Exploring The Potentials of Library and Information Systems and Services for Sustained National Development and Integration

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Abstract

The paper revisited to concepts of' development and national development. It identified and discussed the indices of national development such as rural development, education and literacy, manpower development, politics and legislation, professionalism, socio-economic mobilisation and development, and national and international relations and integration within the perspectives of the much talked about Development Goals. As all the times sustaining agency for overall national development, the place of library and information systems and services delivery were highlighted. It advocated for the establishment of Community Information Commons(CICs) as integrated melting pot media where all and sundry in the society irrespective of their socio-economic and political, cultural and educational strata will have equal opportunity to conveniently access and utilise varied print and electronic information resources and services regardless of their locations and time of need to meet their short and long term individual, societal and national expectations and desires.

Introduction

Conceptually, development simply implies state of change, growth and transformation from one stage, level, status quo or paradigm to another, Depending on the prevailing circumstance, vision, mission and goal in view, development could be systematic, rational, strategic, gradual and/or radical. Development can be said to be negative, unacceptable and undesirable when the end result or outcome turns out to be from good to bad. In such cases, the status quo of things drifts from the state of prosperity to disparity, stagnation, non-progression and nothingness. On the contrary, development can be said to be positive when the end result or outcome shifts from bad to good, better and best. In such cases, the paradigm or status quo becomes acceptable, desirable, encouraging, prosperous, progressive and exemplary. Paradoxically, development is a continuum with no static end such that when the aimed status quo or paradigm is attained, it subsequently triggers the need to move further for the attainment

of much better, much higher or more superior level or stage of developmental achievement all in the bid to get things better and maintain a niche over existing and anticipated compatriots or competitors. Also, development is a pendulum movement from positive to negative ends or the other way round; and a continuous process reflective of the prevailing circumstance, vision, mission and goals in view. Perceptively, development is better measured within the context of levels and stages of attainment, scheduled plans, and expected outcomes. Within the perspective of national setting, national development implies systematic, gradual or radical shift from the state of national irrelevance, inconsequential, inactiveness, redundancy, degradation, slumber, nothingness, non-progression, belatedness, and retardation to the desired state-of-the-art growth and advancement in the strategic sectors of the nation. Such national strategic sectors include but not limited to the:

- Economy,
* Education and Literacy,
- Science and Technology,
- Law and Security,
- Politics and International Relations,
- Sustainable Water Supply,
- Sustainable Environment and Energy Supply,
- Social Welfare and Empowerment,
- Culture and Integration,
- Agriculture and Animal Husbandry,
- Health and Sanitation,
- Communication and Transportation, and
- Good Governance.

Thus, the extent to which a nation is said to be advanced holistically or sectorially is a function of its level of holistic or sectorial development. This suggests that nations must continually progress in all sectors to effectively meet up with the challenges of the contemporary national, international/world scene. As a way forward, there is the need for nations and societies to have development plans, phases, targets, mile stones, and strategies to guide and support developmental agendas for the respective strategic national sectors aimed at achieving holistic national development and advancement.

Development Agenda

Essentially, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG: 2000-2015) agenda centred on : eradication of extreme Poverty and Hunger, achievement of Universal Primary Education, promotion of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, Eradication of Child Mortality, improvement of Maternal Health, combating of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases, ensure Environmental Sustainability, and A Global Partnership for Development. Generally, the MDGs could be said to aim at overcoming the many dimensions of challenges to societal development which include but not limited poverty, hunger, diseases, ignorance, gender inequality, environmental degradation, insecurity, etc. The MDGs which served as framework for development agenda globally served to achieve an all round development of all the strategic national sectors for holistic advancement of the society. However, the extent to which

such goals have been achieved across the globe is dependent on the prevailing circumstance of the respective regions, nations and societies.

Though it can be said that the MDG agenda has successfully served as reference point for global action against under development, the MDG albatross such as:

- gender inequality, widening gap between rich and the poor, increasing gap between the urban and rural areas in access to social amenities,
- difficulty in access to basic health care,
- continued environmental degradation especially due to deforestation,
- presence of poverty and hunger among the millions of people,
- difficulty in access to quality education,
- declining energy supply, and
- continued rural-urban migration, etc.

are still eminent scares particularly in developing nations and societies. To some extent, it can be argued that the disparity between and among regions, nations and societies in the achievement of the MDGs led to the evolution of the 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' agenda at the 2012 UNO conference in Rio de Janeiro(Rio+20) to ensure the sustenance of what have been achieved while strategising on universal transformative agenda to overcome the encumbrances to development in the respective regions, nations and societies at the post-2015 development agenda era.

Basically, the United Nations Organisation (UNO) 'Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs:2030)' also referred to as 'The Global Goals', centered on 17 goals. The Goals comprised of: eradication of Poverty, eradication of Hunger, provision of facilities for Good Health, availability of Quality Education, assurance of Gender Equality, provision of Clean Water and Sanitation, availability of Renewable Energy, assurance of Good Jobs and Economic Growth, promotion of Innovation and Infrastructure provision, Reduced Inequalities, availability of Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption, support for Climate Change, protection of Life Below Water, protection of Life on Land, maintenance of Peace and Justice, and assured Partnership For The Goals (https://sustainabledevelopment .un.org/sdgs). A cursory assessment of the tenants of the SDGs point to critical issues related to the wellbeing of People and Planet, and assured Prosperity, Peace and Partnership around the globe which, if not properly managed, could be inimical to successful breakthrough in any development agenda globally and in any region, nation and society.

You do not have to agree with me more that the extent of the successes of any development agenda and strategy by and for any region, nation and society largely depend upon the extent to which people are:

- free from the shackles of poverty and hunger;
- assured of good health, nutrition, quality education, socio-economic empowerment and inclusiveness;
- free from the bondage of gender and social inequality;

- cohabiting in prosperous planet/environment with sustained water supply and sanitation, economic growth, security, vista of employment opportunities and innovations, planned consumption and production patterns, and reliable agenda for climate change, forestation and reduction of biodiversity loss; and
- free to promote and support peaceful co-existence, partnerships, justice and accountability within and outside their community, society, nation and globally.

The State of The Affairs

Taking Nigeria as a case study, it is a country with diverse cultures, traditions and languages spoken by its over 180 million peoples. It is estimated that there are about 396 ethnic groups adhering majorly to two religions (Islam and Christianity) and the third one being the Traditional Religion. A majority of the Nigerians are still peasants mostly living in the rural areas of the 774 Local Government Areas. They are unlettered thereby could not read and write in any language. They have to rely on the oral traditions of communication and access to information. It is observed that the conflicting diversity of the composition of the country and the observed inequality in access to quality education, health care, welfare and other good things of life from government programmes and activities tend to continuously have some adverse effect on the collective national unity, integration, cohesion, diffusion, progress and advancement of the country economically, politically, culturally, socially, scientifically, and technologically.

The lack of clean bill for national integration, development and advancement is being perpetuated by the disequilibrium in the observed levels of educational and information poverty, imprisoned consciousness and general societal violence and insecurity. In addition, there are evidences of deep rooted intra and inter-community, cultural, ethnical and religious tensions; conflicts and apparent dissatisfaction with the order of the day, illusion and mistrust for the government. Majority of the population are still grappling with the vagaries of poverty and ill-health; mistrust for the politicians and political office holders; lack of access to quality education; rampant cases of unemployment, underemployment, and over employment; and lack of access to relevant and timely information. There is no doubt in the fact that an unlettered/illiterate society and individuals cannot participate fully in any socio-economic and political agenda for enhancing development of a nation, just as a lettered/literate and reading society and individuals are informed society and individuals that cannot be easily cheated, exploited, maneuvered and toyed around.

Library and Information Services **Provision**

For all intent and purposed, the domineering factor in the attainment of any measure of success in development endeavours is the human factor(people) who by their nature and characteristics have the requisite capacity and ability to do and undo anything to meet up to expectation or otherwise. It is the humans/people as the role players and stakeholders that initiate, nurture, strategise, implement, support, promote, domesticate, sustain or vitiate efforts aimed at achieving global, national and societal development agenda. In effect therefore, it beholds that those vested with the responsibility of executing development programmes at every stage are exposed to varieties of strategic information, information resources and sources, as well as services relevant to the development vision, mission and

expectations. It can thus be argued that the extent to which the role players and stakeholders in development agenda in any setting have access to relevant information and services can effectively influence the extent of the successes to be achieved in at every level/stage of development efforts. Hence, the ultimate need for the provision of library and information services to facilitate access and utilisation of relevant information resources and sources, regardless of the type, format and package, to meet up the development expectations and cope with the existing and anticipated challenges.

The relevance and contributions of library and information services provision in the scheme of any development agenda is better understood and appreciated within the perspective of cost benefit and cost effectiveness analysis. That is, the cost and consequences of having relevant information at hand before, during and after embarking on development projects/programmes versus non availability of relevant information before, during and after embarking on development programmes/projects. Thus, the nature, type and diversity of library and information services to be provided for global, national and societal development and advancement in line with the vision and mission of the MDGs and SDGs must take cognisance of the typical sectors of any societal settings which include but not limited to the Economy, Education and Literacy, Science and Technology, Law and Security, Politics and International Relations, Energy Supply,, Social Welfare and Empowerment, Culture and Integration, Agriculture, Environment, Health and Sanitation, Communication and Transportation, and Governance. Implicitly, every type of library and information system ranging from public, academic, school, college, special/research, royal/palace and community libraries should be involved in facilitating access to the relevant information needed to meet the expectations of the role players and stakeholders in the respective sectors of the society such libraries are designed to serve. Hence, the type of library and information services to be provided must be a by-product of the information needs and expectations of the respective sectors they are meant to serve.

I have sadly discovered that the Public Library Services in Nigeria which are essentially expected to serve the information needs of the diverse lettered and unlettered Nigerian populace regardless of their socio-cultural, religious, ethnic, economic, political and educational backgrounds are better imagined than perceived reality. In most cases, and in most states, they are shadows of themselves engulfed and enveloped in past glories, thereby making them irrelevant in the schemes and programmes of reading culture and continuing education of which they are to be key stakeholders and partners. They have been financially and materially strangulated and incapacitated to perform any meaningful library and information services to their immediate constituencies and the general public. In some states, the public libraries' customers' ignorance on the importance of libraries to them is being exploited by some State Governments to the extent that the Public Library Headquarters have been relocated to obscure places to give room for places of warship and politically motivated structures. What is mostly tenable from a majority of the State Governments under which the State Public Library Services are to be reasonably financed to effectively flourish, are mostly lip services and well documented proposals and action plans beautifully couched on paper for records rather than for implementation.

Within the perspectives of library and information services provision in educational institutions, luckily, the tertiary educational institutions' libraries are effectively flourishing due to the emancipatory financial life-line from the TETFund. On the contrary, the Primary and Secondary school libraries which

are expected to be catered for by the State Universal Basic Education Boards and In part by the Local Government Areas to effectively meet the academic and information needs of the pupils, students and staff are mostly non-existent or are performing far below expectations. The primary schools are even worst off as there are really no school libraries in the sense of it particularly in the public schools. Like the Public Library Services, a majority of the school libraries and particularly those in the rural areas and semi-urban areas are essentially more of reading, resting, chatting or gossiping rooms and centres. The members of the school community mostly utilise the so-called libraries for their individual or private needs rather than for educational and information needs. The nature and type of their collections and the so-to-called library and information services left much to be desired due the evident human, financial and other necessary material starvations. However, what can fairly be considered as school libraries are mostly obtained in the Private Schools and the Unity Schools under the edges of the Federal Ministry of Education.

In another perspective, it has been discovered that library and information services provision is not strategically included and effectively catered for in the schemes of the 'Almajiri Education' programmes by the Universal Primary Education Commission; the Agency for Mass Literacy Commission adult and non-formal education programmes; Public Health Programmes and Services; National Orientation Agency; National Agriculture Extension Research and Liaison Services; the Nomadic Education Commission programmes; the State and Local Government agricultural extension services programmes; Rural Development Programmes/Schemes of the three tiers of government; and virtually all the Federal and State Socio-Economic Empowerment Programmes. These lapses, to a large extent, have negatively affected the reading culture competencies and continuing education needs of the *none* and neo-literates in English language and also in other languages. In addition, the information seeking behaviours and access to reliable documented and non-documented information especially by the majority of the populace in the rural and semi-urban areas in the country has been reduced to over reliance on whatever it is heard from the radio stations; politico-social campaigns and commercial posters and bill-boards; and sometimes from the television stations, depending on the availability of electricity supply and the economic status and privileges of the individuals and communities.

Expectations of Library and Information Services Provisions **For** Overall Development

Under the 'Information For All (IFA)'scheme , the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA ifla@ifla.org / www.ifla.org) position of libraries as the heart of the information society is that libraries should be seen as:

> place of wide-eyed discovery;
> tool for life-long learning;
> support for political and social enquiry;
> bank of ideas and inspiration;
> source of answers to factual questions;
> place to acquire new skills;
> community centre;
> local studies resource; and

In line with the 21st century expectations in coping with the dictates of information needs by all and sundry, the basic questions that all types of libraries must continually seek answers for should include but not limited to:

- what type and how many libraries and information centre are/should be involved in the development crusade?;
- what information systems, resources, sources and services should be made available for the existing and anticipated customers?;
- what type and extent of services should be provided?;
- how should the library and information services provision be funded and financed?;
- what type and extent of cooperation, collaboration, partnership and network should be maintained between and among that libraries and information centres?;
- What type of technology should be employed in the provision of library and information services to the varied customers?; and
- what type and extent of education, *training and motivation* should the library and information centre staff benefit from?

However, answers to the questions and implementation of the outcomes should be guided by the needs and expectations of the *environments That is,* the *physical* environment, socio-cultural environment, economic environment, and political environment the library and information centre is situated and or should be served.

The Way Forward

In the light of the fore goings, it is suggested that Community Information Commons (CIC) should be established in clusters of Local Government Areas of the states in Nigeria. The CIC can simply be conceived as more or less a civic centre, a *platform, a forum, and a place* where peoples of different educational and literary background; socio-economic and political strata; and cultural and ethnic divide in the society and community formally and informally assemble to effectively access and utilise the information resources, facilities and services of the centre to share their common experiences, stories, cultures, challenges, goals and aspirations. It affords them the opportunity to discuss and strategise on their individual and collective vision; issues, challenges, plans, ambitions, and other developmental considerations on how to mobilise and strengthen the people to effectively contribute to the development projects/programmes for the achievement of their individual and collective visions, missions, goals, aspirations, and objectives for the overall integration, development and advancement of the community, society and the nation at large.

Unlike the conventional library setting, CIC has the capacity to draw members of the locality, community and society closer and integrally by offering suitable integrated environment that will facilitate addressing their strategic needs through the integration of technology, content and services in a siren physical space and atmosphere not easily tenable in normal library setting. It allows for effective utilisation of varied approaches to *information access, retrieval and* utilisation from remote, physical,

intellectual and perspectives in an integrated operational environment and regime. When lured to properly access socio-culturaland utilise the CIC facilities, resources and services, the CIC creates some sense of belonging, confidence and commitment to its development, security and sustenance among the members of the locality, community and society. Also, it serves as 'Bind-Forum' for evolving collective approaches to resolving disputes and crisis; solving locality, community and societal challenges; and also advancing their resolves to positively and effectively advance forward in the locality, community, and society to effectively cope with the exigencies of the time. Essentially, the CIC serves as catalyst that facilitates building in the locality, community and society, a reliable source and media for enhancing reading culture competencies and continuing education opportunities; socio-political and cultural consciousness; and also a culture of hard work and commitment; self-discipline, reliance and confidence; and an avenue for the acquisition of moral and ethical consciousness and accountability for the overall development and advancement of the locality, community and the society in all dimensions and levels of needs and aspirations. This is especially through the effective exploitation of the integrated remote, physical, intellectual and socio-cultural approaches to information access and retrieval.

References

https://sustainabledevelopment .un.org/sdgs.