

INFORMATION: THE OIL IN THE WHEEL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

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Introduction

Libraries play a major role in the educational system, the development of a strong human resource base and the socio-economic and political progress of every country. Libraries also satisfy the recreational needs of a nation's citizenry.

To turn out sound products at every level of education, there is the need for the teacher and the 'taught' to have access to resources to enhance their goals. One of the main resources is the library.

Again, the underlying factor of any nation's development is instructive knowledge in all facets of life. If knowledge is un-harnessed, it is no knowledge. It is the library which collects, organises, preserves and makes such knowledge available as and when needed.

The library is also a means by which people can improve their status in life, with little formal classroom education. Libraries can therefore be seen as the oil in the wheel of national development.

A nation which does not take care of its historical information to serve as pieces of bricks to build upon its current information to be used for planning and on-going development, and does not lay effective plans for the harnessing of future information, by putting structures in place to maintain and sustain the means for this aim, in this case libraries, is already destroying its future before it gets there.

Andrew Carnegie, whose Foundation many libraries have been benefiting from, once said that

"I believe that a library outranks any other one thing that a community can do to help its people. It is the never failing spring in the desert".

Again, in 1998, Vartan Gregorian, the President of the Carnegie Corporation said in his essay on Libraries and Andrew Carnegie's Challenge that "Libraries contain the heritage of humanity; the record of its triumphs and failures, its intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements and its collective memory. It would be a true tragedy if that record did not serve and include African countries at the highest level possible". The presence of Carnegie Corporation in our country and universities now, buttresses this statement but one wonders if we will really seize the opportunity and escape the tragedy Vartan talks of.

In Ghana, all the types of libraries – academic, special, public, school, college, private-abound but to what extent they are contributing to national development is the question.

Current Situation Of The Library Environment In Ghana

National Library

In our basic years in the Library School we were taught that the National Library is the

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libraries "library". It is supposed to be the national reference library where all types of libraries tap into. It is supposed to have, in addition to its normal collection, a collection of all reading materials, written by citizens of the country in all subject areas, reading materials written by citizens and non-citizens of the country about the country in or outside the country and all reading materials written and/or produced in the country by anybody. It is the custodian of the nation's culture and heritage. It is also expected to publish an annual national bibliography.

To date, there is no National Library in Ghana. Some of the functions of a national library are being performed by the George Padmore Research Library, which is under the Ghana Library Board. University and special libraries also perform some functions of the National Library.

However, only a few days ago, at the back page of the 'Daily Graphic' newspaper of 5th March 2003, there was a welcome news which was a report attributed to the Minister of Education, Prof Ameyaw-Akumfi to the effect that the Government will set up a national library in Accra directly under the Presidency. The Ghana Library Board has been tasked to work out the modalities, which as expected will include input from stakeholders. Implementation will be in collaboration with the Carnegie Corporation of the USA. No date for implementation was set but we believe it will be very soon.

Academic Libraries

These are mainly the university and polytechnic libraries. There are now 5 public university libraries, 6 private university libraries and 10 polytechnic libraries. All these institutions have libraries but their quality in terms of stock, staffing and other facilities vary from the good, through the bad and then to the ugly.

The academic library is the heart of any academic institution. If it does not function well, then other parts of the body will also not be well. The main aim of their existence is to provide resources to support teaching, learning and research in the parent institution's specific programmes. Its special clients are faculty, students and researchers and in recent times the general public who need specific information, which under normal circumstance should have been found in the National Library.

Over the years these libraries have gone through several stages of decay. On our campuses, most students, faculty and researchers, and sometimes management, have no faith in the library because it has failed to perform to expectation. They refuse to acknowledge that the bottom line or cause of this decay is inadequate funding. Library staff do not have control of this. At best, they can influence the authorities, but to a limit.

Inadequate funding means no provision of new books, no continued subscription to journals and no introduction of new technology into service provision. Physical facilities, which have not seen renovation for years, are not attractive.

May be, this is the reason why in recent times teaching methods relying mostly on classroom learning and independent research to supplement classroom teaching as in years gone by, barely exists. This situation should not be allowed to go on since it is impacting negatively in the quality of graduates being turned out.

In recent times, academic libraries, especially university libraries, are coming out of the doldrums gradually. The use of ICT in sourcing information has come to stay.

IFLA-DANIDA backed by GNCIC introduced a project in 1998 which brought in Internet

connectivity and initial training of librarians in ICT use. A document delivery arrangement with some Danish libraries gave faculty and researchers access to print photocopies of articles from journals on request.

Today, a project called Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI) which is administered by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) is making available about 7,000 journal titles, which normally should cost tens of thousands of dollars, free of charge, online and on CDROM to academic and research communities in Ghana through the 5 public universities and the INSTI of CSIR up to the year 2005. This is, as usual, a donor project and so we should now be thinking of how to sustain it when the project ends. Today, the university library is not only a repository of information resources necessary for day-to-day learning and research, it has also become a place where access to and use of ICT enables users to acquire information from anywhere in the world at the touch of a button in a very short time.

Interlibrary networking to enhance resource sharing is being advocated these days. This is a good venture but the bottom line is funding to enable the infrastructure, especially, provision of enough ICT facilities and maintenance of such a service to be put in place. It is a vicious cycle where one always comes to meet inadequate funding.

Let me commend librarians in academic libraries for performing well on their jobs but it is of a general view that there is the need for them to develop skills in advocacy, income generation and ICT. Too much reliance on donor support, which is our bane now, especially in the area of ICT, makes sustainability of the service when donors pull out difficult.

Librarians must begin to generate funds in order to sustain themselves. In these days when Government funding is dwindling and on the average a university library gets at most 3% of its expected 10% of the university's annual budget, we must begin to be innovative and initiate self-sustaining means in order to supplement government subventions and stay afloat in the information provision business which is fast being invaded by charlatans.

The academic library has a responsibility to the institution. Provision of very current information, on a daily basis if you like, to back the institution's programmes is non-negotiable. The problems of inadequate funding, outdated materials, limited reading space and ICT facilities still very much with us makes the prospect of living up to expectation far fetched.

The role of the universities in turning out human resources who are the wheel in national development is paramount. Most top political, technical, administrative and professional positions in the country are held by university graduates. Whatever knowledge they have and are using was acquired formally and informally by reading directly or someone reading and passing it on. Herein lies the role of the library. Every graduate at one time or the other as an undergraduate used the library, if even it was only for materials to include in his literature review for his project/thesis. Every serious minded lecturer at one time or the other visits the library to update his notes and also for materials to aid in his research. Again, research results are used to fashion out policies which go into various sectors of the economy to improve it. These efforts may look small or insignificant but they come in total, to support the development of the nation. Need I say the academic library is very relevant for national development?

It is only when academic libraries are adequately funded, infrastructure and facilities provided, staff well catered for, will the provision of efficient and effective services by our academic libraries be comparable with any good academic library worldwide. The expertise and know-how is abundantly available.

Let me end this discourse on academic library staff by noting that, it is a happy and satisfied person who gives off his best at work. The working conditions of the staff of some of our universities need to be looked at. Issues of status (academic or administrative) which varies among the universities though they are all public universities; mode and pace of advancement, staff development, general welfare and also attitude of authorities towards librarians, need to be addressed and on time. It is doing a lot of harm to the morale of staff.

Special Libraries

Special libraries provide resources to support the aims and objectives of the parent organisations. They have limited subject coverage. Their services are geared towards a limited or a few clientele. In Ghana, they can be research, commercial, financial, industrial, diplomatic or belong to a government ministry, department or agency.

The degree of development of a special library in Ghana mostly depends on the buoyancy or commitment of the leadership of the parent organisation. This makes it difficult to lump them in one group. They belong to the poorly endowed, fairly endowed and richly endowed groups.

There are so many special libraries around that one has lost count. Most of them are based in Accra. Efforts are being made to document them in order to know their number and location so that we can assist them to grow if necessary. It is difficult to

know most of them because they are making no impact as evidenced in the trooping of their expected clients to the university libraries in search of information.

Most of these libraries were set up with fanfare and publicity when the parent organisation was being outdoored, to make the world feel that they are forward looking research oriented organisations. As is usual that the library is the first place which suffers the financial crunch when there is reduction in budget or income, when the chips are down to real day to day administration with its unexpected shocks in cash flow, the library becomes a newspaper reading room, or common room for staff or sometimes a store for not often used equipment. It is against this backdrop, that identifying real special libraries has become necessary to save the nation from shame and embarrassment from the foreign world, when primary information is being demanded and there is none.

In spite of these, there are some special libraries, which are really carrying out their functions. Some have problems of funding, inadequate space and limited IT facilities. Some of them who do not have any infrastructural or funding problem have the problem of staff not adequately trained to work with the sophisticated equipment put in place. The win-win situation is absent here. You either have a hat but no head to wear it on or a head but no hat to wear. This is the crux of the matter. The time has come when parent organisations should x-ray their libraries to know their specific ailment so that proper medication can be prescribed.

A very important issue which brings about lack of job satisfaction among special library staff is improper grading. Most often the librarians find themselves placed at a level lower than their colleagues whom they graduated in the same year with. No amount of talk or documentary proof solves

the problem. Often they are given designations, which upon hearing one cannot know if one is talking to a Librarian. With time, they are even given other schedules and gradually taken off library duties without any chance to take additional courses to enable them fit into that organisation's field. Wherein lies the future of such people? They are neither bats nor birds. This accounts for the large outflow of professional librarians from the special libraries only for their positions to be filled with unqualified persons but referred to as librarians. This is a separate matter not meant for discussion here now.

The special library has a specific role to play in national development. It is expected to store and disseminate specific, atom-level information to people. What the university or public library cannot provide in minute detail is reserved for the special library. Some special libraries are doing that and with the use of modern means of communication too and I doff my hat to them.

Special libraries are very necessary in national development. When they network with libraries of their ilk and ultimately with other libraries, they become a formidable custodian of precious and prime information. This information is what is needed to improve our agricultural, scientific, industrial and commercial fortunes as a nation. Again, input for policy is made at the government level by ministries, departments and agencies. Such inputs can only be well informed and the policies better endowed by referring to past ones, considering the present and reading about experiences of other countries. Special libraries in ministries, departments and agencies are expected to make such information available. They are so close to the action front that they cannot afford to fail the nation.

It is my urgent appeal to parent organisations to enable their special libraries to perform the roles they were set up for. With adequate funding, automation of their services, networking with other libraries, proper staff designation and schedules they will perform better. The nation looks up to them as they have accepted a responsibility and it must be carried out successfully. There is a vacuum now in information in some fields which need to be filled by special libraries. 'Sankofa' is one of the famous Ashanti emblems, which is depicted in several designs in the cloth and jewellery that we wear. We might as well apply it in this area practically by going back to pick up what needs to be done for the utmost good of the nation.

Public Libraries

This is the type of library, which is close to my heart. It is so because it is open to the whole population – children, teenagers, young adults, adults and the aged, literate and illiterate, physically challenged and unchallenged.

It is here that the librarian sees the aesthetic beauty of the service she offers. Staying at a corner and watching these groups of people trooping in and out with materials of their choice in their hands or firmly tucked under their arms is an unforgettable sight to behold. Unfortunately this is not the case now in our public libraries. Their services have been so run down that most librarians do not even want to be associated with them. I really congratulate the staff who have remained there all these years. If you had also left, may be there will not have been any need for efforts to be put in place now to revamp the public library service.

The Ghana Library Board runs the Ghana Public Library Service. It is supervised by the Ministry of Education and has a Board. Its headquarters is in Accra and has

branches in all the regional capitals and a handful of district capitals.

The Ghana Public Library Service used to be one of the best, if not the best, in West Africa years ago. The Miss E.J. Evans days! A vehicle, with Ghana Library Board Mobile Library boldly written at its sides used to be seen on the roads loaded with books heading for the hinterlands where there were no branch libraries because their mandate was (and still is) to serve the whole nation. Regional and branch libraries were well stocked with current books. Furniture were comfortable for serious and leisure reading. What went wrong? What happened? This may be attributed to the lack of adequate funding and commitment by government.

Over the years public libraries have depended on a lot of external funding and so made the government to shirk its responsibility. When external funding ceased, it became difficult for government which was contributing very little to its funding, to rise up to the occasion and take full responsibility. The refusal to adopt a cost sharing strategy right from the beginning is our doom. Self-sustenance should have been the bedrock from day one and external funding seen as additional.

Again, crises in the economy some years ago made the public library service one of the casualties. Its budget had to be cut because it was seen that it was serving only a small fraction of the population.

This perception came in because the culture of reading is a big problem in Africa and indeed in Ghana. The culture of reading can be improved when concerted efforts are made to encourage local publishing of relevant materials to suit the levels of literacy of the population and also with themes common and relevant to our environment. At least our children can begin reading about "Adomi Bridge" and "Kejetia

Lorry Station" rather than "London Bridge" and "Central Station in Amsterdam". When we grow up we will learn that. Reading should be a joy not a task like our pupils and students make us see it today, with their "chew, pour, pass and forget" formula. Students of today thus read just to pass examinations. Don't be surprised to hear that some librarians do not read too!! They also need to develop a reading culture in themselves. It's never too late, as you will need it during retirement! The problems of the public library service are poor funding, inadequate and old materials, run down infrastructure and facilities, poor IT services and poor service conditions resulting in high staff turnover.

If the Public Library service is to stand up from its very deplorable state, then a lot of funding has to be pumped into it, to enable it renovate and refurbish its infrastructure and facilities, acquire current reading materials, provide vehicles for mobile library services and also for logistics. Acquisition of current reading materials must be adequate enough to cater for its varied users including adult learners, those involved in distance learning and the physically challenged. IT services will have to be introduced in order to channel the resources and intellect of the young ones who spend their time and money on internet sites which do not benefit their academic, social and moral development. Educational and entertainment sites will be introduced to them and their use made mandatory which will in the end benefit them. Most things which are beneficial to one's life in future need to be instilled with rules. Often the free floating things are not beneficial.

The time is now very ripe for the public library to advertise its events in the local print and electronic media; involve national authorities and heavy weight stakeholders in their events; carry out activities which involve community participation and also

provide for the physical and intellectual needs of the physically challenged.

The issue of poor conditions of service for staff of public libraries has been over flogged so I will only confirm here that if staff of academic and special libraries which have not come as low as the public libraries in service provision and inadequate service conditions are still complaining, then we do not need to mention staff of public libraries but suffice to say that, very serious steps must be taken to improve their condition of service otherwise there will be no librarians to carry out the improved services which I am told the Government and donors like Carnegie Corporation are putting in place. This time let us share costs so that when Carnegie Corporation leaves we will not be left high and dry and have a repetition of what has brought us to this current situation.

There is no nation which has developed with uneducated, illiterate, undisciplined citizens. The public library offers reading materials for formal and informal education. In fact, it is often referred to as the "poor man's university" because an ideal public library must stock all materials to satisfy all the needs of the citizens. People have been known to have used public libraries for self-study and passed all relevant examinations in their professions.

To enable the public libraries provide adequately for school-going users, it must maintain strong links with school libraries in order to know the current textbooks being used.

There is also the need for collaboration between the public library service and District Assemblies to set up community libraries in places far away from their regional and branch libraries and where the mobile libraries cannot reach. Today, some community libraries are opened without the knowledge of the Ghana Library Board. All citizens of Ghana are entitled to the provision

of materials for educational and recreational needs so this service must get to all nooks and corners of the country. A 46-year-old country is old enough to provide her children with this very vital food for development.

The need for innovative services to meet the specific and varied needs of the citizenry, from city to rural dwellers, illiterate to highly educated, leisure to highly academic readers cannot be over emphasised.

The government must support the public library service adequately to enable it carry out this function of making educated out of people termed uneducated, literate out of illiterate and disciplined out of undisciplined citizenry. The public library must be perceived as belonging to all of us and so we should all ensure that its life and development does not go below expectation in order to endanger the future of this nation.

School Libraries

Historically, before independence, school libraries were not given due attention. Only a few very good government and mission schools had school libraries. Attempts were made after independence to improve the situation. Through the Ghana Library Board (GLB), mobile libraries were introduced to go into the rural areas and library facilities were set up in some regions to provide reading materials for school pupils and students. The GLB subsequently set up a School and College Libraries Department in 1972. Beset by a myriad of problems - lack of funding, understaffing, lack of support from authorities of 2nd cycle institutions - from inception to date, it has not been able to carry out its functions adequately.

Most schools have been paying lip service to the provision of school library service in their schools. Every term "Library facilities" is an item on the bill for students to pay. When one visits some of the schools there is nothing to write home about their library

service. As usual such funds go into other "priority" facilities. In schools which are desirous of providing a library, one often sees old and tattered books in a very small room. The problem of poor funding, no proper accommodation for the library, lack of qualified staff to man the library, lack of interest of the school hierarchy and lack of proper links with the public library system need to be seriously tackled to put school libraries on sound footing.

It will do the nation a lot of good if a Directorate for School and College Libraries is set up at the Ministry of Education. It is long overdue. This Directorate will be guided by a policy and supervise the implementation of the policy. It should also collaborate with the Ghana Library Board and the Ghana Library Association to promote good service delivery and professionalism in the administration of School and College Libraries. The situation as it exists now, where non-professionals occupy positions of professionals and are called professionals thereby misusing nomenclature and actual professionals made to work under such people, is least to say, demoralising and unacceptable. Such collaboration will set things straight and put round pegs in round holes for job satisfaction and ultimate good service provision.

School libraries are very vital in the development of the nation. It is the first level that children who grow into adults are expected to come into contact with books. If this stage is not handled properly by introducing them to the culture of reading, most of them get lost along the line and become social misfits who constitute a big problem to the society in future. 'Catch them young' is the catch phrase. If we can catch future athletes and footballers young, we must as well catch our future geniuses in industry, government and the economy

young, by systematically introducing the culture of reading to them when their minds are fertile and acceptable to teaching and learning. Someone once said that if you want to hide something from an African hide it in a book!!

Role Of Ict In Library Services

Integrating ICT into traditional library services is highly desirable. However, issues like developing the technological and regulatory infrastructure, connectivity, accessibility, training and licensing costs and how it will fit into local information producing services will need to be addressed before venturing into it.

The introduction of ICT in libraries in Ghana has been successful in some university libraries and special libraries. Services like the use of CD Rom and databases of full text journal articles and abstracts are the most popularly used. Online databases can only be used where there is Internet connectivity.

General uses of Internet

There are many uses but a few will be mentioned here.

It is an important medium for communication, i.e. sending emails, browsing, e-commerce, chatting and video conferencing.

It is a convergent point for video and audio where live telecast of both news and events are made.

Through the use of networks resource sharing is enabled.

It enables quick and easy dissemination of information to any part of the world once there is a network connection.

It is useful in research and education for collaborative research and communication between teachers and students and also among themselves.

It assists in personal learning for the life long learner, provides fun and other day-to-day information.

In spite of these, the Internet can be misused. There are several crimes committed on the net, by the day, not to talk about obnoxious sites, which can pop up on your screen when you have not even asked for them.

Internet in Libraries

Internet use in libraries poses some challenges to librarians. The main ones are authority of information, collection development and availability of appropriate infrastructure, which will give good service.

Authority of information on the net can be a problem. It is common knowledge that anything can be found on the Net and can be put there by anyone. Most of the information on the Net are not subjected to professional scrutiny prior to publication. Though the information may be important it may not be authoritative.

In collection development, the issue of whether more emphasis should be placed on electronic resources acquisition than on print materials; actual acquisition processes of resources being cumbersome; actual management which is an ongoing, maintenance issue and whether or not there is the possibility of digital preservation and archiving are serious issues which must be tackled well, right from the beginning and settled accurately before starting the service at all.

The availability of appropriate infrastructure, which will give good service, is another major challenge. A network with good speed; web authoring expertise to enable regular updates; effective user education to win them over from the hard copy book; uninterrupted funding to procure computers; and to pay ISP and other charges to ensure continuity of service, are important hurdles to be jumped.

All libraries want to have Internet service but the availability of funds is the deciding factor. The initial capital outlay is huge in terms of infrastructure, equipment and maintenance of the service. Lack of funds therefore makes them to stick to traditional service provision rather than lack of enthusiasm. Good Internet service needs investment in infrastructure, equipment and staff training. University and some special libraries in Ghana are better placed in this bid and these have enhanced their knowledge and capability. Public libraries if given the resource will also perform.

Use in Academic and Special Libraries

Internet services in academic and special libraries are used for various functions including electronic document delivery; digitisation; on demand publishing; cooperation and sharing of resources among libraries in different geographical locations; searches for information; cooperation among researchers; email discussion lists (a forum where professionals discuss issues) and of course email services. Most of these services are fortunately present in some of our academic and special libraries.

Use in Public Libraries

Internet services as at now are unavailable in our public libraries. However, we are not very far away from what obtains in the developed world. Most of the public libraries in the developed world are still experimenting and exploring the use of Internet so they have not been seriously involved in networks.

To whatever use the Internet is put for academic and special libraries the same can also be done for public libraries. However, in addition, the Internet can be used by public libraries to disseminate local civic information, for example about the District Assemblies, information about Assemblymen with their pictures and email addresses to enable their constituents to

communicate with them, business, education, tourism, health facilities, etc; as well as the provision of academic information to enable self-education.

The ideal is for the public library to be an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to provide free access to its users and so fulfil its long-standing objective of providing information for all. This is, not possible because of the heavy financial outlay. Alternatively, public libraries can negotiate with private Internet providers and provide them with space within the library to offer internet/computer services at a small fee.

When the public libraries are ready to go Internet - that is when infrastructure and equipment are in place, staff knowledge in computers and Internet use updated - they should then look out and seek cooperative links in public library consortium for effective services.

Assistance from Organisations

The library fraternity in Ghana is however aware of initiatives by some organisations, companies and NGOs to get Internet facilities to the communities and thereby assist the public library.

UNDP's Mobile Telecentre To Go (MTTG) which consists of 2 buses equipped with IT facilities for 30 and 40 persons respectively is meant for internet services for people in deprived areas in Accra. Several educational and professional bodies like GNAT, AMA, GBC, some 1st and 2nd cycle institutions and 3 nursing training schools have already benefited from it.

Mobetrain is a private initiative launched at the InfoTech Ghana Fair in July 2002. It is owned by 2aCom.net and is a container mounted on a truck with 20 computers. It provides training and Internet services to the public. It is currently stationed in Accra but will ultimately move to the rural communities to introduce the use of computers to them.

World Link Program launched in 1997 as a pilot project gives IT training and Internet access to Headmasters/Mistresses, teachers and students in some secondary schools all over the country.

www.patriensa.com is owned by the Asante Akim Digital Coalition Network and has 30 computers powered by solar energy at Patriensa. They are for computer training and internet browsing. Some computer repairs are also carried out by the local people.

Telecentres

An innovation in the provision of ICT and internet services are Telecentres, Tele cottages or Tele Kiosks. These are a public facility where a community can establish and give access to ICT tools like computers, radio and television, internet, photocopying, telephones and facsimile, secretarial services and computer training all under one roof, to its people. What exists now are internet cafes, communication centres and secretarial services as stand alones. The shared resources at the telecentres make it economical and ensures that the very poor who cannot own computers and maintain an Internet service have maximum access to information.

As we are told in a famous story to go to the ant to learn about its success, it is necessary for the authorities administering the Ghana Library Board to meet these groups to find out how best they can cooperate to extend these services to the rest of the population of the country. As a link to this, is the Government's proposed National ICT Policy in the offing?

National Ict Policy

Government being convinced of the role of ICT in the 21st century in the creation of wealth, generation of employment and poverty reduction, which will bring about socio-economic prosperity for the nation, has adopted specific measures, chief

amongst them being the formulation of a National ICT Policy.

The Policy has been drafted, which sadly and unfortunately had no input from Librarians because we were not invited.

This draft policy among several things, seeks to promote access by both public and private sectors to the use of ICT. It intends to set up a national communications infrastructure/backbone to give equitable access to local and international networks. We are anxiously waiting for this to cut costs for organisations and institutions that are paying heavy amounts to private ISPs.

When the National ICT Policy and necessary infrastructure are put in place, current and appropriate information will be brought to all Ghanaians including those in the rural communities to enable national development. It will be necessary for Government to look at the establishment of Telecentres in the rural areas in the formulation of the policy as the urban areas are already fairly serviced. These Telecentres in rural areas will open up the areas for sustainable development and stem the drift of the youth to the urban centres.

It is expected that financial and technical support promised by the World Bank, UNECA, IICD and others towards the successful implementation of this policy will be provided so that this dream will become a reality.

I wish to appeal to Government and institutions that they should involve Librarians in the evolution of any policy on information since we will be called upon to assist in the implementation.

General Comments

Recognition of Libraries/Librarians

A satisfied person offers a satisfactory service. Most librarians in the various types of libraries in this country are being offered a very raw deal. They are sidelined,

ignored and simply unrecognised as offering a very vital service in the development of the nation. These treatments are very demoralising. It is not only receiving a salary that matters but being enabled to prove your worth on the job is very important. Some institutions only employ librarians to show the world that they also have libraries. What goes into making the library a real library is often not provided.

Government and authorities concerned should really see libraries and librarians as indispensable partners for the education of the individual in particular and the nation in general. Currently only lip service is paid to their recognition. This is seen in the way library budgets are cut first when there is a reduction in the institution's budget; insignificant budgets for libraries; non-inclusion of librarians in the policy formulation committees on information services for the institution and even for the country.

Again, in some institutions, colleagues in different professions but who completed in the same year are recognised as senior to the librarians and so become their bosses. Where the librarian is firm and determined to demand what is right, stumbling blocks are erected in the form of administrative bottlenecks and double interpretation of rules and regulations to frustrate him/her. This is also unfair and anti-productive. I will only appeal to my colleagues who are going through such situations to stand firm and not relent. You should continue to work hard, introduce innovations into your service delivery. The seemingly thick, dark clouds will give way to a brighter light soon.

Librarians Council of Ghana

This is a long-standing issue. The GLA has been registered as a professional body since 1986 just like any professional body. How come that till date there is no body set up to register and regulate the practice of the

profession which will among other things determine who is a librarian or not; check malpractices of librarians and excesses of employers. As at now, the playing field has been left wide open to anybody from the keeper of a one room village reading room with no library training, to the head of a university library all being referred to as Librarians. This should not happen in the 21st century.

We must have some standardisation or categorisation in the profession – who is what and with what – which employers can use as guidelines for placing employees in appropriate positions. This free for all nomenclature situation must be addressed and on time as it is doing the Association and indeed the profession, more harm than good. There must be a Librarians Council of Ghana put in place, and very soon, to put things in their proper perspective. I believe that what such a specific Council for Doctors, Pharmacists, Engineers, Accountants etc. are doing for them will equally be useful for Librarians.

District Libraries

I understand that District Libraries fall under the ambit of District Assemblies. One would have thought that after practicing this new system of decentralisation for some time now, where funds are channelled directly to the Assemblies, we would by now be seeing some good district libraries. This unfortunately is not the case.

I am aware that there was a team including librarians who sometime in the recent past visited several District Assemblies towards the setting up of libraries in the Districts. I do not know what has been done to the report presented at the end of the visits. What I am sure of is that libraries have not yet been set up in all the districts.

District libraries are where the teeming numbers of school children and school

leavers in the districts will fall upon for self-education to improve upon what they have been taught in school. If we are serious about educating the whole citizenry and also stemming the drift from the rural to the urban areas, then more attention should be given to the establishment of these libraries.

They should be set up and manned by qualified personnel. The Ghana Library Board should be fully involved in this exercise and together with the Ghana Library Association will give professional assistance especially in employing the right calibre of staff and in the fixing of salaries.

One thing necessary however, is that District Assemblies should seriously think of providing basic amenities so that the professionals will accept postings to such places. It takes a super patriotic person to accept to work in a place where there is no electricity, no potable water, no accessible road and no good accommodation when the job market is not yet saturated in the urban areas.

Conclusion

Libraries make a difference. To researchers, it enables them to explore the frontiers of knowledge; to government and industry, it helps in economic development; to the society it helps to develop their socio-cultural capabilities; to children and young adults it gives them learning opportunities and to the general public it improves their quality of life.

The provision of library and information services is a profitable economic investment, which cannot be measured in cedis and pesewas but in overall national development. It is an effective medium for the transfer of information among generations. It is the ordinary man's "university" since it provides an avenue for his independent education to enable him achieve his goals in life.

The establishment of a National Library of Ghana is long overdue. The lack of a central library where the academic, social and cultural prowess of the country and its citizens can be accessed by Ghanaians and foreigners alike, is giving the nation an unfavourable publicity. The promise to set it up soon is therefore a positive development.

Today, the nation's libraries are under-resourced and under-utilised; they are in a crisis situation which if not checked may affect her intellectual assets for years to come. The setting up of a high-powered Committee to examine and identify the causes of the inability of libraries to provide optimum service and make recommendations, which most importantly must be adhered to, is very necessary. If we are not careful the global information revolution wind may blow over our heads just like the industrial revolution did centuries ago and we are now only trying to catch up.

There is no refuting the fact that the provision of information services by libraries in Ghana is not very successful. Problems like lack of funds, inadequate facilities, poor conditions of service of staff leading to high staff turnover in public libraries, inadequate legislation and non-availability of structures to regulate service provision, among others, have been weighing down the desire of librarians to give effective and efficient services. There is also much to be done in the area of ongoing training to up grade skills of staff, strengthening of library infrastructure and capacity, innovation and reformation of services and policies.

The days when library professionals were seen as only arrangers and keepers of books are long gone. When the librarian was typified as an unfriendly woman with old fashioned dressing, wearing horned rimmed eyeglasses and giving stern orders from

behind a weather beaten table, are gone and gone forever. The Librarian today is an information resource provider, resource centre manager, human gateway to electronic resources, a walking encyclopaedia of quick reference sources. He/She is modernised and able to use sophisticated ICT gadgets like any other professional. She operates in the modern era where libraries are not limited by walls and with a touch of the mouse can access necessary information from anywhere in the world to oil the wheel of national development. Librarians are trained to provide information and that is what we have always done and continue to do using the modern means as they come and go. We are proactive and maintain linkages with a wide range of local and international organisations to bring about constant improvement in our service. What we need is to be given the opportunities, facilities and funding to do what we know to do best. You cannot expect someone to walk when you have strapped him from head to toe.

Here, I will want to give a word of advice to my colleagues. There is a rapid tide of change in the information industry flowing downstream, the speed of which cannot be monitored. Librarians who fail to move with the tide will be swept into the rapids and drowned in it. I believe none of us will want to be insignificant in this modern information delivery methodology, so we should not sit on the fence but jump in and move along with the tide.

To make library services in Ghana comparable with any in the world, the establishment of the Librarians Council of Ghana will be a very positive sign in the direction towards achieving a good quality information provision network by libraries in the country. When there is no regulatory body for something, things are done in an adhoc, unplanned and in uncoordinated manner, that do not achieve the best results.

The Library profession in Ghana needs a Council to supervise its practice.

The wheel of national development can best be oiled for smooth mobility by a steady flow of current, precise, good quality information through the age-old information providers, libraries.

Finally, I will join Morton to say that "... in a global economy that is increasingly centred

on access to knowledge and information, books (and information) continue to be a critical key to solving a nation's problems, and learning remains a critical element in a nation's arsenal of strategies for survival" This is aptly put in support of libraries being a necessary component for national development.

Thank you.