Historical Background, Development and Standard of Public Libraries: An Overview of the Nigerian Situation

(Pp. 302-308)

Folorunso, Olayinka - Senior Librarian, University Library, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Folorunso, Femi Joseph - Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, Faculty of Education, University Of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Abstract
It has been observed that public libraries in Nigeria have not developed as expected. Instead of moving forward, they are still very backward in terms of development. This paper examines the historical background development and standard of public libraries services in Nigeria. It looks at the roles and the sources of funding of these libraries and pinpoints problems bedeviling them. It concludes by recommending ways of revamping the public libraries from their doldrums.

Introduction
In national development, information and its effective and proper dissemination is an integral and powerful force to reckon with. No meaningful national development can take place if copious attention is not paid to libraries, information centres and to effective dissemination of information because information itself is power. Since researches preceed discoveries and inventions and the incubating homes of researchers most of the time, are libraries and information centres, it logically follows that the invaluable roles that libraries, information centres and effective

dissemination of information play in national development cannot be overemphasized (Fabunmi and Folorunso 2009). Ifidon and Ahiazu (2005) in their work on prevention of crisis in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria, affirmed the grave dangers that can be caused by having gaps in the channels of information. They argued that whenever there is an information black-out, the consequences are chaos, sentiments, crises, catastrophe, and rumours which may result to total war. In this regard therefore, for national development to have a smooth sail and success information dissemination through their proper channels should be put in their right perspectives.

These aforementioned views are some proofs of the invaluable roles of libraries and particularly of that of public libraries being the University of the People which give access to every intending member of the society.

Public Libraries Defined

Generally, public libraries are accepted as public goods. They are universities of the people since it gives access to every intending member of the public. Library's Glossary Dictionary (1977) defined a public library as a library established by local, state or central government for the use of the general public. There are however, some individuals or organizations that establish library that offers services to the public free of charge and such libraries also provide educational, social and political information to people in a particular community.

Olanlokun and Salisu (1993) viewed that public libraries are libraries set up to provide free but traditional service to everyone. A public library is a service oriented institution with set goals to be achieved within the resources made available by the parent institution, which is usually the government. In other words, a public library is primarily established to provide viable and revealed services to the entire members of the public. The public libraries in Nigeria have the same universal function of serving the general public by providing educational opportunities for the self development awareness and potentialities for both rural and urban dwellers. In order to realize the objective, the functions of public libraries therefore involve the acquisition, collection, organization, and dissemination of information available in the form of printed and non-printed materials for effective use. Patrons of public libraries are very many as they cut across all walks of life and also embrace illiterates, pensioners, children, adolescent , adults, farmers, physically – challenged people etc. The public library is therefore the main arena through which the overall information resources in various areas of knowledge are

made freely available to all members of the society irrespective of age, sex, religion, cultural background and educational standard as well as political and social inclination.

In 1953, the Federal Government of Nigeria with the help of UNESCO organized the first regional seminar on the development of public libraries in the various regions of Nigeria with the following objectives (Edoka, 2000):

i.   creating and strengthening reading habits in children from early age;

ii.   supporting both individual and self -conducted education as well as formal;

iii. providing opportunities for personal creative development;

iv.   stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young adults;

v.   promoting awareness of cultural and appreciation of the arts, scientific achievement and innovations;

vi.   providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts;

vii. fostering intercultural difference and favouring cultural diversity;

viii. supporting oral tradition;

ix.   ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information;

x.   providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interests groups

xi.   facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills and;

xii. supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age group and initiating such activities if necessary.

Oderinde (1980) affirmed that the "foundation of Nigeria's pubic libraries services was laid by non-Nigerians, and with funds from abroad". It was only in 1950s that the government of the Federation of Nigeria started to encourage library development. It was argued that the UNESCO seminar on development of public libraries in Africa held at the University College, Ibadan in August 1953 was the starting point. The Ibadan UNESCO seminar focused and highlighted on organizing public libraries on Regional or

National scale, provision, selection and use of publication and audio-visual materials in African public libraries and on professional training for public libraries services.

In summary, some of the historical circumstances that led to the establishment of public libraries services in Nigeria include:

a. Efforts of some individuals who donated building and collections which later formed the nuclens of public services in Nigeria.

b. Establishment of regional reading rooms by colonial masters which later transformed to public libraries;

c. Second World War which necessitated the establishment of public information centres to disseminate (war) information;

d. Establishment of regional government and subsequent creation of states; and

e. Increase in number of students' enrolment in schools.

The Roles of Public Libraires in Nigeria
Seymour (1980) argued that responsive library services require intelligent planning, ability to learn from experience, and sensitivity to human needs. Therefore, concerned library personnel who want to provide responsive services must keep themselves constantly alert to changing library roles and ensure that library users derive maximum benefit from the services provided. Public libraries being media of education help to ensure the realization of national development in Nigeria. The roles of the public libraries services, in a nutshell, include:

i. provision of information for planning;

ii. provision of political and economic information;

iii. provision of educational informational and facilities;

iv. undertaking researches;

v. organization of enlightenment programmes;

vi. promotion of culture;

vii. recreation; and

viii. engine room for National Development.

Sources of Funding of Public Libraries in Nigeria

Edoka (2000) argued that public libraries should have resources needed to satisfy the information needs of various interests and groups in any given community. The extent to which the public libraries can meet the needs of their patrons therefore depends largely on the availability of fund. Apotiade (2002) buttressed this when he identified sources of funding of public libraries as:

i.   **Government:** Since the government is the owner of public libraries, the onus rests on it to adequately support the operations of these libraries and this is usually done through special fund and tax payers money.

ii. **Gift and Private Contribution:** This comes in form of cash and book donations from corporate bodies, philanthropists and international organizations.

iii. **Endowment:** This is a kind of benefaction which is slightly different from gift. It is a support given to particular projects as some libraries grow in prominence due to services rendered.

iv. **Miscellaneous:** This comes from internally generated revenues. Some of the revenue may come from patrons registration fees, fine for late return of loaned library materials, photocopying and literature search.

Problems Facing Public Libraries in Nigeria

Some of the teething problems facing the growth and development of public libraries and their desire to render effective services to their patrons include poor funding, inadequate stock, bad location, lack of adequate and qualified staff, low morale among the few staff and insecurity of library materials.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Before a country can develop there must be effective learning centres to develop the capacities that will be beneficial to the society. The degree of effectiveness and effectiveness and efficiency or otherwise of Nigerian public libraries directly affects national development. Public libraries suppose to be universities of the people where potentials are developed.

In this modern age, there is unprecedented demand for mass literacy and academic excellence and in order to meet up with the demands, public libraries should be put in the right perspectives to stimulate educational rowth

and general development. The conclusion reached is that public libraries are very vital and invaluable to national development but that they are performing below expectations in the area of meeting their objectives which include satisfying the information needs of their patrons.

In view of the foregoing, it is recommended that:

i.   the Nigerian Government should establish public libraries in various rural and urban communities being the most accessible universities of the people;

ii. public libraries should be adequately funded by government;

iii. there should be adequate and effective information techniques in the various public libraries as we are now in the era of information explosion and in the world of modern information technologies;

iv. mobile libraries services should be given more priorities;

v.   non-governmental organization should encouraged to invest in public libraries in Nigeria;

vi. public libraries should not be situated in noisy environment but should be centrally located in reserved areas in order to attract serious readers (Apotiade, 2002);

vii. librarians and other para-professional staff in public libraries should be motivated in terms of good conditions of services and salaries so that they can be attracted to their jobs.

References

Edoka, B.E (2000). *Introduction to Library Science*. Enugu: Snaap.

Fabunmi, F.A and Folorunso, O (2009) The Roles of Libraries and Information Centres as Engine Rooms for National Development in Nigeria. *Proceedings of International Conference on Research and Development,* Cotonou: Pan African Books, 2(2) pp. 34-35.

Ifidon, S.E and Ahiazu, B (2005): Information and Conflict Prevention in Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science,* 15 (2) 126.

Library's Glossary Dictionary (1977). Reverence Book. 4th Revised Edition.

Oderinde, N.O (1980). The Position of Public Libraries in the Metropolitan Area of Lagos in Aje, S.B and Olafioye, A.O (eds) *Library Services in Metropolitan Area of Lagos: Background and Sociological framework,* Lags: NLA, pp1-2.

Olanlokun, S.O. and Salisu, M.T (1993) Understanding the Library: A Handbook on Library Use. University Press: Lagos.

Seymour, W.N (1980) The Changing Role of Public Libraries: Background Paper from the White House Conference London: The Scarececrow.