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Spring 10-21-2020

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MNGUTYO, JAMES NGUSHIN; INYANG, ELIZABETH OKON UNN; and ATUH, OBISIKE N., "Advocacy and Lobbying as Instruments for Public Relations in Nigerian Special Libraries" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4352.

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Advocacy and Lobbying as Instruments for Public Relations in Nigerian Special Libraries

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Abstract

Nigerian institutions and society at large are shrouded in deep, prevailing and wide spread ignorance of special libraries' importance. As a result these libraries are underutilized hence the slow and little national development being witnessed. Advocacy and lobbying are therefore identified as necessary instruments for public relations in dispelling this deep rooted, prevailing and widespread ignorance that has prevented Nigerian special libraries from being optimally utilized for national development. In this light, the paper takes a look at the concept of special libraries, public relations and more specifically advocacy and lobbying and proceeds to examine the need to use advocacy and lobbying as instruments for public relations in Nigerian special libraries as well as identify the forums in which these instruments can be used such as library-user Interactive forum, management meetings, monthly seminars/workshops, in top management /staff meetings among others to achieve the desired result and conclude that the path may be long and tedious but patience and perseverance are all that is required to achieve the desired result.

Key Words: Advocacy, Lobbying, Public Relations, Special Libraries, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigerian special libraries are known to have enjoyed little attention that has resulted into slow and little national development. The fact remains that majority of Nigerians do not know their strategic role in the provision of information for national development. Nevertheless, they are still seen establishing and minimally maintaining them as though their full value is known. This may perhaps be due to the fact that they are required at some point as criterion for the

establishment of certain academic and professional institutions by their regulatory bodies among other things.

Quite so, special libraries in Nigeria like others elsewhere have come to stay (Mngutyô and Tarbo 2020). It is unfortunate that their importance towards this regard has not being fully known and realized by most people in developing society such as Nigeria despite the occasional library orientation and education organized. Special libraries no doubt are inevitable and their importance cannot be ignored without reprisal consequences. In the case of Nigeria, it is the slow and little national development being witnessed (Mngutyô and Ngushin, 2018), despite huge financial investment in their parent institutions. This therefore makes advocacy and lobbying as instruments for public relations imperative in Nigerian special libraries to dispel the prevailing ignorance of special libraries importance so that they could be harnessed for optimal utilization. By this, the else while status quo that hitherto existed would be brought to an end while the Nigerian society experience rapid improvement in national development. The paper therefore examines the concepts of special libraries, public relations in general and more specifically, advocacy and lobbying and discusses the need to use them in Nigerian special libraries and identify the forums they can be used in.

Concept of Special Libraries

Special libraries as they are popularly known are exclusively established for unique purposes. They are central to National Development (ND). They belong to those groups of libraries essentially meant for research in a particular field of study and are patronized by specialists in specific fields (Ode and Omokaro, 2007). Udofot (2018) disclose that they are libraries specially built for a particular field and group of people and aimed at achieving particular goals or objectives of the communities they serve. Hameed (ND) further indicate that they are also

research libraries that serve the interest of research institutions and people working in an organization with specified subject interest which is usually narrow in scope. At other times Hameed submit that special libraries serve the interest of the public on a narrow discipline. Edoka (2002) also states that these libraries belong to particular establishments such as government ministries, research institutes, banks and professional bodies. Shidi, Aju and Ashaver (2016) add that they are unique and cater for information needs of their parent bodies such as individuals, institutes, government organizations etc. Some important special libraries in Nigeria are International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Library, Ibadan; The Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Library Lagos; Federal Institute of Industrial Research (FIR) Library, Oshodi; National Veterinary Research Institute (NVRI) Library, Vom Plateau State; Nigerian Institute of Legal Studies (NIALS) Library, Lagos; Cocoa Research Institute (CRI) Library, Ibadan and Central Medical Library, Yaba-Lagos (Ode and Omokaro, 2007).

Accordingly, Mngutyô and Ngushin (2018) assert that special libraries are uniquely designed information systems for providing relevant and up-to-date information resources and information as the case may be to specific group of people in a specific discipline with similar interest. They are information systems established solely to assist people, organizations, institutions etc be it governmental or non-governmental with information in fulfilling their various mandates in society. Regrettably, they are not known for what they represent hence undervalued and underutilized by the people they are meant to benefit (Mngutyô and Tarbo 2020).

Concept of Public relations: Advocacy and Lobbying

Public Relations (PRs) of any kind are important in every organization and cannot be over emphasized. PR is the work of explaining to the public what an organization does so that it will

be understood and approved of (Longman 2000). It involves information given to the public, persuasion directed to modify attitudes and actions and efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its public and of its publics with that institution (Chia in Israel (2012)). The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English language (2010) posit in addition that they are activities and techniques utilized by public and private organizations and enterprises to establish favorable attitudes and responses in their behalf on the part of the general public or of special groups : included are analysis of attitudes, appraisal of procedures and policies, recommendations for internal change and effective presentations of the organization's purposes and objectives; the same dictionary also sees public relations as the public conduct of the affairs of an organization with regard to its reputation and standing and to public opinion; and also as the relationship between the general public and an institution of any kind. Invariably, public relation is a management tool that is increasingly becoming important in the management of organizations such as the library, whether private or public, whether they are profit making or nonprofit oriented, an essential element in the communication system that enables individuals to be informed on many aspects of subjects that affects their lives (Israel 2012). In essence, Aitufe in Israel (2012) maintain that public relations functions as evaluating public attitudes, identifying the policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest and executing an understanding and acceptance. World Book (2002) further indicate that the activities of public relations is aimed at increasing communication and understanding between an organization or individual and one or more groups called publics.

Quite so, public relations are the various ways an organization or an individual employ to understand and improve her relations with the public through the given of information and persuasion to change attitudes and actions or integrate attitudes and actions. Today it is

considered as an important management tool in organizations such as all types of libraries. The methods employed are basically advertising, lobbying, publicity, press agents and advocacy (Shidi & Sambe 2019). According to Olat (2001) the same methods used in marketing are used in public relations to let people know who and what you are and to build relationships with the media. Examples include press release, newsletters, brochures, annual reports, or well-designed publications. Increasingly, libraries are utilizing interactive social media, such as blogs, twitter and face book, as tool in their public relations campaigns to advocate library activities.

Public relations involve two things: the explanation of an organization's activities to the public it serves so that it could be properly understood. The explanation could take the form of defense and influencing policy to its favour as well as the way they relate with the targeted public. It is the combination of these activities that either leaves the public with a negative or positive image of that organization. In Nigeria the activities of public relation especially as regard the aspect of explanation has not yielded result, hence the need to use advocacy and lobbying as instruments for public relations today.

The Concept of Advocacy

Advocacy is the act of pleading for a course; a vindication; defense (The New International Websters Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language 2010). Encarta (2009) adds that it is giving aid to a course that is, supporting a course or position. Shidi (2019) admit that it is a public appeal needed to justify the provision of needs. It therefore involves pleading, justifying, supporting and defending a course of need(s). Advocacy is an important concept in any information environment including the library most especially the public libraries. This is because Nigerian public libraries are the most neglected libraries in Nigeria. But it should be noted that besides public libraries, school libraries as well as special libraries in Nigeria also are

not fully given the desired attention hence the need for advocacy and lobbying. They are therefore essential and appropriate instruments for public relations in Nigerian special libraries in order to restore it relevance and importance.

The concept of Lobbying

Lobbying on the other hand by the same dictionaries (The New International Websters Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language 2010 and Encarta 2009) means to attempt to influence (something) in favor of one's own interest among others; and a group trying to influence policy: a group of supporters and representatives of a particular interests who try to influence political policy on a particular issue. Advocacy and lobbying are therefore strategic tools in pleading, supporting, defending a course as well as trying to influence policy in its favor.

Need to use Advocacy and Lobbying in Nigerian Special Libraries

There is no doubt that special libraries are important and relevant in a nation given their strategic position as it concerns national development. Yet this has not been fully realized by the Nigerian society. Whatever is the case, Nigerian special libraries have come to stay, and there is nothing that could be done about it. Though they may be paid less attention, undervalued and underfunded as it is but this is to the detriment of their parent institutions and ultimately to the Nigerian society. Be that as it may, advocacy and lobbying are therefore appropriate instruments of public relations for ensuring that Nigerians and their institutions realize their relevance and importance. The rationale for the use of advocacy and lobbying as instruments for public relations in Nigerian special libraries are viz.

Firstly, Nigerian special libraries have been misconstrued, misconceived and neglected as adjunct for decorative purposes for too long now. To move them out of this situation, advocacy and lobbying are therefore essential to alter this. This is because it comes with explanation that involves pleading, supporting, justifying and defending to reorientate and change the wrong image and mindset of the people in her favour. And what more, of their role and importance in parent institutions so that they could be better understood, while their ideal, public and professional images (Iroaganachi and Esse 2012) are laundered while at the same time influencing policy and funding to their favour.

Secondly, Nigerian special libraries have come to stay whether their importance and relevance are known or not. Most institutions are established by law and as far as they exist, so does their libraries. Some of these libraries have been established along side with their parent institutions as criterion for accreditations to allow them earn approval to operate. Since they cannot be scrapped however they are, the alternative choice left is to make the most of them. Advocacy and lobbying are therefore instruments of public relations for library managers to achieve this. This they can accomplish by justifying their course during management meetings where they are given opportunity to be heard at regular intervals where they are called upon like other departments to render their report and during budget defense. Also, they can go farther to realize their higher purpose which is provision of utilitarian information for the production of goods and services through constantly reminding of the need to pay library attention for effective information provision.

Thirdly, the ignorance of the importance of Nigerian special libraries amongst Nigerian is deep rooted and rife. In order not to allow this ignorance to destroy Nigerian special libraries, advocacy and lobbying seem appropriate instruments for public relations to be used. This is so

that staffs of special libraries and Nigerians are convinced of their benefits more especially when they are properly harnessed and financed. Again, the strategy of advocacy and lobbying appear as the sure way to defend Nigerian special libraries from the destructive ignorance of their parent institutions, the public they serve and ultimately from internal or external forces. This is because it does not only place the library at the pleading position alone but also gives it the authority to demand for its right so that it can serve the institution better.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of Nigerian special libraries is apparent for all to see. This is obvious and cannot be hidden from any interested observer. This is evidenced in the slow and little national development being witnessed in Nigeria on the aggregate. Since they cannot be scrapped and are critical in national development, advocacy and lobbying are appropriate in order to defend them against continual failure that appears to stem from a number of factors that may not be their fault per se. Equally important, is that it would enable stakeholders to know where to place the blame and what to do to correct the anomaly. Again, it is appropriate in defending library's internal policies which may appear obnoxious but ultimately is for the benefit of parent institution and her activities. Also, it should be used to defend and justify the poor library activities stemming from shortage of staff, lack of adequate information resources and ICT state of the art facilities/internet services, training and retraining of staff resulting into ineffective information service delivery amongst others.

Moreover, it is apparent that the relevance of Nigerian special libraries is yet to be fully realized hence the little attention they enjoy. Advocacy and lobbying are therefore useful to justify and defend the relevance of Nigerian special libraries as well as influence policy in its favour before their parent institutions. Today many departments in institutions are seen competing for their institutions scarce resources. In order for special libraries to have their own

share and live up to their mandate, lobbying is required. The need to recount their successes in the process is important just so that parent institutions could be reminded of the inevitable status of the special library amongst them in order not to be sidelined. More specifically in doing that special libraries should publicize their role in the success of their institutions accreditations, assistance to staff in executing successfully their responsibilities as well as their general support with important information relevant to the activities of their institutions.

In addition, many Nigerians do not know the purpose of special libraries in the various institutions in society. Educative and other enlightenments programmes such as library orientation and education before now has not helped, advocacy and lobbying therefore come handy for special libraries to justify their existence so that they could be understood and their relevance known and appreciated. This should encourage the increase use of library while at the same time according it her appropriate attention and rightful place as a result. This should be sustained as much as possible in all areas of library to see how it turns out to the benefit of parent institutions and the things it can do if allowed and funded adequately. By this it would means daily provision of utilitarian information that assist in the furtherance of parent institution's interest or course.

Advocacy and lobbying are never ending phenomenon that must be carried out on continuous basis as far as parent institutions or organizations exist in society for the purposes of production of goods and services which are continuous and permanent features of human society. Not everyone who has been through tertiary institutions knows the value of libraries and information systems. The tendency for it to be attack at any point in time as society progresses can never be over ruled. The need to constantly organize public lectures to advocate and

influence policy in favour of library and information issues cannot be over emphasized especially in Nigerian society.

The relationship that exists between parent institutions and their information systems is yet to be fully established and realized. Hence the need for advocacy and lobbying for a turn around and by so doing the libraries can be optimally utilized and accorded their deserved attention in the process. The responsibility of special libraries is to provide pinpointed or specific information to targeted users whose work schedule may not allow them to pore over documents to sieve and obtain information for onward application in the day to day activities of their organization. On that basis the library can undertake information search on behalf of such members to save their time and effort. By intense advocacy and lobbying, the public of special libraries should be enlightened to encourage patronage. Perhaps, it is as a result of this that in time past and present that some Nigerian special libraries have been accorded better attention by their parent institutions leading to computerization and automation in such libraries.

Although special libraries are consciously established by various institutions in society because of their perceived relevance, this appears to be loss on the same institutions that established them overtime mostly in Nigerian institutions. This is not to mention on the public for whom they are meant to serve. As a result, they are accorded little attention, as it can be seen in some special libraries and academic libraries in Nigeria. This little understanding and consequent less attention has inhibited progress in a manner that has been devastating on Nigerian society. Advocacy and lobbying for these libraries is therefore imperative to create more enlightenment and understanding in users of special libraries in a manner never known before to attract more investment in them for higher productivity to their parent institutions.

Furthermore advocacy and lobbying are recommended in Nigerian special libraries because they are neglected. Most times they are abandoned and their role considered irrelevant and so not included in important projects hence the failure of many projects. It is on account of this that advocacy and lobbying are required to defend and lobby for their role in parent institutions to attract interest and attention. This role is that of constant information provision. This is to ensure that they are included on every committee in their parent institution to offer appropriate information as information officers to whatever projects being undertaken. However this realization is yet to be established because of the absence of advocacy and lobbying that could have gotten them involved and appreciated in the scheme of activities in parent institutions.

Ochogwu (2007) posit that despite information explosion the world over Nigeria is still experiencing information lack. Quite so advocacy and lobbying are strongly required in Nigerian special libraries for library and information services to be accorded their rightful attention. These activities are carried out by the library to meet the information needs of members of parent institutions. These activities result into specific information provision as required by these users. It is because they are seriously lacking in Nigerian special libraries that the perennial information lack has persisted. It is through advocacy and lobbying that these issues are well understood and appreciated by the public of Nigerian special libraries.

In the same vein, to avert the dangers of inadequate provision of information that has characterized Nigerian institutions calls for the need to use advocacy and lobbying. These instruments are effective public relations in special libraries in Nigeria to reveal the negative effects or dangers associated with inadequate information provision on any project in parent

institutions. By so doing parent institutions and stakeholders would perhaps be gingered to invest in special libraries to avert the likely failure.

Again, strong advocacy and lobbying as instruments for public relations are required in Nigerian special libraries to attract more attention to the provision of information resources that are germane to information provision. This is equally so that parent institutions can know the value of information resources in the library and their relationship to their information needs in order to place them on first line charge of funding. This is more so that, parent institutions would not be unaware of the implication of neglecting special libraries which would mean institutional death due to absence of living utilitarian information that is key to institutional survival.

Forums where Advocacy and Lobbying can be used in Nigerian Special Libraries

Some of the forums where advocacy and lobbying can be used for public relations may include:

Library-user Interactive forum

Librarians are usually members of key committees in well organized institutions. These committees are forums where decisions are taken. The librarian can use the forums to advocate and lobby for library course with management and other important key members of parent institution.

Participation in parent organization seminars/workshops

Some well organized organizations from time to time make time for departments to host seminars and trainings workshops for the entire organization staff. In attendance are usually the chief executive and top management staff including heads of the various departments. These are opportunities where the library can lobby to be featured. They can use such opportunities to

present empirical research findings/results conducted on information related issues negatively affecting their institutions arising from information lack using the instruments of advocacy and lobbying. In this forum it is easier to get others to learn their voices to library course that may influence the top management in favour of the library.

During registration of library users

During registration of library users, leaflets are handed down with short inscriptions stating the need for the library to be stocked, equipped and staffed; it may also carry important facts such as “information is a right”, “information is power for effective job performance, so empower us to serve better” among several others. By so doing library users are given the opportunity to act as advocates and lobbyist at any fora in the institution where the librarian may be or may not be present for the library.

Management meetings

Membership of management and project committees afford the librarian firsthand opportunity to advocate and lobby for the library. These meetings are known for discussing important issues affecting the parent institutions as well as providing insight to their direction. The nature of projects or issues of concern are clearly and freely discussed at such forums. This enables the librarian to clearly know the information requirement of such projects as he equally asks questions for clarification in order to contribute his quota by sourcing and supplying information and or documents. By so doing the image of the library is boosted as it is seen making relevant contribution in ensuring that parent institution’s projects do not suffer failure while lobbying for more funding and attention to serve parent institution better.

Quarterly publication

This is an avenue where library or institution floated quarterly publication is used constantly to advocate and lobby for library activities and funding. Quarterly publications are undertaken on regular basis. They are meant to quarterly update members of institutions of the activities of institution including those of its library. Librarians can use the avenue to advocate and lobby for the library. This is a publication that chief executives and top or key management staff or their representatives are interested in and read always. This forum affords the librarian an opportunity to advocate and lobby to influence things to library's favour.

In top management/ staff meetings

The librarian is usually a member of important committees in their organization. Quite so, this gives them the opportunity to identify with top management members and by so doing they are able to advocate and lobby for the library both within and outside the institution. Even if this means paying them regular visits and identifying with them through their departmental programmes and other social occasions outside the library. More over they can as well prove their worth by documenting information generated during such occasions and initiating paper/book publication of same on behalf of such members.

Budget Defense

Finally, many people in Nigerian institutions do not see the library doing anything. As such, the library can prove them wrong through budget defense. This is a forum where departments line up to defend and justify their past activities, funding, achievements and failures. Because of this the library must always be seeing identifying areas where information is needed and supply same as

much as it can. This is so that during such forum it can justify and defend her activities to attract attention and more funding.

Conclusion

It is evident that special libraries play no small role in national development through their various institutions by the provision of information for the production of goods and services. However, the Nigerian society and her various institutions are in deep rooted, prevailing and widespread ignorance of this. As a result, special libraries have received less attention that has not in any way culminated into the much desired national development the society seeks. Hence, the need to use advocacy and lobbying in Nigerian special libraries to explain, justify, support, defend and influence things to her favour in such forums as library-user interactive forums, top management meetings, budget defense and so on so that they could be better understood, valued and paid attention to enable them serve their parent institutions better. The road may be long, but patience and perseverance is all that is required in this path to achieve the desired result.

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