

## **Cataloguing Information Agenda for the New Millennium in Nigerian Libraries**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper conceptualises the creation of an Online National Bibliographic Network in Nigeria as the cataloguing and classification information agenda for the new millennium. To this end, a virile and efficient communication network system that will enhance the linkage of databases from the local, through zonal offices, to the national level is proposed as a preparatory step to ultimately connecting the international grid of databases. The continued relevance of cataloguers in professional practices is established. The attendant problems of "biblio-techno-  
evolution" are examined, while the role of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Nigeria Library Association, the National Library of Nigeria, other library institutions, commercial agencies and individual librarians in meeting the challenges occurring in the business of creating access to the world of information is discussed.*

### **Introduction**

The rapid growth in computerisation, information technology (IT) and telecommunication systems has led to a sudden surge in automation and global advances in information handling and dissemination.

Libraries in Nigeria are making efforts at computerising their services and are at varying stages of automation. Just like in the traditional setting, all efforts are geared toward improving access and devising means of getting library materials to the users in the fastest and most efficient way possible. Unfortunately, most libraries are still very far from computerising.

In formulating a cataloguing information agenda in the new millennium, the focus must be more inward rather than relying absolutely on external efforts, especially, where Nigeriana and Africana materials are concerned. According to Igbeka (1998), "cataloguing information on monographs can be obtained using Library of Congress National Union Catalogue (Book form). The production of this stopped in 1982. It was then replaced with microfiche form, whose production also stopped in 1991. In

place of this came LC (CD-MARC ) Bibliographic tapes... the production of this has also been stopped and LC bibliographic information can now be accessed only through the Internet." These changes are incessant and for every change, there are enormous inconveniences in terms of financial, policy and structural implications.

It is noteworthy that libraries are adopting digitised systems for handling and distributing information. Even in Africa, the Association of African Universities (AAU) has initiated a project known as Database of Africa Theses and Distribution (DATAD) and the Rhodes University library in South Africa is pioneering the Network of Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD). It is unfortunate that Nigerian universities are not part of these efforts due to lack of funds (Ikem, 2000). There is no doubt that the Internet has revolutionised the provision of library and information services to users. But are Nigerian libraries part of this global networks? Since there is no network system of any sort, we can neither begin to envisage viable Internet connectivity and digitised methods of information transfer cannot be attained.

### **Cataloguing Information Agenda**

Cataloguing is done to ensure consistency in the practice. Obviously, the need for consistency and standardisation is important to the practitioner. The information provided in any catalogue (be it card or electronic) depends on the set of cataloguing codes and the policy adopted by the library. The Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, second edition gives three alternatives tagged the three levels of bibliographic information: the first level description gives the barest or minimum information; the standard bibliographic information translates to the middle level description; while the full bibliographic information translates to the third level description.

In furtherance of standardisation, it is being proposed that this new millennium should witness more result-oriented and focused efforts by Nigerian cataloguers to network with the aim of sharing bibliographic records through electronic forms. Thus, the cataloguing information agenda being suggested is the creation of an Online National Bibliographic Network (ONBN). This system should be properly planned by instituting the network as a special project under the auspices of the National Library of Nigeria. The personnel to handle the project should be carefully selected cataloguers across the nation. This set of cataloguers should form the core of experts to formulate the policy of the project and to establish the initial database. They should be given tenure appointments during which they will undergo necessary training and then be involved in re-training others who will take over from them after their tenure and after establishing the central office.

Online bibliographic networking involves the systematic interchange of materials, bibliographic data service, information or occasional transfer of such resources from a central office to a number of libraries. Network refers to multi-library organisations

designed to facilitate interlibrary loans, reference, duplicate exchange, processing and the like (Wynar, 1985). The concept of a network of bibliographic databases is not new. According to Tedd (1993), large bibliographic agencies such as Online Computer Library Centre (OCLC) and Research Libraries Group (RLG) set up networks of terminals for accessing bibliographic records for cataloguing purposes since the 1970s. In Britain, the UK Office of Library Network (UKOLN) was set up at Bath University in 1990 to produce a common strategy for networking in the UK library and university community. In Africa, bibliographic networks have been established to facilitate resource sharing and information transfer. An example is the SABINET, South African Bibliographic and Information Network (Van Nickerk, 1986).

### **Network Structure of the Online Bibliographic Control System**

The national bibliographic network should have a structure that will enhance integration. The policy guiding the creation of a centralised office for bibliographic control will have to be worked out. Suffice it to say that it is important that the local and zonal networking systems should be established. In doing this, topological considerations must be made in determining network policies and procedures. Issues concerning linkages and configuration of computers across libraries must be based on variables type, size and geographical location of libraries in the network. For instance, it may be easier to network all academic libraries in a zone, all public libraries in a zone; and all special libraries in a zone than to network all University libraries in the country, or all research libraries in the country or all public libraries. It should be noted that not all libraries can be connected at the initial stage. Consideration must be given to problems of proximity and type of libraries in Nigeria. For inclusion in the bibliographic network system, the following should be considered:

1. The mandate of the participatory libraries, that is, in terms of policy, patrons/clients, limitations, etc.
2. The available resources, that is, capacity, types of materials, special collections, etc.
3. The available facilities, that is, telephone, computers, existing network systems, e.g. Local Area Network (LAN), Campus-wide Network, Wide Area Network, etc.
4. Personnel, e.g. librarians/information scientists, technical staff, computer analysts, library assistants, etc. who are sufficiently knowledgeable in information technology.
5. Availability of funds, although the ONBN should be a special project funded basically by government, library patrons should be prepared to make provision for maintenance costs, personnel costs, consumables like stationeries, diskettes, etc among others.
6. In order to avoid the problems of location, consistency and variations, the establishment of specialised zonal databases should be considered. This

means, for example, that academic libraries within a zone can only have a few variations in their cataloguing practices, and therefore, should be suited for linking up in a zonal network system.

The separate databases created will then be linked up within a central zonal network system which will in turn be linked to the National Network. For convenience, the project could be carried out in phases, viz:

- Phase I – Local Network System (LNS). The first phase of this project will take care of identifying eligible libraries in their individual capacity at the local level. The libraries that have met the set standards would enter the preparatory stage. Necessary local area networking would be done; telephone installations would be made; other auxiliary services like constant electricity would be provided; maintenance and technical staff would be on the stand-by.
- Phase II – Zonal Network System (ZNS). After the LNS phase, the stage is set for the Zonal Network System. All identified and certified libraries would be linked up in a Wide Area Network with an office in the most centrally located library in each of the six zones. All the public and academic libraries in the network in a zone will have a central bibliographic control unit where the ZNS will be coordinated.
- Phase III – National Bibliographic Network System (NBNS). This is the stage where all zonal bibliographic offices are linked together in one centre possibly under the coordination and control of the National Library of Nigeria.

There are six regional zones and thirty-six states in Nigeria. Each of these zones has at least five states within it. The zones can also be used for bibliographic resource sharing and electronic networking.

Each of these zones has well-established public, special and academic libraries that can serve as zonal offices for the zones. For example, the North-Central zone has about six university libraries (Benue State University Library; Federal University of Agriculture Library, Makurdi; Kogi State University Library, Ayangba; University of Ilorin Library; Federal University of Technology Library, Minna; and University of Jos Library). In addition, there are other higher institutional, research and special libraries. Almost all the states have State Library Boards. Branches of the Library Boards are established in various parts of the states. Research and other institutional libraries could be categorised as academic libraries and should therefore be linked up in the network with academic libraries in the various zones. Hence, reputable university libraries in each zone could be made the main zonal host for the network. The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) has branches in most of the states of the federation. Cognisance should be taken of the locations of all these libraries in making design decisions to connect them to the state, and hence to the ZNS.

Cataloguing networks can be used as a database for pre-order verification, spotting location for possible inter-library loans, public service uses like citation verification and solving bibliographic problems. It is also a development that will act as impetus to libraries that are yet to computerise to start doing so as the reality of the inevitability of global network system begins to dawn on them.

On the whole, the Online National Bibliographic Network will be preparatory to Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) whereby voice, data, fax, and other multi-media information will be transmitted on a single link in a digital manner through the use of fibre optic technology. This communication system is already in use in many countries of Europe and America (Tedd, 1993).

### **The Relevance of Cataloguers in the New Millennium**

The cataloguers will continue to determine subject contents of materials and give appropriate headings. They will continue to determine subject headings of all items entered even in an automated environment. They provide the necessary description of various dimensions of all library materials. Users will only access whatever they provide as online. Intellectual decisions are the prerogative of humans, and all that are technologically achievable are the functions of intellectual investigations and comprehension. This is accentuated by the fact that it is not all that are intellectually feasible that are technologically achievable. "A computer system is only as good as, or as bad as the human beings who design, implement and operate the system" (Tedd, 1993).

The human aspects of the on-going IT have not been of particular interest to practitioners. The fact is that human beings are prone to fear of change. Some practitioners may never be part of the proposed information agenda. It is not all those involved in information handling today that will be partakers in the implementation of the information agenda in the new millennium.

### **Recommendations**

- Government must have clear-cut policies on libraries in Nigeria. Information provision and education generally must be given the priority they deserve. For information to be properly utilised it has to be communicated to the appropriate quarters. Communication networks in Nigeria should be overhauled without which no meaningful development could be achieved, also the supply of electricity must be regular. Immediate steps should be taken to establish the Central Office of the Online National Bibliographic Database and zonal offices opened in the six zones of the country.

- The Nigerian Library Association and the Cataloguing and Classification Section of NLA could help in identifying those to be involved in pursuing the cataloguing agenda. The Associations need to be involved in setting up the centres and they must engage in evaluative measures to regulate the project. Besides, periodic training and retraining of members must continue through workshops and conferences. Opportunities of international exposure should be explored for members so that the nation can keep abreast of developments in the profession around the world. They should participate more in national discussion in order to gather support and recognition. Decisions taken at meetings, workshops and conferences should be pursued vigorously and practitioners be result-oriented.
- The National Library of Nigeria must continue to act its role as the vanguard for the development of libraries. The NLN is usually the body to execute most decisions of national interest. It therefore needs to ensure that government is made compliant on the various decisions taken at conferences.
- A library is as good as its cataloguers. User satisfaction and public relations are remotely controlled from the technical sections. They constitute the remote control that herd all users and library staff toward the direction they think is appropriate. In order to improve access, cataloguers must be empowered through training. Necessary equipment for networking should be made available. The heads of libraries have a lot to do in this regard. They must make connections (nationally and internationally) and use these to promote the objectives of their libraries. Internal and external sourcing for funds and less reliance on government; outreach programmes embodying exchange missions to libraries at home and abroad will make this proposition a reality.

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