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### Building Community Partnerships and Collaboration for Effective Library and Information Services Delivery

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#### **Abstract**

*This paper takes a broad view of the steps to be taken by libraries in building community partnership and collaboration for effective library and information service delivery. The concepts of partnerships and collaboration are explained and the background of rural information landscape in Nigeria is revealed. The paper also x-rays the roles and challenges of community libraries in Nigeria. The paper further notes that the terms libraries, public libraries and rural/community libraries were used interchangeably to capture the complimentary roles each can play in building community partnership and collaborations. So the focus of the paper is on rural/community libraries. The paper identifies and discusses the various groups, actions and institutions that these libraries can build community partnership and collaboration with to effectively deliver library and information service. They include market place association, churches, philanthropists and Friends of the library, Age grade association, Town unions, the Diasporas, readership campaign, schools and local governments. The paper concludes that library is not an island entire upon itself, and with the economic crunch which has affected the library budgets, rural/community libraries have no other option but to build community partnerships and collaboration if they are to deliver their services effectively and efficiently.*

**Keywords:** *community partnership, collaboration, library services, information services,*

#### **1.1 Introduction**

It may not be a sweeping statement to say that there is no particular place that can be called rural library in our villages and communities in Nigeria. In fact, rural library is alien to an average public in any community in Nigeria. Rural communities of Nigeria largely depend on library and information centres on their source of getting information sources and services. The role of rural

libraries in the effective of information resource and services delivery to the rural communities cannot be over-emphasized. Rajendran and Landan (2020) describe rural libraries as organizations that improve persons' knowledge, community buildings and empowerment by investing in people and communities. Rural libraries are knowledge providers close to the communities and improve the quality community life. What can

be inferred from the above description is that rural libraries have the capacity to be a hub for community activities, train illiterate and semi-illiterate and even make a literate to be active readers and be a place for independent learning. If the rural libraries can provide these services, conscious efforts should be made for their building partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders in the communities for effective library and information service delivery. The methods and processes of building these partnerships and collaboration are the concern of this paper.

### **1.2 Rural/Community Libraries in Nigeria**

In Nigeria context, community libraries are branches of public libraries located in rural communities or zonal headquarters of local governments. These local governments are more or less classified as rural areas. Throughout history, libraries have been pivotal institution in communities because they ensure that everybody has access to information. Libraries are natural community centres, which purpose is to encourage community participation and provide safe and welcoming places for community people to congregate and engage in activities that will be of benefit for the entire community. This means that libraries can play essential role in the process of community building and should be seen as vital assets that exist at the very heart of community life to effectively deliver library and information services to the communities served, there is need to build community partnership and collaboration with actors in the community.

Ketih (2009) quoting the American Library Association notes that “almost all American (92%) say they view their local library as an important education resource, 7 of 10 agreed their local library is a pillar of the community, 72% say it is a community centre, 71% say it is a family destination, 69% say it is a cultural centre.” Nwosu (2017) opines that as a warm and friendly space, the rural library has

the remarkable opportunity to become a community gathering place in communities where such a space is surely missing. It provides a place to exchange ideas of all sorts and excels at providing a social hub for any community.

### **1.3 Community Partnership**

Community partnership means an agreement between various community institutions with libraries on how to provide effective library and information service delivery. It is a working relationship between libraries and other service providers or support persons or institution that may be helpful in realizing library's objectives. These partnerships are collaborative and may be long-term relationships and provide opportunities for mutual benefits and results. According to Forbes (2022), community partnerships are an essential tool for a non-profit's success. Strong community partnerships provide an opportunity to expand resources and services delivery. Aashel (2022) states that a successful community partnership should be grounded in solid planning, mutual respect, shared values, clear expectation, a willingness to listen to each other, and a desire to help the community.

In building community partnerships for effective library and information service delivery, the overall goal and ultimate intended result is to strengthen the overall community to maximize positive impact on the citizens.

### **1.4 Community Collaboration**

One of the guiding philosophies of libraries is to strengthen community ties and foster a sense of connection among the people they serve. In the face of economic hardship where library budgets witness cuts, libraries need to build community collaboration to stay afloat in their deliveries. Crevasse and Stockdale (2023) describe community collaboration as a concrete way to bring community members together and combine the strength of people who might otherwise not

have the chance to interact and help out. Building collaboration within communities can benefit the library in a number of ways. More practical reasons to collaborate are getting funds and/or pooling resources that may be dwindling, opening up physical spaces and inviting patrons to come use the library.

Collaborating with organizations and people in a community increases library's resources, increases the reach, promotes creativity and helps the community work toward common goals and can offer a lifelong learning programmes such as craft making, storytelling, sharing knowledge on indigenous knowledge (State Library of Iowa, 2019). For libraries, collaboration could mean expanded services and greater visibility in the community.

## 2.1 Literature Review

### 2.2 Rural Library Information Landscape in Nigeria

The model of librarianship that was imported into Nigeria and other African countries was based on Anglo-American model of librarianship with little or no adaptation to local circumstances. The model was predicated on the notion that the potential users of public libraries in Africa would all be literate and that books contain all the information and knowledge one needs. The fact that many Africans were and are not literate was not considered, neither was the reality that Africans disseminate information orally (Kontash 2005, Osuigwe, Jiagbogu and Udeze, 2012). This notion, though alien created difficulties for librarians in rural libraries who need to make user communities imbibe the reading culture as well as convince the partnering agencies of the importance of the institution in the life of the rural populace.

Libraries have been seen as cultural centres (Anyim, 2003). However, in order to cater for the information needs of the teeming

illiterate population of Nigeria, libraries must become centres, not merely reading centres. This is more so because oral tradition as one of the aspects of the African indigenous civilization and culture has been most traumatized by the colonial experience. This hitherto veritable document of the history and cultural mores of the people was rejected and ridiculed by colonial scholars as hopeless, leak-ridden receptacle. For a non-literate people, this assumption was devastating, as it brought to question the very basis of our existence.

It was then claimed that colonization inaugurated African history; that before the coming of the Europeans, there was no history. Iwuji (2003) argues that it cannot be imagined that it was ever doubted that Africans, before colonization, acted out the business of living, at least peculiar to them. What was in doubt was the authenticity of a record of these activities as conveyed by word of mouth, from generation to generation. What was not written down was considered absolutely worthless as historical evidence.

Every culture, whether literate or preliterate, produces a record in more or less permanent form that can be handed down from generation to generation. In non-literate societies, this record is oral and indigenous and conveyed in the form of ritual, legends, myths, songs, and ceremonies, the transmission of which, from one age grade to another, forms part of the social education of the group. This is systematically organized. Oral literature is part of the indigenous knowledge. With the increasing tendency toward urbanization and the influence of western civilization on our culture, some of our tradition may disappear in a few decades unless librarians do their best to record and preserve them for future analysis and study. It is a pity that we have changed from oral and "ear" culture into print and "visual" culture.

Libraries and Librarians are uniquely positioned to play a vital role in supporting

indigenous communities. Recognizing the fact, increasingly librarians all over the world are undertaking interactive activities with indigenous communities that bring rural dwellers on board as equal partners in knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and utilization and this enrich their lives. So libraries are identifying and documenting indigenous knowledge and giving support in ensuring that the intellectual property rights of indigenous communities are not exploited. Librarians require an informed understanding of rural community concerns as well as the purposes for which rural people seek access to and appropriate information and how this impacts on service provision for the rural populace in Nigerians to avoid intergenerational loss.

### **2.3 Challenges of Community libraries in Nigeria**

A community library is expected to serve all categories of people, old or young, men and women, educated or illiterate, physically challenged, no religious or ethnic bias. Because of the perception in Nigeria that libraries are for the educated, it is rare to see public libraries in rural communities (Fati and Yelwa, 2019). This is the reason public libraries in Nigeria are not making in-roads into the community by establishing rural or community libraries. This poor outing by the public libraries may not be unconnected by obvious challenges. Some of the major challenges are discussed hereunder.

**Infrastructural Facilities:** Many community libraries where they exist are normally in one room or obscure corner of the town. The buildings are derelict and not attractive or conducive for reading. The building surroundings are not well kept and have leaking roofs. Some are overgrown with bushes. As stated by Osuigwe and Unagha (2018), the headquarters of the public libraries in Abia State is housed in 1966 building. If this

is the case with the headquarters, what then is the state of the divisional, branch or zonal libraries? Inside the libraries are dilapidated tables, chairs and book shelves covered with dust.

**Lack of financial support:** Community libraries in Nigeria are not only faced with inadequate funding but lack of financial support. The establishing authorities allocate less than adequate budget to libraries. The expenditure of libraries is not even enough to meet the needs of the headquarters library, let alone those in the rural communities. Nwokocho (1998) avers that inadequate funding is hindering the development of public libraries in Nigeria, and this trickles down to the rural libraries. After 25 years of this revelation, the funding support for public libraries vis-à-vis rural libraries has not challenged.

**Poor information resources:** Rural community libraries in Nigeria are not provided with adequate resources to effectively meet the information needs of the rural communities. The resources are outdated, torn and not readable due to damp. New acquisitions are not carried out due to inadequate funding and there are limited or no donations for the libraries.

**Inadequate human resources:** The shortage of library staff in libraries in Nigeria is obvious. At present, rural libraries have inadequate trained library staff to manage them. Many of them are manned by non librarians, and the consequences are grave. As a result of the inadequate staff, supervision of these libraries is non-existent. The staff of the rural libraries may attend to their families businesses such as farming, petty trading and leave the libraries unopened or attended to for weeks.

**Security challenge:** When the security of lives

is no longer guaranteed in our communities, rural libraries faces the challenges of theft, vandalization, physical attacks on library users or even being burnt down.

### **3.1 Ways in which Libraries can build Community Partnerships and Collaborations**

This section discusses the various ways that libraries can build community partnerships and collaboration for effective library and information services delivery.

**i. Market Place Association:** Rural libraries can be established at the market to give opportunities to traders to access information while at the markets, selling and buying. This can serve as a 'library without walls' or extension services of the rural library. This was exactly the case of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP) and can be replicated in Nigeria. The model was at Pittsburgh Public Market (PPM) Model which is an open showcase where the inhabitants came to sell and buy. CLP, in conjunction with the MLIS students from the University of Pittsburgh converted a two-hundred square foot area in PPM into what they call 'library without walls.' This service-point features all of the information seeking options that one would expect from a full library including books, DVDs, CDs and librarians to staff the area during PPM hours (Very and Atthaus, 2013). The goal is to demonstrate libraries as present and relevant to rural communities that may not have libraries. Libraries in Nigeria can partner and collaborate with market Associations to bring this scene in our rural markets. They can sponsor the library's activities in the markets.

**ii. Churches:** The church is a very critical organization to partner and collaborate with in rural communities for effective library and information service delivery. In places where church libraries exist, the rural libraries can

help to organize the library resources, train the staff and recommend books for acquisition. Where they do not exist, the rural library can reach out to the churches to partner with the rural libraries in making it viable and with the assurance that their information needs will be met and satisfied. Churches can pool resources together and build a rural library or galvanize their members to see the importance of funding a rural library where it exists. The church library can play a significant role in revitalizing a church to meet today's challenges. As Towns and Barber (1971) and it is still relevant today in rural libraries in Nigeria, that the church is being squeezed by cultural pressures and bombarded by the knowledge explosion, partnering and collaborating with the church, the rural library should be more than a depository of books but something more than pleasant but unnecessary part of the church and where church leaders and members look for assistance.

**iii. Philanthropists and Friends of the Library:** The library should identify philanthropists and Friends of the library in the community. As libraries are community assets with specific goals related to community well-being, they should leverage on philanthropy for achieving their goal of effective service delivery. Payton (1988) defines philanthropy as a private action taken in support of a public good. Philanthropy is led to motivation for giving. ALA (2015) states that philanthropy and community well-being are related because supporting a community well-being is often a motivation for giving. In partnership and collaboration, philanthropy becomes a tool for non-profit organization like the library, to build community well-being. Community well-being goals for public libraries are traditionally related to literacy and access to information, but public library missions have expanded in recent years to include goals

around community engagement, lifelong learning and personal and professional growth of the individuals services. Institutional philanthropy includes foundations, individuals, corporation, friends of the library and they are mechanisms for fundraising and facilitating philanthropic support for the library. This may be in the areas of funding, donation of private libraries, purchase of books, constructing a library building, hiring and payment of staff.

**iv. Age Grades Association:** Age grades system is a traditionally structured arrangement which has held ancient societies together, and in today the bedrock of the community socio-economic developments. Age grade associations assist rural communities in executing community projects (Erim, Ahpama and Asor, 2011). One of these projects include the library. Age grades can carry out enlightenment campaign on the information and reliance of the library and make their rural people to actually use the library. Age grades can raise money to fund the library in the acquisition of materials or handing over a completed building to be used as a community library. Nwosu (2015) identifies age grade as a verifiable organization for libraries to build partnership and collaboration for effective library and information service delivery. She stresses that usually, the inauguration of an age grade is done in an elaborate ceremony. At such occasion, the community leaders could challenge the initiated to embark on development projects for the community. They could be influenced to choose the school or rural library project.

**v. Town Unions:** Town Unions in Nigeria have come out strong to carry out developmental projects in their communities where governments have failed to do so. They execute these projects as social responsibility.

Libraries can partner with these age grades for financial support or in paying staff salaries. Town Unions at the beginning or end-of-year meeting map out projects to carry out in the community. If properly lobbied, they can collaborate with libraries to sponsor some activities or undertake to build a community library. This will help to engage the youths in using their spare time wisely, and avoid youth restiveness.

**vi. The Diaspora:** Indigenes of communities living inside the country or other parts of the country are known to form unions. Part of their activities is to embark on community development projects in their homes. Diasporas are seen to serve as a vehicle for transferring resources, technology, knowledge and ideas to their home countries and communities, and thereby contribute to their economic and social development. Diasporas play an enabling role as agents of development and carriers of social capital for the benefit of their communities. According to Uruguchi, Majanovic and Kedic (2018), financial and skills flow from Diaspora communities are often seen as the most tangible element of the nexus between migration and development. The take from the statement is that for libraries to fully reap this potential, it is key that they build the necessary partnerships and collaboration with the Diasporas. This can be done by getting contacts with the members of the Diasporas and engaging them on how to help libraries to effectively deliver library and information services to the members of their community.

**vii. Readership Campaign:** Libraries can build community partnership and collaboration for effective library and information services delivery by promoting readership campaign among the youths of the communities they serve. This can be done during the library week and readership

promotion campaign organized by the Nigerian Library Association (ALA). The Week is a period set aside by librarians to raise awareness about the valuable roles library plays and for citizens to read for national and self-development. According to Ahiauzu (2022), “Library Week” is a week set aside annually by the NLA since 1982 to draw the attention of all Nigerians to the value of the book, reading for leisure, libraries, librarians and other library workers. The week showcases the work of the libraries and what the library does to a community in several ways to all strata of the society, and points to what the lack of a library and reading culture can do to a society in terms of development. Thus, in carrying out the activities of the “Library Week”, libraries can connect out-of-school children to the Book and ensure lifelong learning.

**viii. Schools:** There is a compelling need for libraries to build community partnership and collaborate with community schools in their areas of influence, if they are to perform effectively and efficiently in service delivery. Franklin and Streeter (1995) and Bush (2002) have seen collaboration to be constantly promoted as a valued activity for educators, libraries and social service professionals. Shared resources, as well as shared responsibilities can lead to reduced costs and positive outcomes for collaborative projects. The import of the above statements, is that this could mean expanded services and greater visibility for libraries in the community. Libraries in community should build collaboration and cooperation, mutual understanding and trust for shared responsibilities in areas of resources, funding and staffing. The primary goal of school involvement is to provide extended library services and increased access for children and youth in their communities where school libraries are non-existent or cannot effectively cater for their library and information services

delivery. Parents of the students can be levied to help in this regard.

**ix. Local Governments:** Ensuring that every child has access to a library is not an unachievable task. Bellanaija (2020) suggests that one way to do this is to ensure that government builds at least one library in their state. The Federal government should build at least one library in each state and the Local Government should be mandated to build a library in their Local Government Area, to give our children and adults access to learn and study. Libraries are important cornerstones of a healthy community. This is one area the libraries should build community partnership and collaboration. A strong advocacy group from libraries can compel the local government chairman to build libraries across the communities. The establishment of public libraries however has been mostly limited to urban areas. This has resulted in illiteracy and ignorance among young people and adults in rural areas. While urban areas can be excused for having libraries, many rural communities and rural dwellers do not have access to libraries and enough books. This should be a great concern for libraries and librarians and one of the best ways to tackle this is to partner with local governments to build and equip rural libraries.

### **Conclusion**

Building community partnership and collaboration for effective library and information service delivery cannot be over-emphasised. The library is not an island entire upon itself (John Donne). Libraries are not self sufficient and therefore needs and relies on others to be able to render effective service delivery. In communities where illiteracy and ignorance is the order of the day, libraries are being called upon to fill the gap. But with shrinking library budget to buy books, employ qualified staff, erect building,

libraries require the company and support of stakeholders (as discussed in this article) in order to thrive and perform creditably well. It is therefore, concluded that when strong advocacy are made by libraries and the stakeholders in communities see the benefits of having libraries in their communities they would key into the programme of building partnerships and collaboration as pushed forward by the libraries.

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