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Resource Sharing among Law Libraries: An Imperative for Legal Research and the Administration of Justice in Nigeria

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Introduction

"The present race between knowledge and book production has made it impossible for any library, however big it may be, to acquire all the printed literature in the world even on the smallest area of the spectrum of knowledge, or to cope with even a fraction of the daily production of literature" (Sangal, 1984).

The traditional concept of ownership in collection development is gradually being replaced by access to information and knowledge without regard to location and format. Resource sharing among libraries has become the common desire and practice. Increase in the volume of library materials and information, the increasing costs of acquiring and processing them, the need for trained personnel, storage space, and the increasing demands by users are motivating factors for libraries to share books, journals, preprints, catalogues, list of publications, recent additions, newsletters, policy decisions, current events, news flash, etc.

Definition of Concepts

The terms "library cooperation", "library networking", library linkages", "library collaboration", "library consortia", "interlibrary loan", "document supply", "document delivery", "access services", are used interchangeably to describe formal and informal cooperation, partnership and resource sharing activities in libraries.

Walden (1999) defines resource sharing as "a term used to describe organized attempt by libraries to share materials and services cooperatively so as to provide one another with resources that

might otherwise not be available to an individual institution. It represents an attempt to expand the availability of specialized, expensive, or just plain not-owned resources beyond the bounds of a single institution". Also the Provincial Resource Sharing Network Policy for Alberta Public Library Boards (2009) defined resource sharing as "the common use by two or more libraries of each other's assets, whether they are equipment, staff, knowledge and expertise, materials facilities, and/or information resources".

Law Libraries

Dada (1998) stated that "the law libraries are a special hybrid of the art of librarianship. Be it academic law libraries, court library, commercial houses law libraries, the in-houses law library and the ministry of justice law libraries; the primary objective of the collection is directed as servicing the research and information needs of the parent organization".

The term "legal research" lacks a consistent, concise and generally accepted definition. From a parochial perspective, legal research has to do with how to use a law library and the materials it contains. Wikipedia (2009) defined legal research as "the process of identifying and retrieving information necessary to support legal decision-making. In its broadest sense, legal research includes each step of course of action that begins with an analysis of the facts of a problem and concludes with the application and communication of the results of the investigation". Chinch (2006) maintained that generally there are three steps of legal research. These are:

- identifying and analyzing a problem;
- finding appropriate information to solve the problem'
- presenting the result of the analysis and research in appropriate and effective manner.

Justice has to do with "moral rightness based on ethics, rationality, law natural law fairness, religion and/or equity" (Wikipedia, 2009). Justice and how it is administered entails the "maintenance of administration of what is just by the law, as by judicial or other proceedings" (Dictionary.com, 2009). The phrase "administration of justice" has therefore been used to denote the system of administering laws with the ultimate objective of doing justice to all people without fear or favour, affection or ill will.

A number of researches have been carried out on the need for resource sharing among libraries in Africa . Notable amongst them are Etim (2006) on resource sharing in the digital age: prospects and problems in African universities; Speirs (2006) on resource sharing in the digital age; Waiganjo (2006) on academic and public libraries partnership in sharing information through technology in Kenya and the role of the African virtual library; Agboola (2003) on information technology potentials for interlibrary loan and cooperation; Lamikanra (2003); Ikem and Nwalo (2002) on prospects for resource sharing among university libraries in Nigeria; Jalloh (1999) on library networking and consortia initiatives in Africa; De Kock (1997) on information technology infrastructure for resource sharing in Southern African academic information services; Edwards (1994) on library cooperation and resource sharing in South Africa; Rosenberg (1993) on resource sharing for Africa; Ubogu, et al., (1992) on library networks and resource sharing in Nigeria, etc.

It is evident that not much has been written on resource sharing among law libraries in Nigeria in particular, and Africa as a whole. This paper therefore presents the significance of resource sharing among libraries and states the need for law libraries to partake in this activity for the promotion of legal research and the administration of justice in Nigeria.

Brief History of Resource Sharing

THe Centre for Research Libraries was built in Chicago in the 1960s. This centre was to coordinate cooperation among 162 institutions to acquire; store and preserve less frequently used but very expensive research materials for the institutions need. In the 1970s costs of library materials began

to go up while library budgets remained almost stagnant. As a result, in 1974 the Columbia, Harvard, and Yale research libraries and those of the New York Public Library founded the Research Libraries Group (RLG). This was born out of the belief that no library can be self-sufficient to satisfy the information needs of all its patrons materially and service-wise. RLG provided databases of library holding created cooperatively by member libraries (Martey 2002).

Canada has the Information Network for Ontario (INFO). Nearly 300 public libraries are connected between South Ontario library service and Ontario library service, using a choice of access by Internet, standalone PC. or CD-ROM. In 1996 the University of Pittsburgh Library System and the University of China exchanged digital full text journal articles over the Internet (Edwards, 1999).

The Nigerian Experience

John Harris, the Librarian of the University College, Ibadan (now university of Ibadan) was the brain behind the introduction of resource sharing in Nigeria . Consequent to conference held by the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) in Grenoble, France, in 1973, the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) was charged with the responsibility of being the clearing house for all the existing libraries in the country. And by October 1973, an inter-library lending unit was set up in the National Library of Nigeria. The problem of standardization arose because of the contributing libraries employed different rules for bibliographic description; hence the cards received were in different formats with varying details which were at variance with the existing cataloguing rules (Nwosu, 2004). Perhaps Ubogu (1992) summed it up when he asserted that that:

All effort at efficient resources sharing in Nigeria, seem to have come to naught. Most projects lie either on the drawing board or are half completed. Library cooperation exists only informally, based on goodwill of one library to another. It lacks legal support by formal agreement. Union catalogues, the bedrock for most cooperative efforts are almost non-existence for collections other than serials. Finally, unless and until a modest attempt is taken to address the issue of poor funding of law libraries, physical movement of library materials will continue on a large scale for the foreseeable future.

The Need for Resource Sharing

Explosion in published output, increase in bibliographic access of literature through Internet and off-line databases on CDs, static, and in many cases decreasing library budgets along with high cost of published output had made it virtually impossible for libraries and documentation/information centres to fulfill information needs of their primary clientele. Under such squeezing situation the best option left with the libraries is to optimize their resources through extensive sharing (Tanvir, 2009).

Rahman (2006) highlighted the aims and objectives of networking and resource sharing as follows:

- To promote free flow of information resources;
- To ensure better access to information resources;
- To ensure maximization of information resources;
- To save resources and avoid duplication of effort;
- To ensure faster provision of information and literature support to the users;
- To facilitate reciprocal exchange of local publications.

Cooperation among law libraries can occur in various ways. There are the traditional interlibrary loan procedures, which do not differ from those of other libraries. Most law libraries, especially those of university law schools, will lend materials to other libraries and will borrow as well, using standard interlibrary forms or online requests through major networks. Perhaps the only distinguishing feature in a

law library is that more materials are of reference nature and do not circulate beyond the library walls. Increasingly, however, law libraries provide photocopies in lieu of lending original materials.

Benefits for Sharing Resources

Martey (2002) identified some benefits for sharing resources to include:

Individual Library User and Staff

- Enhancement service through access to more information services available in consortia member libraries
- Cheaper and more effective services
- Document delivery services
- Selective Dissemination of Information and Current Awareness Services
- Electronic Conferences
- Increased Human Cooperation
- Skills Development for opportunities available through cooperative arrangements

Institution Library

- Increased cooperation and sharing
- Improved purchase of electronic information and library collection management
- Reduced library subscription
- provision of education and library services
- Increased support for the library especially partners in development (donors) that prefer groups rather than individual institutions.
- Institutional library exposure at national and international levels

Parent Institution

- Reduced costs for sustaining the library services
- Increased value (quality and quantity) of information resources available to both staff and students, thus supporting the mission of the institution.

National

- Increased growth of a national information society
- Improvement on Technology development
- Standardization of library services across the country
- Standardization of library training facilities

Some Implications for Lack of Networks among Law Libraries

There is emerging, in our law institutions, a small but growing number of staff who are no longer satisfied with the services being provided by our libraries. They cannot excuse the librarian for his inability to download from the Internet for them the information they require urgently.

Some persons would argue that as professionals in their own right, their information needs are no different from those in developed countries and therefore require no less access to current information than their counterparts elsewhere.

The emergence of other groups (information professionals) means a lot for librarians. Are they going to be irrelevant, by-passed by information seekers? (Walden, 1999).

Globally-declining budgets, exponential expansion of information, and the continued emergence of different media formats, are forcing libraries to jettison that old and unachievable idea of comprehensiveness. The debate now is that of access versus ownership of collections while the name of the game is network and resource sharing. Different categories of resource sharing have been propounded, but prominent among them was the one given by Ikpahindi (2006).

Categories of Resource Sharing

Ikpahindi (2006) quoted Oladapo (2005) categorizing resource sharing into three main categories thus:

1. Self-standing.

2. Functional collaboration

3. Partnership

If the three categories are compared, the differences, according to Ikpahindi (2006), will essentially be related to factors such as:

- Ownership
- Branding and
- Financing

In the first category, all of the three factors above belong to one organization or library. In the second, the costs may be shared and the branding may indicate this. Ownership is equally with the lead organization/library. In the third case, the cooperating organizations/libraries share the ownership; contribute resources and 'co-brand' the resulting product or service.

It is important that no library serves as a coordinating centre. As much as possible, it should be decentralized, but there is a need for a monitoring committee. The committee will consist of at least one member from each of the participating libraries. The task of this committee is to ensure that the project is effective; hence there will be a need for the committee to meet regularly. The committee will determine the broad guidelines for operating resource sharing among users in the consortium.

ICT as a Driving Force for Sharing Resources

There is no doubt that recent developments in information access and retrieval has posed a major challenge on the viability of our libraries. The nature of information science and the evolution of scholarly communication, with all the technologies it brought, are changing rapidly. And this continues to force libraries to face the challenge of remaining integral participants in research and educational process.

One observable trend in the information environment is that more and more resources are moving to the electronic formats, in some cases being made available only in electronic form and would never be published in any other form. Earlier on, paper union catalogues were developed so that the location of library resources would be known. This method was viewed to be extensive and cumbersome. Advances were later made in the use of web and storage technologies by libraries to automate their resources and services. The use of a standard information retrieval system like Z39.50 allows:
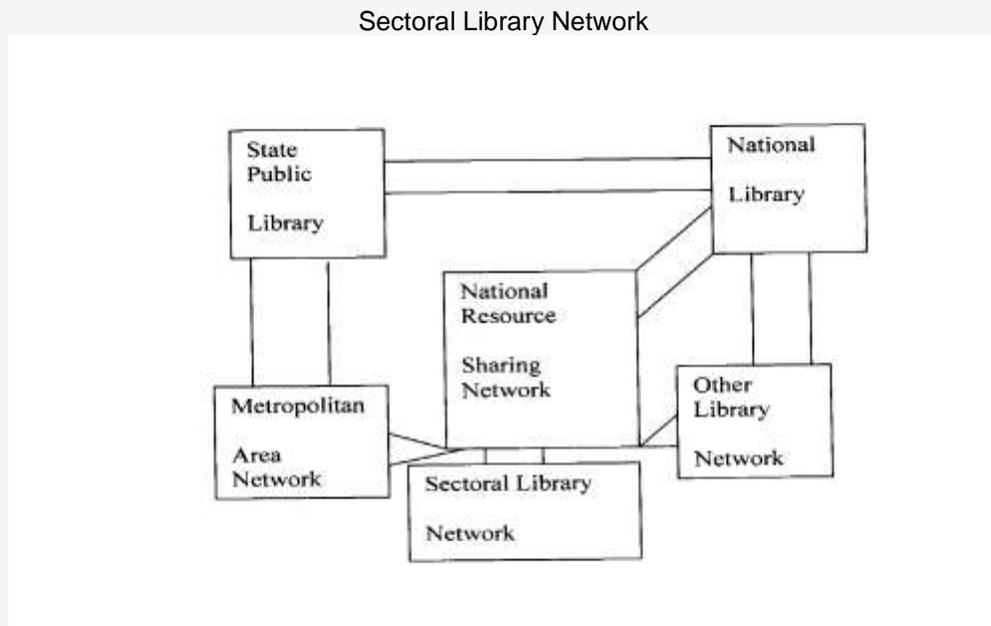
- library collection from different libraries;
- connection of member libraries via the Internet;
- no single location to host distributed library collection;

The use of a common search form; the search module goes to the different databases and does a local search and pools all the harvested search results, which are then returned to the user's screen.

When a query is typed into the distributed search screen (from the Z39.50 server) using a web browser, the browser passes the query to Z39.50 server to be distributed to the member library servers, with Z39.50 client installed. The clients' responds with results are now passed back to the initiating Z39.50 server to be delivered to the initiating browser client. As a result, libraries using a service online web PAC can easily access the collections of the libraries within the network (Sahoo, 2009).

(Sahoo, 2009) also gave a model of a national resource sharing network thus:

Fig. 1. Model of a National Resource Sharing Network as propounded by (Sahoo, 2009).

Sectoral Library Network

Looking at the model, the national resource sharing pool serves as the main server for the co operating libraries. Each individual library is expected to automate its collection and its bibliographical database should be kept accessible through network. This is followed by making sure that each library connects to its immediate nodal network, say a state public library where all public libraries in the country can draw resources. Also each entity of these smaller networks is advised to follow the Z39.50 standard protocol for resource sharing and should design the subject gateway with the help of librarians and subject specialists. The state public library node is connected to the national library and all of them, including the regional and sectoral networks are channeled to the national resource sharing pool.

Factors Militating Against Resource Sharing in Nigeria

Funding. The introduction and use of ICTs in libraries necessitates the need for more money to maintain and upgrade both equipment and software, pay databases, and facilitate Internet connections.

The situation in research libraries is even worse. Unlike in academic libraries, research libraries do not have any fix amount set aside for their development. From a study of level of financial support to research libraries. But when the parent institutions budgets are approved, they do not have their separate departmental budget to spend: rather their expenditure on library matters is authorized from the centralized budgets by the directors.

Coordination. Lack of coordination among libraries to initiate a cooperative network. Ojedokun (2005) reported that in South Africa while some institutions were considering becoming members of the existing consortia, other libraries were considering forming new ones.

Government fiscal policy e.g. the inclusion of library materials in reshipment inspection and the Form "M" process, formation of taxes and customs duties on books and educational materials and, according to Dada (2007), the notorious "due process" formality is perhaps the most important problem, which is cumbersome and should not be a part of library book procurement.

Dada (2007) also noted that one of the problems facing law libraries is "an expanding growth in the subject of law, and developing computer based library network". Prices for legal periodicals and other legal serials have increased more steeply than inflation generally in the US since the late 1970s. Thus because of the nature of legal materials, serials and other continuations comprise a high percentage of law library collections.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations:

- Promoting more effective means for cooperative collection development among law libraries.
- Making available a more uniform and friendly system interface for users and staff. There are cooperative systems that are designed by library cooperatives. "The system is being shared by institutions having the same target of clientele. For instance, the use of OCLC in the advanced countries" (Idowu, 2000).
- Encouraging and coordinating digitization projects.
- Law libraries must continue to provide value-added services to improve and increase their efficiency, visibility and image.
- Government should exclude acquisition of library materials from "Due Process".

One aspect of library resource sharing structure that will greatly facilitate and enhance its operation is frequency of meetings. There should be formal meetings of the directors/Librarians of law libraries to be scheduled in conjunction with the Annual meetings of NALL (National Association of Law Libraries).

Conclusion

The benefits derivable from library cooperation are immense. Savings are made from limited funding; users have ready access to a greater amount of information resources; duplication of materials is reduced and time and efforts too; staff build and maintain professional relationships and this boosts their morale and brings about job satisfaction as they are able to use their talents more, share skills, expertise and facilities of each member library.

The ultimate in resource sharing is when the individual user in a specific library, sitting behind a workstation goes through options which give him access to contents of collections of several libraries, which he can retrieve the electronic versions of the full texts and download or print. The real gain, which is substantial, is intellectual, where access to larger amount of materials is made. It is unfortunate, however, that despite good laid down policies, visions, missions and promises, the philosophy of resource sharing in Africa, in general, and Nigeria, in particular, has remained largely on paper. This situation is undoubtedly caused by lack of mutual trust, political will to succeed, gross under-funding of libraries and inhospitable networking environment, among other critical issues. Nevertheless, cooperation among law libraries is no doubt a sine qua non and the only realistic means of ensuring provision of resources needed for scholarly research and administration of justice in Nigeria.

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