

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of libraries in economic development of any nation. This paper is of the opinion that, given its rightful place in the scheme of things the impact of library services will be felt at every sector of the economy, and so act as a tool for social and economic reconstruction. As any librarian or patron knows, libraries play a vital role within their communities far beyond that of entertainment and education. Libraries are a go-to source for research support, accessible information and thoughtfully curated content, but in many cities and communities around the world, the library is the de facto community center or social services hub, connecting people in need with resources (both on-site and off-site), and offering shelter, compassion and connection. Libraries also play a key role in building citizens, job creation, supporting small businesses, attracting new residents and visitors, which in turn have a powerful impact on social and economic development.

Keywords: economic development, social development, job creation, library services,

INTRODUCTION

In a general perspective, as the UNESCO Draft Medium term plan 1984, puts it, individuals and communities must be provided the knowledge and know how that will awaken them to the projects open to them, and above all, enable them to act more effectively themselves in improving productivity, hygiene, health and general living conditions and on exercising their civic rights. But the central point where information can be harnessed, accessed and disseminated is the library. If effectively used and supported, libraries can promote socio-economic developments in the country. No nation prospers without information and no information can be properly managed and disseminated without libraries.

Information and a conducive environment of is a vital tool in all forms of human endeavour. It is the link for national development. For a nation to develop, it needs to have and provide relevant, updated and adequate information on food security, health, education, youth empowerment, gender equality etc. Libraries are there for proper management, provision and dissemination of such information.

Libraries are store houses and disseminators of information to the community or society and so a potential socio-political force which has not yet been fully tapped in Nigeria. While of course literacy rates are important for

anyone interested in getting an education or generally participating in society, literacy rates are also intrinsically tied to economic development.

Literacy rate (in particular, early literacy) and mean education level are both indicators of economic development. Elevated levels of early literacy improve the quality of child care and academic success. Of course, literacy plays an important role later in life too: literacy leads to a greater workforce participation level.

The role of library services in social and economic development should invariably have its pride of place at urban, rural and the entire society.

What is a Library?

According to Encyclopedia Britannica the word library is from a Latin word Liber, (meaning "book") is a collection of written, printed or recorded materials. Including films, photographs, tapes, phonograph records, video discs, microform and computer programmes organized and maintained for reading, studying and consultation. An assembly of books is therefore not a library nor is a library only a place where books are kept. A library in the sense we are concerned with here is an organized system designed to preserve and facilitate the use of graphic records. It is a social instrument created to form a link in the communication system that is essential to any society or culture.

The Role of Libraries in Education

The successful marriage between education and library cannot be divorced. Right from time immemorial, library and education have walked hand in hand and have yielded result. Nwosu, (2002) has this to say; it should be crystal clear that the ideals of education would be elusive without the library". This indispensable role has been reflected in many descriptions of the library in academia such as "the handmaid of the scholars", "the pivot on which the life of the institution revolves", "the educative aorta of the institution" the heart of the institution. A place where the dead is "alive", the life wire of any institution just to mention but a few. Wilson (2019) maintained that library is the pulsing heart which is to quicken every activity that goes on upon the campus; it is that easily accessible mentor to which every alumnus after his days of privilege within the college walls have ended should look for guidance; and it is the beacon light whose rays should illumine more and more the path of those leaders of men who are entrusted with the conservation of equality of opportunity and the solution of the problems of civilization that daily assume a greater and ever increasing degree of complexity.

Library acquires teaching and research materials and this helps in the reconstruction or development of individual minds when there is development at individual level. It in

turn brings about national development. Hence national development is the sum total of individual development.

The Role of Libraries in Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria Employment and entrepreneurship

Beyond the fact that libraries offer assistance to the general public with job searches and resumes, libraries themselves are sources of employment. Libraries are serving as an important supplement to local and federal agencies focused on employment activities, by providing access to needed services in a setting that can offer support and access to all members of the community. In the current economy, these services are making a difference in the lives of individuals and their families across the nation. In addition to finding actual jobs, people use the library's online resources for preparatory steps such as creating resumes, researching job information, submitting applications online, and receiving training for job-related skills. Those who are employed use the library to conduct work, and entrepreneurs and small business owners use the library's computer resources for writing business plans, finding investors, marketing, and business administration.

It goes without saying that libraries can't achieve all of their incredible functions without staff. By providing jobs in the community, libraries are contributing to the economy in another, more literal way.

Beyond providing incredible content to patrons, it's undeniable that libraries are an important contributor to economic development. And even as the role of the library evolves (adapting to a post-pandemic reality, evolving to offer more digital resources), this will continue to be true.

Supporting small businesses

Even as funding shrinks, libraries are an impactful patron of local small businesses. From hiring local artists and educators for workshops, to investing in locally sourced resources or purchasing technology from local companies, libraries drop a significant amount of money into their local communities. Add in business partnerships with small- and medium-sized companies, and the library, though a non-profit venture, almost acts as a mini-economy in and of itself.

Libraries also provide important resources to small business owners via their tools and databases. According to Kelly (2021), when libraries provide business development data, market entry costs drop dramatically, lowering the barrier to entry for small business owners.

Attracting new residents and visitors

According to Joel, S. A., & Ayinla, O. T. (2015), a city with amenities is a vibrant and attractive one — and libraries are part of that package. With more and more people expressing interest in living

in urban centers with accessible amenities, a library can offer plenty of appeal. And with a growing population comes a growth in spending and investment.

While libraries may not be explicitly what encourages someone to sign the lease in a particular neighborhood, or uproot their family for a big move, libraries are often associated with access to an enhanced quality of life. Studies show that libraries are perceived to contribute to the safety and stability of a neighborhood. When a library is located in a commercial district, there's also a tendency of spending at nearby establishments.

Literacy, Language, and Support Programs

Libraries are an important entry point to community services for new users. Programs provided through libraries can serve as a portal to a wide range of community resources that are vital to a family's economic self-sufficiency. Services to new users often involve English language classes; intergenerational literacy, foreign language instruction, and other basic skills training. Libraries often serve as informal referral centers as well, directing new users to area support services.

Problems Militating Against the Performances of Libraries in Economic Development in Nigeria

The primary role of the library is to

acquire, process, preserve, and disseminate recorded information. It is therefore the responsibility of the library to enlighten the users and other members of the community it serves by presenting them with factual information that will guide their actions and help make good steps that will promote economic development.

Unfortunately, at present, the greatest problem to information provision by libraries to promote human resource and socio-economic issues are high illiteracy rate and lacked of reading culture. Other barriers include inadequate trained personnel in librarianship that is provision of grants for training of personnel to attend seminars, workshops and conferences, lack of resources, financial constraints, inadequate library services, poor distribution network of libraries, lack of viable data bases for research works and publishing industry that can publish and provide survey and reports. There is no area of library operations to which the computer has not been applied with tremendous gains. At this juncture, one can ask how much of these technological devices are in use in Nigerian libraries. In the past decades, whatever has been done in terms of modern technological applications or automation has not gone deeply enough to make an appreciable impact.

Suggestions/Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, as well as the need and for the library not only to

maintain its impressive record but also keep improving on it,

Libraries should be accorded its pride of place in the scheme of things.

There should be dedicated and trained staff.

In line with the new trends in information technology, the library stands to benefit a lot from automated systems.

There should be a change in nomenclature, instead of library, a community information centre could be more appropriate. The word library has western bias.

Government should provide money and other library equipments as at when necessary.

Those in authority should utilize the money provided by government for library expenses instead diverting it into their own pockets.

Library weeding should be done as soon as materials are no longer living "active life".

Library staff should be sent on training from time to time so as to learn new innovations.

Conclusion

On the whole, the role of libraries to the socio-economic development/nation building is not fully covered in this meager write-up, but one thing is worthy of note. Librarians and other cadres of library workers should rededicate and double their effort to achieve all

important goals of communicating, educating, preservation\ conservation of these precious resources so that corporate bodies, government agencies can use them for administrative, decision making, references at all times. This will foster socio-economic well being of the nation.

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