital inclusion holds for the Nigerian economy with ICT contributing 9.61% to GDP in 2014 and over $50Billion to the economy (Abah,2019).

3.0   Conclusion

In conclusion there is no gainsaying the fact that digital inclusion of the youths is fundamental to the sustenance of the Nigerian economy and our development. Nigeria has 18 million people that are connected to Facebook while the global figure of Facebook account is about 2 billion people (All Africa, 2016). Majority of this people are the youths hence during the visit of Mr. Zuckerberg he pledged support to Nigerian Tech startups and SMES which is a welcome development for youth digital inclusion. Google on the other hand has trained over one million people in Africa on digital skills, with a projected plan to train 10 million Africans in the next five years (This Day, July 28,2017). Abah (2019) posits that, "digital inclusion must evolve as technology advances and recognizes that access to and use of ICTs is an essential element for participation in society, democracy and economy." Therefore, Digital inclusion of the youths holds the key to a bright future, a flourishing and sustainable

economy in Nigeria. The library must take its place in the digital drive to actualize Youths inclusivity in the country.

4.0   Recommendations

Based on the discourse and exposition on the imperative of digital inclusion of the youths for sustainable development, the following recommendations are made.

Recommendation One

Libraries as a matter of policy should incorporate youths' digital inclusion in their planning and services.

Implementation Strategy

Public and university libraries to as a matter of policy incorporate youths' digital inclusion in their plans and services.

Recommendation Two

Federal Government should remove barriers to youths' inclusiveness in the digital space by adequately funding public libraries and higher institutions to ensure free digital access.

Implementation Strategy

Federal Government to adequately fund public libraries and higher institutions to enable them provide free digital access to youths.

Recommendation Three

Digital literacy and skills should be included in our curriculums for youth empowerment.

Implementation Strategy

Library schools and universities to include Digital Literacy and skills training in their curriculums for effective youth empowerment.

Recommendation Four

Libraries should partner with Technology Giants to establish youths digital inclusion through provision of corners or endowment funds in their

organization.

Implementation Strategy

Public and university libraries to partner with Technology Giants to establish their corners or endowment funds for youths' digital inclusiveness.

Recommendation Five

Library professionals should engage in advocacy for digital training and youth inclusiveness.

Implementation strategy

Library professionals to carry out advocacy for digital training and youths' inclusiveness in public and university libraries.

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