Library consortium: IITA, Ibadan, Nigeria experience

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to describe the library consortium experienced at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan, Nigeria. Activities involved improving researchers' timely access to resources for research for development.

Design/methodology/approach – The approach taken was a librarian interview and observation of library records.

Findings – The consortium involves agricultural libraries in both developing and developed countries. Using the library software Inmagic database enhances the web-based centralized online public access catalogue of all the participating institutions, the CGV Library. This enabled access to their comprehensive collections, promoting better library services to agricultural researchers. Hence, it bridges the digital gap between developing and developed countries. They are involved in joint acquisition of electronic journals and timely response to sharing their independent collections through electronic document delivery services.

Practical implications – The paper recommends that Nigerian libraries, especially agricultural research institutes, could emulate the IITA library consortium.

Originality/value – The paper provides recommendations to libraries wishing to form consortia in Nigeria and notes the positive impacts that this would have on national development.

Keywords Consortium, Libraries, Nigeria, Resource sharing, Agricultural institutions, Resource allocation

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Libraries in many countries, especially developing countries like Nigeria, are under-funded. It therefore becomes difficult to meet basic needs and provide adequate information access that will help improve economic development in these countries. Even where a library has the necessary financial backing, it is not possible to be self-sufficient. Membership of a consortium can be one approach to addressing the problem of accessing information, compensating for under-funding, cost avoidance and preventing unnecessary duplicate collections among libraries. Consortia enable libraries to be connected to one another for resource-sharing and attaining a stronger position in the national/international information network. Cost avoidance, improved access and increased resource sharing experienced by the IITA library in Nigeria is an example of the significant improvements that can be realised by libraries in developing countries through membership of a consortium.

Library consortium

(Kopp, 1998) traced the origin of the usage of the word consortium and stated that it first began to appear in the library literature as well as in the field of science and education during the 1950s and 1960s. The author concluded that the concept of library consortium was used to characterise libraries cooperating as a group to:

- negotiate with providers of information services;
- partner to share resources and services; or
- lobby their government for better funding.

This was supported by Ngwira (2003), Bashirullah and Jayaro (2006) and Anwar and Al-Jasem (2001). In their article on the development of consortia, Nfila and Darko-Ampem (2002) reviewed developments in academic library consortia literature from the 1960s through 2000 and reported that "the current trend is sharing integrated library systems and computer databases, collection development, purchasing of electronic journals, and staff development". Their report posits that consortium have been effective at extending resources and, improving service to users and per-unit costs and are now expanding the role of consortia to shared technologies and more formal agreements (Nfila and Darko-Ampem, 2002).

Historically libraries have used interlibrary loan and union catalogues as the foundation for successful library consortia. In addition to the now common academic consortia model, subject-specific library consortia, such as agricultural consortia, also aim at ensuring satisfaction of their specialised researchers' information needs. Library consortia can be practised at regional, national and international levels. Cohen (2002) reported that regional sharing of resources made the limited resources of individual institutions into wealthy collections that could serve the information needs of the Pacific region. Consortia can also be operated as associations of schools, colleges, universities (whether

federal or state), or research institutions or non-governmental organisations' libraries. Consortia aim at provision of the best services to patrons with minimal cost. Furthermore, such consortia can be established on the basis of the subject backgrounds of the interested bodies. However, a consortium with a joint subscription to electronic resources faces the challenges of fair dealing and agreement on the subjects to be covered for the individual institutions involved (Ramos and Kamsiah, 2005). The advent of information and communications technology (ICT) and electronic publishing (i.e. "born digital" information resources) have made it quick and easy to achieve the purpose of a consortium.

Availability of infrastructure combined with sufficient capacity of the staff involved can result in an extremely successful library consortium. Resource sharing in the form of cooperation has been a long-standing tradition and a part of libraries worldwide. One of the more well known examples of library cooperation is OCLC, which grew from a shared-cataloguing consortium called the Ohio College Library Center. (OCLC, n.d.) In Nigeria there was the VTLS project funded by MacArthur and Carnegie, and the Mortenson Center for International Library programs, USA. It aimed at automating Nigerian libraries' collections, which eventually would result in improved library cooperative practices. Six Nigerian university libraries (University of Ibadan, University of Jos, University of Port Harcourt, Obafemi Awolowo University, Bayero University and Ahmadu Bello University) participated in the project by using Virtua. Full exploration of VTLS would enhance access by users and information professionals to library collections and services of the six universities virtually. The VTLS project could also lead to networking of more libraries and consortium building to overcome the under-funding problems in attaining richer resources to satisfy users' needs (Mortenson and McArthur, 2005).

Prior to automation, interlibrary loan transactions were traditionally processed and sent to the requestor(s) through ground postal service, airmail or through a personal contact, a practice now known as "snail mail". It frequently took some days or months before the requestor could receive the document(s). But with the advent of information and communications technology (ICT), users get the information needed within the shortest possible time – hours and sometimes minutes. This also involves the role of librarians/information professionals with the skills to perform these functions (Ashcroft and Watts, 2005). Training and retraining of librarians from time to time to maintain the relevance of their responsibilities in the digital age is essential (Komolafe-Opadeji, 2009). Information technology is dynamic in this digital era; without continual training one's skill set quickly becomes obsolete. Furthermore, individual and centralised online public access catalogues (COPACs) of organisations, available on the internet, assist users as well as librarians from any part of the world to search library collections and make a request if need be. This could also be seen as virtual service to a virtual clientele. Through self-service people can search libraries' holdings remotely, discover the status of the materials they need, place a hold, or request or renew materials already borrowed as the case may be. Users can also print, download, send links, and save copies. This access and ease of sharing requires the information literacy skills essential to ensure the ethical use of library resources by researchers (Angello, 2010).

Library consortium in developed and developing countries

The formation of library consortia is limited to any single continent or library type. This is a worldwide trend. In developed countries for example, the budget of the Canada Library and Archives has been downsized multiple times over the last 20 years, which brought about the Federal Libraries Consortium (FLA) (National Library and Archives Canada, 2009). This spurred their effort to cooperate in order to rationalise services and collections to meet the challenge of serving the diverse user needs in the country. Membership of FLA is voluntary and open to all Canadian federal government libraries. The National Library of Canada gives its support, while funding for the consortium is provided through membership fees. The consortium has grown to include 117 member libraries from different federal government departments and agencies. On the other side of the world in Turkey, the Anatolian University Library Consortium (AULC) was formed in 2000 with 12 members and has grown rapidly to 163 members in 2012 (ANKOS Anatolian University Libraries Consortium, n.d.). Consortium members could access electronic journals, e-references, bibliographic databases, and e-book collections. It was observed that electronic journals were used primarily by graduate students and academic staff of the consortium universities; undergraduates were less likely to need those same resources (Karasozen, 2008). Furthermore, in the UK, a consortium of academic libraries called M25 has been established to share purchase, subscriptions of resources at discounted rates as well as sharing of different integrated library systems to enhance teaching, learning and research (M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries, n.d.).

Library Consortium are also gaining ground in the developing countries because of its positive impact on the teaching, learning and development. Ghosh *et al.* (2006), in their analysis of the Indian Library Consortium (ILC), posited that Indian libraries, in general, were passing through a crucial period of advancement "where automation and networking have become quite well developed in India's special and academic libraries though such facilities implementation lags far behind in the public libraries" (Ghosh *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, Bozimo (2011) reported on the formation of the Nigerian University Libraries Consortium (NULIB)[1]. The major challenge among others facing its sustainability is funding. Bozimo (2011) recommended proactive strategies for sourcing fund and, at a conference on Open Access Repositories, the accelerated adoption of an Open Access model for Nigeria (Open Access News, 2008).

Library consortium – IITA experience

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)[2] is a non-profit organisation established in the year 1967 with headquarters in Nigeria serving sub-Saharan Africa with 13 stations to alleviate poverty, food security and improve the livelihood of the citizens. (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, 2009) It is one of Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)[3] centres aimed at taming hunger and poverty. In their article on consortia subscriptions Ramos and Kamsiah (2005) discuss the formation of the CGIAR library consortium when, in

2002, the CGIAR centre directors signed a Memorandum of Understanding in support of the formation of a library consortium with the following objectives:

- "share resources and knowledge", such as joint journal subscriptions and document delivery;
- services, content, expertise, technologies, and processes;
- facilitate access to information held at all CG centres by centre staff and partners, particularly those located in developing countries where information access is limited;
- contribute to the dissemination of CGIAR research output;
- implement the intended collaboration by jointly developing and executing projects within the CGIAR and in collaboration with other institutions and partners (e.g. FAO, USDA-AgNIC, scientific publishers) and through other initiatives;
- exchange best practices in knowledge and information management" (Ramos and Kamsiah, 2005).

Centralizing acquisition and collection development of resources, maintenance and sharing of individual independent collections has made the centre libraries a unified entity in support of research for development and its sustainability. As a member of the consortium, an IITA library can access the full text of jointly subscribed journal titles as well as tables of contents via Swetswise, which serves all the IITA stations in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the 16 centre libraries purchased Inmagic web publisher, which they use to manage their individual library collections.

The members' use of Inmagic allowed them to create the centralised online public access catalog (COPAC) called the CGV Library[4], which can be accessed online via the internet. The effect of the integrated library catalogue of the CGIAR centres was to enable the 16 libraries to search and discover the resources across the collections of all libraries virtually at any point in time regardless of their location. This also facilitated effective interlibrary loan and electronic document delivery services. As part of this consortium arrangement, the IITA library was registered as a member of the CGIAR libraries listserv. Using CGV Library for discovery and verification and the listserv for communication, IITA places request(s) for journal articles or book chapter(s) that are not among the jointly acquired resources online and receives them in under 30 minutes without additional cost whenever the need arises. The article is then passed on to the scientist or staff member who requested it. While basic, this is an effective form of electronic document delivery.

Among the benefits derived by IITA from the CGIAR Libraries consortium is enhanced access to a broader set of resources, which has helped to provide timely service to our clientele regardless of their location. Our improved document delivery raised the visibility of the library while reducing the costs for purchasing content from commercial document services. This automatically reduces demands on the purse of the library. In addition, centralised negotiation and the administration of licensing content and maintenance of the catalogue results in minimal oversight by individual libraries.

Challenges

As with nearly every library, dwindling budgets, the information explosion as a result of new titles, and the rise in the cost of electronic resources limits our ability to purchase new acquisitions and support subscription renewals. Hence, libraries find it difficult to meet some of the information needs of researchers. Libraries resort to buying single articles from the British Lending Library, publishers' websites and, at times, travel to the University of Ibadan, some ministry libraries or other agricultural libraries in Nigeria. However, we are able to find some resources freely available online, which could be as a result of Open Access initiatives or the author being required to include their content in an institutional repository. Keeping the catalogue current is another challenge; delayed updates by the member libraries of their new acquisitions prevents discovery of those resources by other members of the consortium. There are also ongoing maintenance issues such as upgrading of hardware and software. The resulting downtime renders information inaccessible and disconnects a library from other centres.

Prospects

Because of the ability to see the resources held by other member libraries, the consortium can reduce the number of duplicates across libraries, allowing for more diverse collections and more effective use of materials budgets. The centralised electronic databases of holdings can be accessed and requests placed electronically, as described earlier in this article. Consortium member libraries also save time and money by eliminating the need to acquire and manage individual subscriptions. Moreover, these efficiencies have strengthened the sense of team spirit among libraries and made them more committed to the vision and goals of the consortium. Furthermore, information and portable document files can be transferred across borders electronically. Users enjoy fast delivery of materials for personal and research purposes. In addition, electronic resources can be used by more than one person at a time.

Conclusion

Without doubt, the state of libraries in developing countries such as Nigeria leaves room for development and improvement. IITA Library as a role model of a consortium of agricultural research institutes in Nigeria has contributed to closing the research gap between developing and developed countries and ahs made research collaboration possible. Nigerian libraries – especially agricultural libraries – can tap into its world of experience to make it consortia a reality in the Nigerian context. Automation and networking will continue to increase among Nigerian libraries as consortia continually gain ground. Library consortia, sharing integrated library systems and databases, joint acquisition and collection development of digital libraries, electronic journals, e-books and staff development can all be made possible through cooperation.

Recommendation

With the present economic crisis in developing countries such as Nigeria, where currency devaluation and budget reductions are an ongoing challenge, the author recommends that

Nigerian libraries, be they university, special, research school or public, meet and form a consortium that best suits their purpose. The consortium, when in place, would bring about:

- a reduction in the cost of subscriptions;
- an easier payments system;
- cooperation, promotion of libraries and resource sharing;
- optimisation and rationalisation of collection development;
- the development of a national/centralised catalogue of library publications with the purpose of reciprocal borrowing privileges;
- promotion of national library networking;
- training in the form of exchange for information literacy; and
- creating pressure on national bodies and ministries for better funding allocations for libraries in Nigeria.

When adopted and implemented among Nigerian libraries, a national consortium will go a long way towards the development of a more diverse and rich set of resources for the country. This will further strengthen Nigerian libraries in serving their clientele. It will also foster private public partnerships that will raise higher hopes for international relationships among government and non-governmental organisation libraries within and outside the country.

Notes

1 Nigerian Universities Library Consortium: see www.nulib.net

2 International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA): see www.iita.org/home

3 Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR): see www.cgiar.org/

4 CGV Library: see http://vlibrary.cgiar.org/V?RN = 915330034

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