

CURRENT TRENDS IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE:

Essays in honour of Late O. K. Odusanya



Edited by:

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THE ROLE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRES IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS)

BY
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AND
BOLARINWA, O.M.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The United Nations (UN) was set up after World War II to maintain international peace and security. Each member country keeps its independence and sovereignty but pledges to relate with other nations peacefully. UN seeks to reaffirm faith in human rights, to establish conditions for the entrenchment of international justice, and to promote social progress and better standards of living. This has led to the Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Millennium declaration was a renewed attempt by member states at finding solution to the myriads of problems – poverty, inequality, diseases, hunger and other avoidable social devices – that have plagued the masses of their countries. MDGs were an unprecedented global consensus reached by 189 member states of the United Nations. The Nations agree to advance a global vision for improving the condition of humanity throughout the world in the areas of development, poverty eradication, peace and security, protection of the environment, and human rights of all.

The key commitments set out in the Millennium Declaration came to form the Millennium Development Goals set out in the UN-MDGs (2000) document. They are:

- Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieving Universal primary education

- Promoting gender equality and women empowerment.
- Reducing child mortality
- Improving maternal health
- Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other endemic diseases
- Ensuring environmental sustainability
- Developing a partnership for development

The MDGs are accompanied by 16 global targets and 48 global indicators. The goals, targets and indicators are meant to work together to stimulate swift and effective action to achieve the development and poverty eradication aims of the declaration. The year 2015 is set as the actual date for the full realization of the MDGs. The MDGs represent a global partnership that has grown from the commitments and targets established at the world summits of the 1990s. Responding to the world's main development challenges and to the calls of civil society, the MDGs promote poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality, and aim at combating child mortality, AIDS and other diseases. Set for the year 2015, the MDGs are an agreed set of goals that can be achieved if all actors work together and do their part. Poor countries have pledged to govern better, and invest in their people through health care and education. According to Bamisaye (2008) MDGs are steps in the right direction provided they achieve what they are set out to achieve. However, there is the need for the implementation of existing policies to bridge the gaps between policy and practice.

Judging from our experience as a nation, numerous laudable programmes have failed simply because little or no attention is paid to the role of information. For instance, several millions of Naira was committed to Operation Feed the Nation and Green Revolution, Integrated Rural Development Programme as well as Vision 2010 and 2020. Regretably, librarians and Information custodians were not involved in any serious information provision for the programmes support and success. It is high time information is seen as a strategic resource, and increasingly the backbone of organizations and nations decision making and success. Opeke (1993) observed that information has now been universally accepted as a

vital resource in any organization. International organization need information to make informed decisions about community needs, define alternative ways to satisfy these needs and evaluate the success or otherwise of such endeavours. No doubt, adequate use of information results in better public decisions. It has been observed that the principle of the peoples' right of access to information about the working of the government is fundamental to democratic process. Most governments and organizations of the world still pay lips service to this valid principle. If similar approach is adopted, the achievement of the MDGs may experience several challenges. No meaningful development takes place without information (accurate and useful).

Development is significantly enhanced by information (Holmberg, 2004). Development refers to the degree which a society has improved its environment in terms of social, economic and political well-being. Information is both an integral part of development and a powerful instrument for furthering the process of development. It plays a key role because people have to be aware of problems before they can think of solving them; they have to be aware of facilities before they can use them effectively. Adeyemi (2005) identified availability and access to relevant information as very vital to the achievement of MDGs. Holler-Ross (1999) sees information as a vital tool for solving problems and making sound decisions. Information is used in aiding National development. According to Ochogwu (2007) Libraries and Information Centres have a very crucial role to play in the realization of developmental programmes such as MDGs project as they are reliable sources in information provision.. He further emphasized that time has come for government to involve libraries in such projects. The success of any country's participation in this information society will depend greatly on how developmental programmes like the MDGs are met in such countries. It is on the basis of this that this paper intends to discuss the various roles Libraries and Information centres can play in the actualization of the MDGs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of libraries and librarians in disseminating information on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cannot be over emphasized. According to Adeyemi (2005), libraries and librarians have important role

to play in collecting, repackaging and disseminating information on MDGs to different people and sectors in their respective countries as a means of ensuring the actualization of the MDGs in developing countries. Wald (2005) also submit that librarians can play an important role in the provision of adequate information by analyzing the Millennium Development Goals document, listening to community needs, developing cultural competence, and working with community partners. Meeting the information needs of diverse communities, on MDGs, is a challenge for librarians. Adeola (2007) emphasized the need for librarians to be abreast of information on MDGs, as a major responsibility. Such information need to be disseminated to the general populace who might be in need of such information.

Furthermore, Charles (2003) recommends library intervention in managing information on developmental programmes and identifies various programmes and activities of the National Library of Uganda and the Kenya National Library Service to delivering integrated developmental services and programs to people. However, Wald (2005) maintained that librarians in Nigeria are not well informed about all aspects of the MDGs. Ghosh (2005) posits that librarians and other information professionals have important roles to play in the actualization of MDGs in Nigeria. He emphasized that librarians in Nigeria should be current about MDGs situation in Nigeria and globally and also know where to access latest information about MDGs.

Muswazi (2006) conducted a survey of 14 public libraries in Swaziland on the availability of resources on MDGs and found out that information resources are limited in terms of relevance, currency and volume. This will definitely hinder the implementation of terms contained in the MDGs document. Wald (2005) also review the poor availability of white literature on MDGs for use by the general public in Ethiopia, and made a case for the use of grey literature to raise awareness. Ghosh (2005) identifies the effectiveness of the use of posters to disseminate information to the rural masses. Information on the magnitude of MDGs problem is necessary for planning, programming, policy formulation, advocacy and community participation. Appreciating the magnitude of the problem helps to explain why the actualization of MDGs by 2015 is very important.

ROLE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CENTRE IN ACHIEVING THE MDGS

The role of Library and Information Centre in the achievement of MDGs can be considered in relation to the following five major functions of the library and information centres.

- Provision of relevant and up-to-date collection
- Ensuring unrestricted access to library's information resources
- Educational role
- Information literacy skills
- Development of Information management skills

PROVISION OF RELEVANT AND UP-TO-DATE COLLECTION

One of the traditional roles of Library is the provision of relevant and up-to-date collection. According to Adeyoyin (2003) the library collection is the hub around which successful library services revolve. It is therefore imperative to build a collection that will enhance effective provision of service. The provision of information has been considered a major factor in the development of a society. It is considered to be a basic element in any development activity (Ikhizama, 2004). Thus, libraries and librarians should ensure adequate and timely provision of information resources to support the society's developmental efforts. Planning for the realization of the MDGs should be based on timely, reliable and useable information which can be obtained from the collections in the libraries and through the services rendered by the libraries (i.e. academic, special public, etc)

ENSURING ACCESS TO LIBRARY'S INFORMATION RESOURCES

Proper organization of library's collection is very vital to guarantee users access. Libraries should ensure that their collection are properly organized (i.e. catalogued, classified, indexed, abstracted, shelved etc) to ensure easy identification, location, retrieval and utilization by Users. For people to be well informed about MDGs they must have unhindered access

to relevant information materials. Also, services such as Mobile library service should be adopted to cater for people who do not have the right attitude towards library use. Ochogwu (2007) emphasized that, even though the world is experiencing the concept of “information explosion” or “overload”, the third world countries of which Nigeria is a part can be said to be experiencing information poverty. This is due to the failure of our library professionals to provide complete access to those information resources due to poor indexing, abstracting and bibliographic work on their part. The availability of information does not necessarily mean its accessibility not to speak of use.

EDUCATIONAL ROLE

The educational role of library and information centres in the achievement of MDGs can take the form of (a) educating members of the society about MDGs – Purpose/Objectives, Methodology, Benefits etc or (b) educating members of the society on how to effectively utilize relevant library resources that will make them to be more informed and relevant in the process of working towards the actualization of the MDGs. Members of the society must be well informed about the purpose of MDGs to enlist their support and cooperation towards the actualization of the MDGs.

Users’ education is very essential to ensure maximum utilization of library resources. Library user education is a device by libraries to educate users on how to use the library resources effectively and efficiently. Bello (2003) submits that library user education is concerned with enabling the user to obtain information required by making use of the total resources and materials available in the library. It is a comprehensive service and process of making the user self reliant in locating, sorting and repackaging information. It is an inspirational and informational link between the book and user, essential for a new user and desirable for an experienced one. (Feather and Sturges, 1997)

DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS

The library is to ensure adequate utilization of information resources and for this to happen, the skills for effective utilization of the resources should be taught. It is essential for the people to know how to use the library with confidence when the need for information arises. The range of

skills required for effective utilization of information is called "Information literacy skill". Information literacy is an umbrella term encompassing a range of skills i.e. identification of information needs, identification of information sources to meet the needs, information retrieval, evaluation and information utilization skills (Amucheazi, 2004). According to Kolade (2008), these skills can be considered under three categories viz: literacy skills, library use skills and thinking skills. Information literacy is a survival skill in the information age. Instead of drowning in the abundance of information that floods their lives, information literate people know how to find, or to make a decision, whether the information they select comes from a computer, a book, a government agency, a film or any number of possible sources (American Library Association, 1989).

The role of library is to teach information literacy skills for effective information utilization towards the actualization of the MDGs. Information literacy skills are required for finding, evaluating and using information effectively for problem solving or for making certain decisions (Kolade, 2008). Information literacy skills are required by the people to enable them overcome, amongst others, the problems of hunger and poverty, illiteracy, gender inequality, child and maternal mortality that have remained endemic in African society. It is usually a problem for people who do not appreciate their information problems and needs to care about discovering what structures or system are likely to meet such needs. The resultant effect is that they continue to wallop in their information sickness until some bibliotherapeutic solutions are found.

CONCLUSION

If there is timely and accurate information supply, it would be very easy to achieve eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; universal basic education; gender equality and women empowerment; reduction in mortality; improved maternal health; reduction in spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other endemic diseases; environmental sustainability as well as developing a partnership for development; as contained in the MDGs programme. This achievement would be made possible because information is a potent resource for development, lack of which results to waste in terms of human and material resources vis-à-vis time spent in planning, implementation and evaluation. With information, MDGs will no doubt

be achieved. It is with this belief that Kolade and Olajojo (2008) recommend lifelong education for all people as the basis for any individual to accept future developmental programmes such as MDGs

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is highly recommended that appraisal should be carried out to ascertain the extent to which the anticipated changes/development has occurred.
- Also, if the rate already achieved is not encouraging, then, there is need to re-strategize to give information a key role in the achievement of MDGs
- There is the need for relevant stakeholders to be co-opted into the advisory and programme implementation committee of the MDGs to strengthen the framework.
- Finally, feedback should be given to the public to know the degree of achievement of the targeted development at the end of the implementation period. While the need to carry out a pilot/experimental study before the commencement of a national and/or international programme of this magnitude should be given a careful consideration. This has been the secret behind the success stories of UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO and others. A lot of fund is committed to information generation and analysis
- There should be incentives for greater involvement of the librarians and information professionals in the implementation of MDGs. Librarians and information experts should not be seen as supplementary participants if they are consulted at all

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