

Role of Nigerian Public Libraries in Reaching Rural Communities with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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Abstract:

Libraries and information centers occupy a central place in the provision of information services to urban and rural dwellers. The public library provides information, inculcates ideas, and develops knowledge that is so essential to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The presence of libraries in different environments and the target they serve indicates that libraries have significant roles to play in supporting sustainable development goals whose actors and targets are also diversified. Libraries can support SDGs through the following activities: supporting the research process, ensuring research visibility, and reducing research anxiety of patrons among others. The activities of librarians go beyond listing to that of taking charge and delivering to the patron's relevant information to drive and actualize the sustainable developmental goals this is also viewed as library inclusiveness.

This paper articulated some roles that public libraries can play in reaching rural communities with sustainable development goal. Also, some factors that pose a challenge to rural communities with sustainable development goals were also identified.

Keywords: Libraries, Public Libraries, Rural Communities, Sustainable Development Goals, Nigeria.

Introduction:

There are 17 general goals for sustainable development and individuals and organizations including libraries, have a role to play in achieving the goals (Ubale & Yahaya, 2016). In providing information services to residents of urban and rural areas, libraries

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and information centres play a crucial role. In today's information and the knowledge-driven world, the public library offers pertinent information, fosters ideas, and develops knowledge that is crucial for successful functioning. Making access to government information a legitimate right is essential to achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Dapo-Asaju & Bamgbose, 2016). Although the SDGs are global objectives, each nation is in charge of creating and implementing national strategies to accomplish them and also, monitoring and reporting progress (IFLA, 2017).

Library communities in each nation are urged to demonstrate how libraries may work as partners to assist in achieving the objectives and meeting the needs of local development when these plans are produced. In the knowledge economy, access to information cannot be disregarded (Dapo-Asaju & Bamgbose, 2016). Oyeronke (2012) noted that a nation's progress is dependent on how much knowledge its people can absorb. According to Sharma (2013), the relevant information is crucial for the rural community, particularly for rural farmers who work in agriculture and other industries like pottery and bead manufacturing. Ola and Osagie (2011) recognized the importance of libraries in society and claimed that they have a duty to provide information to support learning, teaching, research, and community service. Libraries are organized information systems. By compiling and making available access to books, journals, and all other types of recorded material, they act as content and knowledge repositories. Libraries may make sure that the proper material is made available and, in a format that users can understand by acquiring, repackaging, and offering access to it.

Survival information, such as that relates to health, agriculture, housing, income, legal protection, income opportunities and political rights as noted by Ndinde and Kadodo (2014) can be communicated to the people of communities through community-based information centres. Nnadozie, Egwim and Ossai-Onah (2010) noted that access to information services and resources in urban and rural areas is among the much-trumpeted dividends of democracy. The relevance attached to information services is evident in the increasing number of research and publications in various aspects. It is, therefore, not contestable that information services provision is counted among the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world.

The provision of community-based library and information services could help to improve the residents' dire socio-economic situation (Agboolo & Bionle, 2013). Effective coordination and delivery of information services are essential components of national growth and should not be taken lightly. Emojorho and Ukpebor (2012) emphasized that libraries must play a big role in developing nations where there is a dearth of data, information, and knowledge and even less development of knowledge. Libraries must demolish the semantics of many concepts to deliver information in these areas. Rural residents' educational, political, and social growth depends on library services because

they may use them to get the knowledge they need to make informed decisions. Through effective library services, the information gap between urban and rural areas can be bridged. Information services delivery should be given serious attention if any socio-economic development is to take place because it is a source of enlightenment for all and sundry (Daudu & Mohammed, 2013)

There is no institution ever acknowledged by man with multi-responsibility for the good of man as the library. It has been referred to as an arbiter; a reservoir of recorded knowledge (Uhegbu, 2001); a poor man's university; the heartbeat of a university (Flugstad and Farmer, 2010) and an indiscriminate association (ALIA, 2014), to mention but few attributes of the library. The convergence of these descriptions proves that irrespective of location, type and name, libraries are focused and concerned with increasing the knowledge base of clients by availing them of the platforms of self-inclusion. These attributes of the library also influence the conceptualization of its roles; Herrera (2012) asserted that "libraries are more relevant than ever. They are a place for personal growth and reinvention, a place for help in navigating the information age, a gathering place for civic and cultural engagement, and a trusted place for preserving culture."

The vision and mission of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN are targeted at leaving nobody behind through all-inclusiveness whether in developed or developing countries. Though the idea started in 1991, was presented during the Rio+20 summit of 2012 and consented to by 193 member countries of the UN in 2015, it is for the period covering 2015 – 2030. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals include energy, good governance, food security (beyond hunger), connectivity, environmental sustainability, economic growth, etc. The significance of correlating institutional roles remains imperative due to the fact that going beyond MDGs which terminated in 2015 is not negotiable. The MDGs remarkable accomplishments left behind an existing mobilizable framework of actions, a focused agenda around which governments, agencies and civil society coalesce and has easily seeped into national development strategies and budgets drawing the readiness of international and local partners' support, financing and a platform on which they leverage to set and guide priority settings.

Although there are 17 items which make up the sustainable development goals, this paper is more concerned with the fourth goal which is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Generally, the paper discusses the role of public libraries in supporting the SDGs and challenging librarians to brace up to actualize the numerous submissions that encourage librarians to be role models and, the expectations as they facilitate access to information, preserve sources of information, store and retrieve, as well as promote literacy. To this extent, the paper seeks to do the following:

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1. Highlight the general role of libraries in the achievement of sustainable development goals.
2. Highlight some attributes of public libraries
3. X-tray the specific roles of Nigerian public libraries in the achievement of sustainable development goals.
4. Highlight the challenges of public libraries in Nigeria in the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Literature Review:

Role of Libraries in Supporting Sustainable Development Goals:

The items which formed the sustainable development goals were carefully selected and included after wide consultation. The United Nations (UN) created an open working group to come up with a draft agenda which had representatives from 70 countries. The group met in March 2013 and published its final draft in July 2014. To show the desire of the UN to make the world a better place and carry everyone along, the UN alongside the open working group discussions, conducted a series of “global conversations”, that include 11 thematic and 83 national consultations, door-to-door surveys, and an online world survey asking people to prioritize the areas they like to see and addressed in the goals.

Libraries and information centres have made a substantial contribution over time to the implementation and maintenance of specific government programmes. At the municipal, regional, national, and international levels, libraries and information centres have been at the forefront of supporting government programs and policies (Benson, 2016). Ifijeh, Iwu-James, and Adebayo's (2016) assertion that libraries are agents of social communication acknowledges the importance of libraries in the digital age. They help in closing the knowledge and awareness gap among society's citizens. As information specialists and brokers, libraries and librarians may help their patrons become more digitally included. The kind of community/clientele that any library serves defines both those institutions and their scope of impact.

All libraries have important roles to play in advancing sustainable development goals, whose players and targets are similarly diverse, as seen by their presence in various environments and the target populations they serve. The following activities can help libraries support the SDGs:

Supporting the Research Process:

Thorpe (2015) posited that the librarian is a professional with the capacity and

capabilities to research other scholars, buy and subscribe to resources. However, he underlined the need for librarians to focus on going beyond facilitation. This viewpoint is crucial, and it means that librarians could continue to assist research procedures, provide pertinent literature, engage in literature mining, and information mapping, and disperse information resources that have been acquired. Supporting SDGs requires that librarians articulate each goal and align appropriate resources so that the library collection ameliorates the deficiencies of skills required during reviews of literature, compiling consulted resources and working within the confines of literary laws.

Ensuring Research Visibility:

Librarians are trained information scouts to provide direction for the use of unsure publications and to expose resources ordinarily not popular. This act of exposure makes research work visible and inclusive and significantly helps to bridge communication gaps. In order to expose the visible material of other works, librarians should not obstruct the effort of close coordination and collaboration.

Reducing Research Anxiety of Patrons:

The choice of consulting librarians has been reported by Zickuhr, Rainie and Purcell (2014) as paradoxical. That is, most times they are consulted as the last resort instead rather than in the early start of research. Notwithstanding, librarians' altruistic characteristics instill confidence and refocus the perception of research work, primarily because they help reduce any form of anxiety. Librarians do encourage patrons by empowering them to be able to research other researchers and build on the original thrust as well (Thorpe, 2015).

For the benefit of their users, librarians impart critical thinking skills and an understanding of the significance of scholars and the ideas that their works communicate. This information has aided researchers in overcoming the dread that is the root of anxiety and stress. A librarian's ability to quickly and efficiently retrieve information from a variety of sources (books, journals, print-on-demand materials, etc.) has also helped to reduce the stress experienced by customers while conducting research.

Advocating and Encouraging Novelty in Research Activities:

The mediating roles of librarians include and are not limited to encouraging scholars, pointing to novel research and literacy. As a patron receives guidance from a librarian, it becomes the responsibility of the librarian to encourage sharing of knowledge through the deposition of the final document to the library. The essence is that librarianship goes beyond advocacy; they functionally integrate the dispersed research activities and that's primarily what the library stands for.

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Why librarians must support Sustainable Development Goals as long as access to information is paramount to achieving any type of goal, and then librarians are key partners. It is interesting to note that libraries and librarians play very significant roles beyond what is documented about them. The IFLA Statement on Libraries and Development (2013) stated that libraries contribute to the delivery of Sustainable Development in the following ways:

- Libraries provide opportunities for all
- Libraries empower people for their own self-development
- Libraries offer access to the world's knowledge
- Librarians provide expert guidance
- Libraries are part of a multi-stakeholder society

The abilities of librarians go beyond listing to taking charge and delivering to the patron relevant information to drive and actualize sustainable developmental goals is also viewed because of library inclusiveness.

In addition, the library regulates institution which is the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), must avail stakeholders like the NLA and its sub-sections taking charge of different types of libraries to work in collaboration to ensure that their policies and proposed action plans are complete, clear and current as it supports the sustainable development goals.

Public Libraries as a Gateway to reach Rural Communities in Achieving SDGs :

Public libraries are specially positioned to drive sustainable development goals. As explicitly presented by Oyeronke (2012), public libraries play an important role in every society or community. For effective national development, a public library must have a vital impact on the community, in which it is established and must, as a matter of necessity, contribute to the promotion of information literacy and sociocultural and educational services.

According to Shrestha (2013), community/public libraries fulfil a variety of needs and serve as centres for book reading and lending as well as community development initiatives with a strong emphasis on grassroots education, female emancipation, and economic development. These initiatives create hubs for life-changing, neighbourhood-based activities and programs. Four information services are provided to the public through community-based libraries and information centers, including active information needed for citizens' successful engagement in the political, legal, and economic processes (Agboola & Bolanle, 2013). It is no doubt that community information service would reflect the main occupation in each community, provide information to enlighten the

resident on the political and social situation in the country as well as support rural development programs to Nigerian government and other voluntary agencies.

Public library/community information center plays an important role in social development via providing information, educational and entertainment facilities necessary for society (Sharma, 2013). The purpose of public libraries is to support programs that promote functional literacy and to offer information services to people from all walks of life (Benson, 2016). According to Mezbai-ul-Islam and Islam (2010), “the public library is appropriately referred to as an organisation for the promotion of universal education, with the responsibility to distribute information and improve personal and societal lives.” According to Ifukor (2013), “the rural library offers a permanent home for all information-bearing items created in the region or delivered there by information agents from both the government and non-government organizations.” The opportunity to share knowledge, culture, and the usage of public libraries as an essential part of a democratic society where unrestricted access to information has been anticipated is provided through these institutions' service to their local communities.

Public libraries are particularly important because they are open to children, teenagers, young adults, adults and aged, literate and illiterate, physically challenged and able-bodied. The role of the public library is primarily to make literacy a joy rather than a task. The communities where these libraries are situated are engaged extensively, they see the library as part of them, which makes it pertinent.

In fact, it is often referred to as the “poor man’s university” because it is stocked with all kinds of materials to satisfy the information needs of citizens and serves the reading materials for formal and informal education.

Librarians, according to Ubale and Yahaya (2016), need to take up their responsibilities as professional information analysts in offering ideas and services for the attainment of the SDGs. More so, as social service-oriented institutions, it is pertinent that library and information centres align themselves with SDGs so that their impact can be felt (Benson, 2016). Ola and Osagie (2011) maintained that information accessibility is a critical necessity if communities are to realize their development choices and enhancement of their ability to deliver and cope with societal changes. Also, the ability to access information is vital in rural and marginalized areas. Rural libraries bring communities forward with information that is useful to daily life (Mezbah-ul-Islam & Islam, 2010). Nnadozie, Egwim and Ossai-Onah (2010) submit that governments, institutions and people in various parts of the world are sparing no efforts in ensuring that information services are packaged and delivered to the masses, as long as it matches their targets.

As rightly pointed out by Kamba (2009), the development of any community (urban or rural) is generally dependent upon the use of information which allows equal

participation in the developmental processes of the society. This is the most promising approach for reducing dependency on culture, and building the self-confidence and self-reliance of the people in that particular community. The use of the Community Information Centre could provide adequate and satisfactory information (Daudu & Mohammed, 2013). Public and community libraries occupy a central place in the actualization of sustainable development goals. Below are the various services that public and community libraries can provide toward the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

1. Policy Formulation: The policies of LRCN and NLA which should serve as convener is expected to articulate each aspect of the SDGs and appropriate line of action as the mandate of the respective types of libraries. Opinions of professionals from diverse perspectives can be cross-pollinated to enrich the document. This was also the opinion of Anyaoku (2016) who suggested that SDGs can be achieved through enabling policies.

2. Introduction of Advocacy Programs: The LRCN and NLA should provide platforms on different themes either through seminars, conferences, road walks, social media technology and others like television and radio interviews to sensitize members of the public about the collections in the libraries on SDGs and advocating the use of these resources for knowledge, practice and implementation of the itemize goals for our collective good and prospective future.

3. Collaboration with NGOs and other Public Sectors: NGOs are fast and successful driving force to meet the local needs of the inhabitants of a particular area. Libraries can partner with the above groups for fundraising, capacity building and enhancing the economic and social well-being of the less privileged Nigerians (Ekere, Benson and Amaechi, 2016). Public and community libraries can be taken beyond the physical walls of the library by partnering with NGOs to provide sustainable platforms for learners to have access to sustainable education and acquire knowledge. This step, when taken, would help to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In furtherance of actualising this goal of partnership, public and community libraries can provide information resources to support learning at all levels through the instrumentality of community information services. They can also provide information about existing technical and vocational skills centres in Nigeria. The public libraries as noted by Ekere, Benson and Amaechi (2016), can help in reviving adult education programs in Nigeria. In their view, libraries in collaboration with NGOs can help in providing rural dwellers with “financial education” beyond formal education. They argue for the need to adequately educate rural dwellers on how to manage finance, how to save, the right place to get credit facilities, etc. This will contribute toward the realization of Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all).

4. Formal and informal training: The position of the library on the issue of formal and informal training cannot be questioned; however, the capability to distinguish individuals within the two strata is important for librarians so that they can provide services that are not “just-in-case to “right-on-time” adjudging from the resource request and information carrying capacities of a client. The library during the support facilitates education and continuous training of these categories of clients who are also relied upon to actualize the SDGs.

5. Promoting Open Access Initiatives: Public access to scholarly papers on the SDGs would be enabled through specialized information gathering on the SDGs by librarians and made open to everybody. This might persuade researchers and other interested parties to utilize subscription benefits and support the agenda. In order to gain visibility, network, and collaborate with others, Kamba and Abdul (2016) listed the advantages of working with libraries to support scholarly publications on SDGs.

6. Improving the Literacy of citizens: The library will forever be duty-bound to improve literacy; this is also numerously repeated as the goal of SDGs. The library and librarian are therefore saddled to continue to support literacy campaigns, implementation and support by pooling together relevant resources to support education and training targeted at formal or informal sectors (Aliero, 2016).

7. Motivation: Patrons who have achieved distinction through publications on the SDGs require support and motivation. This can be done through media charts, road shows, and program sponsorship. To demonstrate the benefits of adhering to the SDGs, one may make use of library exhibitions and specialized information delivery systems. Other expressions of appreciation deeds include referencing such individuals, prize awards and expressions of public gratitude (Segun-Adeniran, 2015).

8. Evaluation: It is not enough to collate, exhibit and support the cause of SDGs, it is also required that from time to time there should be an ongoing process consisting of several methods of assessing and analyzing the progress of SDG programs promoted by the library. The evaluation shall be based on the set objective and mission and what prospects have been gained when clearly weighted alongside its achievements.

9. Digitalization of public library services: Practical steps should be taken by all the stakeholders in public library systems in developing countries to ensure that the services rendered are tailored towards the needs of the users. Efforts should be made to fully integrate ICTs into the public library system. The low-level penetration of ICTs in public libraries would not provide a viable platform that would take public and community libraries beyond the physical library walls. According to Ifijeh, *et al.* (2016), sustainable development remains a mirage in any country whose citizens cannot effectively and efficiently deploy the use of ICTs to access and utilize quality information.

As noted by Ubale and Yahaya (2016) libraries provide ICT infrastructure and help people develop the capacity to effectively use information and preserve information to ensure ongoing access for future generations. Dapo-Asaju and Bamgbose (2016) observe that, as important as public libraries are in meeting the information needs of the citizenry, these libraries lack basic facilities to provide quality services such as ICT resources to their clientele. The functions of community-based information and technology centres have changed over time from community libraries, with their emphasis on building collections of books, to the multi-purpose community telecentres where information and communication technology is used for a wide range of purposes (Ndinde & Kadodo, 2014).

10. Provision of economic information and employment-related information services: This SDG-related service can be achieved by the public and community libraries through the dissemination of information on development-oriented programs that support one's productive activities, disseminate information on workshops, and conferences that will help the people develop innovative and creative skills.

In order to achieve this, public and community libraries can partner with the Directorate for Employment to ensure that information on employment opportunities is distributed to the right people at the right time and in the right format.

11. Partnership with media houses: Public and community libraries can partner with media houses to ensure that rural dwellers have access to timely information that relates to their information needs. The importance of access to information was underscored by Hamilton (2015) thus:

- ✓ Information is fundamental for development - libraries support this.
- ✓ Information promotes better decision-making - helps people learn new skills.
- ✓ Information helps people exercise their rights.
- ✓ Information promotes accountability.

Since it speeds up both individual and corporate educational development, access to knowledge is extremely important (Oyeronke, 2012). Libraries and librarians would help people lead productive lives because they are adept at gathering, organizing, making knowledge available for use, and publicly preserving it so that it may be accessed, used, and put to use, when necessary, regardless of how it is packaged (Ubale and Yahaya, 2016). According to Ndinde and Kadodo (2014), a lack of information access can significantly limit one's ability to develop personally through education and can harm the effectiveness and competitiveness of any firm, whether it is run by a subsistence farmer or a more aspirational entrepreneur. Information is crucial for each country or society to improve its capability (Kamba, 2009). People who have access to information are better able to make

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educated decisions and influence others (Kamba, 2009). According to Harande (2009), information hunger is pervasive and severely affecting our rural populations, leading to poor living circumstances, illiteracy, and poverty.

Mobile service or mobile library:

Bookmobile is another service that can support people in remote areas in their pursuit of lifelong learning and is an effort to fulfil Sustainable Development Goal 4. A huge truck created to be used as a library is known as a bookmobile or mobile library. They are made to hold books on shelves so that readers may access them when the car is parked. They typically offer enough room for people to sit inside and read books. According to research, bookmobile services have the ability to offer a wider range and higher-quality services. Mobile services have reached segments of the rural population that would not otherwise have any library facilities at all.

In Nigeria, the bookmobile service was first offered by the local governments in the 1960s and 1970s. Success levels varied. The bookmobile and its Philippine equivalents have improved rural areas, encouraged reading interests, and raised public awareness of health, nutrition, child care, and family planning. Mobile libraries are frequently used to offer library services to villages and city suburbs without library buildings. They provide assistance to folks who have trouble visiting libraries as well, with retirement communities being frequent stops. They might also have additional books or computer equipment like what you might find in a library. Additionally, some libraries distribute books in big print and audio formats to homebound users who lack a companion to accompany them to the library.

Challenges of Nigerian public libraries in reaching rural communities with SDGs :

Below are some of the challenges that public and community libraries are likely to encounter when making effort to take the library beyond the physical walls with the aim of actualizing SDGs.

Lack of funds: It is impossible to overstate the problems with the underfunding of libraries and information centres in Nigeria. Agboola and Bolanle (2013) state that it is commonly accepted that community-based library if any exist, experience the greatest financing neglect. Sufficient funding is required before the community and public libraries can take proactive steps that would allow them to extend information services outside of the library walls.

Low level of ICT penetration in public library system: In community and public library systems in poor nations, ICT adoption is minimal. Without the ICT infrastructure and other technologies needed to transition the public library system to the digital environment,

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the digitalization of public libraries for efficient service delivery would remain a mirage (Akporhonor and Olise, 2015).

Resistance to change: Most library managers, especially in the public library systems do resist change in terms of innovation and creativity connected with the application of ICTs to the delivery of library services. This attitude, no doubt cannot be unconnected with the stereotyped training given to them in the library schools which anchors on the organisation of knowledge and information resources in libraries (Prakash, K 2010).

Lack of passion among librarians in public libraries: Without question, passion is one of the factors that propel the achievement of goals, whether for an individual or an organisation. When compared to other types of libraries, such as academic and special libraries, the majority of librarians in the public library sector lack passion, which accounts for the public library settings' lack of innovation and creativity (Samuel & Reuben, 2021).

Conclusion :

The submissions of a large number of authors, the functions of libraries, and the roles of librarians who work in various types of libraries revealed that libraries fill informational gaps caused by a lack of resources, assist in the collection of information from a variety of sources, and provide services for formal and informal, literate and illiterate people, as well as physically challenged, physically fit, and hard-to-reach communities. It is crucial to remember that libraries, which exist in various forms, can assist organize services that promote stakeholders' acceptance and engagement through their sharing, cooperation, and facilitation platforms and services. As it was pointed out that every sector depends on the library, it could be concluded that the library has all that is required to support the sustainable development goals to be achieved because of its characteristic dependability and inclusiveness.

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