ACTES DE LA CONFÉRENCE DE SCAULWA 2005
PROCEEDINGS OF SCAULWA 2005 CONFERENCE

Dakar, Sénégal, 7-11 novembre 2005

LES CONSORTIA DE BIBLIOTHÈQUES
LIBRARY CONSORTIA

Édités par / Edited by

Mariétou Diongue Diop
Henri Sène
Dominique Zidouemba

STANDING CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES, WESTERN AREA

CONFÉRENCE PERMANENTE DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES UNIVERSITAIRES AFRICAINES – ZONE OCCIDENTALE

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Notice catalographique/Catalogue entry

DIOP, Mariétou Diongue ; SENE, Henri ; ZIDOUEMBA, Dominique. Eds.
Les Consortia de Bibliothèques : actes de la Conférence de SCAULWA 2005 : Dakar, Sénégal, 7-11 novembre 2005 = Library Consortia : proceedings of SCAULWA 2005 Conference : Dakar, Senegal, 7-11 november 2005 / Ed. par Mariétou Diongue Diop, Henri Sène, Dominique Zidouemba.- Dakar : SCAULWA, cop. 2006 - 2-200-X p. ; 30 cm.

Mots Clés bibliothèque universitaire consortium, réseau de biliothèques, enseignement supérieur, recherche, coopération documentaire, Université et développement, renforcement des capacités, formation permanente, éducation et recherche, ressources humaines, formation, université africaine, ressources électroniques, accès ouvert, plaidoyer et lobbying, Afrique, Cameroun, Ghana, Nigéria, Sénégal.

Keywords university library, consortium, library network, higher education, research, interlibrary cooperation, university development, capacity building, continous training, education and research, human resources, training, African university, electronic resources, open access, advocacy and lobbying, Africa. Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal.

Les opinions exprimées dans cet ouvrage sont celles de leurs auteurs et ne reflètent pas nécessairement le point de vue de SCAULWA ni celui des éditeurs.

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors. They do not represent necessarily the views of SCAULWA or the editors.

La saisie de ces Actes a été faite par Mme Coura Sy FAYE, Secrétaire à la Bibliothèque centrale de l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar.

Data acquisition has been made by Mrs Coura Sy FAYE, Secretary at the University Library, Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar.

La publication de ces Actes a été rendue possible grâce une subvention de l'INASP.

The publication of these Proceedings has been sponsored by INASP.

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ISSN : 0855 - 546
ISBN : 9988 0 0946 1

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NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN CONSORTIA: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

By

ADETOUN A. OYELUDE, CLN
Librarian, Kenneth Dike Library
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
Nigeria

Abstract

The paper surveys library consortia and efforts among Nigerian Universities at sustaining them. It traces history of the efforts of Universities (State and Federal) and in recent times Private ones, and notes the strengths, weaknesses and strategies for proposed improvement.

It is discovered that past library consortia have not been properly sustained. The few still in existence have problems such as funding, inability to network properly, inadequate or non-existent Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, transportation and sometimes administrative bureaucracy. Library consortia in recent times are seen to be moving more into I.T formats. Prospects in this area are explored.

Recommendations are made for strengthening of existing consortia and building up of new ones where applicable, to put University Education back on the high pedestal where it belongs.

Résumé

Cette communication fait le point sur les consortiums de bibliothèques et les efforts des universités nigérianes pour les soutenir. Elle retrace l'historique des efforts des universités (d'État et fédérales) et récemment des universités privées, et indiquent les forces, les faiblesses et les stratégies d'une proposition d'amélioration.

On a découvert que les consortiums de bibliothèques n'ont pas été correctement soutenus dans le passé. Les seuls qui existent encore ont des problèmes de financement, d'incapacité de se mettre correctement en réseau, d'infrastructure inadaptée ou inexistante en matière de technologies de l'information, des problèmes de transport et parfois de bureaucratie administrative. Ces derniers temps, on voit que les consortiums de bibliothèques s'orientent plus vers les technologies de l'information. Des perspectives dans ce domaine sont explorées.

Des recommandations sont faites pour le renforcement des consortiums existants et pour la création de nouveaux là où c'est possible, pour remettre l'enseignement universitaire sur le piédestal élevé qui est sa place.

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INTRODUCTION

Library consortia is a term now being used to describe what is known as library cooperation or library resource sharing. It entails libraries joining hands to provide services to their users, sharing a common front of either joint acquisition of the materials, like books, journals, equipment, joint dissemination of information for example through bulletins, notices etc, or joint user access e.g allowing registered members of one library to have access to another library without re-registration. Dai (2002) defines library consortium as "an alliance formed by member libraries on a voluntary basis to facilitate resource sharing in pursuit of common interest". Sanni and Igbafe (2004) identify areas of agreement among or between libraries to include:
"cooperative acquisition, cooperative processing. (Cataloging and classification) intending or reciprocal borrowing, networking, exchange of publications and bibliographic information exchange of personnel, joint training of personnel, seminars, workshops, courier services and the admission of readers from participating libraries" (p.54).
A university librarian or a Director of library services in an academic environment must have good relationship with other libraries because his own library only possesses a fraction of the information his clients need no matter how well equipped (Oyelude, 2004). As such, consortia are necessary aids to adequate information services provision.

This paper therefore seeks to give a historical background of University Library consortia in Nigeria, critically examine the achievements if any, and explore the challenges of university consortia in a developing economy, and in the light of libraries being the mainstay of facilitating provision of appropriate University education.

HISTORY OF CONSORTIA IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

Library cooperation in Nigeria started in 1955 with the memorandum submitted by John Harris to the Nigerian government advocating the establishment of a Library Advisory and Consultative Committee for Resource Sharing. (Bozimo, 1980). The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) also started an inter-lending scheme which made it possible for the National Union Catalogue and the National Union List of Serials to start off in 1977. The National Library again held a conference in 1980, recommending the zoning of Nigeria to facilitate cooperative acquisition (National Library of Nigeria, 1981). Further efforts by the NLN were subsequently documented (NLN, 1982). The National Library set up a National Implementation Committee on Cooperative Acquisition (NICOCA) in 1982, in which Nigeria was divided into 8 zones. The zones were to perform the functions of launching the cooperative scheme and getting the resources that were to be shared. This effort did not last too long as by 1986, due to lack of finance and poor communications facilities the effort was aborted.

In the meantime, University libraries were still in some form of consortia through inter-library loans. Materials needed in one university could be sent by mail or counter to another university for specified periods and then returned. This type of cooperation also had its attendant problems. Communication and transportation problems often

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arose and bureaucratic delays sometimes also tended to ensure that materials needed did not get to the user on time.

The basic problem then, as was posited by Rosenberg (1993) was that African University libraries planning to share frequently used resources was not meaningful. According to her, "core collections should never be eroded and cannot be loaned without severe impairment teaching and first level research".

In any case, with the establishment of the Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC), it was to be expected that university libraries would get some needed attention. The Committee of University Librarian's Union (CULNU) came into being in 1973 with the objective of advancement of the development of Nigerian University libraries.

CULNU ensured that University Librarians would meet regularity and the problems of the universities would be resolved jointly. They performed the following activities.

(1) **Inter-library Lending:** Few university libraries participated, operating a delivery and pick-up van service. If folded up when the vans broke down.
(2) **Cooperative Acquisition:** CULNU tried to in the 1980s to put the scheme in order, but did not succeed (as described earlier).

Groups of university libraries came together to try and form consortia in various ways. The Union List of Serials in Nigerian universities was published though the efforts of the Ahmadu Bello University, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan Ilorin, Benin and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Consortia at local or regional rather than national levels have been advocated. (Faniran, 1991; Adedigba, 1984; Sanni & Igbafe; 2004) report on Library cooperation in Edo State, noting the leading role of the John Harris Library, University of Benin in consortia efforts in the state. Nwamarah (2002) also presented the efforts of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka at networking the library to the rest of the university via a Local Area Network (LAN), using a grant from the Education Trust Fund (ETF). The aim then was to link the existing Local Area Networks to the main network to ensure that the library access is available to all on the network. This is the sort of intra resource sharing that gives rise to wider resource sharing projected for Nigerian University Libraries.

The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) initiated the Nigerian University Network (NUNet), in 1995 to establish connectivity for the Nigerian University System (NUS). The NUS consists of 42 institutions in 24 states and Abuja the Federal capital Territory. The NUNet was to establish National computer networks for NUS using dedicated phone lines for e-mail provision; use leased lines to service the network so that e-mail services on the network take place in real time, and upgrade the network to full internet connectivity. Not much was achieved (Oyinloye, 2002).

Bozimo (2004 reports on the efforts at providing shared access to electronic databases, interlibrary loan and document delivery, share computer facilities, exchange of staff and publications and joint bibliographic services in 53 universities countrywide. She describes the consortium activities managed by information and communication Technologies (ICTs) as:

(i) Access to electronic databases
(ii) Electronic content licensing
(iii) Joint use of resources and expertise and
(iv) Joint negotiation with suppliers.

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All these are the ideal but the question is "Are Nigerian Universities achieving much in their efforts at library consortia?

CURRENT CHALLENGES IN NIGEIRAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CONSORTIA

Nigerian University libraries are generally underfunded. Only the privately funded universities seem not to have much of these problems. Adeogun (2005) examines reasons why resource sharing is important in Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) University libraries in Africa. She examines scientifically the resource sharing practices that are unique to each library in the study, constraints of resources sharing as experienced by librarians, students and teaching staff of each of the universities. The Babcock University (Private) library Ilisan Remo, Nigeria is one of the SDA university libraries and it provides adequate services.

For Federal Government and state owned universities in Nigeria, the success story is not so rosy. The problems are:

(1) Lack of France for the consortia
(2) There are few resources to be shared.
(3) Some Library staff are ill trained or ill-motivated
(4) Poor communications infrastructure

The current trends in university library consortia as noted by Potter (1997) are that even though historically academic libraries formed consortia for sharing printed materials, recently, consortia are being formed to provide common access to electronic sources on the Internet. This trend is on the increase as confirmed by Bozimo (2004).

Philanthropic organizations like the MacArthur Foundation have been doing a lot towards capacity building for Nigerian University libraries. As part of their efforts, some university libraries are being helped to benefit from library consortia.

A Jos-based scientist Cliff Missen under the programme is installing an electronic database that can be used and accessed in libraries. It is called the E-granary. It is a plug and play server that fits into any network and provides access to millions of digital documents – including video and multi media – at institutions with little or no Internet connectivity. The universities of Jos, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Ibadan, and the NUC, Abuja are some of the institutions benefiting from this. More information on the e-granary can be got from the website http://www.widernet.org

Again, consortia indirectly exist among university libraries in their sharing of staff. This happens when library staff goes on sabbatical leave to other university libraries or goes on exchange programmes. The only problems with this type of consortia are that it does not take place very regularly, there is no organized scheme for staff sharing and often, the issue of sabbatical leave or exchange programme is politicized! Deserving staff is often left out or approval is denied at the crucial stage. (Information got from interviews with some academic libraries in various Nigerian University libraries).

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FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CONSORTIA

University librarians need to take stock and order their priorities first. If joining a library consortium is on their priority list, they should do the following:

(i) determine why they want to participate
(ii) how they can do so, and
(iii) in what ways they can sustain their participation

Why University Libraries May Participate

(1) Consortia can enhance the quality of services that their library provides its clientele. It may also confer prestige on the library or its librarians.
(2) Sharing is good and working together seems to be the professionally right thing to do. Participating in a consortium could be one's contribution to the profession.
(3) Consortia are a means to reducing costs (Simpson, 1990)
(4) To prevent the emergence of information "have nots"
(5) To use technology as a bridge from traditional printed heritage to the electronic world.
(6) To reposition libraries as the communication backbone of the information society in Africa.
(7) To increase the use of IT in order to improve all levels of the education sector and
(8) To improve the services and status of libraries in Africa. (Jalloh, 1999)

How University Libraries can Participate

(1) Identifying which consortia to join
(2) Network using the array of telecommunications networks for communication between libraries and other organisation, and between libraries and their users. (Rowley, 1993).

How University Libraries can sustain their consortia

Since developing countries have a very poor record of maintaining what was started through outside assistance university libraries need to do a lot to be able to strengthen and sustain existing consortia.

(1) Rights and obligations of membership of the consortia have to be determined and spelt out
(2) Funding support should be determined, as sole reliance on foreign assistance is not the best practice
(3) Archive and permanent access to the shared resources should be guaranteed.
(4) Regular evaluation of the consortia project to determine how well it is doing.

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Funding is a very important aspect for sustenance of consortia in Nigerian University libraries; therefore, budgeting in the libraries should be of paramount importance.

Some suggestions for ensuring this are:

- Campaigning for decentralization of university budgets so that control over expenditure lies with the library.
- Requesting a percentage allocation of the university budget to the consortia. 4% or 5% would be reasonable.
- Insisting that money form income generation activities in the university library be paid into a separate account.
- Insisting that a percentage (1%?) of all outside aid to faculties and departments should automatically come to the library since the library has to satisfy the information needs of the whole university community.
- University librarians should insist that the 10% statutory allocation to the library be given to it in actual fact and not just recorded on paper. Judicious use of the funds then has to be ensured.

CONCLUSION

University education in Nigeria stands to gain much if standard consortia are formed and sustained by university libraries. Nigerian universities should take a cue from their counterparts in more developed or developed countries and face the challenges squarely. The National Library, the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), and the Committee of Nigerian University Librarians Union (CULNU) have a lot to do. They have to bring university libraries together to formalize and sustain the necessary consortia and achieve their common interest and thus put university education in Nigeria back on the high pedestal where it belongs. By cooperating rather than competing, Nigerian University libraries can develop a package of services, which will be made available to their students to support new and existing education programmes.

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