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Fall 10-5-2020

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Asogwa, Chinako; Mmomelu, Leticia; and Daniel, Titilayo, "Effective Library Services to the Legislature: the Need for a Consortium among Legislative Libraries in Abuja." (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4370.

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Effective Library Services to the Legislature: the Need for a Consortium among Legislative Libraries in Abuja.

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Abstract

The ever growing rate of information and publication has made it impossible for any library, however big, to acquire all the information resources needed by the users. Ownership of collection development is gradually being replaced by the need for access to information and knowledge without regard to location and format. Resource sharing among libraries has become the way out of library lack and a way to fulfil users' satisfaction. The arrival of information and communication technologies (ICT) has increased both the convenience and efficiency of finding and producing information resources. This equips libraries with the facilities and the ease to share their information resources to a greater extent. This paper discusses the concept of resource sharing, the need for resource sharing, and methods that can be adopted for effective service delivery to library users. The article discusses how legislative libraries in Abuja can form a consortium to improve access to more collections and be able to fulfil users' information needs. It goes further to make recommendations for procedures to be adopted for a successful consortium and consequent resource sharing programme among legislative libraries in Abuja.

Keywords: - Legislative Libraries, ICT, Legislature, Resource Sharing, Consortium, Service delivery

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Introduction

Information is a vital resource that affects all disciplines and all endeavors in life. It supports education, research, and development in all areas of existence. The main functions of a library are to accumulate information from various sources and to rearrange, process and disseminate them to satisfy the requirements of researchers within the right form and at the right time. As the days go by, several information are made available in written and unwritten form, thereby causing an explosion of information in the world. In this age of information explosion, no library however big or rich in resources, is able to satisfy all the needs of its users due to overwhelming number of document and information resources made available every moment. The demands and needs of library users also change from time to time, so the library most times are unable to meet all users' needs. To solve the problems of information explosion, the concept of resource sharing has been developed as a way for libraries to cooperate and survive together, rather than struggling to survive alone.

In contrast to the mindset of survival of the fittest as a law and condition for progress in human endeavor, there is now a humanistic approach to the concept of survival, and this is the resource sharing idea. Song (2000) is of the view that “no library can effectively satisfy its users from the resources within its walls”. Ekuoye (2002) and Ejedafiru (2011) agree that there is no way a single library can satisfy the demands of its users. It is widely acknowledged that no library, regardless of how large and well-funded it is, are often self-sufficient in meeting its users' demands. The rapid growth of print and electronic resources have made it difficult to obtain library materials easily to satisfy all user needs. So, according to Yao & Zeng, (2012), interlibrary loan, document delivery services and resource sharing have become more and more popular in recent years. Library professionals need to explore options to extend users' access to

information sources by forming partnerships with other peer libraries so that users' ever increasing needs can be met. These joint operating arrangements enable patrons to access resources that otherwise, would have been out of their reach. This requires each participating institution to contribute in the network of their extended libraries' family and not operate in isolation.

Legislative Libraries are libraries that are established to provide information needs and services to members of the legislature and their staff. They are usually found in the legislative houses and other organizations that support the legislative functions. The legislature requires unbiased, relevant, and timely information to be provided by the library. This is an important factor that permits legislators to satisfy people's expectation of them. For a legislator, independent judgment and commitment to national interest are vital, therefore accurate and timely information is key.

The legislative libraries in Nigeria, are however handicapped in providing all that the legislators require of them as a result of shortage of materials and information resources. Nigeria is not exempted from the overwhelming number of document and information resources published every moment. There is increasing demands from the legislative information users who require their information to be current, timely, and tailored to their needs while still being made available in various formats to facilitate ease of use. In today's world, acquiring, organizing and disseminating such cumbersome information for the legislature may not be achieved effectively without cooperation among the legislative libraries. Hence, legislative libraries in Abuja got to develop cooperative plans to satisfy the challenges posed by rapid climb and variety of data sources, increased users' demands and expectations, decreased budgets,

increased prices of books, journals and databases. All these challenges encountered by the libraries can be solved through resource sharing.

Concept of Resource Sharing

The word 'Resource' not only represent the books or documents, but also the knowledge in any format it is presented. Further, it includes the space, services and even man power available in such libraries. The "sharing" means either lending or borrowing. In application to libraries sharing means lending and borrowing of information resources. The American Library Association (ALA) Seminar on Network and Multi-type Library Co-operation defines resource sharing as "The co-operative structures, which cross jurisdictional, institutional, and often political boundaries to join in a common enterprise, several sorts of libraries — academic, special, and public". Resource sharing according to Muthu (2013) denotes "a mode of operation whereby the functions are shared in common by a number of libraries".

Resource Sharing is a term used to connote the situation whereby a library makes available certain library resources and share it with other participating libraries who need it. It is a sort of library collaboration, where every participating libraries share their library resources with other libraries in their network. On demand, each participating library voluntarily comes to the fore to share its existing resources with other libraries involved in the collaboration. In this system, it is a completely mutual relationship where each library is both a giver and a receiver. According to Chatterjee[n.d] "it won't merely mean mutual sharing of data sources available in several libraries, it'll mean utilizing the knowledge sources of one library for generating services by another library". This necessitates the need to develop a spirit of co-operation among the

librarians and information scientists. This spirit of sharing the resources would entail the participant libraries in a system to benefit for advancing their individual goals and objectives.

The goal of resource sharing is to maximize the supply of and demand for materials and services at the minimum expense possible. Library resources are the staff, materials, functions, methods and services available in such library. Today, in an environment of data and publication explosion, it has become practically impossible for any library to stay self-reliant. In a situation of growing demands of the readers and depleting levels of monetary resources, no library is in a position to get all the materials on demand. Resource sharing comes as a way of overcoming these and other limitations of the individual libraries in respect of their resources by way of cooperation among the participating libraries to enhance service delivery.

Concept of Service Delivery

Service delivery is the relationship between service providers and their consumers which encompasses both the services and their supporting systems. The utmost aim is the satisfaction of the clients. One of the basic services as it concerns libraries, is the provision of information resources to the clientele. For legislative libraries to achieve its purpose of supporting legislation, library resources and services should be sufficient in quality, depth, diversity and currency to support the activities of the legislature. According to Aboyade (2013), service delivery in libraries is “the sum total of all library activities aimed at facilitating the use of the library and its resources”. Olanlokun (2013) defined service delivery as “the ability of a librarian to strive within and outside available resources to provide answers to users query and also to meet the overall information needs of the users”. Accomplishing effective service delivery in

legislative libraries in Nigeria is all about availability of up-to-date information which is required to support the activities of the legislative arm of the government.

Information has become the driving force behind the development of nations and effective service delivery is therefore paramount to ensure that users are properly equipped with the resources they need for their development. In addition to playing a vital role in every process of human endeavors and interaction among people, it enhances the quality of decisions made and facilitates social changes in the society. It therefore behooves on the library to provide adequate and appropriate library services to users to support their intellectual, cultural and technical development needs. Akpan-Atata (2013) observed that for information to be at the disposal of everybody, there must be well-packaged information services delivery.

Concept of Legislative Libraries

Legislative libraries are special libraries often found in parliaments and parliamentary support organisations for the purpose of provision of information and information services to the legislature, to support their work. However the role of parliamentarian is defined it will be apparent that many of these functions place a heavy demand for information on those responsible. Rugambura (2010) observes that the Parliamentary Library has a role provide access to information services, sources, and products and to disseminate information to parliamentarians in an objective and nonpartisan manner. Legislative library, according to Katsutoshi (2000) is the cornerstone of any parliament, offering vast accumulation of resources such as books, serial document, database and bibliographies to anyone who is interested in legislative activities. The availability of both library and research resources are very crucial for legislators to effectively perform their representative, oversight and legislative functions. At all points of the legislators work; whether committee, plenary or constituency, good information allows them to

understand problems, consider solutions, influence policies or strategies, and make good decisions.

Unless there's adequate information legislature cannot effectively oversee the chief and perform a legion of other functions. In “Nigeria needs legislative library...” (2012) Pullinger, the librarian and Director General, Information Services, House of Commons, London, while stressing the need for functional legislative libraries in Nigeria, said that Nigeria needs a well-equipped legislative library to spice up its democracy. According to him, “the legislature are going to be well informed about the business that comes before it... Individual members of the National Assembly are well informed to hold out their parliamentary duties in their constituencies”.

There is need for a functional and an up-to-date legislative library to broaden the knowledge base of the staff and lawmakers. The legislative libraries are established to provide research and information services to legislators and staff of the assembly but the dwindling resources has impacted negatively on the service to the staff and legislators; hence, the need for collaborative arrangements.

Needs for Resource Sharing:

A single library cannot offer and meet the wants of users thanks to many constraints like resources, funds, space, man power etc. Hence, the need for resource sharing as a vital method to beat these constraints. For instance, a library may have a book which is required for the user of other library and this case are often a visa-versa. In this case, the sharing of resources becomes imperative thanks to limited library budget. The need for resource sharing stems from the following factors:

Knowledge Explosion: Increase in the number of research institutions, universities, industrial

and commercial organizations and others academic institutions are responsible for increased knowledge generation. Emergence of new disciplines have become more important and relevant thereby causing more research and more publications of new knowledge. Acquiring all published literature by a library is too difficult, but on the other hand the users keep demanding access to all such available information resources.

Increase in Library Users: Population explosion, influx of individuals from rural to urban cities, education, high priority on research and development have caused the liberal use of libraries by all. Increase in user population demands growth in library resources and services, but there's a limit to such growth, as libraries are faced with limited funds and space. Due to the increase in users' demand for diversified information, the libraries are prompted to investigate ways and means for wider range of service and collections; and resource sharing offers practical solutions to these problems.

Library Services: Users within the libraries have become more and more information conscious than ever before, demanding timely and effective quality library services. The current awareness services and selective dissemination of information, information repackaging and consolidation wouldn't be possible unless libraries share resources.

Acquisition Problems: Increase in publishing output necessitates libraries to update their collections continuously. This needs a lot of space to deal with the gathering. Obsolescence of data also involves weeding of collection. Co-operative acquisition, storage, and services can eliminate the issues of space, balance collection building, and promote efficient services.

Economic Resources: Prices of books and journals have increased tremendously over the years and this has highly affected the purchasing capacity of libraries. In spite of governmental and institutional finance, libraries are not in a position to shop for all that is required for the user

community. Regular budgetary cuts and introduction of latest services and maintenance of staff even have affected the procurement in libraries.

Objectives of Resource sharing.

The underlying principles of resource sharing is to provide maximum service at a minimum cost possible; and to make a conducive environment during which libraries offers better services to satisfy user needs within available limited resources. Following are a couple of objectives of cooperation and resource sharing among libraries.

Increased Availability and Accessibility of resources: Clientele of the participating libraries will have access to resources available in all the participating libraries. Resources are often moved from one library to a different library, manually or through modern means. This provides a simple access to and easy flow of data.

To Diminish Cost: Resource sharing helps in building specialized collection and every participating libraries needn't duplicate the procurement of comparable materials. This facilitates availability of larger collection and even the essential material required by the users are often obtained without causing much delay.

Resource Exploitation: Resource sharing advocates making information resources of one library available to the clients of other libraries. Thus, it exposes the information materials to a wider group of users.

Improved Service Delivery: Involvement in resource sharing helps libraries to provide better services; supply more coverage of collections and facilities; share experiences; make

interactions; supply wider access to users; and to supply top quality library and knowledge support services.

Areas of Resource Sharing in Libraries:

Some common areas of resource sharing in Library and information centres are:

Inter-library loan; cooperative acquisition; shared cataloguing; preparation and maintenance of union catalogue and union list of serials; sharing of bibliographic data; specialized purchasing program; centralized processing of library collection; cooperative microfilming of library materials; exchange of publications; and exchange of library expertise and personnel.

Requirements for Resource Sharing in Library: The process of resource sharing largely involves on two major factors. One is that the availability of resources in library to share and the second one is the willingness of libraries to hitch with resource sharing activities. The subsequent are a number of basic requirements for effective resource sharing:

- There should be a communication link or system between the collaborating libraries.
- Most of all the libraries should be willing to hitch with this resource sharing activities.
- Necessary technology and equipment should be available within the libraries in the network.
- Standardized library software, hardware and database for sharing of library resources.
- Operating policies on the sort of data and archives, which users can access.
- There should be an agreement, upon which the entire resource sharing activities may run.

Methods of Resource Sharing

Two major methods of resource sharing are generally being practiced among libraries. These are

- (a) Conventional method and
- (b) Advanced method

Conventional method of resource sharing

In this method, resource sharing of traditional printed materials is practiced. Two or more participating libraries issue their catalogues and union lists of periodicals with archival holdings. The participating libraries also publish union lists. On the idea of those lists of holdings, they share their resources through interlibrary loan (ILL) arrangements. The relationship between these libraries in this type of collaboration is usually physical and the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) are not involved.

Advanced (Automated) Method of Resource sharing:

Here, libraries make use of information and Communication technology (ICT) to further enhance the resource sharing initiatives. The arrival of information and communication technologies (ICT) has increased both the convenience and efficiency of finding and producing virtual documents. This equips libraries with the facilities to share their information sources to a greater extent. This method is basically, though not limited to web-based resource sharing. Web based resource sharing includes the sharing of resources hosted on internet. It is vital for bibliographic control of the explosion of literature and knowledge. It also avoids duplication in purchase of costly documents. Some forms of web-based resource sharing include:

WWW: A worldwide network of internet servers providing access to documents written using a script called Hypertext terminology (HTML) that permits content to be interlinked, locally and remotely. The libraries are widely using this to share their resources with one another. The web is the fastest, easiest, most inexpensive tool of data gathering and communication; as well as sharing.

OPAC: Online public access catalogues (OPAC) has replaced printed catalogues and periodical lists that were used in libraries to find information before the advancement of the ICT. With OPAC, the catalogue holdings of other participating libraries can easily be viewed and therefore, it facilitates identification and availability of materials.

Email (Electronic mail): This is an online protocol that permits ICT users to exchange messages and data files with other users, both locally and across networks. If the OPAC of a library isn't available, the supply of needed document can be done through the email to facilitate services to the library users for effective service delivery.

Digital Libraries: This is the type of library where a big proportion of the resources are available in machine-readable format (as against print), and can be accessed by means of computers and other ICT devices. Digital libraries play vital role in resource sharing, as it make it easier to send and receive electronic documents, whether in text, HTML, PDF, or the other readable format, to participating libraries.

Model for Resource Sharing Among Legislative Libraries in Abuja

Legislative libraries in Abuja while sharing resources with one another may need to form a consortium. In this model, resources, both selected print and electronic, are often housed at a central place and access is often provided to the institutions/organizations involved. A library

consortium is a group of libraries who partner to coordinate activities, share resources, and combine expertise for the purpose of satisfying user satisfactions. In a consortium, libraries come together to realize a combined objective that usually requires co-operation and the sharing of resources. The libraries come together in formal agreement so as to share resources in order to satisfy their users. It is a collaborative effort aimed at sharing information resources among libraries with similar objectives so that the collective strength of the cooperating libraries can facilitate improved teaching, learning, research and information service delivery to users.

The library consortium mainly deals with resource sharing in digital or electronic format. The aim of the consortia is to achieve what the members of the group cannot achieve individually. Reitz (2004) defines consortium as an association of independent libraries and/or library systems established by a proper agreement, usually, for the aim of resource sharing. This needs good networking among the member libraries as ICT facilities are extensively used. Every library is required to possess computers, on-line database and good internet connectivity to be part of this type of resource sharing. The staff also need a good knowledge of communication network to participate in this level of resource sharing. A computerized database of bibliographical records of library materials is to be developed to supply a broad perspective about the resources in various libraries within the network.

Advantages of a consortium

Library consortium is a strategic alliance among libraries with similar objectives aimed at improving access to information resources in different disciplines. Consortium can bring economy, efficiency and equality in information availability and use. Participant institutions in a consortium have access not only to their own resources but sources in the other institutions as

well. Pandian, Jambhekar, and Kansiddappa, (2002) is of the opinion that consortium bridges the gap between information resource rich libraries and information deficient libraries. Libraries can acquire more resources by paying less if they're members of a consortium. Consortium purchasing offers, for the only library, the chance to realize access to more resources than might rather be possible alone. For the consortium members, it offers reduced costs in the inter-institutional document delivery processes for specific resources. Resource sharing is considered to be an excellent advantage of consortium for libraries, because present day librarianship emphasizes that the power for users to access resources is usually more important than collection building within a particular library. Through a library consortium, the collective strength of resources of varied institutions available thereto are often increased. Singh and Singh (2004) opines that the consortium enables libraries to realize the advantages of wider access to electronic resources at a reasonable cost.

Potential Network for Resource Sharing among Legislative Libraries in Abuja, Nigeria

In the Federal Capital there's a considerable scope to start out concrete resource sharing projects due to the amount of legislative libraries therein. The city is legendary for having enough legislative libraries to make a network and may develop collaborative network to share their print and online resources. They will formulate policies after consulting their peer institutions to enable them enter into a formal agreement with one another for resource sharing purposes. The following libraries in the Federal Capital Territory may consider forming a consortium for resource sharing activities among them.

- National Assembly (NASS) Library
- National Assembly Service Commission (NASC) Library

- National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) Library
- National Assembly Budget and Research Office (NABRO) library
- Institute of Legislative Studies, University of Abuja Library
- Policy and Legal Advocacy Center (PLAC) Library
- Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC) library

If the libraries listed above are to come together to form a consortium, users will have better services and resources that would ordinarily not have been possible with any of the individual libraries. Also, the result will be an information rich network that will provide effective library services to the legislators, legislative staff and every other person that is interested in legislative activities.

Recommendations

Nigerian legislative libraries are eager to join other developed countries in providing access to rich and up-to-date information content for the legislators. A consortium initiative by the legislative libraries in Abuja will have vital importance and as such, the following activities are being recommended for consideration :

- There is need for the formation of an apex body that would function as supervisory head for coordinating activities of the consortium.
- Continued effort should be made to convince libraries that hoarding of resources from a large group of potential and needy information seekers is an unfair act and that the

technology driven co-operative arrangements of electronic resources could accomplish the library services far more than they can individually.

- It is recommended that the budgetary requirements for major technical start-ups and consortium based activities may be provided to each legislative library so that each will know what is expected of their institution.
- There is need to evaluate the existing network infrastructure available in the legislative libraries in Abuja and to identify the gaps that exists therein, for providing adequate number of internet enabled PC's and a secure internet connectivity with higher bandwidth among the consortium libraries.
- There is also a need to evaluate strengths and weakness of the existing information resources, systems and services available in the legislative libraries , for providing much required impetus for the formation of the consortium.
- There is need to identify the maximum electronic resources options available for accessing in a consortium mode, and to identify the possibilities of electronic content creation in a co-operative manner among the legislative libraries.
- Finally, it is also necessary to constantly organize the training for existing library personnel in turn with the new environment and regular reminder that sharing resources means sharing success.

Information is vital for the functioning of democratic legislatures. Legislatures, as Frantzich (1979) noted about 20 years ago, “need information to perform their representative, legislative and oversight functions” He further argued that Representatives and Senators

“ideally, need to have information that's complete, accurate, timely, relevant and sometimes confidential”. Globally, no library can claim bibliographic completeness in its collection, so resource sharing seems a crucial option out of the matter. Hence, legislative libraries in Abuja got to develop cooperative plans to satisfy the challenges posed by rapid climb and variety of data sources, increased users' demands and expectations.

Conclusions

With the explosion of information and constraints on the financial resources, resource sharing has emerged as a necessity in library services. Moreover, the issues of space, standardization, professional development of the staff, challenges posed by new technologies, and drastic cut within the library budgets have impacted negatively on present day librarianship. Resource Sharing becomes more important and inevitable for a developing country like Nigeria, where the knowledge centers/libraries are in need of funds and resources. Libraries encounter problems of inadequate resources and hence there's an immediate need for library networks and resource sharing. This is why it might be a superb idea for legislative libraries in Abuja to be involved within the sharing of resources among themselves. The legislative bodies cannot function effectively without a well-equipped library to supply timely and authentic information to the legislators to assist them in their work.

Due to the extensive use of information and communication technology (ICT) in legislative libraries, it's time to develop formal resource sharing framework to enable each library have access to rich collection of data for the legislature. Librarians therefore, should seek their organizations' support to be a part of such network which can be established in a documented manner. Professional associations also can play an important role in organizing such network by

defining the structures, policies, procedures, and standards. Similarly, donor agencies can support resource sharing activities among legislative libraries as a way to support the building of legislative capacity in Nigeria.

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