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ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND ENHANCED READING CULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES

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Abstract

The sustainable development goal is a match towards revamping the economy of nations. Nigeria embarks on the journey of economic redemption. It is expected that, as with the sustainable development goals, national governments will develop their own action plans that emphasize or deemphasize various goals depending on the local situation. Be that as it may, a country like Nigeria needs literate citizens, citizens who are ready to commit themselves to the use of libraries, access relevant information and digest this information for the benefit of all and to ensure a steady economic growth hence, the need to promote the reading culture of the citizens through the use of libraries and access to information. The growth of libraries in evolving information and cultural environment is essential, as key stakeholders providing access to information, education and research, and social participation. If access to information and libraries are not included, it is more than a missed opportunity. It is incumbent on the government to take the libraries seriously and fund them to provide public access, information and skills if it must make its mark in the golden frame of sustainable development of the economy.

Keywords: Access, Information, Libraries, Reading Culture and Sustainable Development

Introduction

The sustainable development goal is a match towards revamping the economy of nations. Nigeria embarks on the journey of economic redemption. It is expected that, as with the sustainable development goals, national governments will develop their own action plans that emphasize or deemphasize various goals depending on the local situation (IFLA, 2015). The government at different levels has been making effort to revive the economy. To redeem the Nigerian economy, every sector of the economy has a great role to play; giving that information is power and the key to a successful economy. It is therefore germane to establish the fact that access to information is important in ensuring that sustainable developments are achieved at all levels within a nation's economy.

Be that as it may, a country like Nigeria needs literate citizens, citizens who are ready to commit themselves to the use of libraries, access relevant information and digest this information for the benefit of all and to ensure a steady economic growth hence, the need to promote the reading culture of the citizens through the use of libraries and access to information.

Reading culture, at present, in Nigeria is in double jeopardy: not only is the patronage low, the efforts made by past Nigerian governments, institutions, and different organizations, local and international, to entrench it in the country have been jeopardized by the current "viewing culture" and "chatting culture", the habits of watching pictures or videos, and chatting with friends on smart phones and other electronic devices, especially among the youths, in the country. The incidence of poor reading culture in Nigeria today is not limited to the youths alone; a large percentage of adults, even those with higher education, in the country today have significantly exhibited a decrease in their reading habits. This problem is attributable to globalization and the rapid development of the entertainment industry which have displaced reading as a prestigious

source of information and as a pleasant and esteemed form of leisure (Kamalova and Koletvinova, 2016).

This situation is sad, given the consequences of poor reading culture on the citizenry and the nation. Such consequences, in the researcher's opinion, include illiteracy, high failure rate in examinations, examination malpractice, increase in students' dropout rate, and continuous high rate of unskilled manpower in the country. These, by extension, breed poverty, disease, frustration, security issues, and underdevelopment in the country. Conversely, an active reading culture invariably leads to enlightenment, peace, and development in any society. In this regard, Ruterana (2012) asserts that reading is "vital to our becoming better informed, having a better understanding of ourselves and others, and to our development as thoughtful, constructive contributors to a democratic and cohesive society". Similarly, Igwe (2011) opines that the level of development in a country is directly proportional to the quality (level of education and enlightenment) of the human resources in the country.

The Concept of Reading Culture

Reading culture evolves when an individual habitually and regularly reads books and other information materials that are not necessarily required for him to advance in his profession or career (Ogugua et al, 2015). Motivation for reading is seen as an important contributor to the amount and breadth of reading. Researchers have found out that when children believe they are competent and efficacious in reading, they tend to read more. In most cases however, even when children are competent and efficacious, they may not in fact, engage in the reading task except they have a purpose for doing so. Eccles et al in Okpala (2005) defined the different components of task values as interest value (defined as how much the child likes the reading activity); attainment value (defined as the importance of the reading task); and utility value (defined as the

benefits the child derives from the reading task).The interest value has a significant influence on recall in reading. Children could read literature above their grade level if they are adequately motivated or if they find the book interesting.

Language competences in people vary from one degree to the other among individuals. The extent to which an individual gains success in reading depends on the extent of his competence in language. A person cannot learn anything unless it is tied to something already known. This is where the schema theory comes into play. This theory emphasizes the building of new connections and knowledge on existing experience. Prior knowledge facilitate text processing and comprehension by providing a framework to which the text content can be related, permitting generation of inferences, and serving as a basis for evaluation of the accuracy and importance of the text content (Starr and Lovett, 2000). Building schema is particularly important for children who lack a wide experiential background.

Children who lack the necessary cultural and linguistic experience will find reading an impossible task. Even if the child is able to read the surface structure level of the language, there is still the need to understand and appreciate the all-round meanings and implications of the writer's expressions. The frustration and eventual failure of bilinguals (and second language learners) in reading can be attributed to language problems arising from learners who are hurried into reading in a language they can neither understand well nor speak fluently.

The Roles of Libraries in Promoting Reading Culture and its Impact on Sustainable Economic Development

The importance of reading cannot be overemphasised. It represents the connector between the past and the future, a window of wealth of knowledge or expansion of knowledge horizons and gateway for transformation of the society (Chettri & Rout, 2013). Reading shapes moral,

moderates behaviour and attitude towards development. It is indispensable ingredient of education and thus development. Thus, reading is regarded as indispensable instrument for equipping citizenry with knowledge, skills and attitudes required for economic self-sufficiency, poverty reduction and sustainable development. While the major yardstick for academic performance is the examination result, the underlying factor of academic success is reading and understanding. However this is fast declining in Nigeria (Agbama, 2015; Ruterana, 2012). Among the teens, reading would represent an agent of transmission of appropriate norms, values, ideas and skills from generation to generation. It is regarded as activity done over and over again to acquire or upgrade knowledge, skills and attitude and represents a fundamental building block of learning and general development of a society. This suffices to say that the economic, social and political health of any country is contingent upon building citizens with reading culture.

Reading as defined by UNESCO is the “ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials”. If Nigeria is to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century she must harness the energy and creativity of all citizens. We are living in a global world and an individual who cannot read or write is cut off from opportunities for self advancement and deprives the society of his own contribution to national development. Life-long literacy is required for industrialization and technological development, participation in culture and in government at different levels (Iloeje, 2014). National goals cannot be actualized without good reading culture. An educated citizenry can easily be mobilized for political, social, economic and technological development. In the world today, according to United Nations, more than 861 million adults are illiterates while about 113 million children are illiterates. Nigeria has been listed by UNESCO as one of the 15 countries of the world accounting for three-quarters of world’s illiterate adults. Fourteen countries out of the 15 listed countries are African countries. Africa has the highest illiteracy rate (40%) and is the slowest in progress. This

alarming situation has been a source of great concern to UNESCO. Illiteracy has prevented individuals from participating in democracy and other forms of social interaction for a functional society. UNESCO advised all countries to reduce female illiteracy to 20% by 2020 and eradicate all adult illiteracy by 2030. Youth literacy target is 100% by 2030. In order to improve the literacy level of Nigerians, the Federal Government of Nigeria committed itself to universal primary education (UPE) in 1999. This programme provided a minimum level by which all children will be educated. Education was made free and compulsory at the primary school level. For national advancement, a literate and highly skilled population is needed. If all Nigerians could read and write, and given the opportunities to take advantages of these capabilities, economic growth, health and political participation would all improve. Female literacy (including women of reproductive age), for instance has led to the reduction of child deaths in recent times (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation).

Before we examine further the impact of libraries in promoting reading, it is necessary to examine briefly what development is. According to Igwe (2011), development refers to improving “people’s lifestyle through improved, qualitative and functional education; incomes, skills development and fulfilled employment.” He also maintained that development involves people being able to read and write. Economic development is a constant commitment to advancing human existence with quality of life including socio-cultural, political, economic, and general welfare of the people. Sustainable economic development refers to a comprehensive economic, social, cultural, and political process that focuses on improving the quality of lives of the entire population and of the individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in the development process and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting there-from. Sustainable development is a long-term continuous development of society, aimed at the satisfaction of

humanity's needs at present and in the future via rational usage and replenishment of natural resources, and preserving the earth for future generations (Erhun, 2015).

Libraries of all kinds are all together helping to circulate needed information services to the respective sectors of the economy leading to the growth and development of the nation. Valantin (2014) notes that the ability of the government to develop effective policies and plans depends on its capacity to interpret information relevant to the country's economic, social, cultural, and financial situation. According to the author, strong national information centers such as libraries and Information infrastructure allow access to information in all sectors and provide the basis for competent planning and decision-making. Libraries, however, require sound policies to provide the necessary framework for the development of information and communication systems and services to meet developmental needs. Human knowledge is invariably enriched by information; hence, the collective intellectual abilities of a nation that is; human capital, which will also depend on access to information through a well-equipped library.

Libraries and Access to Agricultural Information for Sustainable Development

Agriculture in Nigeria has been given prominence among the sectors of the economy and the roles of libraries in agricultural research and extension of rural agriculture services is quite enormous. According to Adeniyi and Ojo (2015), agricultural libraries provide information services to farmers, students, livestock producers, and agricultural business organizations, research workers subject specialist teachers, for the purpose of meeting the challenge of man, food, and hunger and to make for sustainable development.

The need for sustainable development in the agricultural sector has created pressures on agricultural education, research, and extension services in rural communities. Based on that, libraries are established in agricultural universities, colleges, institutes, the Ministry of

Agriculture, and allied institutions to promote the study, teaching, and research in agriculture. Aguolu (2000) opines that libraries as a platform to promote the reading culture amongst key players in the agricultural sector play major roles in the sustainable development of the Agricultural sector by generating and disseminating agricultural information or knowledge to agricultural extension workers, researchers, students, farmers as well as to policymakers in government. Furthermore, Adeniyi and Ojo (2015) stated that libraries in the Agricultural Sector train and educate the students, researchers, and other agricultural information seekers on how to search and retrieve the required information and also make available documented sources of information that could lead to better agricultural education and sustainable development. Libraries strive to ensure free and unhindered access to indigenous knowledge on agriculture.

Adeniyi and Ojo (2015) emphasized that for sustainable development in the agricultural sector; there must be access to indigenous knowledge on agricultural information. Okore et al. (2009) opined that libraries should promote access to indigenous knowledge by creating an environment which permits face-to-face forum and network formation to discuss and debate on issues that might be useful to members of the community, for example, the use of talk shows in promoting intergenerational dialogue between the young and the old on different subject areas ranging from agriculture, ecosystem, Medicare and conflict resolution. Libraries should also use other sources of indigenous knowledge, including indigenous experts, opinion leaders, and village elders, farmer to farmer interaction involving neighbors, friends, or village gathering in social places. This will lead to sustainable economic and agricultural development.

Libraries and Access to Educational Information for Sustainable Development

The role libraries play in the sustainable development of the education sector is quite enormous and crystal clear. For instance, Anyim (2016) provides a clear picture of the roles of the academic

library in the higher institution and states that university library is an intellectual resource center of the university that supports teaching, learning, and research for enhancement of knowledge frontier of students, teaching and non-teaching staff of the university. More to the impact of the library on the sustainable development of the education sector is the ubiquitous access to information through virtual libraries which has made research more interesting and availability of knowledge at researchers' fingertips (Anyim, 2018). The Library helps the education sector in Nigeria in the training of professionals in different fields through its provision of information materials required for the academic program of the institution, provision of research information materials required for the academic programs, dissemination of the existing and new information, provision of adequate security for accessible information materials and provision of resources and research support for students and faculty (Anyim, 2020).

The library continues to contribute to the sustainable development of the education sector even in emergency situations through its digital means. It was discovered that the hope of academic institutions for sustainable progress during emergency periods is pointing towards the digital divide within the country in which applications of mobile technologies play vital roles. As digital innovation is a present theme in education with a focus on higher education institutions, libraries are not reluctant in making access to information easier especially, in a time of total lockdown like the one brought about by the covid-19 pandemic. However, libraries have devised a means of using the potentials of mobile technologies for accessing, retrieving, sharing, and dissemination of information in order to ensure that the education sector does not suffer as a result of a lockdown or any other emergencies (Anyim, 2020).

The education sector in Nigeria has been in the revolutionary process to digitalize educational resources so that access to information becomes less cumbersome. Due to growing concern for quick access to knowledge and increased desire to meet the information needs of academic

scholars, the way in which information is stored, retrieved, and disseminated has been transformed. As more academic programs are being introduced in the institution of higher learning such as continuing education, distance learning, etc., libraries play a prominent role by creating that platform to promote reading habits and by providing both printed and electronic resources to support the programs. The use of electronic resources for distance learning programs involves the provision of e-resources in conducting problem-solving research by the students and other users of the library. This also reflects how readily accessible electronic resources are presented to the members of the academic community for the purpose of learning, teaching, and research (Anyim, 2020).

The library contributes to sustainable economic development by supporting education advancements, human resource development, business, entrepreneurship, technological innovations, and social skills. This marks a major shift in the perception of libraries as centers for mere passive and recreational reading, to active research institutions and socio-economic development agents. The libraries champion the development of the nation by enhancing the cause of education and academic research. The standard of education of a nation determines the standard of life attainable in such a nation. In that regard, Orji and Maekae (2013) opined that a nation develops in relation to its achievement in education. The library is crucial for the intellectual moral and spiritual advancement and elevation of the people of a community. It is an indispensable element of the absolute well-being of the citizens and that of the nation at large. Soblaje 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. The pivotal role played by libraries is one of the factors which help in the development of a society.

Libraries and Access to Health Information for Sustainable Development

Sustainable development in the health sector seems to be farfetched without libraries providing health information to support the activities of the sector. The Library Association of Ireland (2020) opined that without medical or specialized health libraries and librarians, health information would not be readily accessible for policymakers, patients, health sector personnel, and other users. Health care librarians organize and provide health information services to all categories of information consumers within and outside the health sector, with a focus on health professionals, patients, researchers, policymakers etc.

With the beehives activities of health care professionals, it is not surprising to see that the health sector generates a large amount of health information and records annually through research and practice. The health care librarians acquire useful health information sources such as online databases and other information formats, process them and make them available and accessible to the healthcare professionals and patients (and other users), organize these health information records, and make them available and accessible to the users when needed (Ilogho et al., 2020). Medical libraries are examples of special libraries that provide specialized information services to meet the unique needs of their users. For instance, the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH) library in Enugu, the US National Library of Medicine, World Health Organization (WHO) library, libraries in Medical Research Institutes, etc. These libraries acquire, organize/process and make the health information accessible to healthcare givers, patients, and researchers in the respective organizations. The health sector in Nigeria requires quality information as this sector ensures the well-being of the people. A healthy nation is one with available and accessible health care information, and that makes the library a very important tool for attaining sustainable economic health development. The libraries ensure quality delivery of information to aid the health workers to discharge their duties effectively. Adio et al. (2007) noted

that citizens need access to information on clinical effectiveness in order to improve the quality of care and to stay well-informed on developments in specialist areas. Many diseases that cause serious health problems to people are well documented in most Academic libraries in Nigeria. The adverse effect of these diseases on Nigerians caused low productivity among the labor force.

Libraries and Access to Cultural Information for Sustainable Development

Culture and tourism are in terms of their basic characteristics are two complex and layered fields of modern civilization, and they have a positive effect on the overall social and economic development. Culture and Tourism are connected with lifestyle, geographic area, education, and society; and they are necessary machinery for sustainable economic development (Tosic and Lazarevic, 2010). As culture and tourism involve the overall intellect of the society, the sum of all material, spiritual resources, and lifestyle of a nation, the library ensures that information resources and services that promote culture and tourism are provided. Library maintains information relevant to the placement of culture on the market with cultural and artistic product, which has cultural and economic value; promotes and revived cultural goods and the landscape of a town that will be etched on tourists' minds; and provides information that helps to explore, know and learn something new about national and local cultural values of the region tourists are visiting. The tourists have different motives for traveling and staying in the cultural-social areas contain aspirations for fulfilling a large number of different and vehement human needs and wishes. It can be a wish for gaining knowledge, discovering and getting to know various regions and civilizations, a visit to various cultural events, art, adventure, change, freedom, the change of the itinerary, etc. Among the special ones is a trip to the past, small-town visits, and other countries, a visit to natural and cultural areas, exploration trips, seminars, getting to know the life

and work of an artist, and for the sake of rest, recreation as well as for health reasons and the like (Tosic and Lazarevic, 2010).

The library supports the tourists by providing access to information that cater to any given tourism goal or objective. Libraries, as cultural institutions, are essential in the sustainable development of the culture and tourism sector in Nigeria. By digitalizing their book collection, libraries have become an important agent behind social progress based on knowledge managed by digital technology. In such a way, they enable direct online access to library material, studying accessories, and other information that takes an active part in presenting a specific region to tourists. The role of libraries in the development of cultural tourism has rapidly increased in the last several years because tourists more and more gather a lot of information on a destination before deciding to visit it. There are numerous ways for libraries to attract tourists. An example may be an organization of tourist visits providing them to get to know the cultural and historical heritage of a region, the history and structure of the library itself, its book holdings, and its services. If libraries organize exhibitions, they should be part of the tourists' visit. Before the very visit tourists can be provided with a short video presentation as an introduction to the things they are about to see. Visits should be organized on several occasions during the day and adapted to different types of visitors. The programs of the visit should involve both adults and children and they should be made according to the type of visitors (Tosic and Lazarevic, 2010).

The libraries play important roles in promoting the culture and tourism sector, by providing vital information to visitors seeking information on how to locate some tourist sites, hotels, and industries among others. They produce a directory with regard to the addresses and locations of various cultural and historical sites. Libraries can work with communities, local tourist guides, and other stakeholders to mainstream libraries and make them more visible in the major tourist trails. In addition, libraries support the development of tourism by providing information of

interest to tourists such as history or basic facts of the place, hosting cultural events, preserving and holding local cultural artifacts or photos, hosting cultural and other events of interest to tourists. Libraries can support the development of tourism by providing information of interest to tourists such as history or basic facts of the place, hosting cultural events, preserving and holding local cultural artifacts or photos, hosting cultural and other events of interest to tourists.

Strategies for Improving Reading Culture

1. Providing Access to Books

Several research studies had shown that students develop love for reading when they have access to reading materials (Amuchazi, 2004). Also, Dike (2004) emphasized that one of the cardinal ways school libraries can engage in promoting free voluntary reading is by making reading materials accessible to students. When libraries provide access to interesting books, they help to relieve the effect of poverty among children of poor and illiterate parents.

2. Reading Interest and Guidance

Reading interest and guidance help to motivate reluctant readers. When librarians know their users and help to match the right books from the library's collection with the right child, even reluctant readers would be encouraged to read (Hicks and Willaume, 2002). Reading guidance can also be in form of conversation, book list and displays, book talks and reading experiences.

3. Associating Reading with Pleasure

a. Conference Reading: The best way of getting children to read is by associating reading with pleasure. When children read together, taking turns in reading and being read to, they get easily motivated and develop positive attitude towards reading. They gradually develop into voluntary readers. Parents should cultivate the habit of reading to their children from when they are still being carried in the womb.

b. Reading Clubs: Reading clubs enable children to share their individual experiences. They should be established in all communities. Activities of a reading club include storytelling, reading aloud to each other and sharing book experiences, debates, writing and illustrating stories. Literary events can also be organised such as exhibitions and book fairs with publishers. Awards for organised competitions can serve as reward for reading. This should be encouraged. Reading clubs should not be abandoned in the hands of interested individuals and NGOs, the federal government can lend support by helping to establish reading clubs in our communities.

4. Establishment of National Commission for Libraries (NCL):

This commission when established will cater for the growth, development, coordination and services of various zonal and regional branches of the National Library of Nigeria in different states of the federation.

5. Establishment of State Commission for Libraries (SCL) throughout the 36 states of the federation:

The commission will be responsible for the growth, development, coordination and services of its branches in the local government areas of the state. There should be the establishment of libraries in all the local government areas of the respective states.

Recommendations

1. The libraries in different sectors of the economy should be treated as a priority during budget allocations.
2. There is a need for adequate funding of the library in different sectors of the economy in order to acquire necessary resources and facilities that facilitate the distribution of required information to the users.

3. The government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the publishing companies should embark on attitudinal change campaign using various media, in favour of good reading culture, and highlight on the negative effects of poor reading culture on their academics and the country Nigeria.

Conclusion

Libraries firmly support broader development targets on access to information across various sectors of the Nigerian economy. Libraries are the institutions in society that assist in promoting the reading culture amongst citizens, it equally assists people to exercise their right to information, and safeguard and provide access to cultural heritage. The growth of libraries in evolving information and cultural environment is essential, as key stakeholders providing access to information, education and research, and social participation. If access to information and libraries are not included, it is more than a missed opportunity. It is incumbent on the government to take the libraries seriously and fund them to provide public access, information and skills if it must make its mark in the golden frame of sustainable development of the economy.

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