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## ***Library Philosophy and Practice 2011***

# Libraries as Tools for Capacity Building in Developing Countries

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## Introduction

The two key concepts of this paper are capacity building and development. These concepts are interrelated. Because of the unsettled nature of development, capacity and the ability to develop or build it have become controversial. The concept of "capacity building" is a popular phrase in development discourse. It is one of the most urgent challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa today. It is indeed a challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as technologies and markets are being revolutionized, compelling Africa to seek for the right kind of professionally competent people and institutions to meet the challenge. It must be realized that governments, non-state actors, and (foreign) donors all tend to invoke capacity problems to explain why policies fail to deliver, or why aid is not generating sustainable impacts. Reports of conferences on every possible subject generally include a host of capacity building recommendations in their conclusions (InfoCotonou, 2003).

The World Bank's study of long-term development prospects for Sub-Saharan Africa "From Crisis to Sustainable Growth, 1989" found that the capacity for sound policy design and policy sustainability is in short supply in most African countries. "Capacity" can be defined as abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, values, relationships, behaviors, motivations, resources and conditions that enable individuals, organizations, network/sectors and broader social systems to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time (Bolger 2000). According to Umar (2004), a number of professional development activities and programmes have been created; however, nearly all these activities and programmes revolve around continuing professional education. Continuing education plays an important part in professional development. Training and retraining, staff exchanges, links with similar and related professions, etc., are other activities professionals undertake to develop themselves. Professional development helps build confidence through knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to practice effectively. Salisu (2002) regretfully observes that even in developed countries, complete professional preparation is not possible in a formal educational setting.

It is the objective of this paper to clarify the concept of capacity in relation to capacity building, and to discuss the roles of librarians and libraries in capacity building in economic development.

## Capacity and Capacity Building

The concept of capacity has been defined as the power of something to perform or to produce. From the UNDP's perspective, it is the ability of individuals and organizations or units to perform functions effectively, efficiently, or sustainably. Alternatively, it can refer to the people, institutions, and practices that enable a country to achieve its development objectives. Capacity has both human and institutional dimensions with the following components:

- skilled human resources
- leadership and vision
- viable institutions
- financial and material resources and
- effective work practices, including systems, procedures and appropriate incentives.

Human capacity refers to the individuals capable of performing the tasks necessary for a country to achieve its developmental goals. Institutional capacity refers to the available organizational structure and processes that facilitate the achievement of developmental goals. Adequate capacity engenders self-reliance, and provides a country and its people the ability to make sound economic choices, create sustainable policies, and solve problems.

Capacity is the ability to cope with problems but also to move and transcend the immediate. Practically speaking, it could refer to something like space in the library. Do we have the space to accommodate 10,000 chairs and the readers? What is the capacity in terms of space? Do we have the capacity to organize this "library talk"? Are we able to invite people outside our immediate environment, even from outside the country, in order to host an event like this? Another dimension is the intellectual capacity to think through problems. In this regard, capacity can be attributed to institutions like libraries, individuals, and nations. Anyone reading this paper is able to do so because of capacity of some sort.

In Nigeria and other African countries since attainment of political independence, emphasis in the sphere of human capacity-building has been on formal education and training for building skills. Apart from establishment of tertiary institutions with their functional libraries to provide academic training, there are also a number of post-experience and management development institutions to help further build capacity. Some of these institutions are the National Center for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA), Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), Agricultural and Rural Management Institute (ARMTI), Center for Management Development (CMD) and Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM). The last two offer specialized training to private sector officials. According to the World Bank (1998), local training and research institutions transmit the skills required for managing development, by offering specialized training. The significance of research in capacity building is in the advancement of knowledge and creation of ways of doing things. Research institutions contribute to capacity building through their research outputs in various ways (Obadan and Uga, 1997).

In both government and private sectors, capacity constraints exist. Many developing countries like Nigeria can boast of crop of educated personnel in different fields – science and technology, business law, accountancy, economics, engineering, librarianship and other disciplines – but there are still severe constraints as represented by shortages in a number of skills, especially in science and technology-related fields. The situation has been compounded in recent years by the increasing trend of brain drain since the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 and the virtual collapse of the educational system at all levels since the early 1980s in many developing countries, as revealed by the National Capacity Assessment Report (2000). Democracy is critical factor in the development process. Corruption is at the basis of our lack of ability to build capacity, and ineffective use of local expertise. NGOs must train people, and should be encouraged to seek local input into whatever they are doing for a

community.

## The Concept of Development

The late Mwalimu Julius Nyerere defined development as being "of, by, and for the people" (Nyerere, 1993). This definition is quite apposite not only because it is similar to the Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy, but because it recognizes development as a democratic process. It can be argued that development can be considered to be taking place when unemployment, inequality, and poverty are declining. If they remain high, a community cannot be said to be developing. While growth may be concerned with macro-economic indicators, development is about improvements in the conditions of people. There are also different types of development: social, political, psychological, and, of course, economic development. Each requires different capacities.

For development to be feasible, it must be bottom-up and participatory, and for the masses to be actively involved, they must be empowered. Empowerment can be socially sustained if adequate and qualitative education is provided, and if employment or access to credit facilities for self-employment could be provided. In addition, good pay is necessary for development. The NGO involved in the development process must do a self-assessment so that tasks are succinctly defined and the means for achieving them articulated. The target must be well understood and defined and those beneficiaries closely involved. What we generally understand as a lack of capacity on the part of NGOs could be overcome if the people being helped are involved rather than being regarded as liabilities.

It must be emphasized that democracy is still the way and manner the developing process in Africa has to unfold. We must first re-educate ourselves on how development has to proceed. It is obvious that development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot follow the trajectory it followed in the relatively advanced countries of Europe, North America, and Japan. Thus, within organizations and nation-states in developing countries, it is necessary to engage the forces of globalization from the standpoint of our democratic credentials. With this moral authority we can demand their (developed countries) attention and willingness to lend or make them available for dialogue. The basic thing we are going to ask from them is not only to reduce the gap or the degree of marginalization of the developing countries, but let them know that all the achievements in the field of information and communication technology (ICT) are a common heritage of human kind, and that developing countries also deserve every right to have a share from or of them. Information and communication technology is the greatest contemporary medium of development, and all agents as well as agencies of development require familiarity with, possession of and access to it. As has consistently been argued, only a democratic structure of the world can guarantee this and the envisioned type of development.

## Libraries and Capacity Building

The purpose of education is to pass on society's cultural values and accumulated body of knowledge to the next generation (children) and to prepare them for meaningful adult life (Ogunsola, 2004). If we are to produce children who are self reliant, and better able to fit in to their immediate environment and interact successfully with the world at large we need well developed and adequate library facilities like leaning resources centers, Media Resource Centres, Instructional Material Centres, and so on. One of the reasons why illiteracy rate is high in developing countries is because many people relapse into secondary illiteracy for want of adequate and relevant reading materials to sustain and consolidate the reading skills acquired in the classroom. Without any shadow of doubt, the extent to which young people and workers of today will be creative, informed and

knowledgeable will be shaped by the boundaries of the contents of the library resources available within their environment or organizations. A wide variety and plentiful supply of resources are required to encourage independent study so that young people or workers from early age can learn how to think so that their convictions and views are formed as a result of active mental efforts. All these efforts can serve as solid foundation for successful concept of capacity building in developing countries. By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, western countries had experienced such a proliferation of books of all sorts that the nature of the librarian's work was radically altered, being well-read no longer a sufficient characteristic for the post. The library of today should no longer be a library of the 17<sup>th</sup> century image. Today's library, especially institutional and special libraries to play their active roles in capacity building in developing countries must be information systems. As pointed out by Osundina (1973) the library of today should not merely store documents and preserve them, it must also devise means by which the contents of such documents can be rapidly and effectively transmitted for use. As far as the concept of capacity building is concerned, information has always played a very important part in human life. By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of information increased immeasurably as a result of social progress and the vigorous development in science and technology. Developing countries should not be left behind in this development in science and technology. The pace of change brought by new technologies has had a significant effect on the way people live, work, and play worldwide.

As pointed out by Aina (2004), it is generally known that the library and information profession borrows from a number of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, computer science, business management, mathematics, statistics, marketing, etc. Thus, anything that impacts on any of these disciplines would have a direct influence on library and information science profession. Information and communication technology (ICT) has radically transformed most of the services provided by a library. ICT is heavily utilized in the storage, processing and dissemination of information. Like a cyclone, the technology-driven environment has enveloped the library and is taken in to unprecedented heights in knowledge acquisition, management, and communication. Even, the vocabulary of librarianship is changing: "dissemination" is being replaced by "communication" "repository" by "database", "literature" by "knowledge", "search" by "navigation", etc. This reflects current approach to packaging and the tools used for managing knowledge. Knowledge itself has become more ubiquitous than was ever imagined twenty years ago. Any modern library and information professional must be knowledgeable in library automation, networking, Internet surfing, data base management, processing software, statistical software, etc. All these services, which must be made available in the libraries, can be regarded as necessary tools for any developing country to engage herself in capacity building for that country to have a meaningful development. It must be realized that for a successful capacity building concept, one does not have to leave the site of work before one could be professionally developed. It is imperative that a professional or a worker must keep pace with the latest development in the profession. For instance, the concept of "traditional librarian " is no longer tenable. Changes in the profession are happening both in magnitude and diversity. Correspondingly, the role of the librarian is changing, thus librarian and other professional must transform themselves and the society through training and retraining in order to meet the expectations of their changing role. Professional development has been described as more or less a life long process, where individuals are exposed to changes all the time. Professional development or capacity building is mainly for personal and career advancement and improvement of any organization. Hence, professionals do not need to wait for sponsorship before they can develop themselves and this can be done by cultivating the idea of making use of the library facilities in their environment.

Given the fact that the cost of training is enormous and only few employers could afford to send staff on training on a regular basis, there should be the possibility of

improving one's career from one's work place. This is why the importance of libraries in providing the enabling environment becomes important. Thus, realistically, professional development or the concept of capacity building would be enhanced if it is linked to work situation, that is, one does not have to leave the site of work before one could be professionally developed. As expected, libraries would always play a critical role in professional development or capacity building at all levels, whether leading to the award of certificate or gaining competences in a particular topic. Thus, libraries could promote the development of professionals or the concept of capacity building through distance education, surfing the Internet and professional literature. All one needs in other to access the various sources or informations are a computer with Internet access and a web browser. Professional literature constitutes one of the most important methods for promoting professional development. Most of the topical issues in any professional abound in books; conference proceedings, taped slides, taped audio and videotapes and the libraries should endeavour to make them available in their collections. According to Moahi (2002) free journals are available on the Web. There is no need for subscription to access these journals. The progress of any nation as pointed out by Badawi (2004) depends on the development of its people through education. The development of education on the other hand may be said to be synonymous with the development of libraries and the library services within a given community. But libraries can only help about social development if and when the people within communities make regular use of them. To this end, the extent of educational and professional development that libraries can bring about in any organization depends on the extent to which the people utilize it. Convincingly, the greatest resource for any kind of development is people. Insaïdoo (2001) aptly observes that human factor in the development of any organic society or institution is a very important element that ought to be addressed seriously to ensure optimum use and expression of individual talents and capabilities. It is a fact that a society, institutions, or a nation could be endowed with logistics, natural resources and other factors that lend support to life and development in the broader sense. However, without adequate human resources and a development capacity building scheme that is geared towards the ultimate goal of the society, or nation could be extremely difficult for such a nation to fully explore its resources and exploit them for socio-economic, cultural and political development. There is no doubt about the fact that development is a product of education and education is a process through which people are formally and informally trained to acquire knowledge and skills. It is the realization of the enormous power of information that made libraries and information resource centers inevitably present in all the sectors of a nation's economy. Thus today, libraries are found in all the three levels of our educational system, public, research institutions and private organizations, such as banks, Insurance Companies, Manufacturing Companies, etc. So the roles of libraries and librarians in the concept of capacity building can never be overemphasized. The realization of the importance of libraries has made many professional bodies and association including governments at all levels to establish their own libraries and information centers that would cater for the specific information needs and capacity development of their members. From the foregoing, it can vividly be seen that libraries have right from time aligned themselves with development. Therefore, the librarians and other information specialists should pay particular attention to sourcing information such as notices for training programmes, professional meetings conferences / seminars / workshops, forth coming events and job advertisements. Apart from the fact that information derived from these sources is most useful for professional development, it is likely that these sources will also provide information on the changing pattern of the various professions concerned.

For librarians to function successfully, he must be flexible enough to update his skills with the ever-changing technology. Library managers are hired because it is assumed that they are competent to manage effectively. This is a faulty assumption as a librarian is not a trained professional manager. The basic library management courses taught in library schools are not enough to turn a librarian in to a professional manager. To succeed as a manager as pointed out by Adimorah (1989), he must engage in continuing education in management. To survive the

austere time, in addition to good knowledge of modern management, he must be creative, innovative, ingenious and a calculated risk manager. All these qualities can be acquired through capacity building programmes organized from time to time in developing and advanced countries by various organizations.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

In developing countries today, the capacity building challenges are quite daunting in relation to the overall economic performance and outlook. The building of adequate capacity must be a priority challenge for Nigeria and other developing countries in view of the need to analyze problems, formulate, implement and monitor policies, strategies and programmes in the effective manner. The private sector also requires capacity to participate effectively in the development process and assist in the implementation of public policies. Finally, there is a need for a change of heart with respect to institutions. For sometime now, not much attention has been paid to the survival of institutions. Agencies/institutions are created but somehow neglected or allowed to decay such that not much attention is paid to the interrelationships and respective roles of the different institutions. It is therefore, crucial that the government evolves an explicit strategy for institution building in both the public and private sectors. From the foregoing, it is clear that the task of building and strengthening as well as effective utilization of capacity in developing countries faces challenges which are very likely to be long-lived. Financial resources for intervention in the capacity building process are grossly inadequate, and the outlook of the overall revenue profiles of all the three tiers of government continue to be precarious. The serious under funding of capacity building programmes and institutions becomes more pronounced when the government experiences fiscal crisis. Then training becomes a first casualty in budget cuts. Thus, there is the challenge of giving adequate priority to the development and utilization of capacity. The educational and management development institutions have continued to witness excruciating neglect and decay.

The past capacity building efforts have not satisfactorily addressed the developing countries capacity needs on account of weak implementation discipline, inadequate implementation experience, and resource constraints. Other notable factors include inappropriate aid modalities, substitution of technical assistance, and poor governance conditions, leading to inefficient use of available capacities. And so, a lot still needs to be done to strengthen capacity for development management in the various sectors. Indeed, in the public sector, serious capacity gaps (ratio of deviation between required and actual workforce to required workforce) exist in most ministries, and agencies. Even at government level capacity gaps are also quite serious. Such gaps were usually attributed to embargo on employment, voluntary retirement, budget constraints and non-availability of infrastructure, among others. It must be stressed that capacity does not only have to be built. The capacity built has to be effectively utilized. In other words, producing skilled people, for example, is only half of the battle, the other half is to recruit, retain them and use them, not so much by high pay but by ensuring that they have productive jobs, satisfying work, and secure conditions. Effective utilization of capacity is better appreciated in successful development management, specifically formulation and implementation of sound policies and programmes, effective management of financial and human resources in relation to the attainment of development goals, etc.

It has been established in this paper that professional development or the concept of capacity building is a "sine qua non" for all professionals or workers and that it can be done in the work place without them necessarily leaving their stations. For professional development and capacity building to be in place an enabling environment must be provided by the various institutions or establishment, hence libraries must provide institutional support for professional development. It must be noted that professional development and capacity building, apart from assisting in career advancement also contributes substantially to personal development. Thus,

any library established in any organization must be ready to make personal sacrifices towards sustainable professional development of the concept of capacity building in the organizations. Provision of manpower for the various sectors of the nation's economy, the literate condition of the individual in the citizenry and wider dissemination of knowledge for productive research and development are predicated on existence of a well-nurtured and adequately funded library and information services in any organizations and institutions. Countries with good economic policies and stronger institutional capacity grow faster. The notion that Africans are good at capacity building for evil and very bad in capacity building for something good must be reversed; otherwise there will be too many damages and too few managers.

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