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Redeeming the Nigerian Economy from Recession: Librarians as Rescue Partners

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Redeeming the Nigerian Economy from Recession: Librarians as Rescue Partners.

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Abstract

The Nigeria economy was officially declared recessed in August, 2016 by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Ever since then, efforts are being made by governments at different levels to revive the economy and bring it back to boom. To achieve this, every sector of the economy has a role to play. Given the centrality of information in all forms of development, effective and efficient provision both survival and citizen-action information becomes imperatives in redeeming the economy. This paper discusses the various types of libraries and the role they play towards economic development. It is an opinion paper that stresses the need to partner with libraries and librarians for information provision that will facilitate economic redemption. Inadequate projection of the library profession, unavailability of ICTs in most libraries, poor funding of the library system, low literacy level among others were found to hinder effective service delivery of librarians. It was recommended among other things that librarians should adopt proactive approach in marketing librarianship and creating professional visibility through quality service delivery, lobbying, promotions and awareness campaigns.

Keywords: Redemption, Nigerian Economy, Recession, Librarians, Rescue Partners.

Introduction

That the Nigerian economy is in recession is no longer news. Theoretical and empirical evidences attest to it. Although the Nation has always had one form of economic challenge or the other; today, we live in a country where lack and want, hunger and starvation, crime and criminality, have become a daily experience with the vast majority of the people. We live in a country where the prices of goods and services keep soaring beyond the reach of many people. We live in a country where payment of salaries, pension and gratuity among other entitlements of the Nation's workforce has become an unaffordable luxury. We live in a country where scarcity of everything that supports life and healthy living has become an accepted norm. We live in a country where depression and hardship-inspired suicide are common occurrences. Today, there is an unprecedented and intolerable high rate of unemployment, inflation and acute poverty in Nigeria. All these are pointers to the obvious fact that all is not well. The theme of this conference "Redeeming the Nigerian Economy in the face of Economic Recession" suggests an

action-oriented approach in addressing the subject of economic recession which has been in the front burner of most academic conferences within and outside Nigeria in recent time. Perhaps, the most demanding question from all and sundry in a time like this would be, what must we do to overcome these challenges?

Overcoming national economic recession is an onerous task that requires partnership with all stakeholders. Such partnership should enhance the provision of both survival and citizen-action information to the generality of the people given the fact that all forms of human development are based on the acquisition, dissemination and utilization of information. Therefore, Librarians, as information professionals that manage information for enlightenment and development are critical stakeholders in all efforts aimed at redeeming the Nigeria from the present economic quagmire.

Purpose of the Paper

This paper aims at achieving the following objectives:

- To establish the critical importance of information provision in economic redemption.
- To x-ray the roles that librarians in different types of libraries can play to aid economic redemption
- To recommend ways of improving the service delivery of librarians and information professionals.

Economic Recession in Nigeria: an Overview

Economic recession is a negative real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate for two consecutive quarters. Nigeria is in her worst economic recession in 29 years. The National Bureau of Statistics (2017), puts the inflation rate at 17.24 in April and GDP at -1.3 in January, 2017. The table below explicitly illustrates this.



In a recent ranking of world's happiest nations by Forbes, Nigeria was ranked 20th out of the 20 saddest countries in the world. To the outside world, all these are mere numbers. But to Nigerians, the reality presents itself in the rate of suicides, murders, violent attacks, kidnapping and general atmosphere of gloom. (Falayi, 2017). All these are symptomatic of economic stress and hardship in view of the fact about 112 million Nigerians representing 67.1% of the country's total population of 167 million live below the poverty line. According to a report released by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics as contained in Punch Newspaper of 6th June, 2017, the unemployment rate of the country has hit 14.2% with 11.5million Nigerians jobless. The report further states that 2.1 million Nigerians lost their jobs in 2016 alone.

Aboyade, Ajayi, Ebire and Madu (2017), identify some of the causes of the ongoing economic recession in Nigeria to include: poor economic policies of the present administration, the inability of the immediate past administration to save, Nigeria's overdependence on foreign products, the global fall in crude oil price, high inflation rate, high interest rate, high taxation, the activities of militants and pipeline vandals in the Niger Delta, the existence of wasteful and abuse-prone subsidies, and the different actions or inactions of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in forestalling the recession. Notwithstanding all these, the situation is not irredeemable since no one argues with the fact that, there is no problem without solutions. Hence, all that is required will be to ensure that necessary strategies geared towards salvaging the situation are employed. Part of the strategies would be the integration of library services in reviving the

recessed economy without which the recently launched Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) by President Buhari, and other similar efforts may hardly yield the desired result.

Redeeming the Nigerian Economy: the Need to Partner with Libraries.

It is knowledge that enables people to contribute meaningfully to economic development hence, access to information supports economic redemption. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) (2015), observes that ‘it is common knowledge that access to information across society promotes sustainable development and improves people’s lives’. Information has always been a dynamic force in the society; from early civilization to the modern society. It is a vital economic resource that shares prominence with the key factors of productions such as land, capital, labour and entrepreneurship.

According to Imeremba (2000), information is a powerful commodity that provides nations with the basis for innovation, the resources for informed citizenry and holds the key to the progress of any society. All human developments are based on the acquisition, dissemination and use of information. It is the link pin to wealth creation, poverty alleviation and economic redemption. For any nation to develop beyond all forms of poverty, Achitabwino (2007), believes that there is need for relevant, current and adequate information on agriculture, education, health, democracy, population, family planning, youth empowerment, gender equality, transportation, security among others. Therefore, the availability of information and a conducive environment for its free flow is vital to every redemptive effort by all stakeholders, especially the managers of our economy. According to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) of India (2014), ‘if we visualize the picture of the development of a society, we find that the whole process has revolved around information and knowledge. When the society invented the writing mechanism, libraries came in existence. After that, the library became the backbone of development processes.’ The importance of libraries in the society can best be measured by the importance of information in the socio-economic development of nations. Libraries are the institutions in the society that assist people to exercise their rights of self-empowerment through access to relevant information.

The library has variously been referred to as the home of knowledge; the mind of a society; the heart of academic institutions; a place of immortality; a tool for satisfying man’s curiosity; a live

depository of culture; a working tool for inquisitive men; a sustainer of intellectual activities that opens up minds and inspires people to see vision as well as empower them with requisite knowledge to actualize their dreams. According to Agbo and Onyekweodiri (2014), ‘libraries are one of the most useful enterprises ever undertaken by man. This is evident by human development, which shows that, libraries have been the greatest force that contributed in shaping human civilization. Libraries and librarians are the foundation and pillar of human development, because books and other information resources bear the intellectual wealth of mankind, and librarians transfer this wealth from one generation to another. Therefore, every effort by the present managers of our national economy at redeeming the economy from recession to boom requires active and sincere partnership with librarians for the provision of library and information services that will guarantee all citizens access to both survival and citizen-action information.

If libraries are not partnered with in the ongoing efforts for economic revival, it is more than a missed opportunity. One may argue that libraries are not the only institutions engaged in information dissemination, hence, they are dispensable. However, it should be pointed out that, libraries are at the very epicentre of all information businesses- from acquisition, organization, storage, preservation to dissemination. John (1998) cited in Ossai-Ugbah (2013), opines that ‘of all the roles that librarians and libraries play, two are critical to modern society. The first is the role of libraries as the place where information seekers can access information without restriction – the access role; and the second has been the worldwide effort of libraries to archive, protect and provide ongoing access to information and world cultural heritage for long term – the preservation role’. These two fundamental roles have differentiated libraries and librarians from all other information institutions and professionals. Libraries are grouped into types and each type contributes to economic development in many ways.

Types of Libraries and their Role in Economic Revival

All libraries have a unified primary responsibility of providing information for all forms of development. However, libraries have been broadly categorized according to the type of clientele or target audience they serve. The services offered by librarians in the various types of libraries are needed for viable economic policy formulation by policy makers; economic revival, and ultimately national development. The types of libraries include academic, public, school,

national, special libraries among others. This section discusses the roles some of these types of libraries can play in redeeming the economic fortunes of Nigeria.

Public Libraries: They are established to meet the information needs of the general public. The users of this type of library cut across all social strata/class ranging from the poor, the middle class to the upper class. The public library can be said to be the library of the people, for the people and by the people because they are funded and maintained using taxes, rates, and levies of citizens. Their doors are open to every type of information seekers. They provide diverse resources to meet the information needs of diverse members of the public. The public library is specifically saddled with the responsibility of disseminating economic, social, political, cultural and educational information to communities both rural and urban alike.

According to Mbofung (1995), ‘the public library is an indispensable element in the life of the community because it provides information essential for progress of commerce and industry’ which are the bases for economic revival in times of recession. Citing Ranganathan, CBSE (2014), observes that ‘public libraries are instruments for material happiness and spiritual delight: they are social institution charged with the duty of providing the means for the perpetual self education of one and all: and contribution to the circulation of ideas, the harnessing of leisure, the demand of democracy, the spread of literacy and the success of commercial and industrial organizations’.

To facilitate service delivery to their heterogeneous community of users, public librarians adopt various extension services such as organizing reading circle; organizing reading hours for illiterate adults who cannot read; establishment of book clubs; organizing debates, drama, music concerts, film shows, puppet shows, magic shows, symposia, poetry etc to improve literacy and enhance effective utilization of leisure by children and adults in the society; special exhibition of materials; use of mobile libraries to penetrate some rural areas, etc. All these are aimed at ensuring a literate society empowered with information literacy skills that will enable citizens explore viable economic opportunities and contribute meaningfully to rebuilding the economy.

Through their strategic services, librarians in public libraries, sensitize the citizenry on entrepreneurial opportunities; provide agricultural information to all citizens, especially rural dwellers; provide information on availability of credit facilities and viable small scale enterprises

(Amaechi, Benson, Dike and Okere, 2016). When people have sufficient and feasible information on how to solve their economic problems at the individual level, they are empowered to swing to action in order harness available opportunities to create value for themselves and the society at large.

Academic libraries: these are libraries found in institutions of higher learning, like universities, polytechnics and collages of education. They are established to support the academic programmes of their parent institutions. They provide information materials needed for teaching, learning, research and community service. The academic library is regarded as the heart of the intellectual system of any academic institution. To a large extent, the quality of an academic institution is measured by the quality of services provided by the library because of its unique position in the overall academic system. Without academic libraries, there cannot be tertiary education, which is essential for the training of manpower required for economic development.

No nation rises above its education. Accordingly, Orji and Maekae (2013), note that a nation develops in relation to its achievement in education. Libraries and education are two sister services. Throughout human history, libraries have always accompanied education. Libraries and librarians play a great role in economic development through the support they offer to the education sector. Sobalaje and Ogunmodede (2015), observe that without libraries, no meaningful educational effort can be carried out, as library services improve knowledge and skills for positive productivity as a tool for economic revival. Academic libraries are institutions which provide essential support to the realization of the educational objectives of any country. Thus, one of the major roles of the library is to educate by enriching community life. As information and knowledge increases day by day, the role of librarians as information managers becomes very glaring, especially when library role in knowledge management is linked to the achievement of governments' economic revival and global relevance.

A study by Chigbu and Idoko (2013), which examined the role of academic libraries and librarians in knowledge management and realization of the vision 20:20:20 in Nigeria, found that vision and other developmental programmes of the federal government through the collaborative roles academia and manpower trainers for whom libraries and librarians are invaluable assets. Since only a reputable and reliable knowledge base can bring about efficient manpower

production and capacity building for economic management and governance, librarians roles in redeeming any recessed economy are vital. They help to leverage knowledge assets through the provision of world class information, manpower training, and capacity building, all of which can enhance economic redemption.

Academic librarians undertake the onerous task of collection, organization and provision of access to recorded knowledge in various formats from various disciplines. The educational function of the library is demonstrated in its careful and systematic provision of information resources for readers at all levels. 'It is an irrefutable fact that without libraries, there cannot be adequate tertiary education' (Achitabwino, 2007), hence the emergence of scarcity of professionals who will champion national economic revival. Therefore, any attempt at changing for good the plight of the Nigerian economy must begin with a commitment from all stakeholders to the betterment of the education sector spearheaded by functional library system.

Human capital development facilitated by strong learning system is central in overcoming economic recession. Chigbu and Idoko (2013), believe that 'academic libraries and their resources together with their librarians are in the main stream of human capital development' which is a key resource in national economic revival. The contributions of academic librarians to knowledge management and human capital development will lead to the production of the required workforce that could skillfully manage the economy of Nigeria from recession to abundance, and nurture a workforce that will bring about the good governance needed to inspire the ailing economy to boom again.

National libraries: National Library is a library that is established and funded by the Central Government of any country. It is usually created afresh or entrusted the responsible of national library by the constitutional provision of the country. The national library of any country is the custodian of the intellectual heritage of the country. The intellectual heritage is the total information and knowledge wealth produced within the country; written by the nationals outside the country; or written by anyone on that particular nation (CBSE, 2014). Its key responsibility is to ensure the bibliographic control of all the books and other non-book materials published in the country or published about the country. It achieves this through the means of Legal Deposit Laws.

The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) serves as the information bank of the nation. It is the Nigeria's apex intellectual memory noted as "A" grade parastatal under the federal ministry of education. Sule (2014), observes that 'it is a vital organ that acts as the intellectual memory and databank for learning and remembering processes of the nation, providing the intellectual ammunition to aid government officers in policy formulation and implementation. Among other things, the NLN: serves as a depository of all copyright publications in the country; collects all foreign literatures of national importance and interest; publishes the national bibliography annually and serves as national bibliographic information centre; serves as a national repository for the country; compiles and issues the national bibliography; collects and preserves all information produced by Nigerians and about Nigeria; assigns International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) and International Standard Book Number (ISBN) to publishers and authors in the country; and represents the country on all library matters at international conferences.

The NLN has always been at the vanguard to rejuvenate, inculcate and inspire Nigerians to read more regularly in line with the vision statement of building an informed and enlightened citizenry through the provision of information resources that are readily available and easily accessible (Sule, 2014). As reservoirs of national knowledge, national libraries collect, organize, disseminate and preserve the cultural heritage and intellectual products of the society. They offer valuable services to the members of the society by ensuring the availability of information resources with national relevance to diverse members of the society. The NLN also engages in readership promotion campaign in its 25 branches for children who are the future leaders with the aim to sensitize, inform, educate and advance the knowledge and creativity of the youths through various literary programmes. As stated by (Cornish, 1991), national libraries 'provide national information system to facilitate economic and social development at both national and personal levels' thus making them propellers of economic redemption in time of recession.

Special libraries: A library is special when its collections are restricted to certain subject or group of subjects, and it is meant for certain type of users. Special library as that type of library that is established by government agencies, ministries, parastatals, departments, organizations, companies, and business firms with the purpose of providing specialized information aimed at supporting the aims and objectives of the parent bodies. It is the cumulative business activities of these organizations and bodies that foster the economy of nations. The role of special libraries

is very closely related to their institutional activities, and is therefore mainly focused on making knowledge and expertise available to further the set goals of their parent bodies.

The 21st century gives prominence to specialized and knowledge-intensive services as contributors to development (Madu, Ajayi and Ebire, 2016), hence the Nigerian economic growth can be enhanced through special librarianship. The need for librarians who can mine web content and printed resources in order to deepen the horizon of information provision for every sector of the economy for the economic revival of our society cannot be over-emphasized.

The service delivery of librarians in special libraries, according to (Poll, 2007), is propelled by a subject-tailored collection of information resources; collections and services that are considered current needs; speed and accuracy of reference services; proactive delivery of relevant information to users; customized information services; and cost efficiency of services. Through these customized services, librarians provide current, timely and relevant information to employees' for maximum productivity and informed management decisions that will enhance the competitive advantage of their organizations and ultimately influence the realization of set goals and objectives.

Within the knowledge society that has recently emerged, special libraries, custodians and disseminators of subject and specific information have a vital role to play. The value of timely, accurate and relevant information has increasingly been acknowledged as providing a leading edge in modern competitive world. Special libraries have thus been equipped to support their parent organizations by providing the information required to ensure the survival and continued survival of their parent bodies (Mostert, 2012).

The emergence of the internet among other factors facilitated information explosion and information overload that accompanied it. Today, there is a tsunami of data that is crashing into the breaches of global recorded knowledge. Ifijeh (2010), likens it to 'a tidal war of unrelated, growing data formed in bits and bytes, coming in an unorganized, uncontrolled, incoherent cacophony of forms'. The world has become so flooded with literature so much that mankind would have been displaced by its own record. It is the business of librarians to bring order, clarity and provide solution to the confusion associated with information explosion and its consequences. In all these, libraries become the only must viable instrument used to organized

knowledge, proffer a focus and provide information seekers with a sense of direction out of the maze of confusion. The negative impacts of information explosion and overload on employees' output are mitigated by the efforts of librarians through current awareness services (CAS) and selective dissemination of information (SDI).

It is worthy to note that the quality and quantity of services offered by Nigerian libraries still remain inadequate. Several factors have been found to be responsible for this. These factors are common with almost all the types of libraries afore-discussed. Aboyade, Ajayi, Ebire and Madu, (2017), identify some of these problems to include; inadequate projection of the library profession, unavailability of ICTs in most libraries in the rural areas, poor funding of the library system, information poverty, poor staff motivation low literacy level, the problem of the digital gap, shortage of qualified personnel etc.

Conclusion

Library is the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well libraries are supported. Given the many vital roles that libraries play, it becomes safe to say that partnering with libraries for information provision is a step in the right direction; without which the desired results from governments' efforts towards redeeming the economy from recession may amount to little or nothing. It should be noted that, library and information services that will contribute to redeeming a recessed economy would be one that is effective, efficient, proactive, adventurous, and all-embracing. Hence, efforts should be made by all stakeholders to revive community information centres; explore public-private partnership (PPP); collaborate with traditional rulers to ensure penetration of library and information services to rural dwellers; and support library extension services.

Recommendations

For libraries and librarians to contribute meaningfully as partners in redeeming the Nigerian recessed economy, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. Government, policymakers, and the general public should change their poor orientation and negative attitude towards library services and collaborate more with libraries and librarians for efficient information services delivery to all and sundry.
2. Librarians need to adopt proactive approach in marketing librarianship and creating professional visibility through quality service delivery, lobbying, promotions, campaigns etc.
3. The government at all levels and other stakeholders should ensure adequate funding of libraries in the light of active investment rather than a passive obligation. This is to enable libraries to acquire sufficient facilities and resources that will enhance their services.
4. There is need for training and re-training of librarians in the light of changing trends in librarianship in order to equip them with emerging skills, especially ICT skills.

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