

LIBRARY SERVICES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA

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ABSTRACT

Information is the most valuable asset in the emerging world. Information has become one of the major driving forces that lead a country towards sustainable development. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has redefined the narrative especially in libraries and information centres across the globe. Traditionally, library services have been rendered near useless as some libraries had to shut down in order to protect her users from the risk of contracting the virus. The closure of the library could adversely affect the economy and general livelihood of the society. Thus, continuing the information services uninterruptedly is a matter of significance. The need to be more intentional and dynamic in rendering! Library services should form major focus for librarians. This is to ensure their sustained relevance in the post COVID-19 era. This paper therefore examines the various services the library can render in order to achieve the sustainable development goals after COVID-19 and the post COVID 19 new face of work in the library.

Keywords: Library Services, Sustainable Development Goals, Post COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction

Nigeria's vision 20:2020 was supposed to be achieved in the year 2020 considering the long-term development goals designed to propel the country to the league of the top 20 economies of the world by 2020. Attainment of this Vision would have enabled the country achieve a high

standard of living for its citizens. Unfortunately, the goal was not achieved by Nigeria due to the ravaging global pandemic (COVID 19) which broke out in December 2019 in Wuhan China that turned the world upside down. The COVID- 19 outbreak spread over more than 187 countries (WHO, 2020).

Most of these countries, territories and regions limited their services to prevent the further spread of the disease conditions. Nigeria too was not left out on March, 9, 2020, the Nigerian government in a proactive measure to curtail the spread of this virus declared national border closures, state of emergency in the health sector and restriction of movements in some states including Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Lagos and Ogun states for an initial period of 14 days. Other states of the federation also took cue; by initiating partial lock-downs with each closing their respective borders. During this period, businesses, markets, religious centres, schools and other public institutions and spaces were temporarily shut down. All forms of corporate, social and religious gatherings were prohibited, in order to maintain social distancing (Agusi, Ijoma, Nnochin, Njoku-Achu, Nwosu & Meseko, 2020). The Pandemic succeeded in locking down the economies of the world. People were forced to stay at home and work from home. Libraries which have a strong link with sustainable development were not left out, they too were shut to the public and librarians worked from home.

Olise (2010) described sustainable development as developing for the present and future. It is the process of ensuring that the present development is sustained and maintained for the future.

Sustainable development focuses on the need to build the nation through the process of improving the citizens' lives for the future. Adejumo and Adejumo, (2014) viewed sustainable development as efficient management of resources for human survival taking into consideration both the present and future generation. To achieve sustainable development in an information age, there is need for timely information that will lead to the right decision making and that will inform certain actions. Bradley (2014) in Adejumo and Adejumo (2014) affirmed that libraries contribute to sustainable development. The libraries provide access to data and knowledge that support informed research which is instrumental to achieving sustainable development goals.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has not only been a mass disruptor, but also a trigger that led people to think and act differently in their usual work. To fulfil the role and responsibility that the society requires at this moment of the post COVID- 19. Librarians should have a keen understanding of the prevailing situation, the pandemic, information about the

pathogen and the mode of transmission. This information will help them to provide better post-pandemic library services to their patrons and prevent the community from leading towards a second wave of the pandemic.

Libraries and Sustainable Development

Information is a vital tool for development and there is no nation that can experience developmental sustainability without continuous flow of relevant information. Libraries are majorly concerned with the acquisition, organization, preservation and dissemination of information to educate and enlighten the citizens. The development of any nation depends on provision of relevant, adequate and timely information on education, security, health etc. Access to such information are provided in various formats through the libraries. Library is a place where knowledge is created and shared. It is a storehouse where knowledge in various formats viz a viz print or electronic is preserved. There are different kinds of libraries which include academic, school, public, national and special library. The library, irrespective of its kind perform various roles. The primary role of the library is to provide information service to support the educational, recreational, cultural, economic and technological endeavours of members in their respective communities. It is no doubt that library is one of the organizations that can help the nation to achieve and sustain development. This is because the information provided will reduce the level of ignorance and help people to gain a better living.

Ezekwe and Muokebe (2012) observed that libraries with various resources are best heritages that humanity can claim to have. This signifies that any nation without libraries and information centers is not worth its development. Libraries also, cannot fulfil this obligation if it continues to rely on the traditional methods of disseminating information. Therefore, there is need for libraries to employ reliable and potential tools like internet and other information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support economic, social and political sustainability. (Adebayo, Ahmed & Adeniran, 2018).

Sustainable development is the process of transformation of a country's economic, social, political, educational, religious and cultural value towards improvement in human dignity and the general well-being of its citizens. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a global decision aimed at making the world a better place to live. Sustainable development is a programme that is developed to meet the needs of the present and also those of the future generation. According to Nicholas and Perpetual (2015), Sustainable development is the overall change and improvement in any given society as related to individual progress.

Sustainable development covers a wide range of interrelated issues in the areas of environmental, economic, social, and political, all within the limits of the world's natural resources to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by the year 2030. Furthermore, sustainable development is the development that provides a better quality of life for both the present and future generations (Shah, 2012).

The services provided by the libraries is geared towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The library is globally considered as a centre of research and a place of information empowerment whose roles and services can never be overemphasized, as the public benefit immensely from it. Libraries are institutions that are responsible for selection, ordering, acquisition, processing, storing, and preservation of resources in diverse formats that will be of benefit to users at the appropriate time. Similarly, Nichollas and Perpetual (2015) pointed libraries as information centres that acquire process, organize, store, retrieve and disseminate information to users for actualizing sustainable development.

Library Services and Sustainable Development in the Post Covid-19 Era

Sustainable Development in the post COVID-19 era is a laborious task before every country. International organizations, institutions, leaders of nations and different policy makers are seriously thinking about post COVID-19 rebuilding of nations. Corona virus shook the entire areas of development of countries. It greatly affected the economic, social, educational, health and political stability of every country. The United Nations described it as the biggest test since its inception. Libraries play a considerable role in all fields of human developmental activities. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19, the users of the libraries could not reach the libraries and use the collection. So the huge collections of documents were underutilized. The library staff also could not render quality services. Many libraries had to introduce digital and online library services. Attempts were made to bring library services to users through different technologies of social media (Tammaro, 2020).

Libraries are supposed to be involved in the work of helping each other understand their goals and objectives to enable the dissemination of knowledge to achieve sustainable development goals. Libraries are social organizations that adhere to the motto 'Right information to the right users at right time with least cost.

It serves all sections of the people as an information dissemination center and as a public space. No wonder the father of librarianship Dr R.S. Ranganathan formulated the “Five Laws of Library Science” in 1931, which are:

1. Books are for use
2. Every reader his [or her] book
3. Every book its reader
4. Save the time of the User
5. The library is a growing organism.

Based on these five laws, the library as an information system and a social organization can wake up and work in this post COVID-19 era, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in a very powerful way. According to Prakasan (2020), these goals and the role the library can play in achieving them are as follows:

Poverty: Poverty in a country can only be eradicated with the help of various agencies. A situation can only be resolved if the authorities, the administration and the people consciously intervene. Many institutions have come forward to raise awareness of this state of affairs in the country at all times Libraries are one of the most important institutions. Libraries have books, journals, periodicals, statistics and other up-to-date information that must be brought to the attention of the authorities first and foremost in the post COVID-19 period. Libraries can play a major role in bridging the gap between the rich and the poor and creating an egalitarian social environment. Literacy activities, access to rights for the poor, employment assistance and educational assistance will all contribute to the goal of poverty alleviation. Similarly, the important task undertaken during this period is to formulate and implement information literacy activities to educate the citizens about poverty alleviation schemes and to make them aware of their rights.

Zero Hunger: One of the areas that need to be taken care of in order to create a hunger- free society is agriculture. Many reforms need to be planned and implemented in the post COVID-19 agriculture sector. To create awareness among the people about various schemes in the field of agriculture, agricultural subsidy, various projects in the agricultural sector, libraries should use their resources to eradicate extreme hunger and ensure proper functioning of food commodity by creating awareness and providing an enabling environment where information on sustainable agricultural practices in all its form can be accessed and used.

Good Health and Well-being: The corona virus that shook the world is now going to be a part of our lives. All we have to do now is fight the corona pandemic and live with the corona virus. Therefore, fundamental changes need to be made in the post COVID- 19 health sector. We need to pursue some new habits that were not part of our lives. Wearing nose masks, using hand sanitizers and gloves is becoming a habit. The library should take the responsibility of conducting information literacy programs, follow-up training programs and health discussions to create awareness about such new habits.

Quality Education: Education can enhance innovation, increase productivity and ultimately provide benefits such as improved economic conditions. Education faced a major crisis during the COVID 19 period. It was a situation where children and teachers could not reach the schools and engage in physical learning and teaching activities. However, libraries have made great strides in delivering electronic information to users through online technologies. If such services are carried out more efficiently in the post COVID-19 period, it will be of great benefit to the users. Today a variety of information sources in various formats like audio, video, multimedia, E-books, e-journals, e-theses, video classes, records and online databases of all subjects are available on the Internet. Libraries also have the responsibility to collect these and deliver them to the library users. To promote this, libraries can implement information literacy, digital literacy, and orientation programs to reach out to the public through websites, blogs and other social media platforms.

Gender Equality: Equality and empowerment of women have a significant impact on sustainable growth and holistic development. The COVID 19 crisis is an issue that seriously affected everyone but it was women and children who were the victims. Therefore, an action plan based on gender equality should be formulated considering such categories. For that, libraries as a public space need to become centers of gender equality. Library services, library systems, etc. need to be redesigned to promote the empowerment of women.

Clean Water and Sanitation: Clean water and hygiene are essential to prevent the spread of the disease, which is transmitted by the corona virus. Library and information centres should facilitate access to hygiene- related information through raising awareness, campaigns, and symposiums Also, they should support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.

Affordable and Clean Energy: Energy. Availability is critical to achieving all sustainable development goals, from poverty alleviation to advancing health, education, water supply and

industrialization to tackling climate change. Libraries should pay attention to the following matters in order to achieve these goals in the post COVID-19 era: Reduce energy consumption, significant utilization in energy supply, adjust the interior of the library to allow for adequate sunlight and make adjustments to avoid environmental damage.

Decent Work and Economic Growth: This is an important area to be ensured after COVID-19. Libraries should provide education and training for both the young and old to make sure that they have access to information in an affordable way. It is also their responsibility to make sure that people find jobs through their public library by having access to ICT and skills that will enable them to apply for jobs, as the application process for all jobs have moved online (Abata-Ebire, Adebawale & Ojokuku, 2018). Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure: Industrial growth and infrastructure development is essential to overcome the post COVID-19 situation. Innovative and creative ideas for progress should be brought forward. Students, youth and the general public must come forward to overcome this situation. Libraries can enable them to do this. Debates, discussions and seminars should be organized on industrial, potential and infrastructure development.

Reducing Inequality: Inequality is rooted in a variety of factors, including environmental degradation, poverty, persistent unemployment, conflict, violence, and political instability, as well as structural issues such as poor representation. Discrimination, and the lack of adequate wages, and social and monetary policies. This is a major problem facing countries post COVID-19. Libraries can play a big role in meeting this challenge; arrange library services in a way that is accessible to all citizens. Libraries can take on the task of strengthening the mobile library system, bringing online services to all, launching and implementing information literacy programs, organizing activities to inculcate the idea of equality in the human mind, delivering library services in backward areas etc.

Sustainable Cities and Communities: COVID-19 had a huge impact on all the densely populated cities. Therefore, sustainable development is possible only by addressing the problems faced by cities and urban dwellers. Libraries have a lot to do in this area. Many important libraries are located in cities. Due to COVID-19, the operations of these libraries were stagnated. Their functions should be restored. In addition, heritage libraries and museums should be restored.

Responsible Consumption and Production: This not only achieves the goal of sustainable development but also leads to better economic competitiveness and poverty alleviation. Given

population growth and improved living conditions in developing countries, personal growth and purchasing power are increasing the pressure on already regulated natural resources. Governments and nations have an important responsibility to keep our land clean, hygienic and free from environmental problems. This epidemic continues to challenge even our natural habitat. Therefore, conscious interventions like conducting debates, seminars, exhibitions and other awareness programs to create awareness among the people, etc. are needed to overcome these problems. Libraries are responsible for conducting discussions, seminars, exhibitions and other awareness programs to raise awareness among the people and to provide them with up-to-date information as projects and studies emerge against deforestation. Pollution, unsustainable construction and land exploitation.

Climate Action: When epidemics appear, they are accompanied by problems such as climate change, which can cause serious human problems. Therefore, strong library services can be done against it by addressing the factors that may be contributing to climate change.

Life Below Water: Libraries and information centres should provide scientific information on preservation and conservation techniques that can sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Life on Land: Sustainable development aims at the survival of other species as well as humans. The threats from man and nature to land can be safeguarded by libraries in this Post COVID-19 period through educating people with the skill set on the management of forest, land and ecosystem; its degradation and recovery.

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: To promote peaceful and integrated communities for sustainable development, to bring justice to all and to build effective, responsible and inclusive institutions at all is essential if sustainable development is to be possible. An atmosphere of peace can only be created if there are strong governments to implement it. Libraries can also do a lot during this period. Libraries should take on the responsibility of promoting discussions and seminars focusing on cultural heroes and their writings as well as political leaders and their activities and individuals, and educating citizens on reconstruction.

Partnership for the Goals: Another important goal is to achieve sustainable development through partnership. Mutual cooperation and partnership are essential if any progressive goals are to be achieved. Progress can only be achieved if there is this cooperation between institutions, between states, between countries and between individuals. In this vein, Libraries

can build a mutual cooperation between themselves to exchange information and collection. Similarly, Uhegbu and Igwe (2006) in Abata-Ebire, Adebowale and Ojokuku, (2018) asserts that librarians, whether in school, university, public or in special libraries have a greater responsibility in the development of a global partnership for development by acquiring, Packaging. Organizing and disseminating knowledge and experience to Nigerians.

Library Services Post Covid-19: The New Face of Work

As work resumes after the COVID-19, the working hours of some libraries have been reduced. It is also obvious that social and physical distancing has come to stay everyone wears a nose mask and is careful not to be infected. This has the effect of eroding the camaraderie between library staff and its users. The emphasis now is on minimizing physical contact. Momah (2020). Fernando and Jayasekera (2020) suggested the following measures to put in place to be able to thrive at work during this post COVID-19 era:

- First and foremost, the Library must be fumigated regularly.
- Automated handwashing systems and liquid soap dispensers should be installed at the entrance of the Library to enable regular washing of hands.
- Automated sanitizer dispensers should be mounted in specific contact points across the Library to enable people to easily and frequently sanitize their hands.
- Installation of automated temperature gauges in which Library staff and users will be mandated to use to gauge their temperature before entering the Library. Anyone whose temperature level exceeds 37 degrees Celsius will not be allowed into the Library.
- Installation of sensor doors that automatically open as soon as anyone approaches it. This would go a long way in curbing the spread of germs that come from frequent contact with door handles.
- All Library staff and users must wear a nose mask (even though they have a shield on) throughout their stay in the Library. To reduce personal contact between members of staff. Hours spent in the office can be cut down and staff can be placed on shift. Some may work on the premises while the rest from home.
- The Library clerks would be made to wear disposable protective gloves when retrieving materials from the shelves and shelving books.
- All books will be wiped with alcohol- based sanitizers before being given out to users. Books returned to the Library would be left out in the sun for a while before being brought into the Library, since the novel coronavirus cannot survive under heat. Also, the daily

Newspapers and magazines would also be subjected to the same treatment before they are brought into the Library.

- The Library cleaners would be tasked with constantly wiping tables, chairs, shelves and racks with sanitizing materials. Library equipment e.g. computers, keyboards, fans, scanners, photocopying machines etc. would also not be left out.
- Reduction of the number of people that will be allowed into the Library at a given time.
- The post COVID-19 era is an era where Digitalization would be at the forefront. Library Services has to be taken to the Clientele's doorstep more often. Library collection should be digitalized and made accessible to the users either for free or a fee be attached. Subsequently, there should be more acquisition of digital books so as to build up the Library's digital collection.
- There should be steady power supply in order to deliver effective online library services. This would necessitate the provision of strong inverters to support the epileptic power supply.
- The users who are not able to come in can send an email, or contact the Library via its chat services on the Library's Facebook page or even have a virtual meeting with the Librarian (e- reference services).
- Librarians should be provided with more training opportunities on the use of various technologies and new media to deliver effective library services to users.
- There is need for libraries to forge partnerships so as to form online sharing networks that agree to share local as well as international information using Information Communication Technology (ICT).
- With so much digital information, the Library must make sure that its collection is well backed up and all the necessary anti-virus packages are promptly renewed when they expire so that the data is not wiped out.

Above all educating and re-educating the staff on COVID-19 and the need to take preventative measures must constantly be done. Medical personnel can be called in to give such talks, from time to time. In addition to that, a committee that will monitor staff compliance to set rules should be established. They should also be on guard and be able to quickly spot any staff that is sick and ensure that he or she observes self-isolation and gets adequate medical attention (Momah, 2020).

Conclusion

The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected the social, economic, cultural, educational and healthcare sectors in the world. Hence, the library as a fundamental institution in the actualization of the sustainable development goals should adopt the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in rendering their services. Library and information systems should also take on new responsibilities in this post COVID-19 era in order to achieve sustainable development.

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