



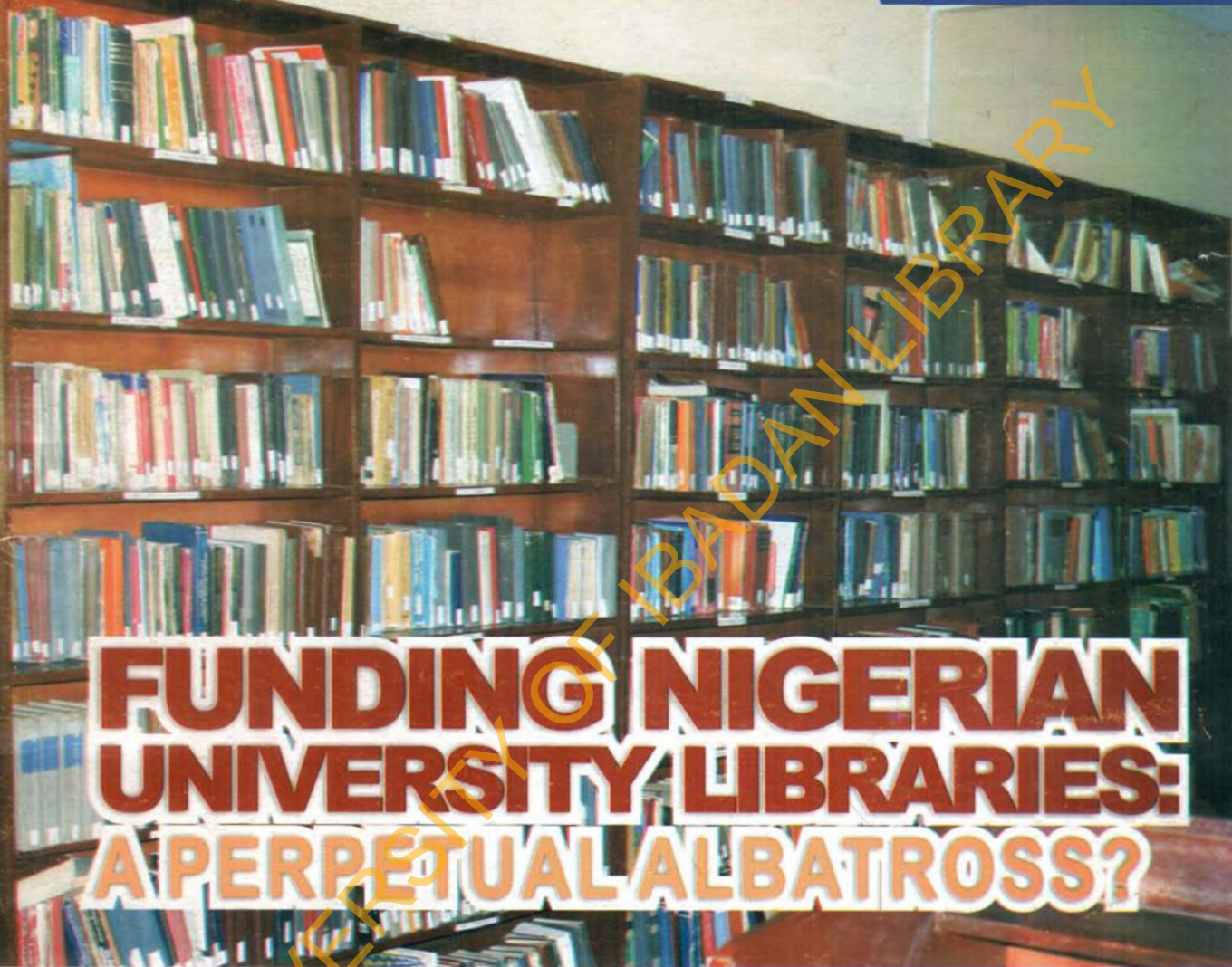
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A Publication of Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

VOL.2 DECEMBER 2011



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FUNDING NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES: A PERPETUAL ALBATROSS?

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Preamble:

There is no doubt that libraries are expensive institutions. Investments in Libraries cannot be 'commoditised'. Its profits (benefits) are intangible and unquantifiable. They are 'Not-For-Profit' institutions that are quite insufficiently appreciated by the society that is often the greatest beneficiary of library services. In the context of this write-up, Nigerian University Libraries refer to the libraries that are funded by the Federal and State governments. The focus here, mainly, is Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

In fact, Nigerian government and its agencies and parent institutions tend to view libraries as necessary parasites. They see libraries as mere dumps where books and other such materials are kept from public glare. They hardly see the library as an edifice with complex and scientific internal operational mechanisms that make accessibility, retrieval and use of materials therein easy. As a structure designed to give service, anticipate and respond to the information needs of its users, the Library must create a friendly, convivial, serene and welcoming environment that is attractive for use. This is the first major concern that should be addressed while the Library contents are then given attention. The logic of equity in the distribution of available resources among contending disciplines within its principal's Teaching, Learning and Research (TLR) coverage is adopted to achieve 'balanced collection'. Balanced collection also implies that all forms of resources are well catered for. Books should be adequately provided and the stock should not be skewed against serials which should be acquired at prescribed ratio and proportions for all disciplines. And, this applies to all other forms of library resources. This is where the librarian's professional competence, budgetary and intellectual ability is tasked.

Libraries are dependent institutions. They derive operational mandates from their principals - their parent institutions. University libraries are therefore responsible to the institutions that fund and host them. A university library is established principally to support the TLR and community development efforts of its university. Federal and state universities are public funded institutions in Nigeria. By extension, the libraries

that support their academic programmes and research activities are funded, in the main, by the public.

Why Fund University Libraries?

The library is the pivot around which all academic, research and recreational (soft books, newspapers, magazines, tapes, videos, etc.) activities of the parent institution rotates. To starve university libraries of funds is to stifle or paralyze research exploits and academic engagements. The quality of academic and research output of a university is largely the function of the quality of library service available in the institution. Thus, inadequate funding of the library has adverse repercussions for not just the university it serves but the society at large. If libraries are properly funded, the quality of TLR will improve and become more robust. The centrality and importance of the library can be measured from the rating given it during programmes accreditation exercises by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and professional councils of various disciplines. The state of academic and research activities of an institution is largely determined by the state of its library - a case of 'show me your library and I will know your academic worth'.

Sources of Funds for Nigerian University Libraries

University Libraries in Nigeria rely mainly on government subvention. The parent institutions are the superintendents of the funds. The subventions are released to the universities by the NUC as Library Development Funds (LDF) then, the universities' administrations, in turn, disburse the funds to the libraries. In University of Ibadan, the library enjoyed a fairly comfortable level of government funding up till about the early 1980s. This was also the case for other university libraries in the country then. Book acquisitions were made to cater for all disciplines and courses offered in the university; journal subscriptions were paid for as at when due; libraries could engage in exchange programmes with other libraries locally and internationally (a lot of grey literatures were acquired through this means); library staff enjoyed local and foreign in-service trainings; various library collections grew steadily; the shelves were kept neat and well maintained; and, above all,

there were enough staff to discharge library services and respond to users' needs and requests. The funding situation at this time was premised on the availability of funds in the university. **The global economic glut in the petroleum crude oil market in the early eighties heralded stiff national economic measures that almost strangulated the universities. The universities not only experienced huge cuts in their budgetary allocations, funding also became irregular.** Given the fact that libraries are "usually the last to be favoured when budgets increase and the first to lose it during depression" (Nwagha, 1990), the impact of dwindling funding of universities on libraries can only be imagined. Literature is replete with the devastating effects of poor government funding on Nigerian university libraries (Banjo, 1980; Dipeolu, 1992; Edoka, 1991; Edoka, 1992; Ekoja, 1992; Ekpenyong, 1993; Ogundipe, 1985; Ogundipe, 1989; Ogunseinde, 1989; Nwafor, 1990; Ola, 1995; Ola and Adeyemi, 2000; Ola and Adeyemi, 2001; Oyelude and Ola, 2008).

Other sources of library funding include Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) from reprography, binding, personalized information services like literature search and printing, internet use and CDROM search; overdue charges and library registration. IGR amounts to an infinitesimal sum of library funds. Libraries also get funding support from donations and special interventions from individuals, corporate and multinational organizations, and foundations like MacArthur, Carnegie, Ford, Rockefeller, among others. These come occasionally. The Education Trust Fund (ETF), which was originally initiated by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), also makes provision for funds to implement special projects in the library. This has been of tremendous assistance to university libraries and has been a supplement to the meagre amount made available through budgetary allocations.

Academic Staff Union of Universities' Concern

The dwindling fortunes of university funding by government took its toll on the university system in the country from the first half of the 1980s. By the end of that decade, the situation had degenerated

such that the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) could no longer continue to ignore the problems confronting Nigerian Universities. It started agitating for better funding for the universities. It clamoured for improved teaching and learning facilities, well equipped libraries and laboratories; general conducive university environment. The improvement of library facilities through better funding was prominently canvassed during the agitations for improved university funding by ASUU in the early 1990s. The agitations culminated in the agreement between the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and ASUU signed on 3rd September 1992 after a prolonged strike action that lasted for five months. Section 4.1.1c of the Agreement titled: Special Budgetary Provision for the Library, stated that:

"It was agreed that budgetary provision for the library services be under a special head of its own and that the head should account for ten percent (10%) of the total regular recurrent budget."

It is worth mentioning that Prof. Idris Abdulkadir who was the Executive Secretary of NUC (1986-1996) when the Agreement was consummated carried out this provision of the Agreement to the letter. He ensured that Library Development Fund (LDF) which was standardized at 10% of regular recurrent budget of the university was paid into special library accounts of the university directly. The situation changed after he left as Executive Secretary of NUC in 1996. There is no doubt that university libraries in Nigeria enjoyed a brief relief from the perpetual dreary financial burden during his tenure. This was to the utter consternation of the Committee of Vice Chancellors (CVC) who could only see so much money in library accounts but turned blind eyes to the enormous problems, impoverishment and degeneration to physical structures and contents of the libraries. In some institutions those who could see the level of impoverishment in the libraries pretended that all was well with the university library system. To them there was money in the library and they must find ways of controlling as well as expending the funds the way they deemed fit. Thus, improved budgetary provision became a source of nightmare to some library heads who attempted to

stand up to their Vice Chancellors on the way they wanted to expend library funds. Others merely watched as library funds was veered for other uses. Eventually, post - Prof. Idris Abdulkadir NUC witnessed a redefinition of the September 1992 FGN - ASUU Agreement with respect to the provision therein for library funding.

Today, rather than the appropriation of 10% of recurrent budget, the library is handed a paltry 10% of overhead cost of university's recurrent budget which is just a sub-head of the 'regular recurrent budget' of the university. In University of Ibadan, this amounted to a paltry sum of N4 million in 2009. For a library system of the magnitude of the University of Ibadan, this money could not have been enough to cater for proper cleaning of the KDL complex alone not to mention other libraries within the system. The library was expected to use the funds for: other libraries within the system.

- The acquisition of books
- Journal subscriptions
- Library maintenance (including cleaning and shelf maintenance)
- Staff training, workshops and conferences; and other exigencies.

The fund is abysmally insufficient. Libraries have been running shoestring budgets for too long. Till now, libraries are still impoverished in spite of all the efforts made by ASUU to ensure that the government plays its role for the universities in Nigeria.

Special Concerns on University Libraries

'A good workman takes care of his tools'. The library is an academic's main resource and tool. It is expected that academics would minimally cherish Libraries and crave for their development. However, the reality is the opposite. One wonders why some academics are ever so eager to oppose library matters, especially, moves at allocating funds to the Library. When Library issues are raised in University Senate meetings, Academic Boards and other fora, tempers would rise - egged by careerist academics. Then, complaints would trail-in on the sloppiness of Librarians and the services they render.

Aspersions are cast on the library and librarians. Libraries are alleged as not responding to academic demands thus raising the issues of their relevance. In contrast, references are made to University Libraries in advanced countries without recourse to the amount of funds made available to such Libraries. If we consider the budgets made available to the libraries, we will see that there is no basis for comparison.

It is more worrisome to note that there is hardly any grant awarded to individuals, departments, units, faculties or multi-disciplinary researchers for research or special projects that have no Library component. Just about 5% of the grantees remember the Library when carrying out the research or executing the projects. At the proposal level, the Library plays a pivotal role because they weave the proposal around it to justify the huge amount they propose to expend on the project or research. At the execution level, the Library is completely obliterated from the picture. Then, the victim is further blamed when pressure is mounted on the library to procure those materials they had budgeted for in their proposals! In addition, new programmes are often introduced without the provision of funds for the library to acquire relevant materials to support the programmes.

Unfortunately, university administrators do not help matters. They do not just see the library as the area to cut subvention during recessions but where funds can easily be veered for solving problems to the detriment of library development. Most often, such funds are never paid back to the library coffers.

The Paradox of Clients' Expectations of Library's Responsibility

Library Development Fund (LDF), which is supposed to be 10% of Regular Recurrent Budget (RRB) is considered by faculties, departments, institutes and academic centres and units as sacrosanct. They do not understand that the fund is not released by government to the library; that only 10% of overhead cost, which is just a small fraction of the university recurrent budget, is the amount made available to the library. The irony is that, each department or unit appropriates the 10% of RRB to itself and imagine that if the library has so much funds at its disposal, then, they should be entitled to certain fraction of the funds to cater for their teaching, learning and research interests. Each makes huge requests from the library without considering that the library has responsibility to cater for the interests of others within the university community. They are oblivious of the fact that the library is as responsible for the information provision of one unit of the university in the same measure that it is liable for the non-provision of information needs of other segments of the university. This is a clear case of equity in resource sharing and distribution.

Special Appeals:

To Government: Great countries achieve greatness through the education of its citizenry. Education is the pillar of societal development. No wonder, in the recently concluded election, all politicians adopted 'Education! Education! Education!' as their campaign slogan. It behoves on government not to pay only lip service to education but to give it the prime position it

rightly deserves. Central to formal education, and essentially to research that is considered the bedrock of development, is the well stocked library. **To deny funds for the education sector is to indirectly stultify or strangulate library growth. To pauperise the libraries is to obstruct, hinder, limit or even, terminate research endeavours. To hinder research is to under-develop a nation!**

The appeal to government is to fund the education sector properly; empower the universities adequately so that the Libraries can thrive and provide enabling support and environment for teaching, learning and research. This is not too much for a country to demand from its government.

To University Administrations: Libraries enhance research and research results are germane to development. Libraries are not-for-profit institutions and they should not be treated as undesirable pests. University Libraries are established to support universities to achieve their mandate. Veering library funds or denying libraries the funds meant for sustaining their operations is tantamount to 'shooting oneself in the leg'!

Universities should not just remit LDF to the libraries. They should also make deliberate efforts to source for funds for them. For instance, certain percentage of the university internally generated funds should be devoted for library development. No library can be too rich.

To University Senate: The library being an academic unit of the university should be the concern of the University Senate. The Senate should protect the interest of the library and ensure that the library gets its dues from the university. The insistence of the Senate can force the university and units within it to remit funds that should rightly accrue to the library from time to time.

To University Librarians and the Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian Universities (CULNU): Librarianship is about advocacy. To despair or get discouraged about demanding for whatever is due to the library is to wreck unquantifiable damage to the university and this, we know, has ripple effects. University Librarians are responsible to their Vice Chancellors, but the Committee of Vice Chancellors (CVC) did not sign the agreement that allotted 10% of RRB of university budget to libraries as LDF. If the NUC and the CVC redefined the FGN-ASUU Agreement of 1992 that stipulates 10% of RRB to be 10% of overhead cost, ASUU should be made aware. The Union will consider it as one of the areas the government and/ or its agents have reneged on implementing the Agreement. Properly channelled, this grievance would have been appropriately handled as at when the mis(dis)-interpretation of the Agreement was made.

To Nigerian Library Association (NLA): Our umbrella organization should continue to intervene through proper advocacy and publicity to put the profession in the front burners of issues on education in the country. NLA should not be weary of contributing to debates on education and other related matters. The tendency to push aside or relegate the profession in a society that pays lip service to education is very high. NLA should provide the necessary shield (canopy)

to protect its members. Agitation for adequate funding of Libraries in the country should be one of the main preoccupations of the Association. The Association should not only be seen but heard. It is only then that the society will appreciate and reckon with the profession.

To Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU): ASUU has fought relentlessly and gallantly over the years not only for improved salaries but facilities. 10% of RRB is an outcome of intensive struggle with government. However, some agencies of government have blocked the Libraries, nay, the Universities from enjoying the dividends of the struggle. The appeal is that ASUU, for its own sake, should not relent in agitating for better and sustained funding of education in general, and Universities in particular.

To Faculty Members: Support for the Library is support for a conducive environment for enhancing teaching, learning and research. It is easy to cast aspersions on the library without getting to know the problems confronting it. Objective criticism will assist the library to improve its services. Faculty members should also endeavour to render what is due to the library from their research grants and projects. This will enhance its growth. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's!"

To Librarians: We are to give service to our principals. To render good service is to get recognition. Most Librarians are careerists; they have not chosen to make the profession their vocation. We should strive to provide enabling environment for our users and ensure that we find out what their information needs are. We should stretch and maximize the lean resources we have to satisfy as many users as possible. We can only achieve this if we desist from acquiring materials blindly. The materials we acquire must reflect the needs of our users. We must also ensure that our users leave us feeling better than when they came, whether or not we are able to get them what they need. It is only when we serve our users well that we can be sure of their support when Library issues are raised in committees, academic boards, senate and, even, council.

Conclusion

University libraries provide support for scholarship and research. They are not-for-profit institutions. They survive on whatever their parent institutions are able to give them plus the little they are able to gather together. In countries where development is taken seriously, libraries are well funded because of anticipated service. In the Nigerian University system, lots of controversies trail the funding of libraries. Instead of the 10% of RRB which was agreed by FGN and ASUU in 1992, only 10% of the overhead cost which is just an item in the recurrent budget is made available as LDF. Meanwhile, the library is expected to give excellent service and respond to the information needs of all the units of the University. Proper funding of the university libraries should be the concern of all stake-holders of the Nigerian University system. It is important to note that 'it is what we sowed that we should expect to reap. No more, no less. Let this axiom never depart from our minds.

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