2011

An Assessment of Public Library Services in North Eastern Nigeria

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Introduction

Libraries in general and public libraries in particular, play an important role in all aspects of societal development especially when viewed against its users, which consist of all categories of people in the society. Public library has been defined variously. Many see it as a place built for the collection of books and other printed resources and the personnel to provide and interpret such resources as required to meet the information, research, educational, recreational, cultural and aesthetic needs of the varied users and it is usually financed with public funds. In line with the above, Gates (1976) defined a public library as "that authorized by law, supported from general public funds or special taxes voted for the purpose of administration, for the benefit of the citizens of the country, town, city or region which maintains it on the basis of equal access to all."

The idea of a public library system in Northern Nigeria started in the late 1940s with the Native Authority (N.A.) Reading Rooms. Prior to this period however, a collection of Islamic scriptures and manuscripts can be found with individual clerics scattered across the Region especially in Sokkoto, Borno and Kano which are regarded as centers of commerce and Islamic civilization as a result of their contact with the Arab world through the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes. (Aguolu 1984). These "libraries" lacked all that can be said of a public library in terms of policies, organization, personnel and services.

The first significant attention to public library was the commissioning of a study on library services in the region in 1963, by the government of the Northern Region under the distinguished leadership of the late Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The study was conducted by F. A. Sharr under the Special Commonwealth African Assistance Plan and the report popularly known in the Nigerian Library Literature as "The Sharr Report", praised the "foresight of the Government in seeking, at this early state to rationalize the development of all types of libraries and to avoid the waste and inefficiency which follows from

uncoordinated endeavor" (Sharr 1963). Following his recommendation, there was a review of the existing structures and Public Library system evolved. The first functional Public Library was the Kaduna Lending Library which also doubled as the Regional Reference Library. The Library system was organized under a Director and was departmentalized according to the various functions in the Library.

While a public library system is gradually taking shape, a major political shake-up of the Northern Region took place in 1967. The once famous "giant North" was broken into six (6) states. This development led to decentralization of the Regional Library System and consequently, the former Regional Library Headquarter in Kaduna had to split its resources and assets equally among the new States.

Another milestone in the history of Library Development in Northern Nigeria was the commissioning of yet another study by Robert Pearce to asses Public Library Services in the newly created states in the Region, based on F. A. Sharr's recommendations. The aftermath according to Pearce (1968), was that " six inefficient library services , lacking in policy, staff and funds and lacking plans for coordination and cooperation even to alleviate if only in a small way, this deficiency in resources " came into being with headquarters in Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Maiduguri, Illorin and Sokkoto.

Statement of the Problem

The North Eastern State Library Service began in Maiduguri on 1st August, 1968 with 5,765 Books on display and others were locked up in boxes due to lack of space. Both the State Library collection and the Native Authority Reading Room collection of Arabic manuscripts was housed in one small room. Pearce (1968). While the new states were busy trying to lay a solid foundation with a view to consolidating there position in there various States, further political development in terms of state creation took place in the Country in 1976, 1990 and 1992. Within a period of 10 years, the North Eastern State was fragmented into 6 independent states (ADAMAWA, BAUCHI, BORNO, GOMBE, TARABA and YOBE) each deriving its power from the Centre and each pursuing its unique plan towards public library development.

Since the Sharr and Pearce reports in 1963 and 1968 respectively, no study has been undertaken to look into the provision of Public library services in Northern Nigeria. Aguolu (1984) undertook a historical study of Library development in the Region but limited it to one of the Six States only. This study is a follow-up of the previous studies with particular reference to the provision of public library services in North Eastern Region with a view to highlighting the short comings and proffer solutions. Hence, it will stimulate the provision of effective library services which will in turn play a major role in the educational development of the Region.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. Do Library Boards exist in the new States of the North East Region?

2. What services are provided by the Public Libraries in the North East Region?

3. Are there adequate Resources and Infrastructure to support the provision of Public Library Services in the States?

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

1. To determine the existence of Library Boards in the States
2. To assess the Services provided by the Public Libraries in the States
3. To examine the adequacy of the resources and Infrastructure available in the public libraries in the states

Methodology

The survey method was employed. It was found most appropriate because the study focused on a large population that is spread across the North East Region. The justification for the choice of this methodology in this type of study is further emphasized by Bailey (1978) and Leedy (1980). All the Public Libraries in the Six States (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe) making up the Region, constituted the target population for the study.

However, only the State Library headquarters situated in the capitals are sampled for the study. This is because they are biggest in terms of collection, most patronized by clients and show some semblance of library service provision. Two instruments were designed for data collection. The questionnaire which was structured in such a way as to elicit data necessary to answer the research questions were drawn and administered on the six (6) Directors of Library Boards and two other persons in-charge of Reader Services and Technical Services Divisions in each of the Six libraries respectively, making a total of eighteen (18) questionnaires. A set of Facilities Enumeration Form (FEF) was also designed to record inventory of resources, infrastructure and equipments available in the six (6) surveyed Libraries. All the instruments were administered and collected on the spot personally by the researchers in all the Libraries in the States surveyed.

Data Presentation and Analysis

All the eighteen (18) questionnaires and six (6) enumeration forms collected were found usable depicting one hundred percent (100%) response rate. This was achieved because of the researcher's personal involvement in the administration of the instruments. The data collected was analyzed using Descriptive Statistical elements such as tables, frequency distribution, percentages etc.

Name of Board	Year established	Branches	Total Collection	Prof. Staff	Para-Prof. Staff
Adamawa State Library Board (ADSLB)	1989	10	25,645	50	50
Bauchi State Library Board (BASLB)	1980	08	23,075	30	60
Borno State Library Board (BOSLB)	1978	06	32,749	27	45
Gombe State Library Board (GOSLB)	1996	05	5,957	20	25
Taraba State Library Board (TASLB)	1991	01	5,680	15	10
Yobe State Library Board (YOSLB)	1992	05	9,231	17	15

Table 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF THE LIBRARIES SURVEYED

Table 1 above shows the background information of the Libraries surveyed. Borno State Library Board which was established in 1978 is the

oldest. It has Six (6) local branches with a total collection of 32,749 Volumes and 72 Staff made up of 27 Professionals and 45 Para-professionals. On the other hand Gombe State Library Board is the youngest of all the Libraries under the study. It was established in 1996 with Five (5) branches, has a total collection of 5,957 Volumes manned by 20 Professional and 25 Para-professional Staff.

Table 2: SERVICES OFFERED

SERVICES PROVIDED	ADSLB	BASLB	BOSLB	GOSLB	TASLB	YOSLB	
Circulation	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	
Indexing and Abstracting	-do-	-do-	-do	-Nil-	-Nil-	-Nil-	
Reference	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	-do-	
Bibliographic	-do-	-Nil-	-do-	-do-	-Nil-	-Nil-	
Adult Literacy	-do-	-do-	-Nil-	-Nil-	-Nil-	-do-	
On-line services	-Nil-	-Nil-	-Nil-	-Nil-	-Nil-	-Nil-	

The above table enumerates the services provided by the Libraries. All the Libraries offer Circulation and Reference Services to their users. This actually is no surprise because they constitute the core of Reader service. Indexing and Abstracting is left to the older Libraries i.e. ADSLB, BASLB and BOSLB. Staff strength and experience over the years could be a contributing factor. While ADSLB, BOSLB and GOSLB do provide Bibliographic services. Adult Literacy services which is regarded as an important component of Public Library Services, especially in developing countries, is offered by only three (3) Libraries (ADSLB, BASLB and YOSLB) out of the Six (6) Libraries surveyed.

None of the Six (6) Libraries under survey offers on-line services to users. This again is not surprising because all the Libraries indicated, on the Facilities Enumeration Form that they do not have adequate Computers. At best they have one or two desks tops in either the Director's or Chief Librarian's office dedicated to administrative jobs.

On information resources, all the Libraries indicated that they have Books, Journals and Audio Visuals. Books however constitute between 80% and 90% of the collection, Journals about 10% and 15%, while Audio Visual made up the remaining 5% to 10%.

ITEM	ADSLB		BASLB		BOSLB		GOSLB		TASLB		YOSLB	
	adq	inq	adq	inq	adq	inq	adq	inq	adq	inq	adq	inq
Shelves	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Catalogue Cabinet	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Reading Tables	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Reading Chairs	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Book Trolleys		X	X					X	X			X
Display Racks		X	X					X	X			X
Cupboards	X		X		X		X		X		X	
Computers		X		X		X		X		X		X
Projectors		X		X		X		X		X		X
Videos		X		X		X		X		X		X
Television		X		X		X		X		X		X
Tape Recorders		X		X		X		X		X		X
A.V. Materials		X		X		X		X		X		X

Table 3: ADEQUACY OF EQUIPMENTS AND FACILITIES

Table 3 above shows the responses of the Six libraries surveyed when asked to indicate on the Enumeration Form provided, whether they have adequate equipment and facilities. All the Libraries except TASLB, indicated that they have adequate shelves, catalogue cabinets, cupboards, reading tables and reading chairs, while only BASLB and GOSLB indicated that they have adequate book trolleys and display racks. Again all the Libraries stated that they do not have adequate A. V. resources, what is available does not constitute significant portion of the collection couple with the fact that they are obsolete with the exception of one or two desks tops that are assigned for administrative duties.

Discussion of Findings

1. All the Library Boards lack a coordinated library development policy resulting in haphazard and inefficient services. The IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Public Library Service Development (2001) observed that in meeting the needs of its community the public library will have to develop policies. These policies may vary from one society to another but the principle of planning library development is important in all public library policy development.
2. The Libraries also lack adequate and qualified personnel. Human resource is the major driving force of any organization, hence for any organization to achieve its goal there must be adequate and qualified staff. The IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines (2001) states that "public library should provide adequate levels of staff with appropriate training and sufficient funds to support whatever methods of service delivery are needed for it to meet its vital role in the community."
3. Ninety percent (90 %) of the collections of the Libraries is made up of monographs particularly textbooks which are in most cases outdated. It is difficult if not impossible for the Libraries to provide effective services with this type of collection. To fulfill its roles satisfactorily "the public library must have adequate resourcesthis means it should provide materials in all formats, up-dated regularly to meet the changing needs of groups and individuals, including newly-published and replacement materials." IFLA/UNESCO (2001).
4. The study found out that some basic public library services such as bibliographic services, indexing and abstracting, adult and continuing education are not provided by majority of the Libraries. Out of the seven services recommended by the IFLA/UNESCO (2001), only three are offered by the Libraries. For public libraries to be relevant in the 21st century, they must provide a range of services to satisfy their user's needs.
5. The study also reports the absence of information and communication technology in the Libraries. What is considered as IT collection is one or two PCs dedicated to administrative duties and projectors that have not been used for along while. The IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines (2001) observed that although "the development of standards for the of provision electronic information facilities is at an early stage, it is recommended that at least half the public PCs should have access to the Internet and all should have access to a printer."

Recommendations

The study suggests the following recommendations with a view to repositioning public libraries in the educational development efforts of the governments of the North East Region of Nigeria.

1. The governments of the North East Region of Nigeria must ensure that the minimum standard required for public libraries to provide effective and efficient services as recommended by IFLA/UNESCO, is adhered to. The recommendation cuts across staff, nature of collection, services, structure, equipments, policy and management.
2. Despite the demarcation, the population of the North East region of Nigeria has common characteristics, providing an opportunity for the establishment of public libraries network. This will not only enhance service delivery but also create coordination in public library development in the region.
3. The public libraries must as a matter of policy periodically re-assess the information needs of their community. This is even more imperative now that the users have developed sophisticated needs which are constantly changing.
4. For public libraries in the region to become relevant to their communities in this information age, they must change from the existing systems approach to user centered approach in information retrieval. User's interest and behavior has to be taken into consideration in the design of the system.
5. The governments of the region must be committed towards public library development. Adequate and timely release of funds is essential and necessary for the libraries to be comfortable in discharging their responsibilities to the society.

Conclusion

Public libraries in the North East Region of Nigeria have gone through a lot since the 1960s as Native Authority Libraries, to Provincial Reading Rooms, to Provincial Libraries, to Divisional Libraries and finally to the present State Library Boards. What however remains constant is the inability of the Libraries to adequately satisfy their communities at the various stages of their metamorphosis. This is a consequence of long period of neglect and lurk worm attitude of governments towards public libraries. It is the firm believe of the researchers that the Federal Governments new development policy tagged "Vision 2020", the concept of "Re-Branding Nigeria" and of course the need to nurture our nascent democracy by imbibing democratic values, can only succeed when we have educated, well informed and enlightened citizens. Here lies the role of the Public Libraries in the North East Sub-Region and Nigeria.

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Ed. for the Section of Public Libraries by Phillip Gills et. al.