

**The Role of Library and Information Services in Achieving Sustainable Development:
Issues and Challenges**

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ABSTRACT: *The library serves as the nucleus of development and is crucial to achieving sustainable development objectives. That assertion is so because the information is the fundamental component that can be processed to produce meaningful development. In essence, information is a driver of growth and the characteristic that sets the world's industrialized economy apart from its developing counterparts. Information has been recognized as the fifth factor of production because it has a significant impact on how individuals decide to combine the four traditional factors of production. The difference between the developed World and the Third World economies was based on the availability and use of information for projection purposes. Several world developmental projections that have failed can be traced to the amount of information made available to achieve the objectives that were to be realized. Therefore, the challenges that libraries and librarians face were discussed and the library's role as a valuable information hub equipped to achieve the goals of sustainable development.*

KEYWORDS: information services; sustainable development; libraries; prospects and challenges

INTRODUCTION

Over time, libraries have come to be seen as the center of development (Ogunmodede 2019). The rationale is that without being linked to and traceable to libraries, there can be no meaningful development. The foundation of progress is the library. It is crucial to achieving the objectives of sustainable development. Yet, as a non-profit organization designated by the government, the library uses information as a resource to provide the goods and services that its clients require in order to fulfill development goals.

Information has been identified as ingredients for decision making (Ogunmodede, Apata and Nwokeoma (2016), and as catalyst for decision making and all round development (Ogunmodede, Nwokocha and Apata (2017). It is the only factor that categorizes and differentiates the world into developed and developing, rich and poor economies and advanced and less developed nations of the world. It is important to note that the availability and usage patterns of information for projection, rather than the years of creation, are often what distinguish the economies of the first and third worlds.

The library's sole purpose is to gather, organize, and disseminate knowledge that can be used to foster economic development across all economic sectors. Some of the world's economic projections that have failed at one time or the other can be traced to the dearth of information necessary for the actualization of such developmental projects (Abata-Ebire, Adebowale and Ojokuku, 2018). Ezema and Chizoba (2018) posit that, for crucial information needed for scholarship and research, provisions of different formats (print and electronic) rely solely on the part of the library. Therefore, the critical roles of libraries transcend all fields of study. Pareek and Gangrade (2016) maintained that over the years, global publications have increased exponentially, which has increased the roles libraries play in the management, organization, and accessibility of these publications. At the expiration of the target set for the realization of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in 2015, the leaders of 169 countries of the world came up with the 17 developmental framework known as Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) to find a lasting solution to the challenge of human development. The new target set in the SDGs is expected to run through 2015 – 2030.

The aim is to ensure that all countries of the world actively engage in making our world better. All development goals outlined in the SDGs are anticipated to be completed by the end of the year 2030. By the end of the year 2023, the world is already nine years into the set targets, by implication; there is just six years left to cross into 2030.

However, In the Yoruba parlance, just as a popular proverb that says 'the hours of sunlight remaining is still good enough to dry clothes' advocates not giving in to hopelessness. There is

still a lot that can be accomplished, before the year 2030. Therefore, it is crucial to consider how library and information science contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. Failing to do so will be equivalent to putting off dealing with the problem of brake failure until a moving vehicle is involved in an accident. In view of the foregoing, there is the need to act while the conditions are right.

Libraries, Librarians as “Gateway” to Sustainable Development Goals

Libraries and librarians the world over have been responsible for the creation, collection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge. In an actual sense, there is no institution ever acknowledged by man though with a multi-responsibility for the good of man as the Library (Gani, et al 2016).

Oyelude and Bamgbola (2012) aver that, libraries can play the role of gatekeepers of information through the avalanche of information resources in their custody. Boufarrs and Harviainen (2021) posit that librarians are to be referred to as “gate-openers” in open-access publishing. Librarians are trained to acquire process and disseminate information/knowledge. Though librarians are faced with the challenge of alternative sources of information, such as the Internet, have responded positively to the challenges by focusing on collections of materials that cannot be freely found online. In addition, Librarians have placed a greater emphasis on providing a space where not only information resources are kept, but people can interact with information for the societal building.

It should be noted that Sustainable Development Goals’ mission and vision are targeted at building all-inclusive development to transform the world, be it in the developing or the developed worlds. Librarians then have significant roles to play in the realization of SDGs, quoting the words of Henri Frederic as cited by Gani, Kasa, and Khali, (2016) “Everything you need for a better future and success has already been written. All that researchers, patrons and the society need to do is to access the valuable resources in the library”

Therefore, projecting sustainable development goals without making recourse to the library will make all efforts put in place to realize the objectives a colossal waste. This assertion was premised on the quote by Luis Herrera, which states that “*Libraries are more relevant than ever. They are a place for personal growth and reinvention, a place for help in navigating the information age, a gathering place for Civic and cultural engagement, and a trusted place for preserving culture*”. Libraries have been discovered as a place where you can find reliable information. This is a key strength of libraries in the eyes of societies. Librarians work hard to ensure that adequate information materials get into the hands of the library clientele to dissolve their queries and help them to make functional decisions.

There are 17 goals in the Sustainable Development Goals are urgently demanding action from all nations, both developed and developing. These goals include eradicating poverty in all of its forms

worldwide, achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture; guaranteeing healthy lifestyles and promoting wellbeing for all ages; promoting equitable quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning for all; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls; sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; and ensuring access to affordable, dependable, sustainable, and healthy products for all (United Nations, 2016).

The concern is how the United Nations can be planning the 2030 Agenda for SDGs without the input of libraries. Henri Frederic Amiel rightly stated that, "Everything you need for a better future and success (including achieving Sustainable Development Goals) has already been written... All you have to do is go to the Library."

Information Services and SDGs

Everywhere, having access to knowledge and information is a requirement for opportunity because it gives people the ability to make informed decisions that can improve their lives. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions IFLA (2018) asserts that communities with universal access to timely and pertinent information are better equipped to achieve the SDGs, including eradicating poverty and inequality, enhancing agriculture, providing high-quality education, and supporting people's health, culture, research, and innovation.

In addition, IFLA (2018) outlines a range of library and information products and services that can be provided to advance universal literacy, close information access gaps, establish a network of information delivery sites for public services, advance digital inclusion through access to ICTs, and safeguard and make the Internet of Things (IoT) accessible to all.

Information is also vital for development in rural areas and for empowerment and decision-making (Unagha and Ibenne, 2011). Seneviratne (2007) argues that in order for rural communities to grow, they require access to information for daily life and involvement in social activities. According to Harande (2009), the neglect of rural areas in terms of library and information services is directly related to the delayed or nonexistent growth of African countries. Any real, involved, thoughtful, and sensitive government wouldn't ignore supplying information to remote areas.

Bradley (2014) asserts that a well-informed society significantly contributes to the eradication of poverty and the development of the country and that the availability and accessibility of information resources and services would promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Information Services and the Library's Role

Library's role in achieving Sustainable Developmental Goals cannot be over-emphasized. Areas through which the library can make input are discussed hereunder:

Information repackaging to rural dwellers: In order to accomplish the SDGs for agriculture and nutrition, Omona (2020) reported that women make up more than 70% of the agricultural work force in Uganda. This group of people must have the skills to use libraries and information sciences effectively, as well as to obtain, analyze, and apply information to their production systems. It is observed that most of the information content for improved yields is packaged in the English language in the developing world, especially in Nigeria. The majority of farmers in rural areas do not speak this language.

There is a need for agricultural extension agents to partner with libraries, especially the academic, public and special libraries to repackage most of the information materials in local languages. When this is done, access and use will become easier and the SDGs on agriculture will be achieved. According to Omona (2020), the Maendeleo foundation and the Uganda Community Libraries Association (UgCLA) collaborated to help the farming communities in Uganda increase their income through the use of five rural libraries. With the assistance of specialists from Makerere University in Uganda, the collaboration with the libraries led to the translation of agricultural material into regional languages.

The library can also offer information services that can serve as sources of vital information on a variety of issues of interest in agriculture and nutrition by translating, interpreting, packing, and customizing information and knowledge to suit the needs of farmers and extension agents. Following this, it won't be too difficult to achieve the SDGs for agriculture.

Breeding readers' community: The library and information services play a crucial role in breeding a community of readers. Here are some of the ways in which they contribute:

Providing Access to Reading Materials: Libraries are a key source of books, magazines, newspapers, and other reading materials. They provide access to a wide range of materials, including those that are not easily available in bookstores or online. This helps to encourage reading among members of the community. The libraries play a critical role in providing access to reading materials for members of the community. This is important because access to reading materials is essential for encouraging reading and literacy. Libraries typically offer a wide range of books, magazines, newspapers, and other materials that can be borrowed by members of the community (American Library Association, 2018).

Libraries also provide access to materials that may not be easily available elsewhere, such as rare books, out-of-print titles, and specialized collections. In addition, libraries often have digital resources, including e-books, online databases, and audio books that can be accessed remotely. By providing access to a broad range of reading materials, libraries can help to cultivate a reading culture in the community. They can also help to promote literacy, education, and lifelong learning. Furthermore, libraries can be particularly important for people who do not have easy access to

books or who cannot afford to purchase reading materials. Overall, providing access to reading materials is a fundamental service that libraries offer to help breed a community of readers.

Promoting Reading Programs: Libraries organize various reading programs to encourage people to read. These programs may include book clubs, reading challenges, and other events that are designed to foster a love of reading. An example of reading programs organized by libraries is Summer Reading Programs. Many libraries organize summer reading programs for children and young adults. These programs encourage children to read during the summer months when they are out of school. Children can track their reading progress and earn prizes for reaching reading goals. A study conducted by the Dominican University Graduate School of Library and Information Science found that summer reading programs can help to prevent a decline in reading skills among children during the summer months (Allington, McGill-Franzen, Camilli, Williams, Graff, Zeig, & Zmach, 2010).

Offering Guidance and Support: Librarians are trained professionals who can offer guidance and support to readers. They can help readers to find books that match their interests and reading levels, and can also offer recommendations for new authors or genres.

Creating a Reading Culture: Libraries can help to create a culture of reading in the community by organizing events that celebrate reading, such as author talks, book signings, and literary festivals. These events can help to bring readers together and create a sense of community around reading.

Supporting Lifelong Learning: Libraries can support lifelong learning by providing access to information and resources on a wide range of topics. This can include books, articles, and other materials that can help readers to develop new skills and knowledge. Without mixing words, libraries and information services play a critical role in fostering a community of readers by providing access to reading materials, promoting reading programs, offering guidance and support, creating a reading culture, and supporting lifelong learning.

Digital divide gap bridging through information access

Education and competency of any nation rest on library and information services provided through programs such as introducing children to joyful reading habits. Users of libraries get the most from having access to reading resources, literacy programs, and non-formal educational activities. Through libraries, people of all social, economic, and cultural backgrounds can freely and equally access knowledge and ideas without restrictions. In addition to giving individuals access to a wide range of materials outside the classroom setting, they promote lifelong learning and functional literacy to help adults become responsible members of society. Online information sources from all sectors are also made accessible through the library.

According to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2019), everything in today's linked society, including healthcare, high-quality education, and job searching, is impacted by internet

connectivity. According to Petuchovaite (2019), public libraries play a crucial role in bridging the digital gap and providing support for society's members who are embracing the digital world in addition to managing the print resources in their collections.

Guaranteeing Visibility of Research: According to Gani, Kassa, and Khali (2016), librarians are skilled information seekers who may offer guidance for using unreliable publications and identify options that are typically underutilized. Librarians help to address communication gaps while also making research work widely visible. Although presenting the visible material of other works is attractive, librarians shouldn't impede the effort of close coordination and collaboration.

Preservation of cultural heritage: Due to their efforts to spread knowledge, the current global world has come to accept indigenous wisdom widely (Ebijuwa, 2015). Concerns about the need to protect and conserve it for the benefit of future generations have been greatly stoked by this. The need to produce, appropriately maintain, and spread indigenous knowledge across human society was addressed by IFLA in 2004. The group recommended that libraries and archives implement programs to collect, preserve, and disseminate indigenous knowledge; make information resources accessible; encourage learning and research about indigenous and traditional knowledge; and publicize the value, involvement, and relevance of indigenous knowledge and locally produced knowledge to both non-indigenous and indigenous peoples (IFLA, 2004).

Ebijuwa (2015) maintained that indigenous knowledge has a lot to offer in the quest for sustainable development. This is because it is the basis for local decision-making in agriculture, food preparation, healthcare, education, natural resource management and lots more. To achieve SDGs therefore, libraries and librarians must double their efforts in ensuring that this cultural heritage, rights and privileges do not go into extinction.

Additionally, according to Dada (2016), the libraries offer services that can help to achieve the SDGs' enhanced outcomes in the following ways: promoting media and information literacy as well as general literacy; reducing information access gaps and assisting industry, civil society, and the government in better comprehending regional information requirements; establishing a network of locations where government services and activities can be delivered; promoting digital inclusion through the availability of Information & Communications Technologies (ICT) and a committed workforce to assist individuals in acquiring new digital skills; acting as the nerve center of the academic and scientific community; protecting and facilitating access to the rich cultural heritage of the world and aiding in the implementation of the SDGs by facilitating access to information, promoting literacy and ICT skills.

Furthermore, libraries also engage in the following activities to support SDGs: UN Depository Libraries that encourage the sharing of knowledge and analysis to assist decision-makers in achieving the SDGs; access to information that is openly available and related to the SDGs' goals for health, the environment, and agriculture as well as roll out programs that promote media and

information literacy among underserved groups crucial for achieving universal literacy (Bradley, 2016).

Challenges facing Libraries towards Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

The crucial and important factor in sustainable development is funding. Funding is very critical to attaining the mission and vision of the organization. In libraries, most especially academic libraries, the parent institution is the main source of funding, though funds can also be realized through fees generated from the library users as well as donor agencies. It is to be noted however that the source of funding libraries has deteriorated over time. For example, in academic libraries, a 10% grant of the recurrent university budget for the university supposed to go to the development of the library. This is often appearing only on paper, but when it comes to practice, it is far from reality.

Irunebo, Nworie, Igbokwe, and Omorodion (2018) affirmed that, public universities have experienced a general reduction from the parent institution and the supporting agencies. It was observed that libraries have always been given low priority when it comes to funding allocation. Furthermore, according to Olurayi (2013), Nigerian libraries have been suffering from insufficient funding for a number of years and are unable to effectively achieve their goals. Irenea, Emilian, and Eru (2019) noted that a library's ability to provide essential services depends in great part on the amount of funding at its disposal and how it uses it creatively. Irenea, et al. (2019) further that libraries in Nigeria have seen a sharp fall in budgetary allocation and a considerable reduction in financing sources recently.

Opara (2008) lamented the state of funding of public libraries in Imo State, Nigeria, when he stated that, for a period of fourteen years, public libraries in Imo State, received no book funds from the provincial government. This is in contrast to the fulfillment of the key purpose of establishing any library. The purpose of establishing Libraries and Information centers is the provision of effective, efficient and quality service delivery to users with the aim of providing equitable access to information and satisfying the information needs of the library clientele and society in general.

Aside from inadequate funding, there are other challenges that are facing libraries regardless of type and location. Okere (2022), while assessing factors affecting Librarian's use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Federal Colleges of Education in Southwestern Nigeria lamented the non-availability of resources, materials management and administration, inadequate infrastructure, lack of software standardization and inadequate human capacity. Meeting up with the SDGs will be far-fetched if these challenges are not adequately addressed considering the role of information in the realization of the said objectives.

Information is a gateway to development but, it is disheartening to note that in this century, Library and Information Centers are still battling with challenges of erratic power supply, low bandwidth,

inadequate systems, poor welfare for library personnel, inadequate personnel, poor internet access, inadequate library facilities and infrastructure among others.

CONCLUSION

World leaders should start evaluating the success or failure of vision 2030 now, rather than waiting until 2030. According to an "autopsy" of the Millennium Development Goals, inadequate information availability constituted a significant barrier to the achievement of the MDGs. This paper, therefore, calls for adequate provision of information and library services to fulfill Vision 2030's development goals.

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