PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES FOR RURAL TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper assessed the Public libraries services in the rural areas and found out that the federal, state and local governments have the responsibility of transforming the lives of rural people by intentional effective library services delivery. It also highlighted the Library services that are essential in transformation which include: social, political and educational. The researchers therefore, recommended among other things that government should increase funding of the public libraries, training of manpower, Training and retraining of staff in ICT and related areas etc.

Key words: Public Library, Rural Transformation, Library Services


1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is known as century of information age where ICT, internet, web, electronic resources, digital resources, databases, virtual library etc are taking over information generation, delivery and utilization. The fact remains that the rural areas are not part of this transformation. This is a serious digital divide. Establishment of schools in rural areas is important but public libraries are veritable government establishment that can meet the information needs of the entire citizenry in the rural environment. This is because public library services cut across all ages: children, youths, adults as well as elderly men and women. The services will best be rendered in their local languages so as to be meaningful and useful to the rural dwellers. The fundamental role of libraries is to provide timely, accurate, pertinent and reliable information for their users. Olowu (2004) opined that librarians’ are devoted to improving access to information and satisfying the user need. There is a growing recognition that library services, particularly in public libraries, are integral part of national socioeconomic development and improvement of the general quality of life (Kibat, 1990). The headquarter of the public library known as Library Board, is situated at each state capital in Nigeria. The boards maintain services outlets known as
branches in towns and local government chosen villages to serve the citizens in the states. Effective service delivery in the villages should reach the rural population. Possible ways of achieving this are discussed.

Nigeria is an independent nation for up to 54 years with policies on development of rural communities, but rural areas are still not developed. Diso (2005) added that “Nigerian people are still dominantly peasant farmers, petty traders, middle men or commission agents”. The country has the potentials to develop all sectors of human endeavor more especially if information services are fully enhanced in rural communities throughout the country. Public libraries are good government organs that can transform the rural communities through effective rural library services.

1.1. Need for Information Services to Rural Communities

Information is raw material for development for both urban and rural dwellers. Prosperity, progress and development of any nation depend upon the nation’s ability to acquire, produce, access and use pertinent information. Abissat, (2008) report on older rural people indicates that,

“Access to information and advice is a key resource for local people in maintaining active and independent lives. Access to information is also critical to letting people know their entitlements to welfare benefits and sources of support to overcome social exclusion”.

Harande (2009) holds the view that the “development of countries globally cannot be achieved without the development of the rural community. This is because 75 to 80 percent of the people in developing countries live in rural areas they need positive, relevant and prompt =s attention in their daily activities”. Hence, no serious, active, conscious, sensitive and organized government would want to neglect rural communities.

Transformation agenda should get to the grassroots where rural citizens are. Any nation that neglects the development and empowerment of the rural communities should not expect meaningful development. Development can only be effective if rural dwellers have access to the relevant, diverse information for their activities. Okiyi (2003) asserted that, “rural development is a basis for economic development process. People in rural areas whether literate or not should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive to become better informed citizens generally.

2. PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES TO THE RURAL COMMUNITIES FOR SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

2.1. Mobile Libraries

A bookmobile or mobile library is a vehicle designed for use as a library. It is designed to hold books on shelves in such a way that when the vehicle is parked they can be accessed by readers. Mobile libraries are often used to provide library services to villages and city suburbs that have no library buildings. As well as regular books, a book-mobile might also carry large print books, audio books, other media, IT equipments and internet access. According to Ortan (1980), the first recorded instance of readers, borrowing books from a vehicle in England was from a horse drawn van in Washington in 1859. The working men of Warrington, through the offices of the mechanics institute, purchased the van. The van was used mainly within Warrington for the benefit of the working men who would not go to the Institute Library. It is
important to note that Mobile libraries served a varied clientele from pre-school age to the elderly thus catering for the information needs of all groups within the community. The mobile library service progresses to use of vehicle. As reported by Roumfort (1997), Sarah Byrd Askew, a pioneering public Librarian, was also an early developer of the bookmobile, driving her Ford Model T outfitted with a book collection to rural areas in New Jersey beginning in 1920. According to Kibat (1990), mobile services have reached segments of the rural population that would not otherwise have any library facilities at all. The bookmobile and its counterparts in the Philippines have brought improvements to rural areas, stimulated reading interest and have increased general awareness on health, nutrition, child care, family planning etc. Ebiwolate (2010) pointed out that bookmobile services was introduced by the regional governments in the 1960’s and 1970’s using the public libraries. They were used to provide services to primary and secondary schools as well as to villagers. This has gone almost extinct due to poor maintenance culture but the benefits cannot be overlooked. This laudable venture which the public libraries directly handled should be harnessed as sure means of information provision to rural dwellers for transformation of the society. According to Abolaji (2009), the Rivers State Library Board launched a Mobile Library, operated in a boat in 1978. The boat Library attracted visitors from all corners of the country apart from users in the Rivers State who were the primary clientele for areas that are not easily accessible by easy means of transport. Book-boxes should be stationed in centrally located premises like schools, churches, mosques and town halls, for easy accessibility and utilization.

2.2. Rural Library Services to Farmers

Rural dwellers make living from various crafts but farming is a major activity that cut across every family for sustenance. Information on how to improve their farms and means through which they can improve their farming techniques should be provided for them in a format they will understand (Aboyade, 1990 in Ogbebor, 2011) Information on modern farm practices and chemicals that will improve their farm yields should be in a language they most understand, with pictorial articles showing how such can be applied to their farms. Such articles or information could be in pamphlets or shown to them through audiovisual aids. The audiovisual aspect has the advantage of combing with vision and sound especially for the demonstration of modern farm techniques. The librarian’s must not be agriculturalists but their professional background equipped them to provide technical information services to experts in other fields using the languages they understand most. Agricultural extension information services (AEIS) are carried to the individual farms and houses as a way of encouraging them to seek and utilize such information to improve farm yields and ultimately their standard of living.

2.3. Information and Referral Services

Information and referral services guide people to sources of information and to agencies cable of handling problems or questions. Libraries participating in information and referral services generally have a referral network and a calendar of community events. Libraries are at the forefront in providing information and referral services in rural areas in developed nations (Ogbebor, 2011). The public libraries should have staff sent to collect calendar of community events in the rural areas and package referral and information services to fit such events and deliver same to the communities at the appropriate time.
2.4. Outreach Programmes
These are organized to meet the information needs of the rural population. The objectives are awareness of library and information resources, and the creation of a reading habit among rural dwellers. According to Boyce and Boyce (1995), Library outreach programmes are a way to distribute library services across a large and sparsely populated rural area. Distance learning and other educational programmes can also be extended to rural areas. A well-planned library outreach programme can improve quality of life in rural areas.

2.5. Current Awareness Services
Current awareness services keep the users up-to-date, save time, helps create new ideas, saves money spent on journals and reduces paper work (Ogbuvwu, 2007). Public libraries in developed nations function as social development agents by extending services, sharing books, lectures on topics such as child labor, AIDS/HIV, epidemic diseases, reading habits, environmental protection. Public libraries in Nigeria should take up such services to give rural dwellers such vital information services to give rural dwellers such vital information on time. Libraries can plan current awareness programmes based on farming seasons, pond management agricultural marketing authorities, ranch business for cattle rearers who are asking for grazing reserve areas in Nigeria.

2.6. Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)
To effectively render selective dissemination of information service, the librarian must have a profile of the clientele. When the information of the rural population are identified, such service will be relevant to them. Nigeria is a developing country where the majority of the population lives in rural areas. The majority of these rural dwellers are either non-literate or semi-literate. Libraries exist to serve as many people as possible, disseminating information, preserving culture and contributing to intellectual and social life. Hence, information pertaining to fishing and farming activities of rural areas needs to be repackaged in local languages and disseminated to all categories of users.

2.7. Library Services to the Children
Children need the library for lifelong education in consonance with the national education policy. In some parts of Nigeria, children (especially those from rural areas or economically disadvantaged backgrounds) first meet books in school, and have limited access to books in home and community (Usoro and Usanga, 2007). Extending library services to children is essential for universal basic education to succeed. Public libraries in Niger Delta are expected to extend library services to normadic populations, remote communities, rural primary schools and daycare centers. According to Correa (1997) the library is “the place where teachers and pupils come into contact with ‘the world’ that is, where they acquire the general knowledge which form the bases for all further learning”. If we want children, and all citizens to acquire literacy, we must provide reading materials (Unagha, 2008).

2.8. Factors Militating Against Library Services in Rural Communities and Possible Solutions
Public libraries in the Nigeria have declined dramatically over the past Twenty Years, reflecting both the political and economic situation of the country. Library services is
inhibited by poor infrastructure, inhibited by poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, lack of human resources and so on. There is need to address these problems.

2.9. Poor Infrastructure

No available building to house the material and human resources to serve the rural dwellers. The government, in the good spirit of extending democratic dividend and transformation agenda to benefit rural areas commitment should be made to get accommodation that will house the public library materials and human resources to be used in serving the rural population.

Vans used to render mobile library services in the 70s are rotting away in the Library Board Building. New Vans should be purchased by the government to keep reinforcing the services that are provided in those remote areas.

The material resources should be packaged in oral, printed and electronic media (audio visual) based on local content to address the need of the rural dwellers. This will yield the desired transformation touching Nigerian Society to the grassroots. Computer and other information and communication technology are assets for producing the local information materials to be used in serving the people.

2.10. Inadequate Funding

Lack of fund is seen as the greatest problem libraries face. This is a matter of priority. Public libraries are established by people’s tax. The government changes in attitude towards public library provision by appropriating fund for rural library services will erase this long belief of poor funding. The government stands to gain in the long-run because where the life of the rural dwellers are transformed, their productivity develops and revenue generation from those rural areas become possible.

2.11. Inadequate Human Resources

We are at a point of change in the information economy of which libraries are a part (Chad 2008, cited by Harris 2009). Change is focused on innovation, technology, user experience, resource management and services delivery. These changes call for education and training of libraries and other library staff (Ebiwolote, 2010). The shortage of adequate trained staff in libraries is obvious. Many rural areas lack libraries because of lack of human resources to be used. The state librarians should take up the matter to the library and information science schools where conscious attention should be directed to producing manpower requirement in public library as areas of specialization. On graduation these should quickly be employed and equipped to reader services with incentive in these rural areas. There is always preference to work in the urban areas but with good incentives to serve in the rural areas.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The following recommendations are important to library services in rural areas:
- Adequate funds should be made available for the acquisition of information resources and the provision of quality library services to the rural population.
- Education and training of manpower to render the services should be addressed through the department of Library and Information Science in Tertiary Institutions and on the job training for the manpower to be properly equipped.
- Good incentives such as accommodation, mobility enhanced pay should be given to the rural workers which will encourage them to stay in those areas.
• Training and retraining of staff in ICT and related areas should be a continuous exercise in our libraries.
• Rural electrification should be give good attention by the government. This will ease of life in rural areas as well as make ITC and internet connectivity by the government possible for the rural library staff to use in rendering their services.

4. CONCLUSION
Library services are essential in transforming, socially, politically and educationally. The gap in development between the urban and rural areas can be bridged by effective rural library services. The federal, state and local governments have the responsibility of transforming the lives of rural people by intentional effective library services delivery. The government priority towards rural library service will have fund, infrastructure and human resources seen as inhibitors taken care of.

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