

CONSORTIUM BUILDING: LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT A LEEWAY TO ACADEMIC

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at consortium building as a leeway to academic library development. It discusses the importance of it as a means of offering user access to more information materials. The perceived problems confronting effective library consortium building are highlighted. Its challenges are also examined. The paper concludes by encouraging libraries to embrace the idea of having library consortium, since it is a sure way libraries can share from the human and material resources in each of the participating library.

INTRODUCTION

A library is always perceived as the “store house of information”. As a storehouse of information, no single library can boast of having all the information materials needed by its users in its collection. Libraries are one of the major supporting agencies involved in the processing and provision of information.

Ahiauзу (2002:2) defined a library as a collection of book and non-book materials and arranged in an orderly manner and made accessible to users. Academic libraries are found in the Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities, Each has a similar aim to provide a service through reference and lending of materials appropriate to the needs of the staff and students of the institution. Hence, both the information system and the information professionals are geared towards meeting the changing information needs of users. According to Omekwu and Anyaogu (2006:3):

The initiative and development in the area of automation, networking, resource sharing, consortia, digital libraries, and electronic document delivery, have led to the emergence of new practices in the operations and management approaches of libraries all over the world.

As a result, the need for consortium building among libraries becomes an imperative that cannot be ignored. The term "consortium" as noted by Lee and Lee (1992) connotes a co-operative research effort among companies, universities, industries, and for government typically aimed at helping the participants maintain their leadership position or gain an edge over their international competition in a particular industry. Similarly, Kammourie-Charara (2005) posited that a consortium is a formal association of a number of organizations, usually in a specific geographical area, with agreed goals and objectives. In addition to this, the *Webster's encyclopedic dictionary* sees consortium as “combination to carry out some common purpose”. According to Okerson (2004:1).

A library consortium is any local, regional, or national cooperative association of libraries, that provides for the systematic and effective co-ordination of the resources of schools, public, academic, and special libraries and information centres, for improving services to the clientele of such libraries.

In a library setting, a consortium could be a form of a cooperative arrangement between several libraries for the purpose of cooperative acquisition of materials, cooperative cataloguing and classification of materials so acquired, lending of books, ringing up of electronic networks, interconnecting different libraries or a number of these together.

The urgent need to form consortia of libraries cannot be over emphasized because of the exponential growth of information. Moreover, information resources are becoming complex and multi-formatted. Furthermore, paper based resources such as books, reference materials, journals, conference proceedings, newsletters, newspapers, government and non-governmental publications, are being produced daily by several individuals and institutions of knowledge. With this level of information explosion, no library can afford to acquire all the information materials needed, whether in print or machine-readable formats, notwithstanding the special area of coverage. Hence, consortium building becomes the most effective and economic means in optimum information acquisition and dissemination in this modern age.

Agboola, Oduwale and Ajegbomogun (2000:5) narrowed this down when they acknowledged the under-funding of Nigerian universities and by extension their libraries. The spiraling cost of library materials cannot be ignored in this context. The need has arisen for universities more than ever before to pool their resources together. If done, this pooling together will maximize their procurement, processing and inter library co-operation power. This will help to offer more efficient and timely services to their users and at minimal cost.

However, the issue of consortium building in libraries has not been a new phenomenon. According to Ike and Nwalo (2001:2) there has always been some form of cooperation informally practised by libraries in Nigeria through inter-library lending. Nwalo (2006:6) stated that the origin of formal inter library co-operation in Nigeria started with the meeting group oil inter- library lending held in 1974 at the instance of the National Library of Nigeria. This meeting brought the idea of a National Union Catalogue (NUC) in Nigeria. The emergence of this made the libraries contribute catalogue cards for the National Union Catalogue and the National Union List of Serials. This served as a repository centre for libraries.

The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) would also enhance the formation of library consortia. ICT has made a positive impact in the way libraries provide senders to their users. This has made it possible for a lot of library materials especially journals and large reference materials, to be digitized and made available electronically. Consequently, this has greatly increased the capacities of libraries to meet the needs of their clientele, within and outside the library. Consortium building is closely

associated with computerized multi-library networks, shared databases, telecommunication links and common applications.

Gorman and Cullen (2000:8) are of the view that consortium building need not to be strictly computer-based, as modifications could be made to suit local conditions. This line of thought may no longer be fashionable because the world is in a computer age and every information is channelled towards information and communication technology.

The paper is therefore an attempt to look at the process of consortium building by libraries and underscore the benefits derivable by individual participating libraries and the overall gains in services to users of these cooperating libraries.

IMPORTANCE OF CONSORTIUM BUILDING IN LIBRARIES

Consortium is an association of two or more individuals, companies, organizations or government with the objectives of participating in a common activity, or pooling their resources to achieve a common goal.

One pertinent question to ask is: Why Consortium Building in Libraries? There are some reasons why there is this worldwide focus on consortium building and these include: Quality of services is enhanced; Cost of services is reduced; and Duplication of stock is minimized.

In developed countries, information is readily available to users because of the advancement in the processing of information materials; unlike in developing countries such as Nigeria that still suffer from dearth of information. For its poor development of the information infrastructure Nigeria suffers poor accessibility of information to users. The consequence of this calls for the need for consortium building among Nigerian university libraries.

In the light of this Agboola, Oduwole and Ajegbomogun (2006:4) highlighted some of the importance of consortium building to include the following:

- 1) Co-operative acquisition;
- 2) Shared database;
- 3) Cooperation in the exchange of duplicate materials;
- 4) Shared expertise in answering reference questions;
- 5) Cooperative cataloguing and classification;
- 6) Cooperative storage of materials;
- 7) Inter library loan and document delivery.

Since needs differ from country to country, it is important that each country in the African continent defines its needs in the area of consortium building, and put in place plans of actions to achieve the goals it has set for itself. This, however, does not preclude regional efforts aimed at encouraging countries to come together.

In emphasizing the importance of consortium building, Omekwu and Anyaogu (2006:4) enumerate the following:

- 1) Consortium building helps to build a network of libraries;
- 2) It helps to give priority to the acquisition of library resources in digital format and to make every effort to provide efficient and most cost effective user access to such resources;
- 3) To improve and expand library services and resources;
- 4) To improve the working relationship among libraries and provide an opportunity for them to learn from each other;
- 5) To eliminate duplicated efforts in original cataloguing;
- 6) To cope with changes that take place in libraries;
- 7) To keep pace with users' requests and expectations in libraries in particular in the e-resources field;
- 8) To obtain immediate access to library resources; and
- 9) To achieve standardization in cataloguing, indexing and abstracting services as well as bibliographic services in libraries.

The importance of library consortium building motivated the Standing Conference of African University Librarians, Western Area (SCAULWA) to commission in 2002 feasibility studies on the establishment of consortia in Nigeria and Senegal. Subsequent discussions in this subject matter were taken during the conference of SCAULWA held in Accra, Ghana in November, 2003. The idea to compile a National Union Catalogue by the National Library of Nigeria was another attempt at library consortium. However, between 2002 and 2004, Nigeria was a beneficiary of a generous donation of a country wide license to the EBSCO host, which made it possible for Nigerian Universities with the ICT facilities to have access to thousands of foreign e-journals free of charge.

The Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU), at its biannual meeting at the University of Ilorin in May 2004, deliberated on and took the giant step of forming a consortium, which was named the Nigerian University Libraries Consortium (NULIC), now called Nigerian Universities Libraries Information Bureau (NULIB). This is designed to embrace all university libraries in Nigeria with the prospect of being expanded to include all academic and research libraries in Nigeria in the near future.

PERCEIVED PROBLEMS OF CONSORTIUM BUILDING

In everything that is of benefit in life, there are attendant problems. Membership dues are usually a problem especially where they are high and, therefore, unaffordable by some members of the consortium. EBSCO net is a case in point. There might be problems of bureaucratic bottlenecks in decision-making. Furthermore, licensing Issues may deprive some members of total use of materials in the consortium.

Another problem could arise if a consortium becomes too large, governance and management can become very complex. Moreover, new consortia take longer to take decisions than long-existing ones. The problem of constant energy to power on the systems cannot be overlooked Therefore there is need to exercise patience to allow the consortia work (http://www.library.yale.edu/NERL_PUBLIC).

CHALLENGES OF CONSORTIUM BUILDING

Asamoah- Hassan (2002:10) stated that there is need to look at ways to integrate intellectual access to information by providing for physical and electronic delivery of all needed materials. Existing services and technologies like inter-library loans, photocopying and fax should be used to access materials held in other libraries, especially now that there is internet connectivity. A library may not have all the information resources it needs mainly as a result of high cost of these materials. Consortium building therefore, is a way out.

Integrating collection development processing in libraries may also be useful. There must be a consortium agreement, which will emphasize common interest, visions, values and needs which would be a set of consortia perspective and not just a consortium interest. There must be the basic idea that one can forego individual gains for collective benefit, but each library must derive benefits for being in the consortium which could not have been possible if it had gone all alone.

The commitment and support from the parent institution is very essential. It is necessary to ensure that "commitments made, stay made", 'especially for funding and also for management and membership. Here, the spokesperson from the library must be a person of authority and charisma who can relate to the powers that be.

Dedicated staff to initiate, organize, co-ordinate and maintain the programmes for the survival of the consortium are necessary links between all levels of staff of the participating libraries. Effective staff communication, face-to-face formal and informal meetings are useful irrespective of physical distance. This will assist in developing bonding and sense of being members of one community with a common goal and so instill the desire in them to make the consortium work. Other challenges are:

- 1) Provide great electronic services and resources to users of member libraries
- 2) Build internal consensus among members
- 3) Demonstrate integrity and goal with information providers
- 4) Find better ways to improve services
- 5) Publicize gains and successes achieved .(web 2007)

However, belonging to a consortium is likely to add extra work to each library (in terms of committee service or communications). Libraries may lose some of their decision-making power to the larger group. Yet members should not lose focus, but maintain their stand on library consortium.

CONCLUSION

Libraries in many developing and undeveloped economies are under-funded to meet basic needs, and many countries have inadequate information access to support their economic development. The answer to this problem is library consortium. The success of any consortium most often depends to a large extent on the value each member attaches to the collaboration, recognition and respect for the shared common vision and mission to achieve their aim for a common good.

Most intellectual harvests have shown that consortium formation which is aimed at taking care of a particular interest group is very vital in the development of libraries worldwide.

Consortium building should be encouraged and embraced by as many libraries as possible since it is the process of getting libraries share from the human and material resources; and bibliographic data available. Libraries in the consortium need to be encouraged and embraced among university libraries. Moreover, the inception of (ICT) in library services in Nigeria will enhance consortium building in libraries. We may here observe that the efforts of the Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU) in establishing the NULIB project is a welcome development that should be pursued and sustained as this will go a long way in enriching the service-potential of Nigerian universities in the consortium.

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