CONSORTIUM AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOR NIGERIAN LIBRARIES OF THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT
The paper discusses problems of development of libraries in Nigeria especially due to its inadequate financial allocation from supporting authorities to difficulty for many libraries to replenish their book stock. It suggests the need for resource sharing between national libraries as a possible avenue of meeting user's information needs and .shortfall of books. The paper recommended the need for development of consortium building among national library group so as to create a functional networking backbone for Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION:

Libraries are centers for repository of knowledge where social, political, economic and cultural aspirations of society are gathered and are freely disseminated to users for advancement of the society. Libraries are necessary components of any organizatioa[7] institution. In most societies, libraries are widely accepted as flexible agency for the delivery of information from a variety of source in different formats to the users to meet their varying degrees of need.

The development of libraries in a developing country like Nigeria has been described as a Herculean task because of inadequate official support coupled with dwindling financial allocations (Adeoti-Adekeye, (1999). The devastating effect of the economic depression of the early 1980s on libraries made it very difficult for many libraries to replenish their stock, either through local sources or importation. Most libraries in Nigeria at a time depended almost exclusively on donor agencies. The activities of Book Aid International (BA) are worthy of mention here as various types of libraries in Nigeria benefited from their project in 1994. They made donation of over half a million volumes of books to Nigeria libraries within the years 1994-1998.

The National Agricultural Research Programme (NARP) in Collaboration with the World Bank on their part included Research Institute Libraries in the list of projects for refurbishment in 1992. The project was established with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources with the aim of reviving the declined agricultural systems experienced in the 1980s. By this project, books and journals were donated to the agricultural research libraries among other things. **Carnegie Foundation** and other international organizations also made significant contribution to the sustenance of libraries in Nigeria at the period through book donations.

Though the collection development situation in Nigeria libraries has significantly improved in recent times, there is still shortfall in the supply of needed books and other information

materials in the libraries. While each library is encouraged to step up effort in the acquisition of materials to meet the user needs, it is acknowledged that no library, no matter how well funded, can single-handedly provide all the information materials needed by its clientele, A plausible way by which such information needs can be met is through resource sharing.

Resource Sharing:

Before the use of computers in libraries, resource sharing meant sharing bibliographic materials through interlibrary loan or creating union lists of catalogues. Group purchasing developed with the move from card catalogues to integrated library systems.

In North American, computer-based networks were seen as an evolutionary next step in library cooperation, and libraries shifted their participation in less formal cooperative arrangements to .membership in formal resource-sharing networks. Also the development of regional networks and bibliographic utilities in the 1970s shifted the emphasis in library cooperation from that of sharing bibliographic information to sharing technology for bibliographic control.

In Africa, serious efforts are being made to foster cooperation among libraries through the Association of African Universities (AAU), with the support of the International Development Research Centre (DRC) (Etim,2006), The key players in these efforts are the Cameroonian Interuniversity Network (CVN), while the Kenya Education Network (KENET) will have a far-reaching impact on information technology in Kenya's institutions of higher learning to establish a high speed, reliable, and sustainable IP Network for all Kenyan universities. Other efforts, such as the Malawi Academic and Research Network (MAREN) and Senegal's UCAD represent the determination African leader's efforts at speeding up socioeconomic development through resource sharing. Unfortunately, Nigeria does not yet have a truly functional National Network backbone (AAU, 2005).

Networking:

Due to the absence of functional national network backbone in Nigeria, there have been several efforts to create one but to no avail. Some of these network efforts as reported by Etim, 2006 are:

- Nigeria Universities Management Information Systems (NUMIS)
- National Research and Education Networks (NRENS)
- Nigerian Universities Network (NUNET)
- Nigeria Education and Research Network (NEARNET: a collaboration of NUNET, Poly Net and Teach Net)
- elFLNET CONSORTIUM of Nigerian Libraries
- National Virtual Library Project (N VLP)
- Nigerian Virtual Library Consortium (VLC)

The use of ICTs has actually helped library development as supported by Nwalo 2000,2001); Atimo et al., (2000) Idowu and Mabawonku (1999) Adedeji (2002). Lancaster and Sandore

(1997), for example posit that the use of ICT is work patterns of information managers all over the world for good.

Consortium Building:

In librarianship, consortium building means forming a group of libraries according to their relatedness for information sharing and networking.

The adoption of ICT m Nigerian libraries gave way to automation and digitization of library materials. Automation and digitization as they are not .easy projects are labor intensive and expensive. Lowe (2007) posits that most libraries cannot afford the technical and managerial expertise in-house and extra staff time needed for digitizing projects. In addition to this, great lessons were leant from developing countries' experiences. It was observed that digitization projects were mostly conducted through external funding. After the external financial aid is terminated, libraries find themselves facing series of issues involving continuation of the projects, maintenance, and future development of their libraries. This is not evidence of development.

According to Lowe, other reasons why libraries are turning to consortium building are:

- It can be seen as a way of improving business performance and patron satisfaction
- To gain consistency of resources to guarantee equity of access amongst a particular group of libraries. Consistency in this can mean both in terms of information access, and also technological development or advancement.
- For financial incentives   a consortia deal can be more cost-effective for the library, with lower administration cost for the vendor, hence lower running cost overall.
- It-can lead to benefits of shared knowledge, skill and experience among the libraries
- It provides the libraries with increased lobbying power with vendors for product development.
- There can be an increase in end user autonomy and reliance on remote mediated reference services especially in poorly resourced and or remote geographic areas.

Considerations in Consortium Building:

As a means of avoiding problems, some areas that need consideration in a consortium environment are:

- Ensuring open and accountable decision-making processes (lack of clearly defined goals or requirements can lead to poor decision-making process, and an unsatisfactory outcome)
- Communication between consortium members
- Adequate representation of stakeholders;

In looking at the practicalities of forming or joining a consortium, the library may want to consider whether it will lose its autonomy when a funding structure or product is decided on centrally. They may want to ask such questions as: Will the final decision affect local information access policies? How will it affect collection development at a local levels'?

Does the decision have financial implications which will affect the library's ability to buy or continue to buy other products which staff and patrons want? Can the library continue to maintain balance in the collection or equity of access for patron groups on an equitable basis including remote users as well as in-house users?

CONCLUSION:

Nigerian libraries have had a long felt need for consortium building but their efforts towards this have been frustrated by several factors. It is expected that with better planning and decision making as well as determination to succeed, Nigerian libraries can forge effective cooperation in the future. It is only then that they will have the capacity for meeting most of their user needs.

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