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Globalization and National Information Policy in Nigeria

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Introduction

This paper draws a relationship between globalization and national information policy. Globalization talks of one world with shared universal values in terms of easy movement of goods and services and science and technology, stressing the interconnectedness among the peoples of the world (Baylis and Smith, 2001; Salami, 2006). National information policy talks about laying down guidelines to regulate participation.

Nigeria has made giant strides toward global economic integration through privatization. It is also liberalizing capital markets with increasing scope of mergers and acquisitions especially in the financial sector. The country has continued to relax capital controls which posed a significant obstacle to foreign direct investment (FDI). More importantly, Nigeria is an active participant in the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) – a development plan which seeks to liberate Africa from underdevelopment, poverty, war and corruption (Siddiq, 2003; Soludo, 2007). These are indicators that Nigeria fully supports and encourages globalization.

By integrating the world into a global economy through unhindered movement of goods and services, globalization can undermine the development of the library and information sector in Nigeria. This is where national information policy becomes necessary, so that while the nation's library and information industry benefits from globalization, its side effects can also be properly controlled. It is not intended to portray globalization as a destructive mechanism. Rather it is a universal pursuit for the general welfare of nations. It requires careful acceptance and application in an economy such as Nigeria's. This can be achieved by certain regulatory guidelines.

Globalization and National Policy

Globalization and policy are concepts that have attracted a lot of attention. Scholars, especially economists and administrators, give different accounts of what globalization and policy should mean. Occampo and Martin (2003) have identified three phases of the development of globalization. The first covers 1870-1919 and is characterized by high capital and labour mobility, increased trade, and reduction in the cost of transport. The second phase began immediately after the World War II and was characterized by efforts to develop international institutions for financial and trade cooperation, as well as significant expansion of trade among industrial countries. The last phase of globalization began around 1973 and was characterized by factors such as the spread of free trade, a growing presence in transnational corporations operating, the expansion and visible mobility of capital, a shift toward standardization of development models, trade protection mechanisms, and tight resolutions on the movement of labour.

There are two opposing views on globalization. Anti-globalization scholars perceive it as an underdevelopment strategy, a way of opening up all economies and all production, services, and natural resources to the business operations of expansionary global corporations. To them, globalization is a risk to world economies; another form of imperialism that encourages economic exploitation and deceit where a few powerful and greedy individuals and nations seek to subjugate and exploit an unsuspecting majority. To anti-globalization scholars, globalization is championed by developed countries to control the flow of goods and services so that weaker countries will remain perpetually disadvantaged (Adejo, 2003; Asouzu, 2004; Ninsin, 2000).

To globalization apologists, it is a source of global development. It shows the growing influence exerted at the local, national, and regional levels by processes that are global in nature with emphasis on universal growth. It is a new form of humanism that bridges the differences between human beings; a concept that expresses universal humanism designed to make the world a better place for all. Globalization is the growing integration of economies and societies through information, ideas, activities, technologies, goods, services, capital, and people (Rugumanu, 1999; Salami, 2001; Occampo and Martin 2003; Stern, 2000)

According to Scholte (2001), globalization can be appreciated when viewed as an intensification of cross-border interactions and interdependence among nations, as the spread of various objects and experiences to people at all corners of the earth, as a shift in geography where borders lose some of their overriding influences, or as cultural imperialism and systematic imposition of the culture and tradition of dominant nations.

Policy can be viewed as a plan of action, a statement of aims and objectives, especially when made by government. Policy can be an individual matter or an official enactment. This paper restricts itself to public policy, a form of law made by the governing bodies of organizations to govern, direct, control, and regulate members of the organization. It can take the form of laws passed by the legislature, decisions of government or boards of directors of public corporations, private companies, or even instructions issued by departments. Public policy is usually a product of a bureaucracy to regulate government actions and programmes.

In the words of Anderson (1979), public policy consists of guidelines developed by governmental bodies and officials to regulate official actions that are influenced by non-governmental factors. Anderson views public policy as purposive and goal oriented and consisting of action by governmental officials, as well as the actual desires of government in regulating trade, controlling inflation, or monitoring public housing. Public policy is a course of action, a regulatory instrument that evaluates government actions against certain prescribed indices and focuses government on goals for the future.

When policies are properly articulated, they can lead to good governance and national development, especially in the information industry. While globalization aims to eliminate barriers to commerce and trade, policy provides guidelines for receipt and use of the products of globalization. It does not discourage globalization. Rather, it seeks to fine-tune acceptance and use of the outcomes of a globalized economy so that the nation's library and information sector does not suffer unduly.

Nigeria's Library and Information Environment

The need for information policy in Nigeria in a globalized economy can be better understood when viewed against the backdrop of concern raised by anti-globalization movements. There has been a public outcry against the policies, treaties, and agreements that underlie globalization. People have questioned the rationale of international bodies and organizations like the World Bank, IMF, and World Trade Organization (WTO) which champion globalization, on the benefits of austerity, trade liberalization, and privatization measures underlying globalization. People have also questioned the impact of

globalization on the commercialization of information (Iwe, 2005). IFLA has raised alarm on the negative effects of globalization on the information industry (IFLA, 2001).

The globalized information system brought about the use of Internet have had a positive impact on world economic growth (Quieng, et al., 2004), but globalization has the potential to promote fierce competition and dumping, two issues which the information industry and the Nigerian economy may not withstand. Globalization without a national information policy is an invitation to further underdevelop an already underdeveloped information and library sector. Nigeria's information environment is a risky area, unstable, uncoordinated, and easily abuses, especially with unhindered global access to all sorts of information and its resources. Nigeria's information environment is open to all sorts of information and information-generating products; however, not only are some of them irrelevant to the information needs of Nigerians, many are character-destroying facilities (Uhegbu, 2004). For instance, in a meeting in 2005, Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) revealed that it is no longer profitable to write and publish books in Nigeria because of low reward system, cheaper foreign publishers, poorly-developed Nigerian publishing infrastructure and technology, high cost of publishing, and piracy.

While the Nigerian library and information sector is willing to join the globalization of information, the country should also reevaluate its poorly-developed information infrastructure, poorly-equipped information services personnel, underfunding of library and information institutions, inconsistent and even lack of government policies relating to the library and information sector, erratic power supply, and almost non-existent private sector participation in the industry. For example, library automation, which facilitates globalization of information and has been adopted by most libraries in the developed parts of the world, has yet to take firm root in many libraries in Nigeria. In some libraries where automation is practised, there is much to be desired. The library and information sector in Nigeria remains at the receiving end of information and information products.

Globalization promotes a massive flow of goods and services across borders. It is necessary to develop a national policy that will encourage globalization and at the same time regulate its practice. A national information policy would ensure that information is provided to the right person, at the right time, and in the right format. It would ensure that appropriate information is provided to all Nigerians in all spheres of activities by properly-equipped libraries and information centres. It would also encourage the provision of minimum standards of operation in acquisition, accommodation, personnel, equipment, and quality of services. It would ensure that the right technology, information-generating resources, publishing materials, and facilities are allowed into the country.

National Information Policy for a Globalized Economy

With the emergence of globalization, there has been gradual transformation of the nation's information sector to have easy access to foreign agencies which makes it possible for information resources and facilities find their way into the country, sometimes unsolicited. This has continued to undermine the development of the sector because resources from overseas are cheaper.

A national information policy will help ensure proper packaging of information by determining the nature and format of information resources to meet local needs. Book and non-book material that violates local content specifications will no longer be allowed into the country. Internet service providers could no longer expose young Nigerians to inappropriate content. One way of ensuring maximum use of information is by packaging it in a form that the target audience will appreciate. This involves understanding the literacy level of the country, its ethics, norms, and values, gender and age composition, and numbers and kinds of physically-challenged persons (Nwokocho, 1998).

National information policy will complement globalization with guidelines that allow the benefits of globalization without jeopardizing internal security and survival of the economy. In this regard, publishers and other dealers in the information industry will be able to know and understand how to package their

products to meet local conditions and sensibilities. With a national policy, pirated and adulterated materials, the dumping of useless and toxic publishing materials such as ink, paper, and equipment and facilities will be checked.

Interlibrary cooperation and resource-sharing among libraries and information centres in the country may be greatly jeopardized if there is no policy to regulate it in the face of easy flow of resources across borders. Since globalization leads to interconnectedness of countries, local cooperation among libraries may suffer in preference for foreign counterparts. Even libraries overseas may see globalization as a way to offload their unwanted documents to unsuspecting libraries in Nigeria. It may lead to the abandonment of local cooperation among libraries in Nigeria. National information policy will therefore specify how libraries in Nigeria will go into cooperative resource-sharing either among themselves or with those overseas. Resource sharing is a delicate enterprise and therefore requires carefulness and caution. For instance, what kind of audio-visual accessories, equipment and personnel that should be shared between local libraries and those overseas will be streamlined. A national information policy will help to streamline both the nature and format of information resources that will be made available to Nigerians. An NIP will help to strengthen information infrastructure by specifying how resources will be organized and managed.

Conclusion

Globalization and national information policy complement each other. While globalization encourages commerce and industry without borders, so that goods and services move freely, national information policy facilitates order and minimizes the side effects of globalization. A committee on national information policy should be created. It should comprise librarians, eminent Nigerians in both the public and private sector, and other practitioners in the information industry. The committee's responsibility will be to provide a framework that will encourage globalization of information and ensure that the end users of information are not exposed to unwholesome resources and facilities.

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