

TOPICAL ISSUES IN EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

PAPERS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR C.O. UDOH

Retiring Dean of the Faculty of Education,
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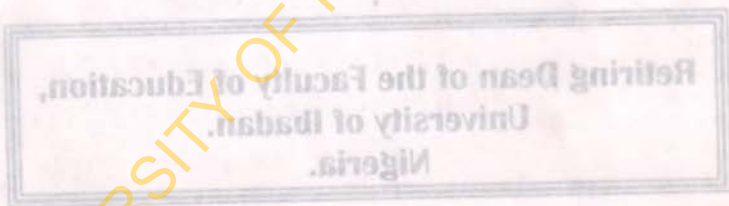
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PAPERS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR C.O. UDOH

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FUNDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SECTOR LIBRARIES IN AUSTERE TIMES

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Preamble

Libraries and Librarians are caught in the wave of increasing information resources; increasing demands for quality services; and increasing problem of lack of funds. This paper has taken a holistic look at the problem of funding local government and public sector libraries under this situation of economic recession. The structural administrative abnormality in the public sector and the position of libraries in the establishments is addressed. Apart from correcting this abnormality, this paper proffers Government's commitment, purposeful leadership, resource sharing, staff development, fee-based library services, national and international assistance and the role of professional bodies as strategies for coping with the recession.

Introduction

Economic depression has pervaded the Nigerian economy for decades now. Economic depression is a situation where demands cannot be met because of inadequacy of funds. Such economy is subjected to austerity measures and infected by hyperinflation. The 1993 World Bank Report (1993) listed Nigeria as one of the 21 poorest countries in the world in spite of the over-orchestrated presence of large deposits of petroleum and other oil-related production in the country. Inflation continues to eat into the fibre of the economy leaving traces of deterioration in virtually all institutions and establishments. These problems have increased because of factors like: unequal distribution of wealth; misplacement of priorities; mismanagement of resources; the devaluation of local currencies, etc. (Ifidon, 1995).

Unlike in the Western countries where information is given recognition as one of the vital national economic resources equated with Manpower, Capital and Energy, (Nzotta, 1995) the importance of information in national development seems not to be appreciated in developing countries. In the Federal Republic of Germany, (Stroetmann, 1992) between 1974 and 1977, the programme of the Federal Government for the promotion of Information and Documentation (I & D-Program) had been put in place to deal with the development of a publicly assisted professional information

system for every citizen. Ever before then, as far back as 1962, Germany realized rather, very quickly, the importance of scientific documentation, which underlies the principles, those apply to the setting up and maintenance of scientific libraries. Documentation is the basis for scientific work and therefore of central and paramount importance to the state. For that reason, public authorities must provide funds for the promotion of Libraries, Information Resources, and documentation Centres. More so now that issues pertaining to strategic management and policy formulations are prerogatives in our ever-mobile world of changing perspective, documentation in whichever form electronic/digital or paper - must not only be the priority but also the concern of any government. This paper canvasses the philosophy of free access to information as a perspective to laying the burden of funding responsibilities at the feet of the appropriate body or government. As the topic emphasizes Government and Public Sector, and the prevalent cliché in our society today - Austere Times - one will not need to look too deeply before seeing through the smokescreen. In a sense, the people are the government and the Libraries that are our focus are government agencies. We should not have tampered with any no go areas if our preoccupation is to do an x-ray or ourselves and our agencies.

Local Government Libraries are Information Resource centres that are set up by Local Government Councils for the documentation, book keeping, outreach services, promotion of reading culture, information gathering, storage and dissemination, etc in the overall interests of their citizenry. Also, along the same line, public sector Libraries are set up by Government to service Government Boards, parastatals and other public enterprises. Both types of Libraries are provided wholly or partly from public funds and their use may not be restricted to any class of persons in the community.

Although the point has already been made in this paper of whose responsibility funding of Local Government and public sector Libraries is, an exploit would be made to unearth other means of coping with economic depression in this austere times. But before them, a look is taken at the reasons why Libraries should be the concerns of Local Governments and the Public sectors in the first place. We will also discuss 'Structural Administrative misnormal (imbalance) and the Public Library Funding Pattern,' as a function of Government's neglect of its information monuments through lack of definite information policy.

The need for Local Government and Public Sector Libraries

Writing on 'The Meta-Information Society', Salem (1990) identified three broad stages of evolution and human metamorphosis and civilization, viz: 'One, the Agricultural Communities era when land ownership and feudalism reigned and human inequality was most prominent. Two, the Industrial revolution era when production and

bourgeois tendencies were predominant and human inequality was merely reduced. And three, the Information era when free communication thrived and the ills of inequality among human elements were virtually eradicated. This stage projected free access to information and like air and water, it is available to anyone who wants to own and utilize it. We cannot overemphasize the importance of information and the utilitarian values of information resources in our times and indeed, in the future especially in the next millennium.

Information Resources are materials that have information values, and they include at the Local Government and Public establishment level; Government publications and documents; books, newspapers, magazines and other periodicals; Maps and manuscripts; Microforms, video tapes, cassettes and other audio-visuals; Reference materials; Confidential files, edicts, bye-laws, legislative records, project files among other such Information Resources Materials (IRM). The repositories of these information resources are very important. For the attainment of effectiveness in government business, the IRM must be handled well and organized efficiently and this is the business of the libraries. It is important that the usefulness and value of information be appreciated. If information is of immeasurable value to us, then, the repository of such information must, in like manner, be of great importance.

Having identified Information Resource Materials, we have to manage them not only to create order and easy handling, but also to enhance supply and easy accessibility. We must note that any Information Resources Material that is handled in such a manner that the users cannot access it is lost. IRM must be arranged therefore in a way that they will be easy to monitor by the library workers as well as convenient for library users to retrieve. There is no doubt that the whole philosophy of librarianship centers on this fact.

According to Nzotta (1993), Information is an essential factor in decision-making. "To make a sound decision on any subject, at any level and in any circumstance, there must be information to guide a person. For private and public matters, individual or group, formal or informal purpose, the right information is required to take a decision that will be fair and just to all parties. "Availability of appropriate information for correct and reasonable decision making becomes more crucial in public affairs, government policy formulations, and legislative functions at local government, state and national levels and even at international level. This is due to the fact that such public policies and laws affect the lives and fortunes of many people. Apart from policy formulation, information is useful also for policy implementation and policy evaluation. Such information could only be well managed when kept in our libraries and documentation centres.

According to Opeke (1993), Information plays a vital role in management and especially in the management of local governments. Political leaders need information in order to make decisions about community needs, define alternative ways to satisfy those needs and evaluate the success with which an alternative is implemented. Better information results in better public decisions. With better information, politicians are able to talk more knowledgeably about the nature of community problems and more realistically about what local government can do to solve them.

The work pattern of public sector workers is affected by the amount of information available to them. Information that will enhance productivity in the job place is desirable to employees in the public sector. They of what their inputs have been towards organizational goals could make comparison.

Also, the relationship between the employee and the employer, citizens and community leader is enhanced. According to Opeke (1993), "Better information is a prerequisite for meaningful citizen involvement in the process of government. Without accurate and timely information, citizen and community leaders are unable to understand what their government is doing for them, and therefore contribute fully to the process of decision-making". Tiamiyu, (1993) expressed dismay at the ignorance of top-level managers of government organizations in developing countries (and especially Nigeria) or productivity potentials of proper information management.

The importance and usefulness of information to Local governments and government parastatals and establishment have been shown; the importance and usefulness of there expository of recorded knowledge cannot be played down hence the need for Local Government and public sector libraries.

Structural Administrative Abnormality and Public Library Funding Patterns

Libraries and Information Resources Centres in Local Governments and public establishments and parastatals in Nigeria are hardly given the recognition they deserve. The apathy with which information and information policy matters are treated is the same with which repositories of information resources are visited. Oftentimes, what local governments refer to as libraries are store houses or store rooms for 'closed' files, old and obsolete materials, and discarded newspapers and magazines. It is a rarity to find properly organized libraries with qualified librarians and other support staff at the local government and public establishments and parastatals level. In the public sector, usually an office allocated to an information officer/assistant who is designated 'The Librarian'. Such a person is usually one who do not know the basic rudiments of librarianship and, for goodness sake! One who has not had the opportunity of any

training in library and information science? Even at the National and the State level where the same practice obtains.

What is more, the library and the 'Librarian-Designate' are subsumed under some Directors or Administrators who think the library should not exist in the first place. The whole structural setting becomes totally unsuitable for the survival of the library. It is a well-known truism that the quality and strength of the library staff as a matter of principle, is dependent upon the 'place' of the library within the establishment. The size of the library, the envisaged number of users, the current stock, the type of services rendered, etc. are subordinate determinants of the quality and strength of any library. The extent of the growth of a library will be determined by the extent of free hand given it by the funding body. A library will not thrive under tutelage of one 'big overlord' or as a 'vassal unit' of an ever-powerful ministry, to which the Librarian/Information Officer or whoever must pay tribute!

In order to get things done quickly and to create the enabling philosophy and environment for subsisting development, the services of qualified Librarians are required at this level. There is no point making a library assistant the head of a library, if we do, we would be inadvertently determining the extent to which the library can grow. Naturally, a wide variety of operations do not require professional training and can be comfortably performed by support staff. There are clerical jobs and other operations that are strictly not professional. It is however important to note that with the current trends in information management and handling, it is advisable to get professionals to handle professional duties.

The fact that new technologies have been introduced to information management makes staff development and training very desirable. We cannot divorce whatever efforts we are making presently in Nigeria from global changes and dynamics. Hence, in order to optimize the use of manpower and create atmosphere conducive for career development and job-satisfaction, in-service training programmes and refresher courses to promote staff competence must be encouraged. This will not only bring out greater skill but also enhance productivity.

The personal qualities of the librarian may determine the measure of independence given to the library and consequently, its level of growth. As we have seen, it is commonplace to squeeze the library under other divisions within the local government or public establishment/parastatals. The library should be a division on its own. This will erase the usual red-tape bureaucratic procedures that are characteristic traits of government machineries and operations. Libraries tend to have organic growth. Unnecessary controls and delays deter their progress. Effective information resources management could be realized if our libraries have such leaders that control respect; have dignity; are knowledgeable, intelligent and

resourceful. These virtues will not only enhance development but consistency, stability and continuity.

Adequate funding of libraries and information centres are important in all establishments and parastatals. In the 'formative' as well as 'developing' stages of libraries, a regular fund is central to the quality of services that could be provided. In the formation stages, equipment, machines for carrying out technical functions, provision of space and accommodation, the materials, the personnel and a host of other essentials must be obtained.

After taking-off, for continuity and relevance, the stock of the Library must be maintained, improved and kept alive. The resources to be acquired must be sought; and new title subscriptions must be made. In short, the library must continue to grow in size and relevance. To achieve this excellence, it must not be lacking funds.

Libraries have been operated as a non-profit oriented venture. At least, the public has a right to knowledge! Services are rendered to users free of charge. All in all, the responsibility of providing funds for running library systems depend largely on the parent institution i.e. the establishment/parastatal under which such libraries are founded and operated. In our present situation, the local government and public parastatals are the parent institutions in focus. It is essential that the local government executives and public sector officials appreciate the importance of libraries and Information Resource Centres governance otherwise, they might run into the danger of being taken through unlimited flux of contradictory policies that may be inimical to their effective management.

Librarians must be careful to itemize the financial needs and commitments of their libraries so that adequate provisions could be made for them in the establishment's overall budget. Any library plagued by financial squeeze (no matter how vibrant) will become moribund in haste! The question as to whether or not libraries and information resource centres can generate funds on their own to augment whatever accrue from their parent institutions will be tackled in this paper.

The past few decades have been characterized by substantial expenditure cuts in almost all types of libraries - we are all aware of the excruciating effects of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Libraries and Information Managers have become increasingly concerned about fiscal management functions in their institutions as they watched inflation erode the purchasing power of their budgets. Library allocations from parent bodies have been particularly severely affected!. Book and periodical prices have risen at a rate well over that of general inflation. While the prices of books and other library materials have taken the 'elevator', the purchasing power (library allocation) has taken the 'stairs! The number of titles published annually increased astronomically, so also is the level of readers demand for the materials.

Librarians and library administrators are at crossroads. They have been under pressure to justify services and to demonstrate 'value-for-money' to their paymasters. 'Value-for-money' concepts have to be considered within the context and framework of planning, resources, allocations, budgetary controls and accountability. Libraries are faced with distributing limited resources between competing demands.

Strategies for Coping with Austerity

The delimita of libraries and Librarians that have been caught in the wave of increasing information resources, increasing demands for quality service and increasing problem of lack of funds has been shown. The Nigerian economic situation has deteriorated and this has caused structural imbalance of domestic production falling drastically below domestic consumption. This has further affected the superstructures and subsequently the substructure of the economy. Operations of most government arms, parastatals, institutions and establishments are getting grounded. The libraries are not unaffected and as a service unit, continued operations in the face of dwindling funds become very hard. The understated measures are thereby proffered for coping in these austere times for the public sector and local government libraries:

Government's means: We have seen that funding the public and Local Government libraries is primarily the responsibility of government. From the examples given, Germany recognized the utilization values of information quite early and accorded it a prestigious position in her affairs. Other Western nations also regard information as a vital national economic resource. In Nigerian Universities, after a protracted industrial dispute by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in 1992, they got a fairly improved funding for University Libraries. The Agreement gave the percent of Universities recurrent expenditure to libraries. It also gave them some autonomy by ensuring that they get their subvention directly from National Universities Commission (NUC). It took away the bureaucratic procedure of having to wait on the bursary departments of Universities to release library funds, which use to be diverted to finance other projects without recourse to the libraries.

Government must start to accord libraries under them and under government agencies the proper recognition it deserves. A common or uniform percentage of budgetary allocations accruing to government and its parastatals should be allotted to libraries. Public sector and local government libraries should not be treated as storehouses of old files and obsolete records. Professional Librarians with requisite qualifications should be employed to man the libraries such that they will develop rapidly and earn the respect they are long overdue for.

A deliberate effort by local government administrators and public institution officials at a policy of prioritization, which will clearly spell out their goals for libraries and Information Resource Centres, will go a long way in ameliorating their estranged status. In doing all this, government must be aware of the fact that the ultimate goal of all information profession is to maximize the social utility of graphic records for the overall benefit of society.

Purposeful leadership: The professional and personal qualities of the librarian will influence the manner in which the library is treated.

A versatile, influential, intelligent and innovative leader with vision and dynamism will make reasonable impact in his establishment. Knowledge of current management concepts of efficiency, economy and effectiveness are essential. In the face of worldwide depression, the ability of librarians to evolve strategies and new management techniques to keep the libraries going is important.

The Librarians must start to prepare budgets that will spell out their libraries' needs in order of importance. Funds must be managed such that all library units and functions would be catered for. No unit must be favoured at the expense of the others. Accountability is of great importance. All library staff must be made accountable so that the incidents of waste would be minimized if not eradicated. The ability of the librarians to mix with colleagues, peers and superiors will enhance the status of the library. They must demonstrate their ability to persuade the higher authorities to provide desired funds. They must develop or adopt budgetary formulae that will be able to balance the limited funds with the variables of cost, rate of inflation and user needs.

Resource sharing: Inter-library loans and resource sharing should be encouraged among libraries in the same locality. According to Ononogbo (1987), the essence of cooperation among libraries is predicated on the remark that "the centuries-old practice of one library lending its books to another is based upon the premise that although books may physically be the chattel of the institution that bought and paid for them, they belong intellectually to the general cultural heritage of mankind and ought somehow to be made available to all men. Ononogbo (1987) further contented that in as much as the principle of cooperation is a worthy venture, it has not been sufficiently practiced by Nigerian Libraries. For the libraries to survive at this time and, in particular, satisfy the demands of users, a new formula must be developed. Possibility for cooperative acquisitions whereby local government and public sector libraries can acquire materials in bulk and completely avoid duplications should be explored. The system of having common clients for libraries within specified geographical areas that will share common resources should be encouraged.

Gradually, with centralization of acquisition, the central processing of materials acquired could be projected and planned for. On the whole, resource sharing and cooperative ventures among libraries of similar clientele would lead to reduce cost and better funds management.

Staff development: Deliberate efforts should be made to improve staff input and ability through continuous training and retraining. Staff will be sufficiently motivated to cultivate a sense of belonging to the tenets of the establishment and to protect that interest of their job-place and uphold the goals and aspirations of their employers if they are adequately remunerated and they have prospects of improving their standards.

Measures should be taken to augment the educational standards of staff via participation in workshops and conferences. Staffs that are well grounded in the professional operations would be assets to the library. Needless to say that optimum utilization will be to the overall improvement of the services rendered in these libraries.

Fee-based library services: Librarians are beginning to consider fee-charging as a way of stemming the tide of tumultuous financial strains during this period of great demands for good quality services. According to Ojedokun and Ola, (1993) to wave aside the need to charge for library services is to risk the continued functioning of the library system in Nigeria. Library services may wholly or in part be offered to consumers at a price. User charges promote equity to the extent that the price a consumer pays is proportional to the quantity and/or quality of services demanded. Efficiency implies maximizing library services and benefits while minimizing costs.

It is even economically justifiable to impose user fees because it is the baseline for judging the efficiency of the services rendered. "The imposition of fees provides a mechanism for determining preference through willingness to pay" (Gell, 1979). Indeed, instead of providing services that are ordinarily unnecessary and irrelevant, the intensity of demand helps to regulate allocation of scarce resources in such a manner that preferred services are given adequate attention to such an extent that there will be prioritization in dispensing library services. Library users are therefore bound to be more appreciative of the services they get from the library.

Moreso, personalized or information services could be charged. Photocopying, binding, special searching of the stock, CD ROM, searches, SDI services fall into these categories. Standard charges could also be made on all categories of users. This will no doubt bring much revenue to the library. However, charging must be taken as a policy decision that must be cleared with the appropriate parent bodies before implementation. The ingenuity of the librarian at making a case for this position is of paramount importance.

Assistance from national and international bodies: Public sector and local government libraries can easily get assistance from national and international bodies and associations. Philanthropic organizations like Rotary Club, Lion Club and the like, are usually ready to help. Non-governmental organizations and international bodies like United States Information Service (USIS), British Council, IITA, UNESCO, etc. willingly render assistance to libraries. To get necessary aids from these bodies needs an outgoing librarian who knows where to look at the right time. Local government heads can also negotiate assistance from foreign governments or bodies for the libraries in their councils. Some advanced countries may willingly enter into agreement with local governments on this ground.

The role of professional bodies: Professional associations in Librarianship have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for public sector and local government libraries to thrive in these austere times. The Nigerian Library Association and the Association of Government Libraries should address the issue of right placement and recognition for libraries at this level. They can come together to persuade government to accord proper recognition to libraries and evolve candid policy outlines for the establishment of local government and public sector libraries. Pressure could be mounted on government by these associations to make special tariffs and custom charges for library materials imported from overseas countries at this period of scarce foreign exchange. Concerted agitators from the Associations on the need to peg exchange rates of providing special grants for library acquisitions will go a long way to cushion the effect of austerity in our libraries.

Conclusion

This paper posits that the provision of library services at the public sector and local government level is ordinarily the exclusive responsibility of their parent bodies. From a general perspective, a government that has its information policy in place will not pauperize the repositories of knowledge i.e. the libraries. An exploit has also been made of the need for library services at the levels of our focus, and the unconscious neglect of public sector and local government libraries has been shown.

Coping strategies are proffered through: Government authorities who should rise-up to the challenges of their responsibility; determined leadership; resource sharing and library co-operation; staff development and in-service training; fee-based library services; assistance from national and international organizations; and assistance from our own professional bodies. These coping measures are by no means exhaustive in these austere times.

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