*AFRICAN LIBRARIANSHIP IN THE BEGINNING OF **THE** 21ST CENTURY; CURRENT SITUATION IN WEST AFRICA*

BY

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the state of Librarianship in the West African Sub-Region taking note of the contemporary practices especially in the public and university libraries. It provides a brief SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the Library and Information Sector in West Africa and various interventions by the government and private sector that have facilitated the development of the profession. It highlights such areas as

education and training of librarians, Continuing Professional Development of librarians, ICT applications in libraries, information resources and services, collaboration, library funding, management and quantity control, publishing and book chain, and the role of Library Associations. It was observed that even though a lot had been achieved in the last decade, a lot more still needs to be done especially in the areas of funding, ICT applications, quality control and collaboration for librarianship in the sub-region to cope with the exigencies of the 21st century.

The paper suggests ways to promote the development of the profession in the sub-region through strategic public private partnerships, advocacy and effective government policies, amongst others. It concludes by advocating for the need to have a government recognized agency that regulates the practice of the library and information profession as a way of ensuring quality control.

Introduction

The threshold of the 21st century has brought with it the transformation of the traditional concepts of librarianship systems, operations and practices from manual to automation, stocking of printed information resources to soft copies in the conventional libraries to online libraries and physical access and use of

information resources to online access and use. The main thrust and ideals of contemporary concepts of librarianship systems, operations, practices and services is the provision of both hard and soft copies of information resources irrespective of their formats in libraries and information centres, at their door steps and in their palms on screens to meet the customers' information needs and wants at their convenience irrespective of their locations and times of needs and access.

The changing pattern and structure of the contemporary librarianship has continually been made possible with the advent of and advances in the Information and communication Technologies (ICTs) towards the close of the 19th Century and more importantly in the beginning of the 21st Century. The concomitant effect is the transformation of librarianship practices and services from manual to online and digitized platforms. The stakeholders such as the publishers, information providers; knowledge and content providers/managers; and the customers/users have been positively infected continually to accept and domesticate the ICTs to their advantage. The ICTs enhance information provision, access and utilisation directly and remotely. Other infected aspects of librarianship involve the nature and content of the curriculum for the education and training of librarians and information professionals; nature, content and

format of information resources; nature of information services and delivery; type of library equipment and facilities; vision and mission of library and information services; nature and practices of publishing and book chain; the roles and expectations of librarians/information providers; and the type, characteristics and expectations of the customers. It is generally agreed that the ICT has come to stay to transform the philosophy and concept of librarianship for good so as to continually facilitate easy access to and usage of information by all and sundry. Due to the significant effect of ICTs on the economic, academic, social, political, cultural and other human endeavors of man, the United Nations (UN) Development Programmme; refer to it as powerful enabler of development" (UNDP:2011, Section 1:1).

Librarianship in West African Sub-region

The West African Sub-region is characteristically made up of majorly the Anglophone and Francophone countries each with its different economic, social, educational and histo-political background; seemingly diversified cultural settings and practices; and a common ground especially in the contemporary democratic approach to governance. Consequently therefore, these differences point to the fact that there could be differences in the levels and practices of librarianship in

the sub-region. What is however common amongst the countries is the availability of a National Library, Academic Libraries, Public Libraries, Research Libraries, School Libraries, etc each providing some forms of library and information services for the benefit of their respective teaming target audience. What is however not common, according to Rosenberg (2005), is the level of ICT applications. Some libraries are fully automated, others remain manually, organized. Libraries which automated some years ago have not been able to migrate or upgrade to new systems, so offer only limited services.

Library Education And Training

1. Library and Information Science (LIS) Schools.

The education and training of library and information professionals in the West African Sub-region started with sending the perspective workers to the countries of their respective colonialists for education and training. Thereafter, when it was considered more expedient, indigenous schools of librarianship were established to educate and train the inhabitants in larger scale especially after their independence from their respective colonial administrators.

In Nigeria for example, the first two library schools were established in the University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in the 1960s. However, by the year 2011, the library and information science schools in Nigeria Universities have risen to more than 20 each offering different levels of Library and information Science (LIS) programmes at Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma levels as well as at all the three levels of degree programmes (i.e. Bachelors – Ph.D). While some Polytechnics offer Library and Information Science programmes especially at Ordinary and Higher Diploma levels (OND and HND), some Colleges of Education offer the programme at the National Certificate of Education (NCE) level to cater for the intermediate Cadre Staff requirements and needs of the libraries.

In Ghana, the first and perhaps the existing Library and Information Studies School (formerly Library and Archival) was established in University of Ghana, Accra in 1965. It offers LIS programmes at Bachelors, Masters and Ph.D degree levels. As it were in Ghana, the existing LIS School in Sierra Leone is at the Institute of Library, Information and Communication Studies (INSLICS) at Fourah Bay College where Diploma, Bachelors and Postgraduate programmes are being offered. However, the Milton Margai College of Education and Technology offer Librarianship as a subject and as an advanced option at the postgraduate diploma

program at the Institute of Education, Fourah Bay College. On the other hand, LIS Schools are yet to be established in Gambia. The Education and Training of the Librarians and information professionals is done overseas or through correspondence courses.

2. Library and Information Science Curricula

It is generally agreed that, as a matter of policy, curriculum of any educational programme need to be reviewed periodically to reflect the contemporary millen of the environment and cope with the challenges ahead. Implicitly, the LIS continually review their curricula with the view to injecting and infusing new innovations so as to respond accordingly to the changing needs of the immediate environments, the society at large and other challenges of the international community. What is therefore required is the establishment of curriculum review mechanism and procedures, as well as engaging in networking and collaboration with other LIS Schools within the country and around the globe. This is to get the best for the education and training for the candidates so that they can fit squarely in the scheme of areas of needs and expectations in information work within and outside the country.

One of the major areas of concern for infusion in the LIS curriculum of the 21st Century is ICT applications. According to Sutton (2001) in Mabel K.M. (2007),

the changes brought into the LIS profession by ICTs can be conceived as (a) natural evolution where the library and information science profession has harnessed ICTs to perform old tasks better through the automation of housekeeping tasks such as reference work, bibliographic services, cataloguing, serials, circulation and acquisition, which are performed more efficiently in ICT environment; and (b) transformational changes which led to the emergence of new function arising out of an expected, demand-driven information society, wider and/or interdisciplinary jurisdiction and closer focus on user needs.

An assessment of the LIS schools' Curricula in the West African Sub-region point to the fact that, there has been systematic attempts to continuously review them to accommodate and infuse ICT applications and competences even in the face of lack of adequate funds to acquire all the necessary ICTs for teaching, learning and research, as well as for their applications in library environment. Rosenberg (2000) observed that in many African Universities, the government is the main sources of funding, with the result that many Universities are poorly funded.

Unlike in the public libraries, ICT applications are easily noticed in academic and research libraries in the sub-region where library services funding is reflected in the institutions' annual budgets even if it were only on notional basis. Attempts

are being made to strick a balance between the traditional and contemporary LIS curriculum content especially in terms of correlating theoretical and practical approaches to education and training of ICT-based competencies. Similarly, students are encouraged to pick up the pieces by undergoing privately, professional certification courses at certified private ICT schools and the Computer Centres in the Universities and Polytechnics. This option which enables the products to acquire additional internationally recognized certifications in, say, Networking, Oracle, Microsoft, CISCO, etc not only increased their expertise and competences in ICT application, but also increased their marketability beyond library and information services environment per se.

The Contemporary LIS School Curricula in the West African Sub-region included and focused on such areas as: computer hardware and software trouble shooting skills, Software Development/Programming; Multimedia; Media and Publishing Studies; Knowledge Management; Systems Analysis Design and Evaluation; Data Processing and Management; Information Network and Networking; Entrepreneurship in Library and Information work; Information Technology and applications; Information Systems and services; Information literacy; Computer Literacy; Library Application Software; Information Resource Databases; Intelligent Information Systems and Services; Management of

Electronic Records; Specialized Information Systems and Services – health, agriculture et; Data communication; Management Information systems; and Web Design and Management. However, the extent of the teaching and learning of the courses largely depend upon the available expertise within and outside the LIS school and the type of ICT equipment and facilities available within the department/institution. In Nigeria for example, the LIS schools in the country formed the 'National Association for Library and Information Science Educators' (NALISE)' to serve as a forum where the lecturers meet annually to deliberate on the way forward for their propgrammes, products and also harmonise their curricula.

Library and Information Services

Apparently, all the countries in the West African sub-region have not only the National Library, being the apex library of the country, but other type libraries such as Academic, Research, College, school and public libraries where library and information services are being provided at varying degrees depending upon the type of staff available; level of finding, type of collection; equipment and facilities available; and the type and characteristics of the target audience. What is common among all the libraries across the sub-region is the provision of the

traditional library and information services such as circulation and reference services. The provision of ICT-based services and availability of e-collections are mostly in University and some few special/research libraries who are fairly predisposed financially and with better trained staff. An assessment of the state of library and information services provision in some of the countries in the West African Sub-region shows that:

Cameroon

In Cameroon there is a central service in the Ministry of Culture in charge of the National Library and public reading with a law (Decree No 2001/PM) requiring the deposition of six copies of all published works of art-printed, graphic and photographic at the National Library and a mandate to define the country's library development policy. The municipal authorities under the Ministry of culture establish, operate, contral and monitor public libraries, some of which serve as regional branches of the National Library. Foreign governmental and non-governmental agencies such as the British Council, American Cultural Centre, French Cooperation Mission, German Embassy, etc establish and operate public libraries across the country. Similarly, they assist in stocking the School and University Libraries with updated books and the provision of library management

education and training to enhance library and information services for the target audience.

Gambia

The Gambia National Library serves as not only the national and public library; but a legal depository for all published books in Gambia. Whereas, the Gambia National Archives serves as legal depository for government records. Other libraries in the country include school libraries with different sizes of collections, special libraries located in government ministries and parastatals including current libraries, governmental and non-governmental research institutes. Unlike some of the research institutes' libraries, a majority of the other libraries in the country do experience short-falls in funding, book stocks, experienced and qualified staff, library and ICT equipment and facilities. These short-comings have consequently negated the libraries' efforts and ability to provide the essential ICT-based library and information services. There is a National Archive for preserving vital government documents and rare collections.

Ghana

In Ghana, all the University Libraries are largely stocked with relevant information resources and are to some extent ICT compliant to be able to provide the necessary services needed by the University in the discharge of its teaching,

learning, research and community services statutory functions. The IFLA and DANIDA assisted in the establishment and management of the Ghana interlibrary lending and Document Delivery Network (GILLDNET) involving 5 State University Libraries and the Institute of Scientific and Technical information; made some impacts on the establishment of electronic network links with regional and global capacity to enhance universal access to and availability of publications and information using the computers, scanners, printers, etc as well as the staff training component provided for the project.

Similarly, a number of specialized libraries exist in Ghana especially under the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). This is addition to those available in foreign missions and agencies, commercial institutions, industrial establishments, professional bodies and other governmental agencies/parastatals. A majority of them are stocked with relevant and current information resources and are also ICT compliant to some extent.

The Ghana Library Board established and managed regional and district public library services as well as the schools and College Department for the establishment and management of secondary school libraries. It serves as the national/bibliographic centre, legal depository and national ISBN agency.

Like in other West African countries, advances in public library services in Ghana require greater push from all dimensions to meet up to expectation and the challenges of the 21st Century. A majority of the hick-ups facing the Ghanian libraries, particularly the public libraries, centre around inadequacy of funds, updated information resources, qualified and competent staff, ICTs and other necessary modern library equipment and facilities.

Nigeria

Nigeria, like other countries of the West-African sub-region has a National Library with branches in more than 30 states. In addition, all the state 36 states of the Federation have State Library Services branches in some of their Local Government Areas (LGA). Both the National Library of Nigeria (NLA) and the state library servers are being administered by their respective boards to provide public library services as mandated by the law establishing them.

Comparatively, the public library services in Nigeria are far below expectation in terms of contemporary library and information services provision as well as in ICT facilities and library equipment availability when compared with the Academic and Research libraries in the country. A majority of the university and research libraries' systems are automated, have e-library systems, collection and services

and are connected to the Internet. Some of the University libraries are into digital projects in one form or the other especially for theses and dissertations in their collections. Similarly, in terms of funding, they are in a better shape than the public libraries that can only boast of regular staff salaries and perhaps some few amounts for some local newspapers and magazines subscriptions. However, what keeps the university libraries going in the real sense of is the benevolent hands of the Educational Trust Fund (ETF) in the form of N20 million ($1.3 million) annual library grant and students' annual library registration fees. A majority of the public libraries in the country are not Internet compliant as even those with some computers, are being used for office chores.

Apparently, a majority of the schools and colleges in the country have libraries for the use of their staff and students. Libraries also exist in some of the government ministries and parastatals, financial and judicial institutions, foreign missions and multinational agencies. A majority of them are open to the public who likewise are encouraged to be registered members. There is a National Archive with branches in some states for archiving vital government documents and other rare collections.

Sierra Lone

Beside the National Archives of Sierra Leone established in 1965, other types of libraries such as academic, special and public are available in the country and are providing some library and information services to their clientele. Famous among the academic libraries are those of the University of Sierra Leone; Fourah Bay College; Njala University College; Institute of Public Administration and Management; and that of the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences. There exist libraries in the schools to meet the yearnings of the staff and students. However, the National Library of Sierra Leone which services as public library in under the auspices of the Sierra Leone Library Board (SLLB).

The overall assessment of the state of the libraries in Sierra Leone pointed to the acute shortage of funds which have negatively affected their capacity to acquire updated information resources, ICTs and provide the much needed library and information services of the 21st century "Information Age". Commenting of the general situation of the school Libraries Akargbo (2000) observed that they are "far from satisfactory and many school libraries exhibit serious shortcomings or are virtually non-existent.

Book Chain

Book Chain involves the printing, publishing, distribution and sale of books. Other stakeholders in book chaining include writers and librarians. Apparently, all the countries in the West African sub-region are engaged in book chain activities which found their roots from the Sub-Saharan trade links with famous traders and scholars of the time and the efforts of the colonial administration and the missionaries to make the inhabitants literate. Beside the importation and distribution of books to the target audience freely and sometimes at rock-bottom price, bookshops and printing presses were established to populate the production and access to printed information resources which are mostly for religious and educational needs. The advent of the colonial publishing houses and outlets added to the impetus of book availability to the general public. Consequence upon these developments was the emergence of pockets of local book sellers/vendors and agents alongside the big-time foreign ones such as Oxford University Press, Longman Publishers, Heinemann Book Publishers, etc, who were already in control of book businesses in the sub-region.

Consequent upon the attainment of independence by the West African countries from their respective colonial administrators, the landscape of publishing and other aspects of book business started tilting to the side of the

indigenous people. They gradually setup their printing and publishing houses; engage fully in the book business such as establishment of bookshops, etc; set up of government printers; become book sellers/ vendors and agents; establish government and private newspaper houses; establish university presses; establish mobile roadside book-stands/newspaper stands; organize/institutionalize book fare; and establish writers', printers' and publishers' associations.. The concomitant effect of these developments especially on library and librarianship scene in the sub-region is the overall availability of variety of printed information resources including newspapers, magazines and journals for library acquisitions and services, simplification of librarian's jobs; and for the general public access and consumption to satisfy their information needs.

The antecedence of the 21st century especially in areas of ICT applications led to the automation of printing and publishing operations (i.e. e-Publishing); creation of e-database of published materials; publication of e-Books and e-journals in CDs; and hosting of e-publications on the Internet for easy access, acquisition, sale and advertisement. Slow as it might seem to be, the ICT application in publishing and book chain in the West African sub-region has affected not only the publishing and book business arena but has also impacted

on the library and information services delivery and librarianship in general. Some universities and polytechnics in the sub-region offer specialized courses in printing and publishing at various certificate levels. Some the countries identified and discussed in this perspective include:

Cameroon

Items published in Cameroun are majorly either in English or French languages and sometimes in both languages at a go to satisfy the needs of the two major English and French speaking political blocks (Anglophone and francophone provinces), and also comply with the bilingualism policy adopted in the Cameroonian politico-administrative settings and in educational institutions. The National Book Development Council of Cameroun serves to regulate book publishing in the country especially the school books. Through the ministry of higher education, a lot the tertiary institutions of learning, especially the universities, have established publishing houses for publication of tertiary books as the lecturers and the researchers have the opportunity to privately publish their works. In a way, the university presses serve to complement the importation of books from abroad from the major foreign publishers and vendors.

The Liberty Laws of 19th December 1990 (2001) serves to regulate book chain (printing, publishing, distribution, and sale) in Cameroun. This has given way to the proliferation of printing and publishing houses by private individuals, religious organizations, and educational institutions to not only publish but distribute and sell their products directly or indirectly through book retailers/sellers. These developments also gave rise to the emergence of bookshops in towns, cities and villages for the sale of variety of foreign and local published materials including second-hand books.

The UN agencies such as the UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO as well as some NGOs and philanthropists have greatly impacted positively to strengthen the capacity and practices of book chaining in Cameroun especially through direct funding and provision of technical know-how, equipment and facilities. In effect therefore, it could be said that the libraries in Cameroun do have some sources from where they could still acquire both foreign and local publications for their services and also publish the works of the academia in the country.

Gambia

Until the 1990s, book chain practices in Gambia were dominated by the foreign publishers such as the Macmillan. A majority of the book needs of the

country, especially for the schools; libraries; and bookshops are being imported particularly from the Great Britain. The pre-1990s publishers in Gambia were the government printers and the Book Production and Material Unit (BPMRU) for the publication of government document; research reports; and for private individuals; and of recent, educational books.

As direct response to the government's policy to encourage private-driven growth in the mid-1990s, publishing trade in Gambia was dominated by the private sector. However, while Macmillan Publisher remains the lead foreign publisher in Gambia, the indigenous publisher, WEC Mission and Non-formal Education Services mostly engaged in indigenous literature publications.

The foregoing point to the fact that the book-based institutions in Gambia, such as the libraries, bookshops/book-vending and educational institutions will continue to be on the receiving end for some time to come as the country's book needs have to be majorly foreign dependent due to the incapacity of the available indigenous publishers who also suffer from shortage of skilled man-power, printing facilities and equipments as well as high cost of printing and publishing consumables.

Ghana

The book chain activities particularly publishing in Ghana is dominated by both the foreign and indigenous publishers. Some of the renowned publishers in the country are: the Longman, Heinemann, African Publishers, Sedco Publishers, Woeling Publishers, Sam-Woode Publishers, and Ghana University Press. Some of the indigenous publishers beside the government press such as the Ghana University Press do publish some quality indigenous works for foreign markets. Book publishing in Ghana is legally protected by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 110 (Ghana Copyright Law).

The Ghana book market is made up of the big-time university book sellers, book selling chain stores, and mobile book sellers (hawkers) mostly found in the villages and semi-urban areas of the country. The major promoters of book chain in Ghana include: the Ghana Book Development Council (GBDC), Ghana Book Trust (GBT) and UNESCO. The private sector participation in the book industry to sustain book production and distribution under the auspice of textbook development and distribution policy impacted greatly on the availability of books published particularly for basic education in the country. Not many of the indigenous publishers are ICT compliant with desk-top publishing, book design and graphic art. Johnson (2009) observed that many languages in Ghana use

characters that are not found on computer keyboards and that the development and production of keyboards in the major Ghanaian languages is essentials.

Nigeria

The book chain activities in Nigeria is mainly dominated by the government press at the federal and state levels for the publication of government documents and the private sector as well as the university presses for the publication of variety of books and other printed documents for education and other socio-political, economic and cultural needs of the society.

The private sector publishers mostly comprised of: (a) successors and/or representatives of the multinational publishers such as the Longman, Heinemann, Oxford, Macmillan, etc. (b) the indigenous publishers that can be categorized into small-scale and medium scale publishers based on their financial share capital; (c) the informal publishers (road-side publishers and printers) whose products are rarely captured in the National bibliography of Nigeria, and may not necessarily be registered members of the Nigerian Publishers Association (NPA). A majority of the publishers irrespective of their categories are found to be ICT-compliant with in-house desktop publishing, book design, and graphic arts (Mohammed, B: 2011).

Like the publishers, the book sellers/vendors are made up of: (a) representatives/successors of the multinational book traders, and (b) the indigenous private-driven booksellers/vendors with their chains of bookshops and stores across the country, (c) the road-side /mobile booksellers with their make-shift stands for the display of their wares (books, periodicals and other printed materials) by the road-side, at educational functions, and in intra-city transport systems and mostly sell their wares at rock-bottom prices, (d) University/educational institutions bookshops, and (e) Library bookshops. The reading culture of Nigerians which is mostly for educational purposes has made the educational institutions and parents easy targets for both the publishers and book traders.

The book chain in Nigeria is regulated by: (a) the Legal Deposit Law which empowers the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) to be depository of all Nigerian publications, compile and publish the National Bibliography of Nigeria, and issue ISBN, and ISSN to publishers, (b) The Nigerian Copyright Law (amendment) Decree 1990 which empowers the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC) to deal with all copyright issues, problems and infringements. Other regulatory instruments and bodies regulating the affairs of book chain in the country include: (a) the 2011 Freedom of Information Bill (FIB), (b) Nigerian Publishers Association

(NPA) which also organizes and participates at international, national and state/local book fares, (c) the Booksellers Association of Nigeria (BAN) for also protecting the interests of the booksellers and vendors, (d) the Nigerian Book Development Council (NBDC). In spite of some odds, considering the bubbling book chain activities in Nigeria, it could be said that the Nigerian libraries and indeed the reading communities of the country are being served adequately to a large extent.

Sierra Leone

Unlike in the other West African countries, book chain activities in Sierra Leone can be said to be still at its infancy as not much printing and publishing activities take place in the country (Zell and Lomer: 2000). There are however some few private printing house, some in-house units across the country and the Government printers in spite of the formation of Sierra Leone Association of Printers in 1992. Most of the country's book needs are being served from abroad especially from Britain.

Like the publishing and printing sector of book chain in Sierra Leone, bookselling and distribution in the country, especially educational materials, is largely foreign dominated. A majority of the indigenous bookshops including

those of the Government and educational institutions slack into comatose. The life ware for book distribution in the country especially for schools and libraries is the Book Aid International (BAI) as the prices of most of the books being sold in the markets are beyond the reach of the average people of the country. Consequent upon these shortcomings, it could be said that much is needed for the libraries and librarianship profession in the country to meet up the 21st century expectations and challenges.

Library Collaboration and Support

The concept "collaboration" can be conceived as "cooperation, partnership, and networking" between and among individuals, organizations, nations, etc, to achieve their individual and/or collective objectives and aspirations. Whereas "support" is simply an assistance in form of financial and material resources or goods and services provided to augment, supplement, complement, upgrade, promote and uplift a seemingly weak or deficient individual, organization, systems, etc to meet up to perceived challenges and expectations.

In the scheme of library collaboration, what is mostly common in between and/or among libraries and in librarianship scene is partnership, cooperation, consortium and resource sharing in between and/or among some interested

parties (libraries and library schools) to overcome their deficiencies so as to achieve their respective goals and aspirations, particularly to meet to meet the information needs of their consumers. Similarly, support, usually inform of assistance, is given especially through bilaterally or multilaterally sealed arrangement, agreement or protocol between the donor and the recipient with the view to empowering the recipient to meet up to a given or perceived expectation in one way of the other. Thus, collaboration and support in librarianship profession has no limitation in their nature, type and characteristics for meeting the existing and anticipated expectations, challenges and needs in librarianship paradigm, particularly in the areas of Library and Information services provision, ICT applications, education and training. According to Asamoa-Hassan (2002), for now, West Africa libraries need partners who to a greater extent would assist in improving their services and are prepared to wait for reciprocal assistance when they are well grounded.

There exists some form of library support and collaboration among some of the libraries in West African Sub-Regions, particularly among the University Libraries at nation and international levels. The foreign forerunners in the promotion of support for and collaboration among the West African libraries, particularly the University libraries, include: Carnegie Corperation, UNESCO, ACU, eIFL, the World

Bank, MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation, INASP, and Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), Book Aid International (BAI), IFLA and SCAULWA.

By and large, the strategic mission and goals of the foreign donor agencies are to partner with the indigenous libraries and indeed the library and information science schools in the region to: (a) encourage and promote the creation and promotion of information and education, (b) promote a sustainable and equitable access to information irrespective of location, (c) foster collaboration and networking among the libraries and also the library schools, and (d) strengthen their local capacities and abilities to manage and use information and knowledge effectively and efficiently to their advantage and that of the world at large. The donor agencies' support, which is mostly in financial and material resources, strategically target such vital areas of need as: ICT applications; development of local content; preservation, security and digitization of rare local/indigenous collections; education and training of library and information professionals; research in library and information service provision; promotion and publication of indigenous knowledge and research; access to scientific and scholarly information; information and knowledge management and use; and, intra and inter-library collaboration and networking at national, regional and international scene.

Details of the successes or otherwise of some of the donor agencies' library systems and library education projects in the West African sub-region have been reported by: Agada (1998); Wise(1999); Arkaifie (1999); Abubakar (2001); Asamoa-Hassan (2001 and 2002); Rosenberg (2005); Johnson (2009); Harle (2009); Bokova (2011); and Susan (2010). By and large, considering the impact of the international donors' support for and collaboration for the West African libraries and library schools for their advancement, it could be said that they are on track to cope with the exigencies of 21st century librarianship.

Quality Assurance in Library and Information Work and Education

It is a fact that the West Africa libraries, library schools and indeed all the other aspects of librarianship in the sub-region are in the threshold of transformation, even though slowly, to meet up to the challenging needs and expectations of the 21st century. This is demonstrated by their continued positive response, eagerness and commitment to the ideals of the donor agencies who are continually committing their financial and material resource to promote and support all strategies and projects needed for the transformation of librarianship in the region so as to respond effectively to the dynamics of the 21st century. Added to the donor agencies' endeavours, is the internal tactics and strategies

employed covertly and overtly by the library administrators and the library associations to elicit support and commitment from the respective governments and their agencies who in most cases are not necessarily committed to the ideals of librarianship.

Quality assurance, which can simply be conceived as maintenance of standards; standards complains; and adherence to best practices, is a necessity in librarianship and indeed in any other service-oriented profession so as to meet and cope effectively with the dynamics of the day. Quality assurance is needed in librarianship to ensure the provision of: quality and acceptable services consistent with the acceptable laid-down procedures and practices; preserve the quality of the services and products provided; ensure the availability of appropriate systems, infrastructure, equipment, facilities, and education so as to provide consistently quality services and products; monitor, audit and evaluate performance to ensure compliance to standards; identity areas of needs, weaknesses and challenges for improvement; and gauge customer satisfaction, needs and expectations in relation to application of best practices, as well as the mission and vision of library system, education, practices and services.

Quality Assurance in librarianship has been discussed by several scholars in the profession such as: Bocekharts (1998); Pritchard (1996); Chen (1997); Goodall (1998); Natarajan (2000); Derfert-Wolf (2005); Mohammed (2006); Sinkara (2006); Nwosu (2007); Wilson (2008); and Sally (2010). By and large, a general assessment of their submissions pointed to the emphasis for the need for implementation of quality assurance in all aspects of library and information education, practices and services; establishment of minimum standards and benchmark for library systems, education, services and practices; and, institutionalization of mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring performance and ensure quality assurance compliance.

The fact that the provision of library and information system, practices, services and education is central to librarianship philosophy, mission, objectives and practices, the application of quality assurance to meet up to expectations especially in the 21st century challenges becomes relevant and a matter of necessity. In Nigeria, for example, quality assurance regulatory agencies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTC) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) have been established by the government to develop minimum academic standards and bench marks for the 3 tiers of the tertiary education system

(University, Polytechnic and College of Education) in the country, monitor performance at regular periods (5 years) for accreditation and ensure compliance to standards. In the same vein, the government established the Librarians' *Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) via Decree 12 of 1995 to promote, regulate,* monitor and set standards for Librarianship systems, education, services and practices in the country.

Library Association

Like any other profession, the Library and Information professionals in the West African Sub-region have Library Association as a professional body in their respective countries for the unity and progress of the members and the profession in general. Although the Association is registered with the relevant government agency as a corporate body, it did not necessarily have a legal backing to strictly regulate, monitor, and standardize librarianship systems, education, services and practices as well as impose any legal sanction on any erring member due to misconduct considered grievous.

As a professional body, the Association do organise academic and professional meetings, conferences, workshops, seminars, etc for the professional and academic advancement of the members and also for promoting the course of

the profession in the eyes of the nation and the world at large. Similarly, the Library Associations registers as corporate professional member of international professional bodies such as the ALA, IFLA, SCAULWA and WALA, etc to allow the National Associations and indeed their registered members participate fully in their programmes of activities.

In order to support and promote specialization in the professional association as a reflection of the specializations in the profession, the Association is segmented into sections to reflect the specializations. For example, the Nigerian Librarian Association has such sections as: ICT section, Academic and Research Library Section, Public Library Section, School Library Section, Government Library Section, Medical Library Section; and Law Library Section.

Customarily, in addition to the General Annual Conference and General Meeting organised by the national body of the Association, all the sections of the Association organise annually their respective conferences, meetings, and workshop for the academic and professional development of their members. The major sources of funds for both the national body and the sections are: annual registration fee; conference, workshop, etc attendance registration fee; and donations from federal and state governments, individuals and support from donor agencies especially for specific project/programme.

By and large, the Association serves as mid-wife between the library and information professionals and the governments as well as donor agencies and their likes to secure support and assistance for the promotion and sustenance of the profession using all available opportunities at its disposal to effectively cope with the challenges of the day.

Concluding Remarks

The paper tried to x-ray librarianship in the West African Sub-region focusing on the contemporary practices especially in University and public libraries, library and information science education, the book chain, library collaboration and support, quality assurance and the Library Association. What comes out clearly is the fact that librarianship in the Sub-Region, with the support of the donor agencies, is gradually undergoing some form of transformation especially with the acceptance and application of ICTs in all aspects of Librarianship. This is in addition to the seeming contributions of the respective governments in one form or the other. The Library Association is indeed a veritable body taking up gallantly the challenges of transformation into the 21st Century Librarianship in the region through its numerous academic and political activities to cave in the stakeholders.

Thus, it concluded that, even though much has been achieved in the transformation of librarianship in the Sub-region to cope with the 21st century challenges and expectations, more efforts are still needed in such vital areas as funding, ICT applications, quality control, Library Support and collaboration.

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