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# **NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT**

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**ADEBOLA OLUMUYIWA MICHAEL** is of the Department of General Studies Federal Polytechnic Ede, Osun State

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**ADETOUN A. OYELUDE: The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (Needs), Libraries and Persons with Special Needs**

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#### **Abstract**

The role of the library in the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) programme is identified and ways in which services are to be rendered to

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persons with disabilities, people in special circumstances, (e.g. orphans, refugees), people infected with HIV/AIDS, poor persons, and exceptional children. These persons have economic, social, political, health and other needs which should be exclusively provided for in a civilized society, and their empowerment a major concern as many of them are especially talented.

National, Public, Special, University, School, NGO and Private Libraries' efforts in special information provision to them is critically analyzed through a survey of fifteen libraries purposively selected, using observation and interview methods. Results showed that only about 42% of the libraries studied make provisions, 14% do not; while 35% make general provisions which may not always suit needs of 'special' clients. Challenges and prospects of libraries, information and resource centres in the empowering of persons with special needs through the NEEDS programme are discussed. It is recommended that peoples' value orientation change, basic infrastructure be put in place, and proper monitoring of NEEDS at the State and Local government levels be carried out, with libraries giving information and education support.

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### **Introduction**

Human beings everywhere have basic requirements or needs. They need to survive and to do this, require many things - food, water and shelter being the most fundamental. These general needs in turn have to be met adequately with the provision of appropriate information and proper social interaction. Man has to be productive, in order to develop and is empowered when he has appropriate information resources and the willpower to carry out any activity so desired.

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is a development programme of the Nigerian government designed to meet the economic reform agenda of the government. Its aims are "to lay a solid foundation for sustainable poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation and value orientation." (National Planning Commission, 2004;3). Since the NEEDS document according to President Olusegun Obasanjo is "a living document, and aspects of it may be modified in the light of implementation experiences," it is not out of place to take a look at the NEEDS Document and program and see how (if at all), libraries fit into the program, how it can be used (if not already), and in what ways NEEDS and libraries can work towards social and economic reforms especially in catering for persons with special needs.

To this end, persons with special needs will be defined, some of their information needs noted, and their place in the NEEDS programme outlined. The importance of libraries to persons with special needs is identified and a survey of purposively selected libraries of different types carried out to determine if they are meeting the information needs of persons with special needs.

### **Persons with Special Needs**

Persons with special needs are those whose characteristics deviate from the norm, mentally, physically or emotionally to a degree that they demand special attention to help them develop their maximum capacity (Okeke, 2001). These persons are sometimes described as 'exceptional' persons. They can be grouped into different categories:

1. Those persons who are physically handicapped. E.g. the blind, deaf and dumb, lame, or who have some form of deformity.
2. Those who are mentally handicapped or retarded. These people have some malfunctions to the brain that make them a little different from others.
3. Those who are economically handicapped (poor) or disadvantaged. E. g. displaced persons, people in war-torn or conflict areas, in natural disaster areas, or who cannot fend for themselves normally due to poverty.
4. Women and children. They are regarded as a vulnerable group. Some of them have special needs due to the fact that in their societies, they are marginalized and are not given opportunity to develop their full potentials.
5. Educationally disadvantaged persons. E. g. nomads or persons living in environments like mountainous areas on rivers or boats.
6. The specially gifted. These have extraordinary gifts of either perception or reasoning and as such perform more than averagely in certain spheres of activity.

All these people described have special needs which vary in degree depending on the level of what the person lacks or has in abundance that makes his needs special. However no matter the infirmity or advantage, all of them have need for information. This information can be got from libraries, information or resource centres, which are storehouses of information, collected, organized and arranged purposely to make retrieval easy for the information seeker.

Indeed, this writer believes that the NEEDS document could not have been put together without input from various libraries and information agencies!

#### **Information Needs of Special Persons**

Information needs of the handicapped are far greater than those of their physically sound counterpart. Opeke and Adebisi (1998) found out that the deaf persons they researched need information relating to the socialization process and information on their various disabilities. They posit that interaction with the disabled should not be left to their teachers alone. Parents and government have a role to play as there should be an educative policy for the specially or physically challenged. They recommend that "a good (school and public) library system should be a strong component of such a policy".

The needs of exceptional children are discussed by Eni-Olorunda (2005). She points out the fact that children who perform above average have special needs as they have to be given tasks that will challenge them. Not having enough to do or work with can make them counterproductive and lose interest in the environment. Indeed, they could even start reacting negatively to the environment if improperly handled.

The mentally retarded, or persons with physical handicaps need health information mostly. Those with HIV/AIDS likewise need extra care and handling. They need information on how to cope with their disabilities, and also how to relate with others.

The economically handicapped (the poor) need information on how to improve their economic status. Information on job opportunities, vocational training, trade and market information take priority for such people. Displaced persons are usually disorientated, confused and disorganized. They need vital information on how to relocate, recoup and reorganize their lives. Many also need health-related information as they are now poor,

malnourished and have undergone trauma. Lots of therapy is needed to assist such persons.

Atinmo (1993) advocates using book therapy (bibliotherapy) in helping the handicapped. She also proposed that the approach be adopted and institutionalized through central policies from the National Government and implemented by different social and religious organizations and particularly by specialized institutions. The NEEDS programme is one of such frameworks which can make use of this to help people with special needs.

### **Information and Facility Provision for Persons with Special Needs**

Information in various forms and formats has to be provided for people for them to be able to make informed decisions. Development information is needed for this. (Oyelude, 2003). For persons with special needs this is more important. Women and girls education for example, has to attract some special attention in an environment where social and cultural impediments are in their way. It must be realized that the benefits of educating girls are enormous – to individual girls both when they are young and later as adult women, to future families and to society as a whole. By empowering women within their families and communities, education enables women to achieve greater self-fulfilment and to contribute more to social and economic development of their societies. (Ibrahim, 2003).

Facilities and other infrastructure have to be tailored to suit their purpose. Information is usually repackaged for them. For example Braille books are made for the visually impaired, and audio tapes are recorded for them. The physically disabled also have facilities like classrooms and libraries specially designed for them, with wide doors to allow wheelchairs in, ramps and elevators where necessary.

Persons with special needs require special education. These education needs are currently being under attended to in Nigeria with only about 103 special schools and homes for the disabled children. (Oloko, 2004). As revealed by Aikomo, Atikpu & Rauf (2005), the situation where there are more privately run institutions for the disabled than that by government should be remedied “since caring for the special needs is a government responsibility not to be delegated to voluntary organizations which could only supplement government initiatives”. The potential in special persons ought to be harnessed to enhance national development. The specially gifted should be allowed to function at own pace and level.

### **‘NEEDS’ and Special Needs**

The basic goal of the NEEDS programme is to ‘create the new Nigerian citizen who values hard work and who realizes that one cannot have something for nothing’. It has a macroeconomic framework that seeks to empower the people, promote private enterprise, and change the way government does its work. NEEDS has four key strategies:

- Reorienting values
- Reducing poverty
- Creating wealth, and
- Generating employment



NEEDS also seeks to empower people by strengthening the skill base (National Population Commission, 2004:31).

The Universal Basic Education Law is to be implemented and better schools and colleges, better trained teachers and trainers provided. More funds are to be spent on:

- Providing courses that build vocational and entrepreneurial skills
- Building technical schools and buying equipment
- Improving training and exposure to information and communication technology at all levels
- Making French compulsory from primary through secondary schools
- Providing special distance-learning programmes for special segments of the population including nomadic peoples

To date, many development efforts have run aground due to mismanagement, lack of foresight and loss of focus. Uwuegbu (2004) traces the history of value orientation from the General Olusegun Obasanjo (1977) Jaji Declaration, to the National Ethical Reorientation of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1982); to the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) of the General Buhari/Tunde Idiagbon regime (1984); to the National Orientation Movement (NOM) of the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (1982); to the Directorate of Social Mobilization, Self-Reliance, Economic Recovery and Social Justice (MAMSER); to the National Orientation Agency (NOA); and then back finally to the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in the year 2004. Uwuegbu criticized Nigeria's value system, calling for changes in the educational system, government creation of enabling environment for the family, school system and religious institutions, and therein, the empowerment of young people and women through equal empowerment opportunities. For him, the NEEDS programme could be a step in the right direction, if carefully implemented.

Omeku (2005) comments on the fact that the NEEDS document "does not seem to contain any indication of the pivotal roles of library and information support systems, either as tools for people empowerment, or as institutions for policy implementation, evaluation and coordination". This is in spite of the fact that the NEEDS document was carefully prepared over a number of years before the final document was published. NEEDS according to Omeku requires specialized information support backbone to provide relevant information for its implementation; coordinate information resources generated in the process of its implementation; integrate the information phenomena in the three tiers of NEEDS, SEEDS (State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy) and LEEDS (Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy), and also, preserve NEEDS-based information for research and posterity. All these he posits can be achieved only with the necessary and proper use of libraries as information support system for the programme.

The library and information support base for the programme, seemingly lacking, prompted a survey of fourteen (14) libraries in Oyo State to find out:

- a.) How effective the libraries are in providing information on the NEEDS programme.
- b.) Whether the libraries had facilities to meet the needs of special persons.
- c.) If the libraries can be used to provide improved services to persons with special needs.

### **Methodology**

Observation and Interview methods were used to gather the data. The libraries, purposely chosen, were visited to observe the physical structure and the library collections. The libraries consisted of the following: 1 National Library (NA), 1 Public library (P), 2 University libraries (U), 2 Research libraries (R), 2 School libraries (SC), 2 Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) libraries (N), 3 Special libraries (SP), 1 College of Education library (C) and 1 Private library (P).

The libraries are:

1. The National Library, Ibadan branch,
2. The Oyo State Library Board, Dugbe, Ibadan,
3. The Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan,
4. The Ladoko Akintola University Library, Ogbomoso
5. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Library, Ibadan
6. Heritage Research Library, Oyeyipo
7. Abadina Media Resource Centre Library, Ibadan
8. Cheshire High School Library, Ibadan
9. WORDOC Library, UI, Ibadan
10. Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Library, Ibadan
11. Educare Trust Library, Ibadan
12. Conflict Awareness and Peace Initiative (CAPI) Library, Ashi, Ibadan
13. College of Education (Special) Library, Oyo
14. Fasal Library, Ogbomoso

Efforts were made to speak to the Reference librarian, Circulation librarian, School librarian or Information Officer of the library as appropriate. Where there were no such personnel, the staff on duty was interviewed. The Interview schedule was followed and the questions were asked as informally as possible, with the researcher using an assistant to take notes. Observation of the facilities was done before the interviews were conducted.

Eight questions were asked. They were to elicit information thus:

- 1.) Does the library have the NEEDS document in one form or another?
- 2.) Is the library special needs-friendly in terms of building?
- 3.) Is the library special needs-friendly in terms of collection?
- 4.) Is information repackaged or translated in the library?
- 5.) Are there infrastructural facilities for information repackaging (even if unused)?
- 6.) Does the library have facilities for supporting adult or nomadic education?
- 7.) Is the NEEDS programme currently having impact on the library?
- 8.) What the interviewee felt could be done to improve the services provided to persons with special needs?

### **Discussion of Findings**

The libraries were chosen for their accessibility and also for the frequency of use by users: They are libraries that would be readily accessible to persons with special needs. A

general summary of the data gathered is portrayed in Table 1. (See below). The Table analyzes the first seven questions.

**Table 1. NEEDS and Libraries in Oyo State**

QUESTION →	Θ	NEED S	Buildi ng Sp. Needs- Friend ly?	Collec tn. Sp. Needs- Friend ly?	Info. Repac- ked.?	Repac kaging faciliti es?	Adult Educ.?	Impact of NEED S?
NAME ↓	Type of Libr.	Docu ment?						
National Library (Ibadan)	N	√	√	√	×	√	×	√
OYSLB, Dugbe	P	√	√	√	×	√	√	√
KDL, Univesity of Ibadan	U	√	γ 0 0	√	×	√	√	×
LAUTECH, Ogbomoso	U	√	√0	√	×	√	√	×
IITA Library	R	√	√	√	×	√	√	×
Heritage Library, Egbeda	R	√	√	√	×	×	√	×
AMRC, Abadina	S	×	√	√	√	√	√	×
Cheshire High Schl. Library	S	×	√	√	×	×	×	×
College of Educ. (Spec) Library	C	√	√	√	√	√	√	×
EDUCARE Trust	NG	√	√	√	√	√	√	×
CAPI Library, Ashi	NG	√	√0	√	×	×	√	√
WORDOC Library, UI	SP	√	√	√	√	×	√	×
NTA Library	SP	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
FASAL Library, Ogbomoso	PR	×	√	√	√	×	√	×

**Key to Symbols:** ✓ = Yes                      √0 0 0 = Partially                      × = No

The last question on what could be done to improve the services to special persons by the libraries is discussed separately.

All the libraries except 2 (14.27 %) have physical structures that are special needs-friendly. They have their libraries on the ground floor, and some of them have ramps which make it easily accessible to those users using wheel chairs. The entrance doors are also wide. Three (21.43%) of the libraries, The Kenneth Dike Library and the Ladoke Akintola University Library, and the FASAL library have facilities that are partially special needs-friendly. Some of the sections within the libraries are not accessible to special needs users. All the libraries (100%) have materials or collections that are particularly useful to persons with special needs. Information the users require can be found in these libraries, though not everything can be found in any one place.

To the question of if the libraries repackaged information, it was discovered that only 5 (34.28%) do repackage information. Eleven (78.57%) do not repackage information at all. This has serious implication for persons with special needs as the form in which information is displayed in most libraries, makes it impossible for many 'special readers' to use. For example, information for the blind needs to be specially prepared and cassette tapes or recordings of materials will be more useful to them.

Nine (64.28%) of the libraries actually have facilities for repacking information in one way or the other. Four of these actually repackage information for special person use. From observation, the libraries that have the facilities but do not use, lack the staff with expertise to do this repackaging, and also do not consider it as an area of priority, thus the facilities remain unused. Five (34.28%) of the libraries do not have facilities for repackaging at all. This finding shows that there is a gap in information provision for persons with special needs. If information is not repackaged, translated or put in diverse formats special person's needs cannot be adequately met.

To the question on if there are facilities for assisting in adult literacy programmes, the responses got indicate that 12 (85.71%) have facilities that can be used to assist, 2 (14.27%) do not have such facilities. The National Library and Cheshire High School do not have such facilities. Libraries have a role to perform as educational agencies and are to help in adult literacy classes. The NEEDS document notes that as at the year 2003, adult literacy rate percent was 57.0% and a NEEDS target for them was 65% by the year 2007 National Planning Commission, 2004: 46). How near is Nigeria to attaining this goal? Majority of the libraries in this study can do something but none is particularly involved in any programme except as being providers of information to teachers of such classes, and the students who make use of the library on an individual basis.

The impact of NEEDS is not felt in the libraries that much, as only 4 ( %) claimed it had such impact. Majority 10 (71.42%) said no impact was felt. This may be due to the fact that the NEEDS Programme is very slow in catching on in the country. The Programme is yet to be meaningful at State level as SEEDS and also at Local Government level as LEEDS.

The opinions of the respondents on what could be done to improve the services to persons with special needs were quite varied. Some advocated that *'the Federal Government should stop wasting money on moribund projects but should look more vigorously at the Education Sector'*.

*'More funds should be devoted to the development of libraries'*.

*'State and Local governments should budget for libraries as done in developed countries, and then private individuals and Non-Governmental agencies would be encouraged to do more'*.

*'Funding of libraries is important. NEEDS programme can be helped to succeed if the information base is well catered for'*.

*'Schools for special persons should be well funded and monitored. Committed staff is necessary for the programmes to succeed. Motivation and training of staff is a key factor'*.

The responses above formed the core of the responses from the libraries studied. The study is reminiscent of libraries in other States of the Federation.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The social and economic reforms that are expected to be achieved through the NEEDS programme are set goals which are attainable only when basic infrastructure are put in place. The Nigerian environment has to become enabling for the people young and old, big and small to benefit maximally. A change in the value orientation of Nigerians is a step toward this for NEEDS to become a laudable platform for better things if information and education are given adequate priority. Libraries and resource centres could be used to facilitate distance education for example, as they are also an effective method of educating the orthopaedically disabled (Zindi, 2003).

Special persons (all categories of them), have to be provided with their basic necessities, provisions for their economic, social, academic, health and information needs by government and the large society will go a long way to building a progressive society, harnessing potentials of rare persons and breeding a crop of useful human beings who will continue to uplift and uphold the Nigerian society. As stated by Atinmo (1996) libraries help in solving their problems since the library materials in print and non-print formats encourage easy learning for all categories of pupils whether normal or handicapped.

The NEEDS programme with continual evaluation and portions yet to be fully explored in the document e.g. the Millennium Development Goals target which concern literacy rate of girls, Primary school enrolment and completion, maternal mortality and infant mortality (National Planning Commission, 2004: 47) should be assigned to specialists and people with integrity to map out workable implementation strategies.

The NEEDS programmes should not under estimate the contributions libraries, information and resources centre can make in providing solid information and education support. They can help to make the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) achievable by the year 2015 as mandated by the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The aims

and objectives of the NEEDS programme can be achieved if the programme is properly monitored and the general orientation of Nigerians improve.

Above all, NEEDS will not be fully workable without State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (LEEDS) fully in force. SEEDS and LEEDS in every State and Local government in the country, working properly, will evolve an excellent NEEDS programme. Nigerian citizens and especially persons with special needs, will then have no choice but to "Rise up and walk" in an economically and socially rich environment.

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**ADETOUN A. GYELUDE** is a Librarian, Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Ibadan. E-mail: toyelude@yahoo.com

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### **OLATUNDE OLUWAFEMI OLATEJU: NEEDS: An Instrument of Employment Generation in Nigeria**

#### **Abstract**

During the recent council of ministers meeting in Abuja, a new economic agenda for Nigeria with a unique acronym – NEEDS was adopted. NEEDS is Nigeria's development plan, inspired by current challenges for change and vigorous growth. It is the response to the development challenges of Nigeria. The main version of the NEEDS was launched on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 2004. The document is meant to educate the Nigerian populace on the economic reform agenda of the Government and its benefits. The paper focuses on NEEDS, its vision and strategies to accomplish its goals. Finally, it concentrates on the strategies of NEEDS to generate employment.

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#### **Introduction**

Over the last 30 years, efforts to achieve a coordinated macro-economic blueprint have been fruitless. This explains our current deplorable economic conditions; per capita income has fallen precipitously over the years to less than \$300 per annum. With more