

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

10-14-2019

Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals: The Role of the Library and Information Professionals in Nigeria

Olalekan Moses Olayemi

Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, Lagos., lekus2000@yahoo.com

Kemi Jummai Olayemi

Bayero University Kano, Nigeria, prettykem1006@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Olayemi, Olalekan Moses and Olayemi, Kemi Jummai, "Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals: The Role of the Library and Information Professionals in Nigeria" (2019). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 3541.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/3541>

GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA.

Olalekan Moses Olayemi (CLN)

Library & Information Technology Department,
Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, Lagos, Nigeria
Email: Lekus2000@yahoo.com

Kemi Jummai Olayemi (CLN)

Main Library, Bayero University Kano, Nigeria
Email: Prettykem1006@yahoo.com

Abstract

Attempts have been made in Nigeria to address the issue of women's right, responsibility with a view to improving the socio-economic and political lots of Nigerian women as a whole. But global indices have steadily placed Nigeria within groups of low performers in terms of gender equality, with opportunities for improvement in a wide range of areas. To address the gender imbalances and respond to the challenges faced by women in the country, efforts must be made by all individuals and professions to address this inequality. The aim of this paper is to uncover the contributions and roles of libraries and information professionals in realizing gender equality towards attaining the sustainable development goals (SDGs). More so, it aims at making advocacy for inclusion of libraries as information centers in national development building for girls and women in the country.

Keywords: Gender equality; Sustainable Development Goals; Library; Information Professionals; Nigeria.

Introduction

The issue of gender inequality has become a global and topical issue in the post-modern era all the world. It has become more pronounce and given more attention, courtesy of the information society; information technologies, media, human right activists, United Nations etc. Gender inequality in Nigeria is said to be high and cut across different areas of economic opportunities such as political participation and representation, access to education, health, income etc. These differences have slow down economic development and deepen poverty. Therefore, Nigeria as a developing country cannot continue to underestimate the role women play in advancing national development. The International Monetary Fund (2018) averred that the “latest economic review of Nigeria’s economy says closing the gender gap would mean

higher growth and productivity, and greater economic stability”. Consequently, putting an end to all “forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it also crucial to accelerating sustainable development” in the country (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

Goal 5 of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) is solely dedicated to achieving gender equality; women have a critical role to play in all of the SDGs, with many targets specifically recognizing the position of women’s in realizing other goals. In an effort to attaining gender equality, emphasis must be placed on addressing the imbalances in the current social, economic, cultural and political structure between women and men, and as such must be addresses holistically, taking into cognizance all the sectors of the economy into consideration. For the struggle for gender equality to be achieved, education and access to information is vital, hence, the libraries and information professionals have dynamic roles to play towards achieving this goal. Recognizing the importance of information to “peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; “Target 16.10” of the Goal 16: aimed at ensuring “public access to information and protect freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreement”. It against this background that this paper intends to X-rayed the issue of gender equality in Nigeria viz a viz sustainable development and the roles of library and information professionals.

Gender Equality in Nigeria

Gender equality means women having the same opportunities in life as men without any form of discrimination, including the ability to participate in the public sphere. According to Friends of the Environment Nigeria (n.d) gender equality “refers to a situation where women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potentials; are able to contribute equally to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results”. Women and girls are confronted with a lot of socio-economic impediment, which often limit their potentials and aspirations. This inequality against women revolves around disparities in education, income, ownership, political power, and equal right. Women are highly marginalized in governance and public affairs, hence restraining them from contributing their full potentials and quota to national development like their male counterparts. Gender equality promotion is aimed at advancing the full participation of women and men in society and in all sectors of development.

In Nigeria, women constituted 49.2 per cent of the total population in the country and form the highest number of poverty group. Nigeria like many African countries is still basically patriarchal society with men in dominant mood, which continues to negatively impact the participation of women in nation building (Ekpu, 2019). Conversely, women's contribution to the social and economic development of societies is more than half that of men because of its dual role in production and reproduction (Yila & Azeez, 2018). Poignantly, gender inequality in Nigeria is relatively high compared to peer countries—that is, countries at similar levels of development. By implication, Nigeria as a nation is likely going to be “missing out on a key ingredient to economic success” and attainment of sustainable development goals (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019; International Monetary Fund African Dept, 2018).

Nigeria is known to be a patriarchal society; as such women are in a subordinate position to the men, though the degree varies across the length and breadth of the country. Many studies have attributed the causes and forms of gender inequality to many factors such as; cultural attitudes, religion, education, early marriage and sexual. According to Yila & Azeez (2018) “traditional cultural attitudes in most societies discriminate against women, depriving them access to education and technology. Girls are encouraged to take any job or encouraged to get married rather than seek higher education”. This problem is capable of upsetting the sustainable development of any economy. Therefore, there is urgent need for the women to be adequately incorporated in the activities and affairs of those societies without any form of discrimination.

Using available opportunity; promoting gender equality is now universally accepted as a strategy for ameliorating poverty levels, improving health and well-being of all as well as living standards. The realization of gender equality is not only seen as an end in itself and a human rights issue, but as a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. Although, the country (Nigeria) has acceded to a number of international instruments on the promotion and protection of women's rights such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Beijing declaration, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1985), and principle of non-discrimination has been enshrined in Section 2 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Folarin & Udoh, 2014; Eniola, 2018; Thomas-Oda, 2019; Dominic, Amodu, Toluwalope, Azuh, and Oluwatoyin, 2017; Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999) gender equality still persists than expected.

Gender Equality and Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was officially agreed and adopted by heads of state and government and high-level representatives at the United Nations General Assembly on 25-27 September 2015 at the UN headquarters in New York. It is meant to be an agreed framework for addressing developmental challenges. Nigeria is a signatory to the SDGs and fully committed to achieving it. The goals form the basis of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which seeks to build on the Millennium Development Goals that came to an end in 2015. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 internationally agreed goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators which seeks to eradicate poverty, fight inequality and improve environmental stability worldwide (Jaiyesimi, 2016). These goals are universal and every country of the world is expected to strategically implement and achieved them by year 2030. The specific top line goals are:

Table: 1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 10: Reduce in-equality
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Goal 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities
Goal 3: Good Health & Well-being	Goal12:Responsible Consumption & Consumption
Goal 4: Quality Education	Goal 13: Climate Action
Goal 5: Gender Equality	Goal 14: Life below Water
Goal 6: Clean Water & Sanitation	Goal 15: Life on Land
Goal 7: Affordable & Clean Energy	Goal16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions
Goal 8 : Decent Work & Economic Growth	Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals
Goal 9. Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	

Like the millennium development goals (MDGs), sustainable development goals (SDGs) also give priority to gender quality and women empowerment. In fact, sustainable development goals (SDGs) cannot be achieved without gender equality, having known that women who constitute half of the world population cannot be neglected in development process. Gender equality is core to the developmental-agenda and principle of the United Nations. The United Nations through its organs, specialized agencies and countries of world, is striving to promote gender equality in which both men and women have equal opportunity to benefit from all irrespective of gender, colour, race, and contribute meaningfully to economic, social, cultural and political development; enjoy socially valued resources and benefits; and realize their human potentials.

Gender equality is a fundamental human rights issue that is recognized in international human rights treaties and a key goal of sustainable development. Gender issues have also been acknowledged to be critical to the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs); this is because the implication of gender equality has a far influence on social and economic progress in improving women status which could be used as a reliable indicator of progress in implementing the overall agenda.

Recognizing the interdependence of gender equality and development, GOAL 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on *Gender Equality* which is:

Table 1: Goal, Target, Indicator for Gender Equality

SDG Reference	Target 5.1	Indicator
SDG GOAL 5 – <i>Gender Equality</i> . 	Target 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere	5.1.1 Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex

The United Nations have placed gender equality and women’s empowerment at the heart of its efforts to accelerate progress universally by directly empowering women and by bringing a gender perspective to all development work. To achieve the SDG 5 requires that all men and women over the world join hands to build a unified holistic equal environment. Everyone has a stake in the proposed SDGs, and everyone has a defined role to play and this is the roles that this paper intends to fill. Laudable as these goals are, if we fail to unite and play our parts, they will never be achieved (Oleribe, Crossey & Taylor-Robinson, 2015; Maleche, 2015).

Discoveries have shown that women and girls in Nigeria like many other countries are faced with various challenges both at the private and public sector such as discriminations and abuses. As a result of this, there are gender imbalances that tend to take place and discriminate them against the men. Even though the attainment of gender equality is not only seen as an end in itself, it is equally an end in ingredients to and a catalyst for the achievement of sustainable development of countries. Empowering women and girls would help enlarge economic growth, promote social development and establish more stable and just society. If Nigeria truly supports the sustainable development goals (SDGs), then gender equality should govern not only the

ranks of our defense service but our philosophy to advance true equality and equity around the globe. Like the gender equality, access to information and communication technology (ICTs) is also critical to achieving other SDGs, such as: achieving quality education (Goal 4), and reducing inequalities (Goal 10) especially among women that are most time neglected in policy consideration (International Institute for sustainable Development, 2017). It has been reiterated overtime, “that empowering women and girls has a multiplier effect, and helps drive up economic growth and development across the board” (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

The Role of Library and Information Professionals Towards Attaining Sustainable Development

Libraries and information centers are repositories of knowledge and information, which are critical devices for eliminating ignorance, eradicating poverty; inequality and building a knowledge economy; they have an essential role in preventing this from happening, by ensuring access to information for all. The place of library and information professionals in the transformation and attainment of gender equality is germane; because information access has been identified by many targets of the SDGs as a prerequisite for development and combat gender inequality. Libraries and information professionals play a significant role in providing access to information and services which enables women to live meaningful lives and be independence. In fact, library and information services are key actors in providing unhindered access to essential resources for economic and cultural advance as well as dissemination of knowledge, culture, and lifelong education. The library and information professionals can contribute to the actualization of gender equality and sustainable development goals (SDGs) through the following ways:

1. Creation of awareness on the importance of library use:

Libraries are social institutions saddled with the responsibility of acquiring, collecting, storing and disseminating information for its host community and the society at large. Libraries are the principal centers for the dissemination of knowledge and culture, and play a significant role in lifelong education. The roles of public libraries are indispensable in the attainment of gender equality as they are expected to “ensure access of information for “the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic, employment

status and educational attainment" (IFLA/UNESCO, 2001). They cater for diversity of users' information needs.

Consequently, the libraries and information professionals need to create more awareness as to the importance of their existence and use to the citizens or members of the community especially the women. It is imperative to bring to their consciousness about the existence and benefit that could be derived from the use of library. They have to let the citizens know that they are the custodians of information resources in the society. This means that libraries will need to identify the peculiar need of the women, level of education and services to be rendered. This kind of user will require a different kind of information service, one that continually seeks to satisfy information needs in more customized ways (Feeney and Cowcher, n.d).

To attract users, generate awareness on the available resources and services especially in less educated environment, libraries need to strategically promote themselves. These strategies need to be created in such a way that women would feel comfortable visiting the centers taking into cognizance their socio-cultural background and environment. This can be achieved through print media and traditional outlet: leaflets, posters, infographics, posters, displays, face-to-face, workshops, orientation and digital tools such as radio, Short message service (SMS), internet, and social media where available. Library and information professionals can provide formal instruction service such as open learning centers, adult and further education classrooms, or informal service (storytelling, crèche facilities), recreational activities etc. This approach and services would improve the visibility and value the women would place on the library. The net effect of library use by the girls and women would promote reading culture, literacy, lifelong learning and importance of placing access on information for their daily living. The ripple effect of this improvement would aid full participation of women societal development and the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

2. Provision of ICT tools and facilities in the library:

The exponential use of ICT has brought colossal opportunities as well as challenges to the present society generally. By ICTs, we mean computers, television radio, and the Internet. ICT has its significant impact on women education and overall developments as well as bridging the digital gap across the gender divide. The uneven access to technology has intensified the degree of digital divide especially for the women. The gender digital divide is not only about the level of access, but also the opportunities and developing their own skills (Gurung, 2018).

“Without access to ICT, women are at greater risk of being left behind as agents of change and leaders in a rapidly changing global society” (Sow, 2014). There is a general recognition of the potential of ICT as a tool for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, a “gender divide” has also been identified, as few women use ICT compared with men (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005). Though, there is high disparity of ICT usage between women and men, it has been noted that there is low usage compared to the male counterpart. The root reasons for this could be attributed to lack of digital know-how, high costs, rural-urban disparities, scarcity of content that is relevant and empowering for women, and barriers to women speaking freely and privately online (International Institute for sustainable Development, 2017). Therefore, libraries and information professionals can facilitate access to ICTs especially women in rural communities where infrastructures are scarcely available for development. The enhanced capability in use of ICT is very crucial for the sustainable development as they can offers avenues for women’s political, multi-cultural, social and economic empowerment. Often, these technologies provide opportunities for information access, communication and self-expression. Internet search, blogs, online multimedia resources, social media, wikis, as well as services such as e-government, e-health, e-banking, e-learning, e-commerce, e-voting, all create new arrangements of communication, engagement and social inclusion for women.

3. Information Literacy:

Information literacy is not just ability to read and write but it encompasses set of skills and abilities necessary for access to information; make right decisions and solve problems. Public libraries and information professionals often provide free educational programs that introduce patrons to information literacy skills. Information literacy can be a key driver for making and sustaining change, advance gender equality, promote political participation, eradicate poverty, and improve healthy living among women. Through the use of library, women will be more literate. They would be enlightened regarding vital issues that could affect their lives such as; diseases, poverty, discrimination etc. Women are who are information literate are likely to access health-related information services, human-right based information or gain access to financial services. They will not be living in ignorance concerning their environment. Thus, information literacy service is an important contribution the libraries can render to girls and women. Those who are information literate, and skillful to use it are able to seize

opportunities, take better decisions and innovate; those without risk being left behind. This information literacy programmes can be geared towards promoting local and popular foreign language common among the community members. The emphasis should not be based on information provision, but properly educate women on how to appropriately utilize the vast and diverse content made available to them.

4. Content diversity:

Content diversity is a fundamental and core issues for the use of information resources. Language and format of available information resources has been identified as one of the factors that hinder access to information literacy among girls and women. Language barriers (local language) and lack of existing materials in appropriate format have been identified as one of the greatest obstacle to information flow especially in rural settings. Language barrier in particular can affect the ability of women to engage in learning.

Access to local, cultural and linguistic appropriate resources has the potential to improve the learning ability of women and promoting literacy. The issue here is that, the library and information professionals should make available (provide) information resources both in English and local formats in their quest to ensure that all users of all categories are benefitted in the use of information resources. Providing intellectual access to information in a format useful to potential users has always been one of pivotal roles of librarian which is a shift from emphasis of document to its contents. In a situation where these resources are available in a language other than the community understands; it behooves the information professionals to translate or transliterate the language or engage translators. This can be another platform through which the library could complement cultural enrichment of their community and contribute to the actualization of information accessibility for all without any form of discrimination.

5. Organizing outreach / community information centers and programs:

The library and information professionals could also organize outreaches / community information centers and programs in the rural areas and disadvantage communities for women. In libraries, outreach involves information provision and services for those who are infrequent users or non-users that are traditionally underserved. It is usually an effort geared toward marketing the library resources and its facilities to the potential users in their communities where they live and work. It aims at offering services without monetary gain, and to identify and fill service voids for women who are not looking for them. These can be achieved through the traditional

delivery systems, bookmobiles, audio-visual collection, books-by-mail, rural health care information systems and deposit collections (Boyce & Boyce, 1995).

6. Social and services inclusion:

Social and services inclusion is also another role libraries and information professionals can offer towards promoting gender equality. Social inclusion here “refers to all efforts and policies to promote equality of opportunity to people from all circumstances and from all socially excluded categories” (Fourie, 2007). Literature and experiences have shown that women exclusion in education and learning characterized under-developed countries. As such many women are without knowledge of developmental process in their settings. The public libraries have the prospective to be an essential driver of social inclusion in every community. Therefore, libraries need to address social exclusion of women from information access considering their marginalization and dominance.

The libraries have often contributed to digital inclusion for women in an effort to increase access to information and improve digital skills. The libraries should aim at increasing numbers of information centers, improving facilities and bring them closer to the women. This is to ensure that all categories of users are accommodated in their pursuit of information accessibility. Through this medium, libraries can become a broad community information centers for training and acquiring skills for women and girls; thereby establishing themselves as integral hub within the community. In attaining this, libraries will need to work and collaborate with individuals, groups, non-government originations (NGOs) and agencies who are particular about empowering women and girls child in mutual agreement, and support, towards realizing economic benefits. For example, Nakuru Public and Kiberia library in Kenya, are empowering women through “bidwork and croacheting” in the informal settlement scheme of Rhonda and Kibera (Kweya, 2019 Twitter). With women inclusion in library services, sustainable development goals (SDGs) can become viable and attainable for human progress.

Conclusion and recommendations

Gender equality has generally been accepted as fundamental and inviolable human right issues that concern all in a bid to attain sustainable development goals. The need to emphasize the promotion of gender equality cannot be underestimated, especially in a world where women constitute half of world populations and mostly cater for family needs and survival in developing countries. Achieving gender equality for all girls and women requires concerted of all, and

libraries and information professionals must not be left behind. In fact they have critical and core roles to play; as such individuals, government and stakeholders are expected to support the establishment and sustenance of libraries. Finally, information professionals must champion and be key agents in accelerating gender equality through the provision of access to information for the realization of sustainable development goals (SDGs).

References

- Boyce, J. I., & Boyce, B. (1995). Library outreach programs in rural areas. *Library Trends*, 44, (1), 112-28.
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. Retrieved from https://publicofficialsfinancialdisclosure.worldbank.org/sites/fdl/files/assets/law-library-files/Nigeria_Constitution_1999_en.pdf
- Dominic, A., Amodu, L., Toluwalope, O., Azuh, A. E., and Oluwatoyin, M. A. (2017). Gender inequality and development in Nigeria: Hindrances and implications. 30th IBIMA Conference: 8-9 November 2017, Madrid, Spain. Retrieved from <https://ibima.org/accepted-paper/gender-inequality-and-development-in-nigeria-hindrances-and-implications/>
- Ekpu, R. (2019). The Amazons didn't come. *The Guardian newspapers*, April, 2, 2019.
- Eniola, B. O. (2018). Gender parity in parliament: A panacea for the promotion and protection of women's rights in Nigeria. *Front. Sociol.*, 3:34.
- Feeney, S., & Cowcher, G. (n.d). 21st century public library services: The function and role of Liswa. Retrieved from <https://slwa.wa.gov.au/pdf/21stcenturydpstratdir2002-07.pdf>
- Folarin, S. F., & Udoh, O. D. (2014). Beijing declaration and women's property rights in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, 10 (34), 239-249.
- Fourie, I. (2007). Public libraries addressing social inclusion: how we may think... World library and information congress: 73rd IFLA general conference and council 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa. Retrieved from <http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm>

- Friends of the environment Nigeria (n.d). SDG 5: Gender equality In Nigeria – A critical political analysis. Retrieved from <https://fote.org.ng/2018/12/sdg-5-gender-equality-in-nigeria-a-critical-political-analysis/>
- Gurung, L. (2018). The digital divide: An inquiry from feminist perspectives. *Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 12, 41-48.
- IFLA/UNESCO. (2001). The public library service: IFLA/UNESCO guidelines for development. *IFLA Publication*, 97.
- International Institute for sustainable Development (2017).What is the gender digital divide, and why should it matter for the SDGs? *SDG Knowledge Hub*. Retrieved from <http://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/what-is-the-gender-digital-divide-and-why-should-it-matter-for-the-sdgs/>
- International monetary fund. African Department (2018). Good for women good for growth: Closing Nigeria’s gender gap. *Country Report*, No. 18/64: 1-92. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2018/03/07/Nigeria-Selected-Issues-45700>
- Jaiyesimi, R. (2016). The challenge of implementing the sustainable development goals in Africa: The way forward. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*,20 (3):14.
- Kweya, J. (2019). Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/joseckyyaa/status/1131103039534903297>
- Maleche, A. (2015). SDG series: Are sdgs the vehicle to end AIDS by 2030? Only if driven by human rights. Retrieved from <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2015/09/sdg-series-are-sdgs-the-vehicle-to-end-aids-by-2030-only-if-driven-by-human-rights/>
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2018). 2017: Statistical report on women and men in Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/784>
- Oleribe, O. O., Crossey, M. M. E., & Taylor-Robinson, S.T. (2015) Sustainable health development goals (shdg): breaking down the walls. *Pan African Medical Journal*, 22: 306.

- Sow, R. (2014). Women and ICT in Africa: A new digital gap. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/05/women-ict-africa-new-digital-gap-201452210244121558.html>
- Thomas-Oda, I. (2019). Why it is time for a female speaker, by CSOs. *The Guardian Newspaper*, April, 4 2019.
- United Nations Development Programme (2019). Goal 5: Gender equality. Retrieved from <http://www.ng.undp.org/content/nigeria/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-5-gender-equality.html>
- United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) (2002). Information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women. Report of the Expert Group Meeting Seoul, Republic of Korea, 11 – 14 November 2002. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/ict2002/reports/EGMFinalReport.pdf>
- Yila, U. M., & Azeez, B. O. (2018). Barriers to women participation in information society in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science for Policy Implications*, 6 (1), 10-17.