

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES FOR THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN SELECTED STATES OF NORTHERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study focused on the Role of Public Libraries in the Provision of Information Resources and Services for Gender Equality in Selected States of Northern Nigeria. The study was guided by the objectives, which sought to find out the programmes libraries organize, the avenues used in the provision of information services as well as the challenges faced in the organization of programmes to empower women and girls for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria. Case study research method was used in this study. The population of this study consisted of all 130 heads of public libraries in northern states of Nigeria out of which ten (10) were selected as sample. The libraries were purposely selected because they were found to be engaged in organizing some programmes for the improvement of gender equality as well as the proximity of the states to the researcher. The instrument used for data collection was structured interview, where closed ended questions were used. It was found out among others that the libraries organized programmes such as skill acquisition, where women were taught how to make and market beads, snacks, oil, shampoo, air fresheners, soap, tie and dye, Dettol and other cosmetics; personal hygiene; debates; special classes to girls in junior secondary schools; maternal and child health and home management in order to improve gender equality. It was concluded that public libraries are important institutions through which the lives of women are improved, leading to the attainment of gender equality in northern states of Nigeria. It was recommended among others that public libraries should continue to organize variety of programmes on regular basis in order to improve gender equality in northern states of Nigeria.

Key words: Public Libraries, Information Resources, Services, Gender Equality

Introduction

Women and girls in Nigeria face daily gender- based challenges that include poverty, unemployment, under education, sexual assault, human trafficking, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and Vesico Viginal Fistula (VVF), among others. Most of these violations, according to Adebawale (2020), are largely unreported for fear of stigmatization, shame and impunity.’ Many women are ignorant about their basic rights, which make it impossible to fight for of their rights.

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours and attributes assigned to women, men, girls and boys. Gender does not imply that women and men are the same, but that their interests, needs and priorities should be valued equally and accorded equal treatment. Gender defines masculinity and femininity. The society decides that a person must behave in certain ways and carry out certain tasks; this process of assignation creates gender.

Gender roles are socially learnt, differ among cultures and change over time. According to NILS (2015), gender equality ensures that equal opportunities and access exist for men and women. The phrase gender equality does not refer to the men or women being equal but that their access to and fulfillment of their rights, access to opportunities and participation are independent of their sex or the opportunities and participation are independent of their sex or the socially ascribed

interpretation (gender) of their being as man or woman. Gender inequality causes many women to experience significant disadvantages.

Gender equality is primarily a human right. It refers to equal valuing of the roles of women and men. It does not imply that women and men are the same, but that their interests, needs and priorities should be valued equally and accorded equal treatment. It works to overcome the barriers of stereotypes and prejudices so that both sexes are able to equally contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural and political developments within a society

Public libraries have critical roles in creating and supporting environment that enables everyone, including girls and women in their communities to achieve optimal use of information and services provided. They are centers where people acquire the needed knowledge to reduce ignorance. The knowledge that women and girls can acquire from libraries can make them well informed and aware of their rights, which in turn empower them to contribute meaningfully to national development. In his study, Atuase (2018) revealed that the rich and diverse information resources and professional services provision offered by public libraries position them to provide the right information resources and services as well as educating and training women and girls on gender-based related issues so that they can realize their potentials.

It is essential to consider women and girls' needs when developing a policy on library and information services delivery, acknowledging the different strategies necessary for them. By empowering women and girls with equal access to relevant and useful information resources and services, libraries and information centers, especially public libraries can assist tremendously in addressing gender related issues and promote gender equality.

Statement of the Problem

Public libraries are important institutions for human development in the society. They engage in the acquisition, processing, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information to the people in the society irrespective of religion, gender, age, ethnicity, status, occupation, level of education among other social characteristics. They disseminate information through different ways, which include current awareness service, literacy campaign, selective dissemination of information, programmes on gender-based issues, skill acquisition teaching among others. The roles played by women in the society cannot be over-emphasised. These roles range from child upbringing, food preparation, home sanitation, financial support to the husbands in some cases, to mention but few. Relevant information and services are needed in order to carry out these activities effectively, which public institutions provide. However, do Nigerian public libraries offer special services targeted at women and girls? In consideration of the educational backwardness and high rate of female illiteracy in northern states of Nigeria, the researcher investigated the services provided by public libraries in the promotion of gender equality in selected states in Northern Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised:

1. What programmes do public libraries organize for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria?
2. What avenues are used by public libraries in the provision of information services for the improvement of gender equality by in selected states of Northern Nigeria?
3. What challenges do public libraries face in organizing programmes for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided this study:

1. To find out the programmes public libraries organize for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria.
2. To find out the avenues used by public libraries in the provision of information services for the improvement of gender equality by in selected states of Northern Nigeria.
3. To find out the challenges public libraries face in organizing programmes for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria.

Literature Review

Rights of Women and Girls

Many international organizations have recognized women and girls as central to well-being of every society. In recognition of this, the last decade has witnessed increased efforts by government and other organizations at international, regional and national levels to incorporate gender perspective in their functions and development plans in order to promote gender equality and empower women. For instance, the declaration of 1978 by the United Nations as the International Year of Women and the Beijing Declaration of 1991 are positive steps towards the emancipation of women globally. These international concerns and programmes of action show the importance of women to national development. In fact, one of the seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Global Goals is Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, is one of the goals that make up the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGF, 2020)

According to UN Women (1995), every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation better, they should participate equally with men to have their perspectives effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making, from private to public spheres of their lives, from local to global level. The UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, recognizing this key condition for women's empowerment, which in turn is required for democratic governance, identified as one of the twelve critical areas of concern in its Beijing Platform of Action (BPA), Women in Power and Decision-Making. For this concern, the platform recommends two strategies: First, "Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making" and second, "increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership." Both strategies are proposed to be addressed by "governments, national bodies, the private sectors, political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations, research and academic institutions, sub-regional and regional bodies, and non-governmental and international organizations

The main strategy recommended by the Beijing Platform of Action that was endorsed by the UN member states in the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women has to be consistently linked to the goals of gender equality and equity embodied in the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Miranda, 2005).

IFLA (2017) stated that certain groups of people tend to be consistently marginalized; these people include persons with disabilities, out-of-school youth (children at risk of living and working on the streets), girls and women (especially in traditional patriarchal societies), ethnic minorities and refugees. It further pointed out that, because efforts have not understood the key principles of need, access, experience and use, they have failed to provide the intended outcomes. It further cautioned that the presence of a library, either real or virtual, does not necessarily mean that it will benefit the marginalized and reduce inequalities. If people do not know how to access a library, they

cannot benefit from its contents, if they cannot read the text, they are unable to learn from it; if there is nothing relevant to their needs, they will not be empowered

No wonder, UNESCO has, for a long time, played a strong role in advocating that more support should be given to the creation of knowledge societies in which all citizens are able to access and use the information that they require to live fulfilled lives (UNESCO, 2005). Knowledge societies, according to UNESCO, means societies in which people have the capabilities not just to acquire information but also to transform it into knowledge and understanding which empowers them to enhance their livelihood. A report by Lederer (2020) in THE TIME online, UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres warned that inequality for women is growing and it “should shame us all in the 21st century because it is not only acceptable, it is stupid” and that gender inequality is “one overwhelming injustice across the globe- an abuse that is crying out for attention.” He further pointed to violence against women “at epidemic levels, with more than one in three women experiencing violence in their lifetimes, and legal protections against rape and domestic violence being diluted or rolled back.” He asserted that “gender equality is a question of power- power that has been jealously guarded by millennia; we must urgently transform and redistribute power, if we want to safeguard our future and our planet.”

Legal and Human Rights of Women and Girls in Nigeria

International Women’s Day (IWD) is a focal point in the movement for women’s right. The theme for the IWD 2020 is ‘I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Right’. The occasion also coincided with the 25 years post Beijing Platform for action adopted in 1995. Addressing journalists, as part of the activities to mark this year’s celebration, the Director General, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) called on Nigerian Government to address the systematic barriers plaguing women’s right in the country, which, according to her, will ensure the desired progress of achieving Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals that seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. She therefore stressed that the right approach should be adopted to empower women and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Adebowale, 2020). Women and girls’ rights are human rights. They cover every aspect of life; they are entitled to full and equal enjoyment of all their human rights and to be free from all forms of discrimination. In ensuring that equal opportunity for women and girls exists, the legal institutions in Nigeria, government and non-governmental organizations, have also established initiatives and put in place measures to help girls and women in the promotion and protection of human rights. Some of the measures are highlighted below:

- The National Policy on Women of 2000 launched specific guidelines for promoting gender equality in all sectors of the economy. The policy is being revised into a National Gender Policy in order to reflect the new shift towards gender and development.
- Microcredit provided by community banks and a National Poverty Eradication Programme, which is accessible to about 27 percent of women.
- Establishment of the Female Functional Literacy for Health and Poverty Alleviation Project (FFLH) to provide literacy and health education to rural women and income-generation health education, functional literacy and income-generating activities for women in the rural areas. This project by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development (FMWAYD), the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have been replicated in 22 states of the Federation.
- Provision of loans at low interest rates and waivers of collateral for women seeking credit facilities. 27 percent of women have benefited.

- Establishment of skills acquisition centers throughout the states of the Federation.
- * Pilot projects on modern bee farming in 10 states by FMWAYD in collaboration with the International First Aid Society (IFAS).
- Establishment of Women Development Centers in all the local government areas for training in skills acquisition, mass literacy and adult education programmes targeted at rural women.
- Provision of extension services in rural communities by federal and state ministries to improve agricultural yields and increase their technical proficiency.
- The government has set aside US\$3 846 154 specifically for women involved in agricultural production and processing. In addition, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) programmes at the federal, state and local levels have special provisions for women in terms of employment and poverty reduction.
- The Offices of the Public Defender (OPD) in Ekiti and Lagos offer free legal services to underprivileged women whose rights are threatened or have been infringed.
- The National Centre for Women Development, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, commenced a project in 2003 aimed at compiling discriminatory and customary laws. – on the status of women in various areas, such as property rights, including land tenure; access to credit; education; participation in politics; marriage; succession; and maintenance and custody of children, among others.

Similarly, various sections of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provide for the rights of women as follows:

Prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex and ensure that men and women have equal access to the courts in matters of contracts, torts and all civil matters; equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law; the right to land, housing and property which declares that “the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that suitable and adequate shelters are provided for all citizens” ; the right to acquire property and guarantees every citizen the right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in the country; women shall have equal rights as men with respect to employment opportunities, choice of professions, promotion and remuneration; Nigerian men can have their non-Nigerian wives acquire citizenship through registration, but the same is not the case for non-Nigerian husbands married to Nigerian; a married woman, but not a married man, who avails herself of this Subsection as being of full age. This implies that a girl married at age 12 shall be treated as an adult. Similarly, in various sections of the acts, the system of marriage laws, which includes customary, Islamic and statutory marriage, has resulted in a plurality of legal provisions and precedents regarding property rights and inheritance in the event of divorce and death under: Married Women’s Property Act of 1882; Marriage Act of 1990, Chapter 218 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria; Matrimonial Causes Act of 1970.

Statistics on Gender-Based Issues

Statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2016) stated that about half of the population of Nigeria is women with right to vote and hold offices in almost all states of the Federation. Forty nine percent (49.4 %) are female (Country Meters, 2020). However, the NBS (2016) hinted that women continued to be under represented at the national, state and local government levels. Among high-ranking government administrators with decision- making powers, women were equally under-represented. The NBS (2016) further reported that physical and sexual violence against women affects mostly females between the ages of 20-24 years. In the

absence of new data, available data stated that between 2008 and 2013, 89.9 % on the average of women and girls in the ages of 15-19 years experienced genital cutting at the ages of under 5 years.

In 2015, more females were trafficked in the period 2015-2020 with the proportion of female trafficked for prostitution as high as 70.8% persons were in the ages between 18-27 years. Pointing out the high number on human trafficking in Nigeria, on February 2nd, 2020, a report by Channel Television (2020) lamented that over 20,000 women and girls are sex slaves abroad

Despite progress in opening new doors of opportunities to empower women and girls, they continue to be under represented in major decision-making and are still lagging behind in participation in governance. Borno State chapter, according to Okoye, 2020, has decried poor inclusion of women in governance in Borno and other northeastern states (Okoye, 2020). Similarly, UN Women (2019) stated that Nigeria has the lowest proportion of female representation in the parliament in Africa. Increased women participation in decision making especially those that affect women and children are key to tackling major global challenges. Other challenges that are gender-based include violence in its various forms, such as domestic violence, violence against minors, early marriages, child abuse, sexual harassment, health issues, female genital mutilations, etc.

From the above-mentioned statistics, it is evident that gender-based issues pertaining to women and girls are prevalent and have continued to hinder the attainment of the desirable equality in women's life in Nigeria.

Role of Libraries in Achieving Gender Equality

Access to information enables people to make informed decisions that can improve their lives. Libraries are seen as vital community hubs, bringing people together and giving them access to the services and support they need to live better lives (LGA, 2017). More than ever before, it is now essential for librarians to play a pivotal role and work as agents of change by driving a campaign to address gender-related issues, especially those that affect women and girls.

Public libraries are trusted institutions, free to enter and open to all. According to LGA (2017), "Libraries change lives for the better. Libraries do not only provide access to books and other literature but also help people to help themselves and improve their opportunities, bring people together, and provide practical support and guidance. As locally accountable service institutions, they are well-placed to respond to local needs and issues to live better lives." The joint leadership for libraries identified the following seven outcomes that libraries contribute to in their communities:

1. Cultural and creative enrichment
2. Increase reading and literacy
3. Improved digital access and literacy
4. Helping everyone achieve their potentials
5. Healthier and happier lives
6. Greater prosperity
7. Stronger, more resilient communities

In the same vein, American Democratic Project (ADP, 2011) opined that, in order to ensure an informed citizenry and encourage citizenship, the under listed library, programmes are essential:

- Libraries ensure civic literacy- libraries help users to identify, evaluate and utilize information for critical thinking and necessary to make choices essential to one's livelihood.
- Provide real and virtual spaces where people can gather to solve pressing problems.

- Libraries can play critical role in kindling civic spirit by providing not only information but also expanded opportunities for dialogue and deliberation as a practice ground for democracy.
- Provide safe spaces or commons, where people can discuss issues and practice deliberative democracy. Others provide safe spaces, or commons, where students can discuss issues in a non- confrontational, non-partisan, and deliberative manner.
- Generally, libraries provide access to a greater breadth and depth of services and support and operating as a gateway to physical and digital information from public health to adult learning, school readiness to employment, and a broad range of business and cultural services to their communities. Libraries are places where democracy, freedom and equality are not only respected but also celebrated. Through their activities, libraries offer significant reach into communities and a cost-effective way of ensuring that local people are connected to the services they need and when they need them regardless of age, race, tribe, gender or socio-economic status.

More specifically, some libraries offer services that support gender equality by providing safe meeting spaces, programmes for women and girls on rights and health, and ICT and literacy programmes support to women to build their entrepreneurial skills. At the international level, a typical example of a library that provides such practical support and services that meet the specific needs of their local women and girls is that of the National Library of Uganda. Christopher (2017) explained that the National Library has an ICT training programme designed for female farmers, providing access in local languages to weather forecasts, crop prices, and support to set up online markets. This programme increases the economic well-being of women through technology skill. The Library has a programme known as NPAL READ's (Rural Education and Development), an information and resource center capacity-building initiative that helps women and girls to gain insights and take control of their own lives. The empowerment programme includes seminars and workshops on women's rights, gender equality, health, violence against women and other issues. The Library encourages women to sign up for the women's group, which meets once in a month in a separate section of the Library where its members feel free to speak their minds. Some of the practical courses conducted by the Library include literacy and numeracy, English language, ICT, entrepreneurship skills and hands-on classes in making goods for sale. READ Centers across the country also offer training programmes in life skills, health, digital literacy and technology.

Research Methodology

Case study research method was used in this study. According to Hassan (2013), all individuals or objects within a certain population usually have a common, binding characteristics or traits. The population of this study consisted of all public libraries in northern Nigeria. According to Rajendran and Ladan (2020), there are 122 local public libraries in Nigeria. Similarly, according to Okojie and Okiy (2019) there are about 18 National Library branches in Northern Nigeria. The total number of public libraries in northern Nigeria is about 130. There are no specific rules for the determination of sample size in quantitative research. Ten (10) heads of public libraries in selected states in the region, which was through purposive sampling. These included: The City Library, Abuja; National Library of Nigeria, Abuja; Kano State Library Board; Kano Public Library; National Library Minna branch, Niger State (Dr. Abubakar Imam Library Complex); Sokoto State Library Board; Katsina State Public Library; National Library Katsina State Branch; Niger State Public Library, Minna; and Kaduna State Library Board(Murtala Mohammed Library Board). These libraries were purposely selected because of convenience and easy to access the librarians

and were found to be engaged in organizing various programmes for the improvement of gender equality as well as the proximity of the states to the researcher. The instrument used in data collection was structured interview. Phone interviews were conducted with all the librarians, where closed ended questions were used.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the data collected and analysis of results. The data was collected in line with the objectives of this study. Thematic analysis was used in reducing the data leading to the findings of the study presented below.

1. Programmes organized by public libraries to empower women for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria

Table 1: Programmes for Gender Equality Offered in the Studied Libraries

	Name of library	Programmes offered			
		Skill Acquisition	Debate	Health Talks	Special class /literacy for girls
1	City Library, Abuja	✓		✓	✓
2	National Library of Nigeria, Abuja	✓		✓	
3	Kano State Library Board (Murtala Mohammed Library Board)	✓	✓	✓	
4	National Library, Minna Branch, Niger State				
5	Niger State Public Library, Minna (Dr. Abubakar Iman Library Complex)	✓			
6	Sokoto State Library Board				
7	Katsina State Public Library	✓		✓	✓
8	National Library, Kastina State Branch	✓		✓	✓
9	Kaduna State Library Board	✓			✓
10	Kano Public Library				

Table 1 shows that 7 of the studied library organize skill acquisition programmes for women. Asked further the content of the skill acquisition programmes, the respondents reported that women were taught how to make and market beads, tying of “gele”, make up, snacks such as “puf-puf”, oil, shampoo, air fresheners, soaps, tie and dye, Dettol and other cosmetics. Five (5) libraries organise health talks such as personal hygiene, maternity and child care and home

management; 1 library organise debates; 4 libraries organise literacy/ special classes to girls in junior secondary schools

2. Avenues used in the provision of information services to empower women for the improvement of gender equality by public libraries in selected states of Northern Nigeria

The participants were asked about the avenues used in the provision of information services for the improvement of gender equality by public libraries in selected states of Northern Nigeria. They indicated that the libraries organized debate, lectures on entrepreneurship programmes, partnership with other organisations that enlighten people for their development. For example, the City Library, Abuja partner with Soroptimist Association, Asokoro Branch for a readership programme with the theme “Literacy and multilingualism”. The reading session was conducted in English, Hausa, Pidgin, Igbo, and Gbabi languages. (FCT Library Report, 2019). Similarly, some libraries invite experts to talk to women. For instance, the National Library Branch in Katsina invited health experts like Doctor Halima Adamu to talk about breast-feeding and nutrition. The Library also collaborated with the nurses of Turai Maternity Hospital for health care counseling to women. In addition, there was a similar collaborative programme with the School of Nursing Reading Club organized to encourage women to read to their unborn children. Furthermore, Women Political Leaders are encouraged to assist in inviting women in the community to participate in these programs.

3. Challenges public libraries face in organizing programmes to empower women for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria

Table 2: Challenges Facing Public Libraries in Organizing Programmes to Empower Women and Girls

	Name of library	Challenges			
		Inadequate fund	Lack of space	Poor attitude	Lack of policy
1	City Library, Abuja				
2	National Library of Nigeria, Abuja	✓		✓	✓
3	Kano State Library Board (Murtala Mohammed Library Board)	✓			
4	National Library, Minna Branch, Niger State	✓			✓
5	Niger State Public Library, Minna (Dr. Abubakar Iman Library Complex)				
6	Sokoto State Library Board	✓		✓	
7	Katsina State Public Library	✓	✓		
8	National Library, Katsina State Branch				
9	Kaduna State Library Board	✓		✓	

10	Kano Public Library				
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The participants were asked about the challenges libraries face in organizing programmes to empower women for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria. They revealed that there were challenges faced in the organization of programmes for the improvement of gender equality. The challenges indicated by 6 libraries, included among others lack of funds, as one librarian said “therefore cannot play our part adequately”; commitment from the parent organization; and one library mentioned inadequate spaces. Hence, some of the libraries such as Sokoto State Library Board could not even organize special programme for women. Other challenges were lack of clear-cut information service policy for women which was indicated by 2 libraries; 3 libraries indicated that nonchalant attitudes towards reaching out and focusing on other innovative ways that could support and encourage women and girls to improve their lives. One librarian said one of their major challenges was that “the library is under Ministry of Information instead of Ministry of Education”; the programmes are only organize in cities because both the government and public less recognize women in rural areas.

Discussion of Findings

The findings on the programmes public libraries organized to empower women for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria revealed that they organised programmes on small-scale businesses, health care, home management and education to the women in their localities. These programmes are critical in the development of the women in financial, educational, and health spheres. Through these programmes, gender equality is promoted, which in turn leads to the development of the women in the society. This aligns with the finding of Christopher (2017) who indicated that libraries contributed immensely in the promotion of gender equality. Therefore, effective and efficient programmes organized by libraries towards improving gender equality can reduce the problems of sickness, poverty, illiteracy among others from the women.

The findings on the avenues used in the provision of information services for the improvement of gender equality by public libraries in selected states of Northern Nigeria revealed that the libraries organized programmes and also invited experts to talk to the women and visited schools, and provided information services, such as current awareness services, literacy campaigns, selective dissemination of information, all in order to contribute towards the development of women. This finding agreed with that of Atuase (2018) who revealed that academic libraries contributed towards the development of communities through educational programmes, which were important in bridging gender gap. This implies that libraries in collaboration with other individuals and organisations play an important role in promoting gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria.

The findings on the challenges public libraries face in organizing programmes for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria revealed that the resources needed to organize the programmes were not available. For example, funds were the major resources necessary for any successful programmes, but they were not available. This finding related with that of Karla (2017) who submitted that adequate funding would lead to the expansion of library programmes towards the development of women. In some libraries such as National Library, Minna and Sokoto State Library Board, the programmes do not take place because of lack of funds. This implies that the implementation and sustainability of the programmes the public libraries

organize towards the promotion of gender equality in selected states in Northern Nigeria, depend largely on funds.

Summary of the Major Findings of the Study

The findings on the programmes public libraries organized to empower women for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria revealed that they organised programmes on small-scale businesses, health care, home management and literacy classes for the women in their localities.

The findings on the avenues used in the provision of information services for the improvement of gender equality by public libraries in selected states of Northern Nigeria revealed that the libraries collaborate with organizations to organize the programmes and also invited experts to talk to the women and visited schools, and provided information services

The findings on the challenges public libraries face in organizing programmes for the improvement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria revealed that the financial resources needed to organize the programmes were not available.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that public libraries are important institutions through which the lives of women are improved, leading to the achievement of gender equality in selected states of Northern Nigeria. They engaged in life changing programmes organized for women, which included entrepreneurship, health management, literacy and lifelong learning among others. This means that some libraries contribute immensely in the realization of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in selected states of Northern Nigeria. It is also evident that currently gender equality is in the spotlight as a global priority. As such, the efforts, services and programmes of public libraries related specifically to women's needs and aspirations are critical.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Public libraries should continue to organize programmes on regular basis, more especially on International Women's Day (IWD) to empower women and girls for the improvement of gender equality in Northern states of Nigeria. These programmes should be expanded to include other areas such as violence against women and girls, girls trafficking, rights of women, early marriages, women political participation, agricultural production, security, Information and Communication Technology literacy, religion, among others. All these are vital to the overall development and achievement of gender equality in Northern Nigeria. However, for the public libraries that do not organize women programmes, it is necessary that they should develop a systematic and sustained programme of action within the limited available resources. They should as well look for other alternative sources of funding, such as through "friends of the library".
2. Public libraries need to expand their avenues of providing information services towards the promotion of gender equality in Northern Nigeria. Avenues such as collaboration/ partnership with non-governmental organizations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO); **United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UNICEF**; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO; as well as inviting community leaders for their contributions and encouragements towards sustainable gender equality programmes.

3. Public libraries should be supported by the parent organisations with funds, provision of adequate spaces, clear-cut information service policy for women, attitudes towards reaching out and focusing on other innovative ways that could support and encourage women and girls to improve their lives, adequate focus on women in rural areas as well as recognition by both the government and general public of the crucial importance of libraries in socio-economic and educational development of individuals and the community at large. All these are needed by the public libraries with the support of individuals and other organisations in order to achieve sustainable programmes towards empowering women and girls, which in turn would ensure the realization of gender equality in Northern states of Nigeria.

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