* THE FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR AFRICA LBRARY DEVELOPMENT

By

Benedict A. Oladele, PhD

Institute Librarian

National Institute for policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru

PMB 2024, Bukuru, Plateau State, Nigeria.

benolak8@yahoo.com

Fulbright Scholar

University of California

Los Angeles, California, 900024-2737

USA.

oladele@international.ucla.edu

ABSTRACT

The library as it is understood today is one of the legacies bequeathed to Sub-Sahara African countries at independence by the erstwhile colonial masters. Like many other infrastructures and facilities, the library has had its own share of the pervasive travails of development on the continent. This explains the lack luster impact of libraries on the development processes of most countries in regard to access and delivery of information. This state of affairs is analyzed against the backdrop of the general political and economic history of the continent and how the lack of policy synergy and in some cases frequent policy somersaults of government serve to undermine library growth and development. Efforts at remedying the situation are also discussed as well as pointing to future directions for development.

Introduction

The primary role of the library in the society is to provide readers with access to information. This role entails a number of behind-the-scene activities such as selection and acquisition of materials, cataloging and classification, storage and circulation. These are the traditional duties of librarians all over the world. The level of user's satisfaction is an index of effectiveness and efficiency of the performance of these functions. In recent times, how these functions are performed has been affected by the emergence and convergence of information and communication technologies. As tools, the technologies present the library with a *fait accompli* as to the inevitability of their utilization but however in the word of Buckland (1997) they present the librarians the choice "to determine how, whether, and when these new means should be used". It could therefore, be said that while libraries in the developed economies and particularly the US made early choice to embrace the technologies, the same thing cannot be said of libraries in Africa. In this regard one cannot agree less with Sturges and Neil (1990) observation that one place "where one is unlikely to find much evidence of the revolution in information technology is in Africa's libraries". The objective of this presentation therefore is to give an overview of current level of library development in Africa within the context of the contemporary political history of the continent. The presentation is divided into seven sections consisting of introduction, Africa library historical background, post-colonial Africa, current situations of library on the continent, constraints to library development, the way forward and conclusion. Some of these sections are subdivided into sub-sections for the purpose of clarity using historical narrative approach.

Historical Background

Contemporary notion of library service is part of the colonial heritage bequeathed to African countries at independence by the colonial masters. This is to say that on the continent, the modern understanding of the library is western in orientation and as such alien. This does not in any way suggest that African countries or kingdoms as they were before colonialism did not have their own type of information system or library which was basically oral. The cultural heritage of the communities including their literary genre, deposits of faith and recording of events of historical significance in the words of Banjo (1998) resided in the "rapidly diminishing pool of traditional intellectuals: elders, clan heads, priests, historians and story-tellers" and musicians. This people were not just scholars in their own right but librarians as well. It could be said that they were the precursors of mobile librarianship in that they could be contacted or summoned to the king's palace to bring their knowledge to bear on any subject. This was the situation on the continent before the arrival of the colonial masters and more importantly in those kingdoms and empires south of the Sahara. The history of libraries in countries north of the continent is a different picture entirely but similar to the western notion of library in that there existed a history of a much earlier literary culture and vibrant scholarship. For instance the Alexandrian library in Egypt which, was founded by Ptolemy Soter about 283 BC (Donaldson, 1983) was reported as containing about 700,000 volumes of manuscripts (Arnold, 2002). There were other private and temple collections in Egypt.

The imposition of colonialism and religious proselyzation on the continent brought about a shift in paradigm. Gradually but steadily, the communities, which later became countries, embraced western form of education and its accompanying facilities and institutions including the library. The colonial masters accordingly established Public libraries at national, regional and provincial levels of the countries. In Nigeria for instance, the first public library was established in 1932 with the support of Carnegie Corporation. Prior to this time, the colonial government in 1902 had established the law library of the Federal Ministry of Justice in Lagos. Similarly the African elites at that time and particularly the lawyers and politicians started to set up their own collections in pursuit of their careers and in a way as symbol of erudition. It must be mentioned that the content of most of these libraries and more importantly the public ones had no bearing on the life and culture of the people but on the geography, history and culture of the colonial masters. The traditional concept of African librarianship referred to earlier on was never incorporated into the colonial library structure or system and this has proved to be a fatal error in regard to the community service role of the public library. One cannot therefore but conclude that the establishment of library service by the erstwhile colonialists in the image of their culture was a sort of systemic indoctrination to make a British gentleman and urbane *bonhomme* out of the African. School libraries were also established and these were managed by 'teacher-librarians' who had no training in librarianship together with the assistance of library prefects. The contents of these libraries were textbooks, magazines and fictions from metropolitan Europe. Academic libraries came much later with the establishment of tertiary institutions. It is important to mention that some of the academic libraries like the University of Ibadan in

Nigeria, Makerere University in Uganda, and a host of others were initially legal deposit libraries for materials published within their individual country at that time. The intention was *ab initio* to make this group of libraries national focal points for research and excellence. This has since become history as that status at least in the case of University of Ibadan no longer subsists.

Post Colonialism

No sooner than the joy and hysteria of independence was over in many of the countries than the reality of statehood started to stare the countries in the face. This was more pronounced in the area of resource allocation where available resources were by far too small for the competing demands. Even then the issue of development planning was a major problem that leaders had to contend with. Planning became an exercise in guesswork as there were no accurate, reliable and current data as input for the planning process (Stolper, 1966). Moreover, the agrarian nature of most of the countries was such that none could achieve reasonable level of economy of scale as most of the farmers were at the level of subsistence producing primary products that were exported to Europe and America in return for finished products. The most devastating post independence development experience some of the countries on the continent had to contend with were the numerous ethnic based political crises most of which metamorphosed into avoidable wars. Some of these wars were the Congo war of the 1960s, the Nigerian civil war of 1967, the Rhodesian upheaval (Zimbabwe), the Somalia war, the wars in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia to mention only a few. The rights and wrongs of these wars are not the subject of this paper but

they serve to illustrate the pervasiveness of a climate of insecurity and wastages of scarce resources on the continent. Another element of insecurity on the continent was the adventure of the military into the politics and the governance of the nations. The adventure was an aberration as much it served to retard the cultivation of democratic principles and norms. Above all, the adventure saw the elevation of dictatorship and sharp practices to a much higher pedestal that had never been known. In this regard, it must be emphasized that the military was able to achieve their objectives through overt and covert connivance of civilians and particularly the politicians. There is also the issue of the emergence of civilian dictators or sit-in leaders. Leaders in this category see themselves as divinely ordained to rule and govern their countries in perpetuity. They see their countries as a kind of patrimony in which the demarcation between their personal wealth and that of the nations does not exist. Such leaders quickly acquire reputation for tinkering with their countries wealth and constitutions in a most unethical manner including being intolerant of opposition. Situations such as this, often times result in circles of crises, violence or rebellion and wars. The implications of the above conditions on the overall development of the countries appear apparent. It suffices to say however that resources that could have been expended on the development of infrastructures including the library are either misappropriated or diverted to prosecute avoidable internecine or fratricidal wars. Furthermore, it is generally accepted that dictators thrive better in an atmosphere where ignorance of mind and brain prevails. One is therefore not surprised to see that institutions and facilities that provide information services like the libraries are usually low on the priority scale of most African dictators.

The African Library Today

Most African countries have the tendency to heap their development woes on their past colonial masters and the neo-colonialists. This does not in any way exonerate these groups from certain responsibilities. Nevertheless, a fundamental question urgently begging for an answer has to do with how have African countries managed their resources since independence? To answer this question in the context of library development on the continent is to reveal the general level of decadence and neglect of the libraries at the national levels of most countries. This is important because most of the libraries in Africa are funded either directly or indirectly by the government. Since independence, most of the African countries have continued to witness exponential growth in the population of libraries due to the establishment of education and research institutions as well as opening up branches of public libraries at regional and provincial levels of most countries. Unfortunately, the growth has never been matched with commensurate acquisition of reading materials, capacity building, adoption and utilization of information technology. In almost every library, the prevalence of paucity of reading materials is a common feature. In many academic libraries, for instance, getting copies of current journal titles is about impossible and if they are available they must have been acquired through donations from private donors and international agencies. The same thing goes for school libraries, which at best exist in theory, but which in reality are no more than a mix grill of textbooks and donated soft reading materials. In some cases, the tendency is to have more furniture than are reading materials. Furthermore, the special or research libraries are not fairing better as most of their journal titles are obsolete as there are gaps in their collections. The public libraries seem to be the worst hit as no any other group of library has suffered the

level of neglect and deprivation being currently witnessed on the continent. It is perhaps apt to say that public libraries are shadows of what they were before independence. They seem to gather more cobwebs and dust than they acquire books, journals and many other types of reading lists. One cannot agree less with Sturges and Neil (1990) observation that Africa's libraries "are almost without exception the last places that serious researcher would visit in order to find information concerning Africa". Describing the predicaments of public libraries in Africa, Banjo (1998) wrote that their capacity "has been further reduced in recent years as they have been obliged to reduce their acquisition of new books to largely what they can get from donor agencies, as a result of dwindling subventions, the high cost of books and scarce foreign exchange". Today in Africa, it is a known fact that almost all the libraries depend on books, journals, and materials donated by organizations and individuals from abroad. The situation of the public libraries is so precarious that Raseroka (1994) describes them as mere reading rooms for high school students. Further still, Mchombu (1991) in a study of some countries access to public libraries on the continent reported a very low level of access. Some of his findings are shown as follows:

Botswana =7.5%
Kenya   =2.3%
Tanzania =1.2%
Nigeria   = <1%

It is very obvious that Botswana is well ahead most other countries. Access in this context relates to how widespread or available the public libraries are to the public. This general sketch of library development on the continent are attributable to a number of issues or constraints, which are hereby presented.

Mitigating Constraints

Library development in Africa has been affected by a number of factors. By nature, these factors are historical, institutional, attitudinal and leadership and they are hereby discussed as follows with the exception of the historical element, which, has been discussed elsewhere in this presentation.

Government Attitude

At all level of government, policy makers and bureaucrats' attitude to library development in Africa is a classical case of contradictions and negativism. The contradictions are explained in terms of the difference between government public extolment of the role and importance of libraries to the development process and their reluctance or sometime refusal to march their pronouncements with concrete resource allocation. Whereas negativism is seen in the general government perception of the library as a facility or institution that is desirable but not needed. This attitude perhaps explains the poor conditions of most government owned libraries arising from under funding and neglect. Due to this attitude, it is not uncommon without any convincing justification or principles for the library to become a casualty in any budget cut exercise compared with other departments and services. Similar conditions also exist in academic and research institutions. There are instances in which chief executives in institutions will push up the library on the priority list in their justification of budget proposals to government only to reverse the rating once approval is obtained and at the level of budgetary disbursement.

A characteristic attitude of government towards the library has also found its way into the policy-making activities of the country. At the level of policy formulation and implementation, the role of the library is always

taken for granted even in an area like education in which the role of the library is crucial. In Nigeria, for instance nowhere is the role of the library is ever mentioned in the policy document on Universal Basic Education (UBE) program for the country and this has been pointed out to government by the School Library section of the Nigeria Library Association. Further still, within a framework of some selected African countries national information policies, Arnold (2002) studied the difficulties confronting the African librarians. Her findings showed that in all the policies analysed, the role of the library was never mentioned. Instead priority was given to IT as tools for information management. The question then is, was this a case of classical policy oversight or a case of negative perception of the role of the library. She concluded "it appears as if many African governments consider the services provided by librarians in their countries to be of less value than the service provided by the other professions". Her conclusion is revealing enough as much as it is confirmatory. In South Africa, Ubogu (2002) gave a revealing insight into the thinking of most administrators about the library in these words:

> A colleague who served a 16-month appointment as
> Interim assistant Vice Chancellor for administration
> At a mid-sized public university observed that the
> Library rarely features in the top ten priorities of
> Institutions administrators. If we do feature at all, it
> May be at the bottom rung of the priorities.

This is atypical attitude of most chief executives towards the library on the continent and it serves to negatively affect library development on the continent.

Finance

Most libraries in African countries are owned and funded by government through annual budgetary allocations. This is especially true of the public libraries and to a larger extent the academic, school, and special libraries. This means that libraries have to compete for the limited government funding with other competing departments and services. In most cases, libraries due to the already formed government negative perception against them, compete from position of weakness compared with other departments and services like health, industry, and education, to mention a few. The weakness is of such a magnitude that most top policy makers readily exploit it at will. The scenario is such that at the level of budgetary preparation and approval in some government departments and institutions, the library features very prominently, but slides down the rung at the level of disbursement. Instances abound where fund release often falls short of approval. Even then disbursements often times come in late if they ever come in at all. The only categories of libraries that perhaps can be said to operate from the position of power are those in the universities where for example in Nigeria it is statutory for libraries to receive 10% of their universities annual budgets as their subvention. This is above Ford (1991) "mythical rule of thump" of 6% elsewhere. In reality, this percentage is inadequate in the face of mounting needs of the libraries arising from long years of neglect or resource starvation. In real terms, the 10% amounts to a pittance as high inflation and exchange rates often make a nonsense of the allocation. Similar situation exists in other countries where university libraries are under funded. In South Africa, university librarians are looking for ways

of getting a substantial portion of their university budgets. These are summarized by Ubogu (2000) as follows:

- relating funding to mission,
- the use of library statistics (both internal and external),
- lobbying,
- a strong show of support from users, and
- The leveraging of library assets to enhance funding.

The above means are self-explanatory enough but it is nevertheless necessary to observe that leveraging of library assets to get the required attention is an innovation that is yet to be tested.

Publishing Industry

Like most other sectors of the economies, the publishing industry in most Sub-Saharan African countries is not in any way strong enough to support library services and particularly collection development. In most of the war torn countries, the industry has totally collapsed while in the relatively stable countries it is anything but buoyant as a result of many years of economic mismanagement. Most authors would rather patronize publishing houses in Europe and America where distribution mechanisms and royalties are efficient and assured. The linkage between the industry and library development seems very apparent particularly in the area of collection development. It is important to stress that most libraries without exception are unable to acquire most locally published materials due to their high cost not to talk of those published abroad if at all they get to know of the existence of such materials. This state of affairs without exception includes the countries' national libraries even with their legal deposit rights. Analyzing the paucity of published work in Africa, Arnold(2002):

> Many of the countries in this region suffer from a shortage of books and available information sources and a general poverty

of information. This can be seen in the number of book and research articles published annually in Sub-Saharan Africa. The number is fractional in comparison to the rest of the world. In 1991 this region produced only1.2 per cent of the world's book titles, …"

The above scenario is also playing out in the cyber space where Africa's contribution to the digital world is comparatively negligible. This represents a challenge to all governments on the continent to provide enabling environment and infrastructure that will go a long way at stimulating intellectual activities that can put the continent on the global superhighways. In this regard, African intellectuals in and out of the continent have very crucial role to play in the drive to make a difference in the knowledge age.

Professional Leadership

Professional leadership for library development in Africa is to say the least weak from the perspectives of the countries' national libraries, the library professional associations and individual headship of libraries. By virtue of their position as the apex libraries in all countries, national libraries are expected to provide professional support to other libraries through compilation of national bibliographies, union catalogs, setting of standards as well as serving as clearing houses for other libraries in relation to reference service. The reality in almost all the countries is that the national libraries have their own share of the travails of development. The performance of most of these listed services is on hold due to what Omolayole, (2003) described as "inadequate funding and limited technical capability" which are major constraints among this group of libraries. The constraints serve to weaken most of the libraries in such a way that does not permit them to champion the campaign for library development in their respective countries.

Similarly, library professional associations in most countries are not in a standing that commands the respect of organizations and governments like their counterparts in developed environment. Membership of these associations is still problematic as many professional refuse to register with the bodies while some of the registered members are in arrears of membership dues. For instance, the Kenya Library Association has in the last couple of years been engaged in membership drive. Many of the associations are financially handicapped to effectively discharge their responsibility and where finance is not a constraint, the performance level of the associations often suggests the need for major improvement in their capability for managing professional associations. Needless to say, their weak structure hinders their outreach capacity in respect of advocacy of issue at the level of governments and institutions.

In a way, the leadership of individual libraries has a way of determining the level of resources that a library may get or how chief executives rate the library. Most library administrators on the continent seem content to remain in the background with regard to 'board room politics'. The tendency if not well balanced can be counter productive, as there is a likelihood of one being sidetracked on many issues. As the head of the library one cannot afford the luxury of remaining aloof to certain happenings in the environment and this is one aspect that is often taken for granted by most Directors of Libraries on the continent. The job of the Director of library therefore transcends professional functions, as it is more of managing and pushing the library interests through the intricate web of contacts, bureaucracy and politics. It is more about getting resources and using them in a most innovative and transparent way. You must push to get what you want.

Information Technology

The present level of information technology (IT) development in most African countries perhaps with the exception of South Africa and Mauritius does not in any way engender confidence in regard to access and delivery of information. Infrastructures for information technology at the level of most countries are either non-existent or weak (Oladele, 2001). Consequently, access to the INTERNET is as problematic as ever because of scarcity of service providers and narrow bandwidth for data transmission. This is a common phenomenon across the continent just as the teledensity of most countries is poor. In its report on global development, World Bank (2004) presented the dearth of IT infrastructure on the continent. Figures from the bank show that there are seven personal computers (PCs) to 1000 persons and five telephone lines to the same number of people in Nigeria compared with South Africa which, has 69 PCs and 112 telephone lines for the same number of people. The same source also shows that Ghana has 3 PCs and 12 telephone lines to 1000 persons compared to Mauritius which, has 109 PCs and 257 telephone lines to 1000 persons. The overall import of the statistics is that libraries in most African countries are not yet in a position to utilize technology to complement their services. This is not to mention the prevalence of low capacity for IT utilization coupled with the unsteady nature of electric power supply.

Wither Africa Libraries?

The aforementioned constraints not withstanding, a cursory look across the continent shows some initiatives that are aimed at developing libraries at the national levels of most countries. In South Africa, the Library Association of South Africa is engaged in the facilitation of the building of public libraries

across the country and technical assistance to smaller libraries through fundraising in the USA. From report, the 'Smart Cape' pilot library project in Cape Town can be described as a success story. Like wise the activities of organizations like Libraries in Society (BiS) from Scandinavia and Library and Information Workers (LIWO) in the area of school library development is commendable. The launching by these organizations of the library practice projects for young learners in the suburb of Cradock in South Africa is encouraging. In Botswana, the library association is also working on the development of the school library systems. Similarly the Nigeria Library Association initiative in getting the government to set up a librarian registration council is a major achievement that has the potential of according the profession greater recognition and influence in the country. In addition to this, it is also expected that successful completion of the UNESCO mediated virtual library for the country will go a long way to complement tertiary institutions' libraries access to information. In almost all the countries there are evidence of initiatives in the form of programs and projects that are aimed at improving library services particularly the provision of infrastructure and reading materials for school libraries, community information centres, public libraries, capacity building and the establishment of virtual libraries. All these are not without the assistance of multilateral and private donor agencies

The above initiatives not with standing, certain needs must be addressed if the libraries in Africa in their journey through the 21st century are to discharge their duties in a most professional, effective and efficient manner. Like their counterparts elsewhere libraries cannot exist in a vacuum but must always draw their strength and relevance from their environment. This is to say that libraries in Africa can only thrive in an atmosphere of

relative peace and stability. All the leaders and citizens of all the countries must cultivate the act of dialog and negotiation as a way of resolving their crises instead of recourse to incessant fratricidal wars. The importance of this approach requires little or no underscoring with respect to the management and channeling of the countries' limited resources to productive development ventures such as the libraries. Closely related to this is the urgent need for all the countries to embark on measures to combat sharp practices like diversion of state resource into personal purse, and application of budgetary allocations to areas other than which they are meant for. To complement the countries initiatives, the erstwhile colonial masters and all the developed economies of the world have unique responsibility to refuse to provide landing rights to illegal capital flight from Africa. They also need to use their influence to bear on the current move to repatriate back to Africa some of the funds that were illegally siphoned out of the continent as doing so will help fund the development of facilities and services including the library.

Government attitude towards library development is an issue that can be addressed by the combined efforts of National Libraries and library associations at every country level. This they can achieve by leveraging their influence in the development process, and particularly in the areas of policy advocacy, awareness campaign, the use of network of contacts in and out of government for consultation, dialog and unobtrusive persuasion. The extent to which this role can be accomplished will be a measure of the relevance and commitment of the national libraries and associations to the development of libraries on the continent. More importantly, the associations have to be in the fore fronts of the campaign for library development. As the associations presently stand they need more than a mere sensitization but

require capacity building workshops and seminars on how to manage associations including bringing their immense influence to bear on government policies and decisions. After all who ever manages information, manages power and influence. Unfortunately, librarians in Africa are yet to realize this.

The adoption and use of IT for library services is a function of the existing infrastructure in the society. There are initiatives at the level of most countries to enhance access to the information superhighway and these are expected to impact positively on library service delivery. This can only be if professionals who are not IT literate are exposed to capacity building programs by agencies and organizations from within and outside the continent. Moreover the curriculum for library schools needs to be reviewed so as to make the products of the institutions functional and relevant to the demand and challenges of this information age.

Conclusion

Going by the analysis above, it is apparent that the level of library development in Africa is not in any way comparable with what obtains elsewhere. This situation is linked to many years of government neglect. A situation in which the library is perceived as an unwanted desirable can only serve to denigrate its importance and role in any development process. Furthermore, the pervasiveness of avoidable internecine wars on the continent serve no useful purpose but only serve to divert resources that could have been used to develop infrastructures and services including the library. What needs to be done is for the current set of leaders on the continent to ask themselves what legacies they will want to bequeath to their countries. Granted that their choice is development, the library is one area

that urgently begs for attention. After all when a nation develops its libraries, such a nation will be liberating its   citizens from the fangs of ignorance of the mind and brain. The multiplier effects of such an initiative on the society can be very enormous. This can only be if urgent decisions are made to develop libraries in Africa.

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