

## PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP (PPP) INITIATIVES AMONG PUBLIC LIBRARIES: THE CASE OF IMO STATE LIBRARY BOARD, OWERRI

*Chuma Opara Nnadozie*

Library Division, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede-Owerri.

And

*Emmanuel Uwazie Anyanwu*

Department of Library and information Science,  
Federal Polytechnic, Nekede-Owerri.

### ABSTRACT

This paper examined Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) at the Imo State Library Board (ISLB), Owerri and the need to increase these collaborations for improvement of library services within the State in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Available literature yielded information on types of PPP options available to libraries and provided insight into ways of using these collaborative ventures to improve resources and services of Nigerian public libraries. The head of the library understudy was interviewed to find out the kinds of existing partnerships with the private sector. Results showed that collaborations or partnerships between the ISLB, Owerri and private organizations are presently inadequate and thus have not made the desired impact. Besides, the Imo State Ministry of Education controls the only significant cooperative venture with a private business organization. It was recommended that, although existing efforts at partnering with the private sector is commendable, there is the need for further collaborations with big corporate organizations for the provision of current information materials, commercial internet facilities, bookshops, printing/publishing services, and **computerized** services even if it involves charging some token fees. This is on the backdrop that a good number of the clientele would be willing to pay for library and information service if the requisite materials, facilities and resources are available,

### INTRODUCTION

In library professional milieu, public libraries are acknowledged and treated as a distinct category of libraries. A search of the literature revealed that the concept of public library has attracted diverse definitions and interpretations from different authorities. One of these definitions saw a public library as that "provided wholly or partly from public funds, and the use of which is not restricted to any class of persons in the community but is freely available to all". (Harrod's Librarians' Glossary, 2000:598).

The constitution of each country stipulates the tier and agency of government responsible for the provision of public library services. In Nigeria, however, the provision and management of public libraries is within the province of the State Governments, which constitutes the second tier of the Nigerian Federation. These State Governments, therefore, establish various public library boards which are under the supervision of State Ministries of Education, Information, Culture, as the case may be.

There is no exaggerating the fact that public libraries in Nigeria are saddled with enormous and expansive responsibilities (Nnadozie, 2002). The nature of these responsibilities could be gleaned from the definition cited above. The present poor funding of Nigerian public libraries, which has been alluded to by several scholars like Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) and Olanlokun (2001), is compounded by the general perception that the services and resources are supposed to be "freely available to all". Considering the diminishing allocation of revenue

to government agencies/parastatals and persistent non-release of funds duly appropriated by the legislature in Nigeria, it becomes necessary that alternative sources of funding should be devised by managers of Nigerian public libraries if these important educo-information institutions are to remain relevant in the scheme of things. One of the viable options, which the country's public libraries and other public institutions should explore and exploit, is the development of mutually-beneficial partnership as captured in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Number 8 and Target 18.

In September 2000, the countries that make up the United Nations unanimously agreed to introduce or adopt the millennium declaration which is aimed at achieving the United Nations' vision for peace, security, disarmament, development, poverty reduction, environmental protection, human rights, democracy, good governance, protection of the "vulnerable group" (that is women, children and refugees), meeting the needs of Africa and strengthening the United Nation as a global organization. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were obtained from Paragraph 9 of a total of 1-3 Paragraphs in the declarations. After necessary deliberations and consultations, these MDGs were ratified by the United Nations General Assembly in 2003. (Mair, 2005).

The Millennium Development Goals are made up of eight issues or goals, including the following:

- To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
- To achieve universal primary education.
- To promote gender equality and women empowerment.
- To reduce child mortality.
- To improve maternal health.
- To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
- To ensure environmental sustainability.
- To develop a global partnership for development.

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are made up of 18 targets and 53 indicators. The deadline set for MDG implementation is 2015. Target 18 of the MDGs is as follows: "Co-operation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies (ICTs)". (Azubuike, 2006).

Undoubtedly, the Millennium Development Goal No. 8 and Target 18 focused attention on partnership. Partnership is a kind of co-operation or collaboration entered into by individuals, groups, societies, and organizations. Each of these groups involved in the collaboration has their special areas of experience, expertise and even interest. The partnership is expected to benefit all those who are involved in it as they contribute their finances, knowledge, expertise, accommodation and other resources that would facilitate the growth and development of the participating organizations. The stakeholders participate in extensive co-operation in the areas of education, banking, health, libraries, etc.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Imo State Library System (ISLS) was established at the creation of Imo State in 1976, but received legal backing through Edict No. 12 of 1977. The edict recommends a Board, which is a parastatal under the State Ministry of Education, entrusted with the responsibilities of establishing, equipping and maintaining library facilities and services within the State. It has the responsibility to develop and provide free and qualitative library services to the generality

of inhabitants and visitors to the State. These services and facilities are provided through the headquarters at Owerri and other branches in different parts of the State, namely: Afara, Isu, Mbaise, Mbano, Nkwerre, Obowo, Okigwe, Orodo, Orlu, and Umuhu-Okabia.

The headquarters of ISLB, which is the study location, is in the heart of Owerri Municipality. It seats about 500 readers at full capacity and has a total seven (7) departments including a section dedicated to the handicapped. The departments are: Administration; Business Services; Finance; Information & Rural Libraries; Planning, Research & Statistics; Public Services and Technical Services. The collection at the Owerri headquarters of ISLB presently stands at 112,082 volumes of largely outdated books (ISLB, 2008). The ISLB was one of the flagships of public library services in Nigeria in the 1980s through series of innovative programmes, including mobile library and rural information services (ISLB, 1987). This has however witnessed a steady decline since the mid-1990s owing, largely, to paucity of fund, occasioned "by diminished budgetary allocations, for capital projects, from the Imo State Government" (Ndukwu, 2007),

The ISLB. Owerri serves a large number of readers on daily basis. According to John-Chimezie (2008), patronage is often as high as 300 to 350 readers, on hourly basis at peak periods. This may not be unconnected with the appreciably high literacy level in Imo State, in addition to, the large number of educational institutions in Owerri and environs. However, seating space has become insufficient, coupled with infrequent acquisition activities and paucity of ICTs and other working tools.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

Considering the declining fortunes of the ISLB in recent years and the bright prospects which PPP holds for the revitalization of the institution, this study is built on the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the existence or otherwise of public/private partnerships (PPP) in Imo State Library Boards, Owerri.
2. To identify the problems of implementing public/private partnerships in the library-understudy.
3. To suggest areas public private/partnership (PPP) could be practiced in the ISLB and other public libraries in Nigeria.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A public library, according to Palmour and Bellasi (1980), should provide recreational, informational and educational services to all adults and juvenile ... as defined by public demand, develop broad community awareness of the library and its services, and supplement but not duplicate, the materials and/or services of the other area libraries, UNESCO (1972) adds that it should be maintained wholly from public funds, and no direct charge made to any one for its services. In a research on the metropolitan library needs of Lagos, Aje and Olafioye (1980) identified the following objective for public libraries, amongst others: provision of opportunity for self-education and self-improvement for members of the public and acquisition of books and documents for the pursuit of research and advanced knowledge. These functions are discharged under the direction of Library Board. Iroele (1992) explained that a typical Library Board in Nigeria is a body corporate, with perpetual succession, a common seal and power to sue and be sued.

The above citations indicate that public libraries have an expansive job specification. Nigerian public libraries have not been playing their statutorily-assigned roles effectively for

various reasons. Olanlokun (2001) identified some of these reasons as economic problems, lack of support from the populace, underdeveloped publishing industry, high cost of inputs, lack of interest by governments and disregards by policymakers who put public library services at the lowest priority due to ignorance of the roles they can play in the country's development. Considering that a public library is not expected to "... make direct charges to any one for its services" (UNESCO, 1972), one of the ways through which Nigerian public libraries can remain relevant in a globalizing, information-conscious and ICT-driven world is through mutually beneficial partnerships with individuals, groups, corporate bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). According to Mohammed (2007), the basic aim of any form of partnership is to build mutually-agreed and concrete relationships and strategies aimed at obtaining collective benefits for all the interested parties or stakeholders. The various libraries need to enter into partnerships to facilitate development of library resources and services. He identifies the various types of partnerships as:

- (i) Operation and Maintenance contracts (O&M); in which the private sector operates a public-owned facility under contract with government. Such investor is however required to make periodic returns to the government as stipulated in the contractual agreement.
- (ii) Lease-Develop-Operate (LDO): This partnership involves a private investor being given a long-term lease to operate and expand an existing publicly-owned facility with the view to enable the investor finance the improvement of the facility so as to recover investments and make profit. The facility so leased would be returned to the government at the expiration of the lease period.
- (iii) Build-Own-Maintain (BOM) partnership, which involves private sector investor building, owning and maintaining a facility, leased by the government and operates it using public sector staff. In this arrangement, returns would accrue to the government in the form of ground rent, tax and reduction of unemployment.
- (iv) Build-Own-Operate Transfer (BOOT) which involves a private investor financing, building, owning and operating a public facility for a specified period after which it is returned to the government. The investor is expected to make returns on investment before the expiration of the agreed period while the leasing governmental or public institution would have acquired a facility, which would not have been easy to build and maintain, otherwise.
- (v) Build-Own-Operate (BOO) in which the private investor builds, owns and operates the facility in perpetuity subject to governments' regulatory policies on its operations that may include pricing. The profit-making potentials of such organization and the long-term right of the investor to operate the facility will serve as incentives to inject more funds while being mindful of prevailing government policies and regulations on its operation.

Mohammed (2007) identified partnerships in library and information services to include: organization of book fairs and exhibitions, provision of accommodation for rental and internet services, establishment of bookshops, accommodation for entrepreneurs, etc. The World Summit on the Information Society - WSIS (2005), in strong terms, encourages public/private partnerships (PPPs) and enjoins various countries to embrace it. Bolarinwa (2005) emphasized the need for collaborative ventures between libraries and the business sector, especially in the area of ICT, to improve library and information services.

Akide (2006) harped on the need to implement WSIS in Nigeria, especially, in the area of providing functional public/private initiatives or multi-sector partnerships to promote technologies, research and development programmes in translation, iconographies, voice

assisted services and development of hard wares and soft wares, Omekwu (2006) suggested the recreation of public libraries in Nigeria as agencies for the development of the mind, enlightenment of the people, and cultural preservation of vital information materials. He suggested a detailed study of Nigerian public libraries for metamorphosis into digital libraries insisting that Nigeria will move towards the information society if our public libraries are revamped and revived in the model of the famous New York Public Library.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The interview method was used. Background information were obtained from available literature, including official documents/records of ISLB and supplemented by data provided by selected heads of sections/departments. In addition, the Acting Director of Library Services was interviewed using checklist of question designed to address the objectives of this study. The researchers also collected vital information through direct observation and guided tours of specific departments of ISLB (including reading halls, stack areas, technical services unit, parks, etc). The responses and information obtained are analyzed and presented in prose form.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Imo State Library Board, (ISLB), Owerri has played a major role in the development of librarianship and provision of library services in Imo State, in particular and the country, in general. Data obtained from interview, observation and documentary sources indicate that PPP arrangement is not being put to maximum effect at the ISLB. At the time of filing this report, the only noticeable evidence of PPP at the study location is the Build-Own-Operate (BOO), which is a scheme involving a private investor. According to the Ag. Director of Imo State Library Board (Ndukwu, 2007), the internet centre at the Library's Park was built by the State Ministry of Education and leased to a private enterprise Data Tech West Africa Ltd, Owerri which makes returns to the Ministry of Education for using the facilities. In other words, the management of the ISLB was not privy to the contractual agreement and consequently, does not benefit from the proceeds of the arrangement. This is an aberration that seriously affects the capacity of the ISLB to generate sorely needed funds for its services.

The Welfare Committee of Imo State Library Board runs the canteen operating within the premises. The appointment and supervision of the caterer is the sole responsibility of the Welfare Committee. Here again, the implication is that the management of the ISLB, Owerri is not directly involved in negotiations that midwived the advent of a canteen-operator occupying a building within its premises. As such, the financial accruals from this unarguably beneficial collaboration are not under the direct control of the management of the ISLB, Owerri.

The ISLB leased its security post to an investor who runs a small-scale business centre. The library has its own internet centre where skeletal online information services are provided and a business centre which renders reprographic assistance. The proposed site for book depot and bookshop was given to NTA Owerri by Imo State Government. This accounts for the absence of a bookshop/depot at the headquarters in Owerri while the bookshop at Orlu was closed. The ISLB's auditorium, which is a purpose-built event's center that attracted patronage from interested members of the public, is now in a state of despair. That potentially revenue-yielding facility has not been renovated which means that a veritable source of income is not being put to economic use. The printing press is owned wholly by

Imo State Library Board though its profit potential has not been maximally exploited. Book exhibition, which can generate revenue if properly managed, has been very infrequent. However, the library organizes quiz competitions for secondary schools in the State. Though the accommodation available is not enough for meaningful partnership, parts of the buildings have been ceded, albeit free of charge, to another government agency the Nigeria Television Authority. In other words, there is presently no real or significant public-private partnership (PPP) at the Imo State Library Board (ISLB). This is because, the private sector, with its entrepreneurial spirit and profit drive, have not been sufficiently mobilized to inject funds into the ISLB. There is no doubt that strategic collaboration with the business/corporate community could lead to massive investment of money required to update the facilities and services of ISLB.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are, presently, no significant or meaningful collaborative business relationships between the ISLB and the corporate world. It has become necessary to introduce private-public partnerships (PPP) in public libraries to enhance the provision of quality facilities and effective services to library users. PPP is particularly needful in this era of insufficient funding and non-release of financial allocations to government institutions, including public libraries. The ISLB management, staff and investor(s) have a lot to benefit if laudable PPP initiatives are applied in full scale. The same bright prospects also await other types of libraries that are bold enough to apply economic and entrepreneurial ideas in their operations and services.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS.**

In the first place, in an era of insufficient government funding, public-owned institutions must be proactive, dynamic and innovative to guarantee their relevance and survival. On that basis, the Imo State Library Board, Owerri needs to engage in aggressive partnerships with book dealers. The library can provide accommodation and other facilities while the co-operating bookshops pay rent at a commercial rate, considering that the ISLB is located at the central business area of Owerri municipality. This is a sure way of maximizing the comparative advantage of its location and facilities for enhancement of its revenue base. Such arrangements would also help to ameliorate the book scarcity witnessed in the recent times.

Moreover, there is the need for the ISLB to engage in partnerships with ICT companies operating in Imo State to enable library users obtain diverse types of information materials they need. Most users are ready to pay for the current but scarce and expensive materials, computer/internet services, printing/publishing and other personalized information services. The library staff that are IT-compliant can also introduce their ideas and other competences to improve the services offered by the library, as a corollary, the management of ISLB could initiate and implement fee-based information services targeted at the mass of business, academic and agrarian communities. Effective marketing of the proposed customized information services would help the institution to generate ample funds in support of government subventions to run its services and maintain equipment.

Furthermore, the ISLB should organize book exhibitions/fairs on a regular basis in association with bookshops and invite, the general public, especially, the academic community and other stakeholders, to participate. This could be a way to encourage purchase of books, increase awareness and visibility of the ISLB and its sister libraries and improve reading habit among the populace. It would also ease the problem of inaccessibility of library materials.

More importantly, the management of ISLB should be directly involved in all PPP arrangements. Even where proxies or delegates are involved, the contractual agreements should be so crafted as to ensure that specific percentages of the accruals is set aside for the ISLB. This would reduce wastages and enhance the financial standing of the Board.

In addition, the ISLB's auditorium should be renovated and tastefully furnished to encourage renting of the facility to interested members of the public. The Library's buildings/blocks that were handed over to NTA Owerri need to be retrieved because the television station has since moved to its permanent site at New Owerri. The library cannot enter into any meaningful public-private initiative if, at least, the accommodation is not available. The State Ministry of Education should hand over the supervision of the business centre at the ISLB's Park to the Board's management, as that would help ISLB to obtain revenue for the provision of services to users. Alternatively, the business centre could be managed as a joint venture between the ISLB and its current operators.

The society is dynamic and librarianship should also move with current trends. Although the Nigerian economy is not in good shape, people are still willing to pay for good services rendered to them. Most Nigerians willingly pay charges by the cyber cafes when they obtain the right kind of materials and services. It has therefore become necessary to change the poor perception and conservatism by which librarianship is known which has been extensively discussed by Aguolu and Aguolu (2002). It is no longer tenable that the public library should provide completely free services to users. The time is ripe for the ISLB to engage in public private partnership (PPP) with corporate organizations and other private individuals who are ready to provide current library materials, online resources and other fee-based services. If new blood is injected into the country's public libraries through public-private initiative, people would be willing to pay token charges, if they are sure of getting timely, efficient and satisfactory library and information services. Other professions do not provide their services free of charge.

To mitigate distrust often associated with business transactions and engender mutual confidence, transparency and sound ethical behaviours, there should be an unambiguous memorandum of understanding (MoU) or partnership deed duly signed by the ISLB and the investors or partners. As a corollary, sound legal practitioners should be engaged to draft binding articles of association to regulate all aspects of the PPP, including the sharing of risks and benefits.

## REFERENCES

- Aguolu, C.C. & Aguolu, E.I. (2002). *Library and information management in Nigeria*. Maiduguri: Ed-Linform Services.
- Aje, S.B. Olafioye, A.O. (1980), *Library services in metropolitan*. Lagos: Background and sociological framework. Lagos: National Library Nigeria.
- Akidc, T. (2006). Towards implementing the WSIS agenda in Nigeria: Paper Presented at the 44<sup>th</sup> AGM/Conference of Nigeria Library Association; Held in Abuja, June 18-23.
- Azubuike, A (2006). The World Summit on the Information Society: Issues and the way forward for Nigerian libraries: Paper Presented at 44<sup>th</sup> AGM Conference of the Nigerian Library Association, Held in Abuja, June 18-23.
- Bolarinwa, J.A (2005). Information technology for nation-building: A collaborative alliance of libraries and business settings. *Owena Journal of Library and Information Science*, 2 (2): 15 20.
- Harrold's Librarians' Glossary* (2000). 9<sup>th</sup> Edition Compiled by R. A, Pytherch. England: Gower Publishers Ltd.
- Imo Slale Library Board, (1987). *Nigerian rural development abstracts*, Owerri: Imo State Library Board.
- Imo State Library Board, (2008). Accessions Register. (Unpublished).
- Iroele, T. C. (1992). The role of the Library Board in library development and management.- Paper Presented at the NLA AGM/Conference at Uyo. Akwa Ibom State, From 9<sup>th</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> September, 1992.
- John-Chimezie, N. (2008). "Interview" held with Mr. Ndukaku John-Chimezie (Deputy Director of Library Services/Head of Branch Libraries, Imo State Library Board) on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2008 at the Imo State Library Board, Owerri.
- Mair, S. (2005). The Millenum Development Goals and Africa: Is Africa in *danger?*. *Agriculture and Rural Development*, 12(2): 1-12.
- Mohammed, Z. (2007). Aibltc-private partnership in library and information services; Paper Presented at the 45<sup>th</sup> AGM/ Conference of NLA held at Uyo, Akwa Ibom Stale, 9<sup>th</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2007.
- Ndukwu, A.N. (2007), "Interview" held with Mrs A. N. Ndukwu (Ag. Director of Library Services, Imo State Library Board), at the JSLB, Owerri in October, 2007.
- Nnadozie, C. O. (2002). *User satisfaction in Nigerian public libraries: A study of lino State public Library system*, MLS Thesis, Imo State University, Owerri.

- Olanlokun. S.O. (2009). Public library services in Nigeria. *In: Olanlokun. S.O. & Salisu, T.M. (eds). Libraries and librarianship in Nigeria: A festchrift Ezekiel Bejide Bankole.* Lagos: Ikeja Press Ltd,
- Omekwu., C.O. (2006). The World Summit in the Information Society: Issues and the Way Forward for Nigeria Libraries: Paper Presented at the 44<sup>th</sup> AGM /Conference of the NLA Held in Abuja, June 18-23., 2006.
- Palmour, V.E. & Bellasi, M.C. (1980). *A planning process for public libraries.* Chicago: American Library Association.
- UNESCO (1972). Public Library Manifesto. *Unesco Bulletin for Libraries*, 26(3):129-131.