

The Capacity of Public Libraries in driving Rural Development in South- East, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the capacity of Public Libraries in South East Geo-political zone of Nigeria to drive local development in their areas of jurisdiction. It was a survey research. The five public libraries in South East Nigeria serve as the population of the study. Interviews and observation were used for data gathering. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis which involves sorting the collected data, coding, interpretation and transferring to percentages. The result of the study showed that there is shortage of professional staff in public libraries in South East Geo-political zone of Nigeria amongst others. The authors concluded that Public Libraries in South East Geo-political zone of Nigeria lack the capacity to drive rural development in their areas of jurisdiction. It was recommended that public libraries should employ more professional staff to enhance information delivery for local development and that local communities should support public libraries through donations by philanthropic individuals within the community amongst others.

Keywords: Public, Libraries, Rural, Development, Capacity.

Introduction

Rural areas are areas within a community that are far removed from cosmopolitan life of the city. Olojede, Adekunle and Samuel (2013); and Nworgu and Nworgu (2013) defined rural area in the Nigerian context as a place with small population size, consisting of homogenous people whose primary occupation is

agriculture and who are mostly illiterates. Anele (2012) observed that Nigerian rural areas lack access to safe drinking water, good primary health care service, good road network, schools and other basic infrastructure which have prevented the people from contributing to the development of their society. In the same vein, Russell and Huang (2012) noted that in some

communities, much of the gains of 21st century technologies are restricted to the urban areas, to the detriment of people in the local areas because the local areas lack basic social amenities. National Bureau of Statistics (2013) observed that school dropout rate is more among children in Nigerian rural areas.

The Nigerian government has responded to the situation in Nigerian rural areas through various development projects such as the National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and Agricultural Development Project (ADP) to mention but a few. Unfortunately, Obetta & Okide (2013) observed that these efforts have, as their primary aim, improvement of food, cash crops and agricultural production which is only a little aspect of rural development and which yielded very little result. The authors opined that rural development is synonymous to rural transformation. The authors defined rural transformation as a comprehensive all round structural and fundamental changes not just in the physical conditions of the rural inhabitants but more so in the mental, physiological as well as cultural aspect of development.

A more viable means of transforming rural communities in Nigeria is therefore needed. The Electronic Information for Libraries (EIL) (n.d) in its 2012-2013 impact assessment of libraries has shown that Public libraries can enhance rural transformation. The impact

assessment reported rural development activities of public libraries in countries like Columbai, Armenia, Latvia, Chile, Zambia, and many other nations. It has been observed that no meaningful development can take place in any nation without a recourse to public libraries and information centres (Folorunso and Folorunso, 2010). Eze (2013) noted that public libraries in Nigeria have the capacity to transform rural communities as was the case in Norway, Kenya and Soviet Union. The author noted that in the mentioned countries, public libraries were used to raise the political understanding of the people on current political problems, government policies, programmes and citizens education.

As in the above mentioned countries, public libraries in Nigeria can drive rural development if well provided for. Osadebe (2012) and Ebiwolate (2010) observed that public libraries in Nigeria can transform the rural communities through the provision of information on agriculture, wealth creation, new business opportunities, new ways of social grouping and learning etc. Waizer & Gruidl (2007) observed that the ability of public libraries to engage in rural development depends heavily on the ability of the library to identify important local resources, chart a reasonable future for the community, and have people to follow assigned tasks through. In order words for public libraries to engage in development projects in their communities, the library must have

capable hands, who will be able to identify viable local resources that can be used in organizing programmes for the community, plan policies to match the local communities demands and have enough manpower to monitor the projects. Edoaka (2000) presented the following as the range of positions that can exist in a public library for it to function effectively: Director, Deputy Director, Assistant Director, Principal Librarian, Senior Librarian, Librarian 1, Librarian 11, Chief Library Officer, Principal Library Officer, Senior Library Officer and Library Officer. The author went on to say that the extent and number of the various positions will depend on several considerations such as size of the library collection, services offered, size and nature of users. A cursory look at the expected professional staff strength of Abia State public library show that public libraries are supposed to have the following number of staff to function effectively: Director=8, Deputy Director=16, Assistant Director=11, Principal Librarian=8, Senior Librarian=10, Librarian 1=29, Librarian 11=18, Chief Library Officer=14, Principal Library Officer=8, Senior Library Officer=11 and Library Officer 32. It was also observed that a new position has been added to the established staff strength. This is the position of State Director of Library Services which is supposed to be occupied by one person only. Glass & Krider (2000) observed that in public libraries in Kansas, USA, manpower is one of the greatest problems confronting the libraries.

The authors further stated that nearly two-thirds of the state's public libraries have no staff with a Master of Library Science Degree.

Apart from man power needed by public libraries to enhance local development, there is need for current information bearing materials and Information and communication technology (ICT) equipment. Abolaji (2009) advised that Information bearing materials in public libraries should include reference materials, books relating to school curriculum, general books not relating to a specific subject area, periodicals, newspapers, audio-visual materials, government publications and electronically stored and retrievable materials. The author observed that these resources enable libraries to play crucial roles in the success of lifelong education of communities and societies in general. Ogbegbor (2011) included maps, photographs, art productions, computer work stations with software's, CD-Rom and connection to the internet as some of the materials needed by public libraries in performing their duties. With ICT equipment, public libraries can bridge the digital divide between urban and rural communities, enhance rural economic vitality of rural areas thereby improve the quality of life of rural populace (United States Development Agency 2010 & Iwhiwhu & Okorodudu, 2012). Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), an international not-for-profit organization dedicated to enabling access to knowledge through libraries

opined that through innovative use of technology, librarians can work with different sectors of the community to increase access to information, improve standards of living and transform lives and livelihoods.

On currency of materials, Texas State Library & Archives Commission (2012) gave many criteria which library materials must attain to be considered relevant to remain on library shelves. Among the criteria is the datedness of the material. Datedness refers to when the material was published and when it was added to the library collection. Texas State Library & Archive Commission advised that library materials especially those dealing on education matters, societal issues and sciences should be weeded within five years of publication.

Despite the work of the public libraries in various countries to enhance local development, Nigeria public libraries seems not to be doing much in that area. This has prompted Abel & Issa (n.d) to declare that public libraries in Nigeria have failed, and have come to a near-total absence of relevance to local communities. In defense of the public libraries, Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) opined that public libraries cannot function effectively, if it is not adequately provided for. This controversy makes it pertinent that the capacity of public libraries in discharging their expected duties should be studied. This is what this research sets out to do.

Purpose of the study

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the capacity of Public Libraries in South East Nigeria in enhancing rural development through information provision. Specifically, the study determined:

1. The human capacity available to public libraries for discharging their responsibilities.
2. The Information carrying materials available in public libraries.
3. The currency of information bearing materials in public libraries.
4. ICT Tools available to public libraries for efficient information dissemination.

The following research questions will guide this study.

1. What is the human resources capacity of public libraries for discharging their responsibilities?
2. What are the information carrying materials available in public libraries?
3. How current are information bearing materials in public libraries?
4. What are the ICT tools available to public libraries for efficient information dissemination?

Research Methodology

Research Design: The research design used in this study was descriptive survey design.

Area of Study: The area of the study is South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

The zone is made up of five states namely Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. There are five Public Libraries in the zone, one public library in each state.

Population of the study: The population of the study was made up of the (5) five public libraries within the south east geopolitical zone of Nigeria, These public libraries are; Abia State Library Board, Umuahia, Anambra State Library Board, Awka, Ebonyi State Library Board, Abakaliki, Enugu State Library Board, Enugu and Imo State Library Board, Owerri.

Instrument for data collection: The Instruments used for data collection were interview and observation checklist. The researchers developed interview and observation guide to enhance data gathering. The interview questions and observation guide were

developed by the researchers through review of literature based on the objectives of the study.

Data collection techniques. Interviews were held with the heads of libraries in their different offices. The interviews were guided by the interview guide prepared by the researchers. With the help of an assistant appointed by each head of library on request by the researchers, the researchers were able to look round the library and noted the resources available to each library.

Analysis of data: Data collected for the study were analyzed using content analysis. The collected data were sorted, coded, interpreted and transferred to percentages. The analyzed data were presented in tables.

Findings

Table 1: Professional librarians available in five public libraries in South East Zone of Nigeria.

s/n	Professional librarians	Expected no.	No. Available	% Available
1	State Director	5	1	20
2	Director	40	6	15
3	Deputy Director	80	7	8.75
4	Assistant Director	55	9	16
5	Principal Librarian	40	9	23
6	Senior Librarian	50	8	16
7	Librarians 1	145	6	4
8	Librarian 11	90	11	12
9	Chief Library Officer	70	20	28.5
10	Principal Library Officer	40	21	52.5
11	Senior Library Officer	55	11	20
12	Library Officer	160	9	17.7

Table 1 show that professional librarians available in public libraries in South East Geo-political Zone of Nigeria are below the expected number of the

establishment quota. Only one cadre (Principal Library Officer) has up to half (52.5%) of the establishment quota.

Table 2: Information bearing materials available in public Libraries in South East Geo-political Zone of Nigeria

s/n	Information Materials	Available	Not Available	% Available
1	Reference books	5	-	100
2	Books relating to school curriculum	5	-	100
3	Books not relating to school curriculum	5	-	100
4	General works	5	-	100
5	Journals	5	-	100
6	Newspapers	5	-	100
7	Magazines	5	-	100
8	E-books	2	3	40
9	E-journals	2	3	40
10	Audio Visual Materials	3	2	60
11	Government publication	5	-	100
12	Maps	4	1	80
13	Art Productions	2	3	40
14	Internet	2	3	40

Table 2 shows that information bearing materials like reference books, books relating to school curriculum, books not relating to school curriculum, general works, journals, newspapers and government publications are available in all (100%) public libraries in the South East. These are followed by Maps (80%)

which are available in four of the public libraries and audiovisual materials (60%) which are available in three public libraries. The least available material in public libraries in the South East are e-books, e-journals, Art product and Internet (40%) which are available in two libraries only.

Table 3: The currency of information bearing materials in public libraries in South East, Nigeria.

S/n	Information Materials	2014-2009	%	2008-2004	%	2003-1999	%	1998 and below	%
1	Reference books	1	20	-	-	1	20	3	60
2	Books relating to school curriculum	2	40	1	20	2	40	-	-
3	Books not relating to school curriculum	1	20	1	20	-	-	3	60
4	General works	2	40	-	-	-	-	3	60

5	Journals	3	60	-	-	1	20	1	20
6	Newspapers	5	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Magazines	2	40	1	20	2	40	-	-
8	E-books	2	40	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	E-journals	2	40	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	Audio Visual Materials	2	40	-	-	1	20	1	20
11	Government publication	5	100	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 3 shows the currency of materials in the libraries in South East Geo-political Zone of Nigeria. The most current materials common to all the libraries are newspapers and government documents (100%). These are published between 2009 and 2014. Three (60%) of the libraries have current journals while two libraries

(40%) have current books relating to school curriculum, general works, magazines, e-books, e-journals and audio-visual materials. One library (20%) has current reference books and books not relating to school curriculum. The other libraries have materials published in other years below 2009.

Table 4: ICT facilities available in Public Libraries in South East Geo-political Zone of Nigeria.

s/n	ICT facilities	Available	Not Available	% Avail.
1	Computers	5	-	100
2	VSAT Proxy Server	4	1	80
3	Satellite dish	2	3	40
4	Printers	5	-	100
5	Photocopiers	4	1	80
6	Projectors	2	3	40
7	Scanners	4	1	80
8	Mobile telephones	2	3	40
9	Internet connectivity	2	3	40
10	CD Players	2	3	40
11	CD-ROM	1	4	20
12	LAN (Local Area Network)	2	3	40
13	Wide Area Network (WAN)	2	3	40
14	Antenna Mast	-	5	-

Table 4 shows that ICT facilities available in all the public libraries in the South East are Computers and Printers. The table also shows that there are Vsat proxy server, photocopiers, scanners in four of the

libraries while there are satellite dishes, projectors, mobile phones, Wide Area Network and Local Area Network in two of the libraries.

Discussion of findings

Findings from the study revealed that professional staff needed to man the libraries and drive rural development in the communities are lacking. In none of the five public libraries are there up to half of the expected number of professional staff. This entails that services that need expertise are left in the hands of non-skilled workers. Creativity and innovation in such circumstance may be minimal as such unskilled staff has no capacity to initiate innovative programs. This finding is consistent with the findings of Glass & Krider (2000) in which it was observed that manpower was one of the greatest problems confronting libraries in Kansas, USA. Without adequate manpower, there is very little that can be done by the libraries.

The result of the study shows that information bearing materials like reference books, books relating to school curriculum, books not relating to school curriculum, general works, journals, newspapers and Magazine etc are available in all the libraries. Abolaji (2009) opined that information bearing materials in libraries should include reference books, books relating to school curriculum, books not relating to school curriculum, general works, journals etc. The author further stated that these materials enable libraries to play crucial roles in the success of lifelong education of communities and societies where they exist. According to IFLA/UNESCO (2001), public libraries can combat rural illiteracy by providing materials

in support of adult education programmes.

The result of the study further revealed that apart from Newspapers and Government document which are current in all the libraries, only two libraries have current materials (materials published in the last five years) in general works, Magazine, E-books, E-journals and Audio Visual Materials. Texas State Library and Archive Commission (2002) advised that library materials especially those dealing on education matters, societal issues and science should be weeded within five years of publication. It is unfortunate that only one library in the zone has current reference books and books not relating to the school curriculum. What this entails is that information given out from the other four libraries is stale information, which can do more harm than good. It is also unfortunate that books for pleasure reading (books not relating to the curriculum) which are very important in the development of people especially youths are lacking in the libraries. The availability of current government publication and newspapers in all the libraries may suggest that probably, the governments are using the libraries as a propaganda machinery to disseminate choice information.

The result of the study further revealed that internet connectivity in form of Wide Area Network and Local Area Network exist in only two libraries, this implies that the gains of internet communications which includes e-learning and virtual access

to information are limited in the South East. ICT equipment is important for public libraries to perform their duties optimally. Iwhiwhu & Okorodudu (2012) observed that for any public library to perform and meet the needs of the users, it is necessary for the library to embrace the use of ICT. Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), an international not-for-profit organization dedicated to enabling access to knowledge through libraries opined that through innovative use of technology, librarians can work with different sectors of the community to increase access to information, improve standards of living and transform lives and livelihoods. The absence of these will to a great extent hinder the development efforts in the zone.

Conclusion

Public Libraries in the South East Geopolitical zone of Nigeria are ill equipped to drive rural development in areas under their jurisdiction. The libraries lack professional staff, current materials on vital areas of information provision and relevant ICT equipment needed for effective transformation of the local communities. Without skilled personnel and relevant working materials, there is very little that the libraries can do to impact positively in their locales.

Recommendations

1. Government should provide current materials on vital areas of information provision to enable

the libraries carry out their responsibilities effectively.

2. There is need for employment of skilled personnel in the libraries. The government should therefore employ more qualified librarians to man the libraries and plan development projects for local communities.
3. Government should provide Internet Connectivity (Wide Area Network) for all public libraries in the zone to enable the libraries offer e-learning services to their clients. This will also ensure ubiquitous access to information.
4. Local communities should be encouraged to form self help organizations to enable them contribute to the development of their libraries and communities.

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