# LIBRARY CONSULTING SERVICES IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND KEY ISSUES

**By**

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**Abstract**

*The paper examines the concept of consultancy services within the library and information sector in Nigeria. Highlighting the role of consultants, the different types of consultancy that librarians in Nigeria engage in, challenges, as well as the nagging problem of costing consultants' services, the paper concludes by suggesting the need for consultants in library and information sector in Nigeria to be current and update their skills regularly. They also need to keep a pool of experts that they could draw on when necessary, understand the scope of the consultancy, maintain their overhead costs down and always insist on having a signed contract before setting out to do the job.*

**KEYWORDS:** Library Consulting, Library & Information Work

## 1.0 Introduction

Consulting is a process in which professional advisors attempt to solve challenges and issues raised by a client. The word "consultant" originates from the Latin word "*consultare*" which means "to discuss" and refers to a professional who provides expert advice in specific aspects of knowledge such as technology, tax law, human resources, library, etc. Consultants could work in a consultancy firm or could be self employed and usually engage with multiple and changing clients. This implies that the clients have access to better levels of expertise than would be feasible for them to retain in-house (Wikipedia, 2011).

The ultimate purpose of a consultancy is to secure a constructive and useful change and therefore, there is need for both the consultant and the client to have a close working relationship which is mutually beneficial. According to Webster and Lorenz (1980) "with the pace of change, the dimension of many organizations, and the

complexity of today's environment, greater attention has been drawn to consultants who can bring additional skills, knowledge, and experience into the library in order to facilitate change". Consultants may work as a team, in partnership; they may work for a big consultancy firm or as an individual independent consultant. They are not employees of the company hired to do a specific work. They are expected to do their job ethically and responsibly with minimum supervision and within a specified agreed period of time. They may work on-site and/or off-site. Consultants usually bring measurable benefits to the system. They may contribute to lowering the cost of operating the library system. For instance, introducing open source software may reduce the cost of cataloguing, classification and indexing through reduction in the time spent in carrying out the task. A consultant stimulates action and offers a response to a situation as well as adds some new ingredients that may prove useful. In this case, the consultant provides impetus for action. Another benefit is that using a consultant enables the organization to concentrate its limited resources on specific aspects of the job. For instance, in capacity building for staff, the consultant comes in to do training when necessary thereby reducing the cost of maintaining a training department. For a consultant to do his job successfully, it is important that the client:

- Defines the desired outputs clearly. For instance, the consultant must produce three copies of an end of consultancy report.
- Ensures that the contract is explicit and the ground rules understood by the consultant and other staff of the organization, if any. For instance, can staff divulge 'confidential' information?

- Defines the authority of the consultant clearly. For example, can the consultant query a staff directly or he must report offending staff to the management.
- Provide the consultant enough time to familiarize himself with the 'environment'.

On the other hand, the consultant should do a 'needs analysis' of any situation before accepting to take up an offer. For instance, if a consultant is to select books for a public library, he may need to do a survey of the target community to determine the profile of users and potential users. Are there more children or more elderly people in the community? The outcome of the survey will influence the kind of book purchased. For instance, if there are more children, then a greater proportion of the stock would be colourful pictorial books.

## 2.0 The Role of Consultants

There are many issues that consultants can deal with in order to contribute to the development of an organization. The consultant may assist in resolving problems, improving performance, securing action, build capacity by training, be a fact-finder, researcher, conflict negotiator or system designer. In general, the role of consultants may include:

1. **Give an objective assessment of situation:** a consultant may be engaged to go into a system to evaluate it in order to improve the organization. This is particularly useful when significant change or restructuring is considered. In such cases, the consultant uses his specialist knowledge, experience and skills to gather information to provide an objective assessment and make recommendations for the desired change. For instance, when the British Council Nigeria decided to

change its libraries to information centres, a consultant was engaged to evaluate the environment and recommend an Action Plan for restructuring.

2. **Technical advisor:** a consultant may also contribute to improving the technical aspects of an organization. He may be requested to determine the technological needs of an organization, design or revise a system or implement a new system such as proprietary library management software. It could be to set up a Website or a social media for library use.

3. **Organizational problem-solver:** this is one of the traditional roles of a consultant. He could be called in to assist in deploying a new technology and getting staff to buy into it, introducing significant change in services and operations, improving the collection and so on. According to Webster and Lorenz (1980), depending on the client's definition of the problem, the consultant may play the role of an advocate for certain changes or may simply provide a problem-solving process.

4. **Education and Training:** Consultants are often used to carry out Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes that assist in building the capacity of staff to carry out their functions more efficiently and effectively. The consultant may be requested to do training needs analysis for staff and/or carry out training in specific areas such as "information retrieval techniques on the Internet". He may conduct workshops, problem-solving conferences, seminars and so on.

5. **Process counselor:** In this capacity, the consultant may be required to provide advice and assistance in defining and implementing a developmental process such

as planning, problem-solving, training, conflict resolution or a range of activities. In such cases, the consultant usually does not advocate or provide a direct answer to the problem; rather, he advices the organization on how to address the challenges and allows the organization to deal with the issues directly. For instance, if there are issues with communication within the system or in communicating change, the consultant may talk with different groups of staff, synthesize their opinions and then advice management on a strategy to communicate the change.

## 3.0 Types of Library Consultancy Services in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the legal framework for engaging in private practice requires registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The CAC services include Incorporation of companies such as Registry (Private Limited Company; Public Limited Company; Limited by guarantee); Unlimited Liability Company; Business Name; Incorporated Trustees (NGOs) and Same Day Incorporation services. Consultancy firms could be registered as a Limited Liability Company (LLC) or as a Business Name (BN). As a Limited Liability Company, the company would have a corporate name, Directors. On the other hand, the BN is usually owned by an individual and requires the name of the company and the appropriate certificate/qualification that qualifies the individual to practice as a consultant in that field. The main advantage of registration of a consultancy company is that the consultant is taken more seriously as a business concern, and government and international agencies are likely to deal more with such companies. Library and Information Science professionals can engage in different types of

consultancy services. Some of the most common tasks that library consultants engage in Nigeria are:

- Establishment of a library/resource centre from the scratch (e-library or hybrid or manual)
- Re-engineering existing aspects of library services such as automating circulation services
- Implementing new technologies such as a new library management software
- Training/Continuing Professional Development programmes such as "Use of Internet Resources in LIS Services"
- Evaluation of existing services such as reference services, analysis of the collection
- Acquisition of books, equipment and furniture
- Cataloguing, classification and indexing of materials
- Creation of library database, portal, gateway or federated search facility
- Design of Website and creation of Listserv, social networks and other discussion groups
- Development of Institutional Repositories, Electronic Thesis and Dissertations (ETDs), Open Source Systems
- Editorial work & Report Writing
- Publishing and Book sales
- Consolidation of materials especially local publications
- Book indexing, including surveys of users, community, etc
- Knowledge Management
- Solicit donation/low cost books, computers, etc

- Proposal writing, Grant seeking & Fundraising – Private, Public Partnership eg to record local history
- Project Management
- Conflict Resolution eg between management & staff, communication improved
- Recruitment

## 4.0 Challenges and Key Issues

Independent consultants may face some challenges while carrying out their tasks. Full time consultants usually do not spend more than fifty percent of their time working. Therefore, they have to find ways of ensuring that they are able to take care of their needs when they are not working. The common challenges they face may include:

1. **Conflict in job schedules:** unfortunately, consultants often have to deal with the issue of having more than one job offer at the same time. This means that even though he may not be engaged all the time, he may lose some jobs if he is faced with the problem of making a choice between more than one job offers in the same period especially because some clients may not be willing to wait.
2. **Consultant's skills and experience may be limited for all aspects of task required:** a consultant may get a 'big' job and find that he does not have all the requisite skills to handle the tasks alone. For instance, if a consultant is requested to set up a university library, he may not be an expert in cataloguing and classifying materials or in using the library management software or in writing reports. In such cases, he may have to call in other colleagues to assist which may mean that his profit margin is reduced; quality of work of done may not be as

good as desired or he may not find other experts who are available to take on the task.

3. **Poor contract agreement:** consultants sometimes face the challenge of working with poorly spelt out contracts. Clients may be unable to define the real problem clearly until the consultant starts working and discovers that there may be other complex and underlying issues that may not have been revealed or may not have been obvious before the work commenced. However, once a contract has been signed by both parties, the most honourable thing for a consultant to do is to stick to the terms of the contract even if it means making little profit or experiencing delays in job completion. Ultimately, if a client is satisfied, the chances are that he will recommend the consultant to another client and with previous experiences; the consultant is unlikely to make the same mistakes. If, however, the tasks are completely different from the original agreement, the consultant has every right to draw the clients attention to this fact and request to re-negotiate the contract **before** the new/additional task is done. As much as possible, it is always better to get a clear definition of the tasks required before the contract is signed.

4. **Poor communication with management:** a common challenge that consultants face is poor communication by the management/client who may inadvertently not disclose the full situation of things to him or may not even be aware of the extent of the problem. In trying to communicate his findings to management, there may be misunderstandings which may lead to either slowing down the pace of the work or if not well handled, it may lead to a termination of the contract.

5. **Capacity for implementation of output may not exist in staff**: another challenge is the implementation of the recommendations of the consultant. The reasons why some clients are unable to implement a consultants' recommendations include: limited skills, lack of funds and lack of political will. Non implementation of recommendations may give the erroneous impression that the consultant has performed below expectation, which is not good for the image of the consultant.

6. **Limited acceptance by staff:** a consultant may have to work with staff who are not receptive. This may be because the principal client may not have been able to convince the staff of the need for a consultant or staff may resent being told that they do not have the relevant skills or experience, or may even feel threatened about losing their jobs. It is the responsibility of the consultant to be apolitical (neither taking sides with Management nor staff), empathetic and at the same time firm, open and truthful with the staff.

7. **Finance:** some clients may not be prepared to pay a part of the fee upfront; they may require that some work (no matter how little) is done before making financial commitments. In such instances, the consultant has to source for money to start the work and this may not be easy. Also, some clients may end up not paying the full fee of the consultant after the job is finished. Although the consultant can take the client to the law court, it may not be worth the time, money and effort. Therefore, in order to reduce the risk, a consultant should ensure that the client meets at least ALL his costs and some profit before the final payment at the end

of the job. That way, the worst case scenario is that the consultant will make only a little profit.

8. **Working Alone Vs Employment of Staff and Rent of Office Space Vs Working from Home:** consultants usually have the need for additional staff to assist in carrying out some tasks. However, because it is not a full time job, it may be expensive for the consultant to employ full time staff because he has to pay their salaries even when he has no consultancy job. Also, the consultant may find it challenging to rent an office space and equip the office fully because there are no guarantees of knowing when the next job will come. Independent consultant may find it more cost effective to work from home.

9. **Threats from other Competitors:** In Nigeria, there is still the challenge that clients think that almost 'anybody' can set up a standard library. The result is that many non-professional librarians are engaged as consultants to establish libraries. The greatest threat is probably from computer science professionals and other professionals in the book trade industry. They usually use the fact that they understand how the library and information sector works to great advantage. For instance, computer scientists who can implement library management software packages to develop a library OPAC may convince the client that he can set up a library. However, they usually run into problems after starting because they find that there is much more to a good library than an OPAC. Librarians need to be more proactive and aggressive in searching for consultancy business.

## 5.0 Costing Consultant's Services

Costing consultants services is a very fluid aspect of an independent consultant's work. The ability to do a proper cost-benefit analysis will determine the level of success or otherwise of the consultant. This is because the fee charged for consultancies is not usually fixed but is dependent on the nature of the work, the amount of time/effort to be spent, the experience, skill, expertise and reputation of the consultant and to some extent, the relationship between the client and the consultant; and the nature/how 'rich' the client is.

Often times, the question raised by independent consultants is 'how much do I charge?' Should it be a daily fee rate or should the fee be charged for each task performed or should an overall fee be charged without a breakdown of the services? Whatever method is adopted, the consultant must be knowledgeable enough to ensure that all his costs are covered and that he makes a profit from all jobs. The consultant must have at the back of his mind that on the average, he works about 50% of the year; therefore, he must strive to cover part of the cost of the remaining 50% from each job undertaken.

There are advantages and disadvantages in adopting any of these methods of costing. In charging a daily rate, the consultant may not be able to gauge the exact number of days for the job, may not know the 'going' rate in the market, may not be good at factoring in the 'hidden' costs, may not have the paper qualifications (certificates) that matches his experience or the client may not be able to afford the rate charged. The consultant must remember to charge, for instance, for days he will use in writing the report; writing the proposal and factor in the cost of word-processing, printing,

telecommunication, use of other experts and transportation, in addition to the main tasks. The tendency, usually, is to undercharge the client. If, however, a consultant decides to charge a daily rate, he should find out the market rate that matches his experience, skills and qualifications. Many international organizations such as the British Council and the World Bank have standard daily rates for different categories of consultants (First degree, Masters, PhD, and Professor); this will give the consultant an idea of how to charge his client. For instance, as at 2010, a professor with experience was paid an average of N50, 000 - N150, 000 per day depending on his bargaining power, duration of consultancy, organization's rate, etc. Staff training, deployment of new technology and other tasks are usually charged on a daily rate basis.

Charging a lump sum for a consultancy requires great skill and experience to charge accurately. Consultant's charges should not be arbitrary but must be based on a careful calculation of a breakdown of the tasks involved, the time, money and efforts required to do the job. It is after these have been analyzed by the consultant that he can charge the client a lump sum. It is used mainly for small consultancy jobs such as conflict resolution between staff and management.

The third method of charging is to charge per task. This is usually preferred for bigger jobs such as the establishment of a university library. In this case, the client is given the flexibility to determine the tasks that he wants to pay for because he may already have some expertise in-house. For instance, the client may like the Consultant to select books, furniture and equipment but may prefer to do the ordering, purchase and clearing of the goods through a central unit within the organization. An example of how charging per task may be done is given as follows.

### 6.0 Sample Consultancy Proposal, Work-plan and Charges

Below is an attempt to provide basic components of proposal that consultants need to include. The paper also provided a sample work-plan and charges for some basic tasks

Appendix I: Components of Proposal

1. **Cover Letter:** Write a cover letter that details the methodology which the consultant intends to use to achieve the aims and objectives of the library and gives a brief background on the consultancy firm.
2. **Preamble:** Do a short (one paragraph) SWOT analysis of the LIS environment and the justification for a library/resource centre. You may include short statements on copyrights issues, a conceptual framework and the overall requirements of the client
3. **Methodology:** Detailed step-by-step approach on how the consultant will go about the task. For instance: (a). I will translate the library's mission statement into a Collection Development Policy and provide a framework to ensure meaningful and consistent growth of the collection over the next five years. I will also recommend and compile a list of relevant resources in the appropriate media to meet the needs of staff and students. We will provide a list of approximately 800 titles from which the management may select. (b). Using a library software agreed with the school's management, we will catalogue, classify and input into a database 1000 volumes of books within six weeks ensuring compliance with international standards.

4. **Duration:** Give a time frame for completion of the work. Also, specify how many days and which tasks you would need to carry out onsite and which tasks you will need to carry out off-site.

5. **Reporting:** How many reports will be provided?. It should include all progress reports, briefing for management staff and the final report.

6. **Outputs:** What will be the main outputs of the consultancy? What should the client expect at the end of the job? For instance: a library that meets international standards; a well written collection development policy; an operations manual, an end of consultancy report, etc.

7. **Inputs from the client:** What do you need from the client to be able to work efficiently and effectively? For instance: work space equipped with computer, printer, internet access; work tools such as DDC, LC schedules, etc

8. **Consultancy Fee:** State expressly what your fees would be.

9. **Conclusion:** Usually a positive expression that shows that the consultant is committed to doing an excellent job and has a keen interest in getting the job.

**10.** **Appendices:** The consultant may attach appendices such as:

**Appendix II: Detailed work plan**

| Task | Specific items | Time | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Selection of Books & other Materials** | | | |
| | 1. Identify sources<br>2. Select resources<br>3.Compile a list of relevant titles and submit list | 4 wks | off site |
| **Ordering, Purchase and Delivery** | | | |
| | 1. Identify agents to order<br>2. Determine what to order through agents (local & overseas), what to purchase directly<br>3. Design systems to monitor and evaluate orders<br>4. Make payments adhering to due process<br>5. Take delivery of goods, check against orders, accession books<br>6. Design systems for complaints and claims | 8 wks | off site/on site |
| **Staff Recruitment** | | | |
| | 1. Design advertisement and advertise<br>2. Shortlist qualified applicants<br>3. Interview with constituted panel<br>4. Appoint<br>5. Write report | 5 days | On site |
| **Processing of Materials** | | | |
| | 1. Organization of knowledge using standard metadata<br>2. Data entry | 6 wks for 1000 volumes of books | On site.<br>Work tools such as classification schedules to be provided by Institution |
| **Operations Manuals & Policies** | | | |
| | 1. Operations manual to include – policies, systems and procedures<br>- Design of services | | Off site |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | - Rules and regulations of library use<br>- Design of user education programme<br>- Collection Development Policy<br>- Monitoring and Evaluation | 8 wks | drafts submitted for approval at agreed intervals |
| **Space planning & Acquisition of Furniture, Equipment, etc** | | | |
| | Furniture, equipment, stationery<br>1. Identify sources<br>2. Select eg Library security system, PCs, Tables, chairs, Shelves, etc<br>3. Submit recommendations<br>4. Design space<br>5. Organize space | 8days | On site |
| **Training** | | | |
| | <u>For Library Staff</u><br>1. Library practice in the Information Age<br>2 Learning resources on the internet for staff and students<br><u>For all staff</u><br>1. Learning resources for all staff (identifying teaching resources as well as resources for students on the net)<br>2. Seminar on the role of the library in the school environment<br><u>For students</u><br>1. Resources on the internet | 2 days<br><br><br><br>2 days<br><br><br><br><br><br><br>2 days | On site |

**Appendix III: Consultancy Fee**

| **Item** | **Fee** |
|---|---|
| Selection of Books and other materials | N100,000:00 |
| Ordering, purchase and delivery of goods (excluding cost of goods) | N500,000:00 |
| Staff Recruitment | N200,000:00 |
| Processing of materials | N800,000:00 |
| Production of Operations Manual and policy documents (3copies ea), including menu of services, Internet services, budget estimates, evaluation procedure | N750,000:00 |
| Space Planning & Acquisition of Furniture, Equipment, etc | N250,000:00 |
| Training | N450,000:00 |
| **Sub total** | **N3, 050,000:00** |
| Travel and subsistence (Based on Actuals)*<br>Travel (Airfare Lagos - Abuja)<br>5 trips x N40,000 = N200,000<br>Travel (taxis) to and from airports<br>5 trips x N10000 = N50,000<br>DTA<br>110 days x N15,000 | <br>N200,000:00<br><br>N50,000:00<br><br><br>N1,650,000:00 |
| **Sub total** | **N1,900,000:00** |
| **Grand total** | **N4, 950,000:00** |

**Appendix IV:** Bio-data of consultant emphasizing the experience and skills that qualify the consultant for the job.

7.0 **Suggestions**

1. **Register the consultancy firm:** it is recommended to have legal recognition by registering the consultancy company with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) of Nigeria. This gives potential clients a higher degree of confidence that they are dealing with recognized experts in the field. The consultant may also be able to charge a higher fee because of the legal recognition.
2. **Keep a pool of experts that you can outsource jobs to:** a consultant should always have a pool of experts that he can draw on when the need arises. This will be necessary when the consultant needs to outsource some jobs. For instance, in

setting up a library, the consultant may decide to outsource the cataloguing and classification of books or get data entry clerks to input data using the library management software to create a database. It is important that the consultant understands the limits of his skills and when it is more cost effective to outsource a task. However, when a task is outsourced, it is the responsibility of the consultant to ensure quality control. He cannot abdicate the responsibility of delivering a good quality job to any one else.

2. **Understand the scope of the job:** it is important that the consultant understands the scope of the work before embarking on the job. It is not a good track record for the consultant to abandon a job mid-way because he suddenly realizes that he does not have the requisite skills or the pay is not adequate. Before signing the contract, the consultant should do a preliminary visit to inspect the environment and have pre-contract meetings with the client to clear any gray areas.

3. **Sign a formal contract:** it is good practice to sign a formal contract for any consultancy job, no matter how small the value of the contract is. This may come in useful when contentions arise while the job is on-going. The contract reminds both parties what they committed to and where a legal battle arises, it could prove useful. The Award letter for the contract is also a invaluable document to use as evidence of experience when applying for another job.

4. **Consultancy Fee:** ensure that the fee charged covers the total cost (including hidden costs such as electric power bills if you are working from home). It may be necessary to get help to do proper costing. The essence is to make a profit that will keep you in business; consultancy is not a Charity where you work free of

charge for people. The reality is that if your client is confident that the consultant has the requisite skills, he is likely to pay whatever fee is charged to a reasonable extent in order to get a good job. Remember that as an independent consultant you may only work 50% of the year, therefore, your costing must take into consideration the periods that you will be out of work. If costing is not properly done, the consultant may soon find himself out of business.

5. **Use excellent negotiation skills:** It is important that a consultant develops very good communication, negotiation and networking skills. These may come in handy when there are conflicts in job schedules, for instance. A good consultant may be able to re-negotiate a different time schedule for clients. He could agree to start off doing some preliminary tasks such as book selection while working on the other job. In some cases, using the services of other experts may be necessary to cope with the amount of work. However, the consultant must ensure quality assurance is done in order not to tarnish his reputation.

6. **Keep Overhead Costs Low:** An independent consultant should try as much as possible to keep overhead costs low. For instance, rather than rent office space, the consultant may work from home and on-site, in the office of the client. Being efficient and effective are two key concepts the consultant must always have at the back of his mind. How can he use as little as possible to achieve the greatest impact? He may not employ staff except when he has big jobs, in which case, he hires temporary staff and builds their costs into the contract.

7. **Update Skills Regularly:** A consultant must regularly update his skills and be on top of his game if he is to do well. Many clients have an idea of how a library

should function, which puts great pressure on the consultant. Therefore, a prospective successful consultant should spend time and money attending training programmes, understanding new terminologies and concepts in the sector. For instance, a consultant should use the term “metadata” in place of cataloguing! Being current and confident are essential elements that please a client.

## 8.0 **Conclusion**

It is obvious from the foregoing that libraries are expected to do more but with less money! Therefore, there is need to ‘think out of the box’ to make the most of the limited resources available. One of such ways is to outsource tasks and use consultants’ services where necessary. Independent consultants can make significant contributions by providing an independent point of view; substantial savings in time, money and energy; and specialized expertise that is essential in resolving particular problems. In general, the process will include identifying the problem, gathering information on the problem, developing an understanding of the causal factors and what might be done to deal with these forces, designing alternative approaches to improving the situation, testing and acting on the recommended improvements, and assessing the impact of the changes, including costs. This may involve reviewing plans, checking progress, identifying major developments, and monitoring results (Webster and Lorenz, 1980). What is most important is that the consultant has the experience and expertise to deal with the task being undertaken. If other professionals can sustain themselves by being independent consultants, there is no reason why library and information professionals cannot do same.

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