African Librarianship in the 21st Century
By
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Abstract
Information and knowledge are critical and strategic resources in human development. The rural and urban poor in Africa require access to appropriate information to fight poverty, deprivation and illiteracy. This is in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This paper examines the activities of libraries towards achieving these goals. It recognizes that African Librarianship is faced with challenges that are both external and internal. Externally, it is faced with the challenges of general backwardness of Africa – high illiteracy level, poor economic conditions, political instability, corruption, lack of government supports; and internally, with imported ideologies. The paper discusses the fundamental challenges of the profession and proposes two ideals for Africa's information management – providing access to relevant information to all in all formats; and harnessing Africa's rich cultural heritage in all forms and integrating them to the Global Information Infrastructures (GII). The paper recommends a complete reorientation of library development strategies which will include community based approaches; government involvement and aid donors to support development.

Introduction
In a global economy that is largely based on enormous access to information, information systems – libraries, museums, archives, telecenters, radio, television, World Wide Web, the Internet become all the more vital institutions. Africa with its myriad of setbacks stands a chance in benefiting from the new information economy that is globalised, but Africa's libraries are under-resourced, under-utilized, are facing crisis that though seemingly quiet, has the potential of affecting the continent's intellectual capital for decades to come (Carnegie, 2000).

Africa has been tagged a Dark Continent because of a high level of illiteracy and for the fact that much is not known about African cultural heritage. Though African entertainment industries have done a lot in showcasing African heritage, much is still needed to be done in developing and managing Africa's information culture and infrastructures. Eradicating illiteracy has been of great concern to governments not only in developing countries but also in developed countries. The concern has risen because mass illiteracy has been found to be militating against the achievement of society. Universal literacy has become one of the imperatives for human survival. The danger posed by the large number of illiterates in the developing countries in the 21st century has been attracting the attentions of the international organizations, governments and educationists. A literacy survey conducted in Nigeria shows 58.3 million illiterates (Alokun, 1998). Today, Nigeria has about 140 million people by the last census; and President Yar'Adua recently gave the figure of illiteracy as 57 per cent (Hassan, 2008). This shows that about 80 million Nigerians cannot read and write. Mostert (2001) gives the figure of illiteracy in Kenya as 90%. Developing countries constitute about 80% of the world population. The world cannot achieve the Millennium Development goals or its

commitments for an Information Society if such a huge population is illiterate, hungry, poor and underdeveloped.

Several studies revealed high illiteracy level as the aftermath of the wrong foundation of library development in Africa. Libraries were built and managed by people whose knowledge was imported from Britain and America and served the information needs of small population of the people. A paradigm shift is there required, a move from the old models characterized by Anglo-American ideals to new models based on community information services that will recognize that 80% of Africans live in rural areas, are illiterate, and need access to relevant information in order to benefit and contribute to the Global Information Infrastructures. Information managers should be conscious of their crucial roles in the information society. Services provided by the library must be based on positive objectives and related to the community's needs and interests, must be made accessible at convenient places and hours for the users.

Knowledge and Information in National Development
UNESCO Charter of 1980 describes information as a basic right after food, clothes and shelter. The importance of information and knowledge in the development of individuals and nations has long been established. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaimed in Art.19, that:
  i.   everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.
  ii. this right includes Freedom to hold opinion without interference and
  iii. to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (UN General Assembly, 1948).

UDHR offers scope to work out a user-centred librarianship involving library collections and services, and electronic access to virtual resources

At the dawn of the new millennium heads of states came together and set for themselves the bold task of eradicating hunger, promoting gender equality and empowering women, and to provide access to all to the benefits of new technologies especially information communication technologies. Two years later came the World Summits on Information Society which took place in 2003 in Geneva and then 2005 in Tunisia. The overall aim is to:

> build a people-centered, inclusive and developmental-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and people to achieve their full potentials in promoting their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN and respecting fully and upholding the UDHR.

Mchombu & Cadbury, (2006) quoting Tony Blair who spoke on the transformation of the economy through technology describes information and knowledge as the most important commodities of a nation in this new environment.

Calanag, (2003); Aguolu, (1997) posit that information is widely recognized as a catalyst for both national and personal development, but many people especially in the developing countries are still unaware of the need for information and fail to exploit it even when information materials are available for free. The reason for non utilization being that availability does not connote accessibility. Obstacles to information accessibility in the developing countries include illiteracy and lack of awareness of the need for information and general underdevelopment. Calanag, (2003) explains why information is more accessed and used in developed countries as the existence of basic infrastructures and facilities and for the fact that 96% of the population are literate and as such are able to access information. The developing countries constitute about 80% of the world population, and 70% are illiterate and cannot access information resources in print and other media.

Munyua, (2000) points out that most African country have not devoted attention to providing their citizens with access to information especially those in the rural areas where 70 – 80% live. Alokun, (1998) links illiteracy to poverty:

> the poorest people in the world are in the countries that have large numbers of illiterate people…The people with the most serious health problems are in countries that have large illiterate population.

Calanag, (2003) cites Lim who articulates the recognizable indices of a developed information society as:

i.   A highly developed library system;
ii.   A literate population;
iii.   The existence of sophisticated telecommunications systems;
iv.   A high level of newspaper reading;
v.   A high level of computer penetration;
vi.   A developed television and radio broadcasting industry;
vii.   A well developed publishing industry.

From this articulation, it is obvious that Africa is far from being an information society. The overall aim of the WSIS is to integrate all nations into the information and knowledge economy. Africa has no choice but to join other nations in the global world.

Africa in the Global Information Infrastructure
The collection of recorded knowledge had existed in Africa, as witnessed by the development of writing and libraries in Egypt as well as in Ethiopia. The missionaries pioneered the development of libraries and such considered their own interests other than that of the local communities (Aina, 2004; Bertelsen, 1996). In fact, establishment of libraries by the colonialists in Africa was purely economic.

The available literature on the state of libraries in Africa present a catalogue of misfortunes which (Plessis 2008; Olanlokun 1999/2000; Mchombu 1991) put as lack of use, lack of appreciation, and lack of resources. These lacks are as a result of external factors to the library itself such as illiteracy, the absence of a reading culture, an education system inimical to reading, lack of books in local languages, lack of government policies supporting libraries, economic problems, fiscal austerity measures, inappropriate donor interventions, lack of foreign exchange, and lack of infrastructures. Plessis, (2008) concludes that these problems have been responsible to inefficiency in delivering essential information services to the people. He further recognizes that reflections on the state of Africa's library in the past decades have further shown that most of the above problems are the aftermath of the root problems. For African libraries to be able to fight illiteracy and the resultants issues of poverty and diseases, they have to

reflect African values – way of disseminating information; and providing content relevant to the majority of the people.

Matare, (1997) notes that thirty years after independence many African countries are still struggling to develop librarianship so that it can match or reflect the social, economic and political conditions which prevail in Africa. After more than ten years he made the comment, libraries and librarians have not contributed to the development of Africa. Hence, 80% of Africans are still illiterate and have no access to relevant information that is necessary for the overall development of individuals and the continent in general. High illiteracy level is the major problem of Africa's backwardness.

The libraries and librarians are the custodian of the African culture because they are responsible for storing and producing the materials when needed. The role of public libraries towards a democratic provision of information has long been established by the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1948). Mchombu (1991) reports that in Botswana the overall percentage of users for types of library services does not exceed 5% and in Tanzania, with a population of more than 23 million people, only about 2% of the population uses the libraries.

Another problem why Africa has not contributed to the global information infrastructure is that book publishing has been very poor as a result of lack of funds. Publishing in local languages has also been identified as one of the challenges of literacy development in Nigeria (Olanlokun, 1999/2000). African libraries are urban based with total neglect of the rural areas where there are concentrations of illiterate people. This is why Africa has not made a significant contribution to the world body of literature (Mostert, 2001).

The challenges discussed above concern the traditional information culture or the print information environment. Today, the information environment is digital, multi media and globalised. Though the much made noise of a paperless society has fizzled out, a new information culture has been born. The new information culture is a hybrid of the new and the old. The important characteristic of this new information environment is that it is globalised, and ICT is the major tool for creating and accessing information. The global information infrastructures according to the United States Information Infrastructures Task Force, 1994, is a seamless web of communication networks, computers, databases and consumer electronics that will put vast amounts of information at users finger tips. The Internet is presently considered as the de facto global information infrastructures. For African libraries and librarians who have not fared well in the print environment, another challenges and opportunities have been presented by the advances in ICTs. Already, many researches have shown that awareness to the benefits of ICTs by Africans has been created, but only little achievements have been recorded. Illiteracy is still a major handicap to the utilization of ICTs in Africa.

Chisenga (1999); United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (1996) enumerate the benefits of contributing to the global information infrastructures. They include:

a. make African people producers of indigenous information and knowledge and not simply passive consumers of imported information;
b. [enable Africa] export information and knowledge and to participate proactively in the development of global information infrastructure;
c. provide African researchers and scientists with access to information on Africa generated from within the continent;
d. enable African researchers and scientists to collaborate on equal footing with their peers around the world irrespective of distance;
e. promote African cultural heritage, including the modern cultural sector of its rich and growing film and music industries.

Chisenga, (1999) advised African leaders and information professionals to make a valuable contribution to the growth of the global information infrastructures. She warned that unless Africa contributes to the global information pool, they will forever remain consumers of the cultural products produced outside the continent. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) shows that Africa generates only 0.4% of the global content, and that if South Africa is excluded the figure will be as low as 0.02% (UNECA, 1999). A recent study on the Internet Band Width and Internet use reveals that Africa is lagging (Etim, 2006).

The Digital Divide
With the introduction of information communication technologies a new gap has been created. The gap is between information 'haves' and information 'have '. In the past age (industrial age), there was a general information scarcity caused by a lot of factors including distance between nations, but with the advancement in ICTs and global information systems, information is overloaded and is being made accessible to all, having reduced the world to a global

village, thereby removing the distance between nations. However, the proliferation of access to information has resulted in a widening gap between the rich and poor countries, a problem which has been highlighted by both the UNDP and the leaders of the G8. The World Bank data for 2004 reports that 63 per cent of people in the US are now Internet users compared to less than 2 per cent in sub Saharan Africa. In the information economy, those who do not have access to relevant information will be "further marginalized and will be condemned to a life of poverty (Mchombu & Cadbury, 2006)." Leaders of nations have realized this and every effort is being made to contribute to and benefit from the global information infrastructures. But the cry is not so loud in Africa. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD) Report shows that the developing world is still lagging far behind in terms of access to the facilities. Developed nations continue to lead Internet subscriptions world wide, and the gap in terms of Internet broadband penetration has widened since 2002 (Obinor, 2008). The Secretary General of the Information Telecommunications Union (ITU) Hamadoun Toure lamented the poor penetration of telecommunication in Africa (with the exception of Nigeria). He also noted that the Internet penetration is also very low because "we have to log on to America to get information and to send information, we also have to log on to America." As such, African nations spent not less than $400 million yearly (Akpore, 2008). O' Farrell & Treinen, (2002) observe that Internet access costs less than a month's average income in US while in Uganda it costs more than a month's average (per capital) income. According to them the digital divide is overlapping: between the old and young, men and women, rich and poor, urban and rural and also between developed and developing countries. Chisenga, (1999) also observes the dominance of the English language and content that target the needs of the users in the USA. Governments around the world are calling their citizens to produce local content in their languages and publish on the Internet. For Africa to be able to benefit from the GII, African librarianship should evaluate their achievements so far; and make necessary changes towards attaining its mission. ICTs should be embraced as a matter of urgency, as an indispensable tool for enhancing innovation, competitiveness and ushering in other opportunities in the achievement of our collective developmental objective, in particular the MDGs so as to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor (Anuforo, 2007).

Problems of African Librarianship
To determine specific reasons for this unexpected lack of use, much effort has been put into researching the problems facing libraries and information services on the continent. Mostert, (2001) discusses the problem as:

i. the introduction of an anachronistic and inappropriate colonial model,
ii. inappropriate training of library staff,
iii. deficiencies in determining specific needs through analysis,
iv. lack of co-operation among agencies involved in library-related work, and the
v. absence of sustained effort to achieve an alternative framework

Plessis, (2008); Mchombu, (1991) identify three causes of African libraries' inefficiencies as:

i. The burden of Anglo-American model that imposed on the African situation, making the library an "alien institution"
ii. Overall neglect of the information users at the expense of information work
iii. Reliance on the information and knowledge base of the developed countries.

African libraries (particularly in Anglophone countries) were models of those of Europe and so also the curriculum; and have not met demand, have been left confused and demoralized (Sturges, n.d). Assiimwe, (2007) also notes that libraries were built and managed by people whose knowledge was imported from Britain and America and served the information needs of small population of the people. The problem with the Anglo-American model adopted by African librarianship is articulated in Sturges, (n.d) as:

the library profession serves the culture of its nation and region, it fails when it does not respect this imperative; programmes of education for librarianship fail if they concentrate on the generic to the exclusion of the geographically specific.

The reasons for non compatibility of the two information cultures are based on the following points:

i. Anglo-American information culture is basically written and print while the African's is oral.
ii. About 70-80% of Africans live in rural areas while rural dwelling is almost insignificant in the US and UK
iii. 96% of the developed countries are literate while more than 80% of developing countries are illiterate
iv. Access to information is easier and inexpensive while it is difficult and expensive in Africa.

The public libraries in Africa have not been able to find its footings ever since. Librarians who are managers of information were trained to manage not African libraries but libraries modeled to the colonialists who established them. Sturges, (n.d) observes that African librarians function better in Europe than Africa. Aina, 2004; Matare 1997 observe that the majority of the people who use the libraries in Africa are the people who have formal education. The African elders who are still socializing in the African culture are left out.

Lack of Africa's classification schemes is one of Africa's problems that impede access to information. The Western classification and cataloguing rules are used in most African libraries but they are irrelevant to the needs of Africa. Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme, UDC and Bliss, LC all reflect cultural imperialism. We need a classification scheme for African history, languages and technology. Jegede, (2007); Aina, (2004); Bertelsen, (1996) also share the same view. Olanlokun, 1999/2000 comments on the absence of books published in indigenous languages, remarks that Nigeria has over 200 indigenous languages and that language is the vehicle of culture. Plessis, (2008), views a true African public library as a "Community kitchens" where information of all sorts are served to every member of the community as opposed to "Food Silos" where class is a prerequisite for services.

Modern information management

Modern information management therefore requires a lot of flexibility in terms of library space and services. Freeman, (2005) conceptualizing the library of the 21st Century, views it as the only centralized location where new and emerging information technologies can be combined with traditional knowledge resources in a user-focused, service-rich environment that supports today's social and patterns of learning, teaching and research as opposed to the Internet that isolate people. He proposes a library that will offer 24 hour access with critical services and technology provided and located when and where they are needed. Information managers in this age should be proactive, visionary and be aware of the happenings in the new information environment. Many information managers seem not to be clear "about the importance of their services within the emerging information society (Calanag, 2003). McMemey (2007) is of the opinion that modern libraries should emphasis two distinct but vital areas, reflecting on and championing of best practices; constant revisiting of what we do as professionals to ensure that our core values are continually communicated to the wider society.

Prospects for African Librarianship

African librarianship has the immense potential to pull Africa out of the cultural crisis caused by decades of colonialism and misdirection. Matare (1997) proposes the fostering of the libraries in the structuring and restructuring of an African culture. The overall expectation of libraries and librarians are two folds: providing access to information to fight ignorance, poverty and disease; and harnessing Africans indigenous knowledge and uploading them to the global information infrastructures.

a. Accessibility issues

It is certain that Africa needs information to tackle underdevelopment. In planning for library development, Africa's economic conditions must be considered. We may not be able to build ultra modern libraries or acquire the latest ICTs for now, but we should adapt what is suitable to African way of living, and make efforts to improve on our best practices.

Core values: There is a strong need to have librarians who are committed towards the development of libraries that will satisfy the information needs of the society. Mchombu, (1990) views the anatomy of poverty in Africa as the key determinant of the objectives and philosophy of librarianship in Africa. He remarked that the library profession does not operate in a vacuum. The public libraries in Africa should play a vital role in social-economic development. It is important for the public libraries to provide basic or physiological needs, ecological self esteem or self actualization. Therefore information management in Africa should gear towards a user-centric information services.

User centered information services: For many years, severe criticism has been levelled against the public library system for allowing literacy to be the prerequisite for reaping the benefits offered by the public library (Mosert, 2001). The modern Information management is purely client-centric. African information managers should be armed with this new way of thinking in information management. It has been noted that a large percentage of African people lives in rural areas and that they are illiterate, are mostly farmers or entrepreneurs. This fact should form the bases of information work. African users should be provided with information in all formats to cater for both the illiterates and literates

Information in all formats: The library should provide information in the appropriate formats. Audio-visual materials such as posters, charts, diagrams, tape/slide presentations, films, cassettes, and recorded or radio programs and also easy do-it-yourself manuals, pamphlets, newspapers, ICTs and

other materials that can be read by literate users. Traditional ICTs are: radio, television, fixed line telephones, facsimile machines; the new ICTs consist of computers and specific data processing applications accessible through computers (e-mail, Internet, word processing, and other data processing applications. ICTs are credited with the ability to bring positive change.

Oral transmissions: This could take the form of group discussions, person-to-person transmissions. Oral transmissions play a very important role in many non-literate societies and should therefore be harnessed for the biggest effect. Extension information managers use oral transmission a lot to make sure information gets to the grassroots. Researches on information needs of the rural dwellers have shown that their sources of information are mainly through political leaders, community leaders, and cooperative societies. Adebowale, (1998) reveals the sources of information for people in local government areas in Lagos State as town criers, cooperative societies, peer groups, churches/mosques, professional meetings and government information department. Libraries can use oral medium to attract users to the libraries.

Community information services: The public libraries should also embark on community information services as a means of eradicating, alienation and deprivation in African society. Every community has a peculiar information need. In Enugu, the Library Board's first mobile library started in 1958 as part of UNESCO Pilot Projects in Africa, library resources were taken to miles away in remote areas, schools, hospitals, prisons and local governments (Ude, 2006). The camel library in Kenya is also a good practice. Udeajah, (2008) reports that University of Nigeria Nsukka published newspapers in Nigeria's three main languages, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa to convey special information especial in the areas of healthcare and agric in such a way as they would be readily accessible to the grassroots noting that 70% of the population dwells in the rural areas.

Literacy campaign: In today's global information society, non-literate people are at a permanent disadvantage. Literacy is a right and a capacity that is fundamental to overcoming poverty. Literacy programmes should be consistent. It has been observed that when literacy programmes are not continuous, the people lapse back to illiteracy. Public and school libraries should organize literacy programmes.

b. Creation and integration of local contents

The information society is concerned about culture. There is a common desire to ensure that the development of an information society enhances and strengthens the home culture, and wherever possible promulgate it elsewhere.

Indigenous knowledge mining: Indigenous knowledge mining can be done by oral recording which will eventually be repackaged. With the help of ICTs such recordings can be digitized and copied into the Internet.

Digitization projects: A lot of digitization projects are being undertaken on the continent. Most universities in Nigeria are digitizing their theses and dissertations. The National Library of Nigeria recently embarked on the digitization of newspapers. The problem often encounter in digitization project in Nigeria is lack of skills. Digitization skills are being regarded as core skills for anyone who wishes to be a librarian in the 21st century.

Recommendations:
To be able to meet with the challenges of the information society, stakeholders should assess what they do as information agents. This paper therefore recommends that:

The library and information science curriculum: The library and information science curriculum should include teaching of oral traditions and audio visual materials and technologies in order to produce information workers who will be able to provide relevant information using all formats in delivering information to the majority of the population. The Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies of the University of Ibadan and of University of Nsukka, Nigeria offer courses in oral archives and audio visual materials. Information technology should also be included in the curriculum. This will equip the information managers with information technology skills.

Research promotion: Research promotion will advance the knowledge on African librarianship. Librarianship is a profession and not an occupation. With a lot of researches going on and the introduction of computer networks, Africans are accessing local contents. Government agencies and non governmental organization should sponsor research

Professional skills: Modern information management demands that information professionals assume new roles. Some of the new roles are:

- Multi-media user – conversant with both new and old ICTs
- Intermediary – connecting information to the users
- Enabler – making information use possible
- Educator – knowledgeable enough to impact change

- Evaluator - matching users with right information
- Advocate – pleading the course of the users
- Innovator – applying various techniques of information service.

To be able to play these roles a wide range of skills are required. Among the skills are professional skills. Professional independence is needed in relation to management decisions and the need for librarians to understand the importance of public relations in promoting the value of their work. When there exist poor communication between the librarian and the information user, information service become ineffective.

Written information policy: A written information policy should be made a prerequisite. The lack of an information policy coordinating the acquisition, organization, and dissemination of information, tends to be a major problem in all the African countries. The absence of such policy leads to poor coordination between stakeholders as well as to unnecessary competition and duplication of efforts. It also often leads to an unnecessarily strict control by governments.

Public/Private Partnership: Public/Private Partnership is needed to sustain library initiatives. The partnership can be between government agencies, national and local, and the library or between private agencies such UNESCO, Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation. A good example of private partnership in Nigeria is MTN-University Connect. With this partnership many universities have access to inexpensive Internet services for research and teaching. Such partnership is needed a lot to develop public libraries.

Advocacy roles: Librarians can act individually at the grass root level, and as a group, through the advocacy of a strong national association to create awareness for the need of information in national development. Governments must be made aware of the importance of accessible information as a prerequisite for development. A successful implementation of community information services with developmental agents working in rural areas can motivate government into increased financial assistance to library and information services.

Conclusion

Librarianship in Africa has reached a crossroad. It either remains insensitive to the plight of the majority of Africans who are hungry, poor and generally underdeveloped, or reassess, re-orientate and proactively fight illiteracy which is the major

factor militating against human development. Any information development plan or project to be undertaken must be based on Africa's peculiar information culture that is basically oral. However, Africa must embrace ICTs which is the new tool for modern society. Basically there should be a suitable balance between the universal information culture and the local information culture. The new model will be less formal, less book-oriented information service, deeply rooted in indigenous information systems and targeting the real information needs of both the literates and illiterates.

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