

Strengthening Public Library Funding in Nigeria through Innovative Activities

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Abstract

Past political leaders of Nigeria had envisioned the public library as a foundation of a literate population, an educated citizenry, and a free democratic society and so supported it generously. The support from the succeeding political leaders has now waned and the majority of public libraries in Nigeria are either experiencing declining or static public funding. Policy makers today often acknowledge, and yet pay only lip service, to Nigerian public libraries. This paper explores the various local, national and global opportunities outside of state public funding that are available to be exploited by Nigerian public libraries and public librarians and other stakeholders through vigorous, concerted and sector-wide advocacy, proposal writing and grant seeking activities. The paper emphasises the imperative for public library stakeholders to promote the social and development relevance of public libraries through these initiatives.

Keywords

Public library, Budgeting, Public funding, Non-public income, Innovations, Nigeria

Background

Though there were some forms of public library service in Nigeria before 1955, such as that provided by the Lagos City Library (established in 1932), the history of public libraries in Nigeria actually started

in 1955 with the promulgation of the first public library law by the defunct Eastern Nigerian Regional Government. The period spanning from 1955 to 1980 would appear to be the golden era of public libraries in Nigeria. This is because the public libraries in Nigeria within this period enjoyed tremendous support from the political leadership that demonstrated serious commitment to building the literacy and intellectual capacities of their citizens. As Mchombu (1991) and Mambo (1995) have noted, during this period in Africa, the public library received as much priority in government business as other essential services like hospitals and schools. With this level of support, Zeleza (2000) noted that library systems in Anglophone Africa (of which Nigeria is one) experienced rapid development during the period. Thus, the library was given a top priority and librarians endeavoured to build quality library collections by concentrating on acquiring materials at an exponential rate, recruiting and training staff both in local and foreign library schools in order to equip them with the requisite knowledge and skills that would enable them to manage the libraries. Funding came not only from the establishing authorities, but also from bodies such as UNESCO, the British Council, Ranfurly, Carnegie Corporation of New York, etc. This is why between 1955 and 1967, the defunct Eastern Regional Government of Nigeria was able not only to build its headquarters in the regional capital of Enugu, but also five other branches.

Unfortunately, government funding of public libraries in Nigeria has not been salutary since the 1980s. With the balkanization of the three regions and later four of the country into the present 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, there is now a public library presence in each state of the Federation, with some state public library systems having branches in some local government areas. However, while some might be enjoying improved public fund allocations, the majority are either experiencing static or declining allocations. For

instance, in his study of public libraries in Edo and Delta States in the South-South Nigeria, Emojorho (2005) reported that the libraries were performing poorly in most aspects due to appalling resources. The bane of public libraries in Nigeria is poor funding, and every other problem confronting them emanates from that (Opara, 2008). Information buying power of these libraries has been declining over the years as a result of static budgets, inflation and exponential growth in the literature of all kinds and of all formats.

Adequate levels of funding are critical to the success of a public library in carrying out its functions. Without suitable levels of funding over the long term, it is impossible to develop policies for service provision and make the most effective use of available resources. A public library that operates with “hand-to-mouth” funding is unlikely to be able to undertake strategic projects to grow its services. Where a public library does not have a purpose-built library, or where there is need for a new library building, money is needed to build and maintain it. Collections of new books and periodicals require money for their replacement and funds are also needed to maintain and update ICT facilities in these digital times. Human resources need to be employed and trained and retrained.

According to Kar et al (1999), over 10 million journal articles are published annually besides new items, editorials and articles that are appearing in popular print media. This figure may have doubled since considering the overwhelming impact of ICT on publishing. The authors further observed that while there is a deluge of information on one hand, the cost of collecting, processing, storing and disseminating information has been escalating. Estimates show that a three to four fold rise in library budget was needed by the year 2000 to maintain the same acquisition levels as in 1990 (Kar et al, 1999). This means that this amount of rise or more in budget will be needed by 2012 to maintain the same level of acquisition as in the year 2000. As Nigeria’s population grows, and literacy and school enrolment levels continue to rise due to successes in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, there will be a corresponding increase in the population of potential and actual users of public libraries. The need for significant increases in the funding of public libraries will be heightened by these

developments, as well as the digital era challenges such as the need for digital infrastructure, delivery formats, licensing and copyright regulations.

Problem Statement

The heavy and almost exclusive reliance on government funding appears to be at the heart of the funding crisis that Nigerian public libraries face. Although the problem is not peculiar to Nigeria, it is much more severe and constraining. The United States National Centre for Education Statistics (2000) reported that 77% of the incomes of public libraries in that country were acquired from local funds, 13% from states’ funds, 1% from federal funds, while 9% came from non-public sources such as user fees, donation/grants, etc. This shows four levels of funding arrangement involving the municipality, state and Federal Governments and non-public sources. By contrast, Nigerian public libraries depend almost totally on government public funding for their sustenance.

Not only are the funding patterns of public libraries in Nigeria and the USA different, the percentage from non-public sources for public libraries in Nigeria is hardly up to 1%. This is because most public libraries in Nigeria have not started to explore these sources of funding. While public libraries in the USA have policies and programmes on fund-raising from non-public sources, those in Nigeria do not. According to Coffman (2004), total reliance on public funding of public libraries has two significant disadvantages. In the first place, with no alternative source of funds, when the economy is in crisis and there is a cut in the budget or when the budget is static as a result of government’s poor appreciation of the role of the public library (as is the case in Nigeria), there will be no option but to cut hours, cut subscriptions, close branches, owe staff salaries and other entitlements, etc.

Secondly, the public library must compete with other essential and often pressing social service institutions like hospitals, schools, etc, from the limited public fund. Thus, even improved library services and high demand for services are unlikely to earn the public library the sympathy of the funding authorities. Moreover, Nigerian political leaders often prefer to spend available financial resources on projects which have immediate impact on the people

or which in their calculation could translate into votes during elections.

Objectives

The poor funding of public libraries in Nigeria requires that public libraries wean themselves from their exclusive reliance on government funding and develop a more diversified income base. The ways to achieve this is through innovations in income generation and budgeting. This need motivated this paper. Accordingly, this paper explores some budgeting innovations and the various local, national and global opportunities outside of state public funding that are available to be exploited by Nigerian public libraries and public librarians through vigorous, concerted and sector-wide advocacy, proposal writing and grant seeking activities. The paper also aims to serve a call to action by public library stakeholders to take control of their own destinies to promote their social and development relevance through these initiatives.

Budgeting Innovations

The development of the public library budget is one of the library director's most critical functions. In Nigeria, public libraries are usually provided with templates by the establishing governments to guide them in preparing their annual estimates. Thus, they are constrained by budget frameworks and limits imposed on them by their establishing authorities, which often do not cater for their peculiarities as the public libraries. Notwithstanding these constraints, innovative and dynamic public library directors will usually find ways to improve the income sources and budgets of their libraries by being adequately knowledgeable, skilled, self-motivated and aggressive to harness the multifarious income generation opportunities that exist in their local, national and global environments.

A fundamental issue that such a library director needs to consider is what would be an adequate library budget in the context of its situation dictated by its goals, the needs of its immediate community, and the level of services it seeks to provide to its existing and potential users. The rest of this paper collates and discusses from the literature some of the useful guides and recommendations on budgeting and alternative income generation opportunities that Nigerian public libraries should explore.

Budget Adequacy

What benchmarks are used to determine if a public library budget estimate is adequate? This question is critical because funding mechanisms for libraries that are not based on objective analysis of current and future needs impair both short and long-term planning (Allen and Dickie, 2007). While standards for academic, special and school libraries may be found helpful in determining funding benchmarks, public library standards do not provide such helpful guide. Public library managers need to know that the most concrete and realistic measure of the adequacy of their library budget is the per capita expenditure by the library. In turn, knowing the adequate budget enables the public library manager to determine the level of existing shortfall and the magnitude of efforts needed to bridge the gap.

Public Funding Adequacy

A public library is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment (Gill et al, 2000). This implies that the public library in preparing its budget estimates will first of all determine the population to be served and thereafter determine the per capita. The resultant figure will be the estimate for the year. This is a formula-based budgeting and according to Allen and Dickie (2007), such budgeting may provide more stability and render the library less vulnerable to disproportionate cuts

Opara (2008) has argued that for higher level of funding to be obtained from public fund allocations, the public library managers would need to make extensive use of lobbying. The requirements for successful lobbying include an understanding of the workings of both the legislative and executive arms of government and the ability of the management and board to state clearly and persuasively how the library will benefit the people to be served. The elements that are most useful in acquiring political support for the library budget are an understanding of political pressure points and the willingness and ability to lean on them (Mason, 1990). Library budgets, according to Lux (2007), have a lot to do with how politicians see libraries. To this end, the use of a multifaceted approach involving lobbying, advocacy and friends of the library group could change the

negative attitude and poor rating of public libraries in government priorities.

Furthermore, it may be helpful if the library manager gives the approving authorities additional information which may help the library's case, such as: population of children, adults and the handicapped who use the library; number of users who are turned away daily because of inadequate reading space; institutional affiliations of users to show that the library caters for full-and part-time students of institutions of learning in the state including distance learners; role of the public library as a critical link to the education of the state's citizenry and its role in the reduction of illiteracy which is one of the cardinal Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Books and Materials as Consumable Items

In preparing the library's estimate, the library manager is enjoined to include books and other materials as consumable items. It is a well known fact in library practice that stock-building is a continuous addition of new titles of books, new editions of available titles and subsequent issues of periodicals. Treating these items as consumables ensures that fund is allocated on annual basis instead of only occasionally.

Pluralistic Income Generation Opportunities and Innovations

It has become increasingly necessary for public libraries to seek alternative sources of revenue to support activities that were once thought to be the responsibility of the establishing authorities (Burhingame, 1995). In like manner, Kemmis (1998) argues that if libraries are to meet the increasing demands of technologically savvy clientele while maintaining quality collections, they must actively seek alternative funding for high-tech services that are now considered commonplace by the populations they serve. The decline in government funding has made it expedient for public libraries in Nigeria to seek for alternative/additional sources of funding in order to be able to sustain the levels of services which, hitherto, statutory allocation catered for and also improve on those services. In pursuit of alternative funding, Nigerian public libraries must do the following: seek and obtain the support and cooperation of their boards and their supervising

ministries; manage the support appropriately so that it does not overshadow the library's cardinal duties; tolerate and manage the risks and uncertainties which go with the pursuit of alternative funding; undertake entrepreneurial and income-generating activities that should however not be in conflict with the library's core services; ensure that they operate within the limits of the legislation establishing them and defining the scope of their library services; seek to change any legislation that is considered to be an impediment to the effectiveness and efficiency of their operations as public libraries in the modern society.

Various opportunities and associated strategies exist for improving and diversifying the level of public library funding in Nigeria, as follows:

Contractual Services

These are services that the public library may perform either for other libraries or for individuals, organisations or other governmental agencies (Sager, 1989). A form of contract that can be realistically done here is between the public library and other types, particularly school libraries to provide special services such as production of Braille books for the visually impaired students, training school librarians for information literacy teaching. Public libraries in Nigeria can also enter into contract with their respective state governments to supply processed books to their school libraries. Furthermore, public libraries which have the facilities and capacity could enter into contractual relationship with institutions of higher learning which lack the facilities for bindery services.

Charging Users for Services and Membership

The public library can charge special fees for research services and information work for business and private clients. These services are based on quick and excellent information retrieval and/or customised research projects. According to Warner (1987), establishing a successful fee-based operation within the library takes a careful professional planning, detailed needs assessment, energetic marketing, and good business sense and practice. According to Sager (1989), services such as online computer searches could be established and charged for. Online reference services could be paid for to cover the cost of computer connect time and telecommunications.

Another fee-based service is photocopying. The libraries should charge enough to generate surpluses to cover the library's own internal photocopying needs (Lynch, 1988). Public libraries should heed the advice of Sager that if charging a fee makes it possible to offer a service or resource that would otherwise be unavailable, the administrator should certainly consider that approach. Fee-based services can also contribute to corporate giving. If the customers are satisfied, new resource for the public library may be obtained from corporate and related business partners, especially if they are satisfied customers (Rader, 2000).

Memorials

Memorials are a positive means of support to the public library, and will be attractive to Nigerians who can afford it. It involves donating newly acquired books or old but still useful and other library materials in memory of a beloved one. There may be a book plate noting by whom the book/s or material/s was or were donated and in whose memory. Many libraries, according to Sager (1989), have found that memorial gifts can be significant supplements to their book budget and that can sometime lead to substantial gifts or an endowment for additional memorial. To facilitate donations and obviate the possibility of getting materials not needed, public libraries should, in their gift policy, draw up a list of needed projects ready to be suggested to an individual or organisation interested in donating to the library.

Open Access Resources

Provision of access to information is the cardinal objective of the library profession. With limited funding, public libraries in Nigeria can avail themselves of the open access resources in order to improve services. Open access (OA) resources are those online resources that users can access without financial barriers, thus saving money to take care of other needs. One way to access an open access journal is to check the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). There is also the Open J-Gate, a service launched in early 2006 in India. This is another index to articles published in English language Open Access Journals. One fear which users have expressed over open access resources has

to do with the potential doubtful quality of some of these resources. However, out of over 3500 journals indexed by Open J-Gate, about 2000 are peer-reviewed, and that database has provision for limiting a search to peer-reviewed journals only. There is no doubt that access to open access resources will help improve public library services in Nigeria, provided that the public libraries have Internet connectivity in place possibly through cybercafés run by them.

Entrepreneurial Activities

Public libraries in Nigeria need to develop visions and ideas to experiment with new and creative means to fund their libraries. Entrepreneurial ventures such as book trade, printing, publishing, sale of works of art and handicrafts and cyber cafe are good revenue yielding undertakings from which public libraries can supplement their funding. These undertakings require proper planning and staff with entrepreneurial sense. The book depot can be relied upon for un-pirated primary and secondary school textbooks and popular titles. Because of the possibility of lack of initial capital for a take-off, public libraries can go into partnership with publishers in form of franchise.

To ensure the success of the venture, the libraries will need to seek the support and cooperation of their respective state's Universal Basic Education Boards and state governments. Publishing, printing and book trade are business undertakings that public libraries should be familiar with. A public library with the space but without the experts can lease such a space to a private caterer to establish and run a restaurant until such a time when the library is able to have trained staff to manage the enterprise. Being run by a public institution as a staff canteen, such a restaurant is likely to attract the confidence and patronage of the public.

All these need entrepreneurial public librarians led by a proactive, entrepreneurial and innovative directors who will use their vision, ideas and courage to experiment with these new and creative ways to supplement other library funds. Of course, the acid test for the success of any of these entrepreneurial initiatives is its ability to generate surpluses beyond its accurately assessed visible and invisible costs, for growing the quality of the public library services.

Community Aid

In Nigeria, rural communities that are often mostly neglected are usually excited at the prospect of having government presence. To this end, library boards in the country should approach communities for support in establishing branches. Such support could come in form of providing the building and the furniture. With their contribution, the communities would see the library as their own and their constituents will avail themselves of its services. In Edo State in South-South Nigeria, one local government council in 1995 renovated and stocked a branch of the state library in its area. This public library/community partnership will facilitate the establishment of community information services which assist individuals and groups with daily problem-solving and with participation in the democratic process.

Grants from Foundations and Corporate Bodies

Several international agencies such as UNESCO, Carnegie Corporation, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, the British Council, Book Aid International (Ranfurly), Books for Africa, etc, have supported public libraries in Nigeria. Some of these agencies such as Book Aid International, have since withdrawn their support to Nigerian libraries for various reasons, some of which may no longer be valid. There is the need to step up action to seek financial support from grant awarding agencies such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Grants can be excellent means of supplementing funds for special projects such as bridging information gap through the provision of information and communication technologies. Private grant makers usually avoid donating money for ongoing operating expenses (Ezzell, 1995). They are usually interested in new innovative, special and extra service such as provision of ICTs to bridge existing information gap. It is for this reason that Summerford (1995) noted that donors want to support projects that will empower citizens and result in long-term improvement in the country. Once suitable projects have been identified, it is time to search for grant awarding bodies from the local community, or from regional development, national and global locations. For instance, public libraries within the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria can approach the Niger Delta

Development Commission for grants. Some of the international grants awarding organizations are:

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation: The international library initiatives of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are dedicated to the development of international activities with libraries serving the general public throughout the world to enable all individuals to improve their lives with information and technology.

Access to Learning Award: This award, worth US \$1 million, is given each year by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations Global Libraries Initiative in recognition of innovative efforts of public libraries or similar organisations outside the United States to connect people to information through free access to computer and the Internet.

Books for All: This is a library project aimed to provide children and young people in developing countries with books. Public libraries wishing to establish small libraries to enlarge existing collections or to improve the quality of school libraries may receive support from this organization.

Guust Van Wesemael Literacy Prize: This award is a contribution to IFLA's efforts to promote literacy in developing countries. Its focus is public library or school library works.

IFLA Funds, Grants and Awards: IFLA administers a number of grants to provide funding for new and exciting projects in the field of librarianship.

It is also important to note that there are many new emerging possible sources of funding for public library services from various non-English countries and organizations (e.g. China) that may be desirous of gaining footholds in the international arena for grant giving. The Internet provides a very valuable tool for discovering them.

Finally, public libraries should recognise the important role of a well written grant project proposal, and the imperative to first understand and follow the guidelines and requirements published by the grant awarding bodies. Consultants may be use in the proposal writing on a commission for success basis.

Inter-Library Networking and Collaboration

The underlining assumption in a network environment is that there is benefit for every participating library. Therefore, a very effective and creative method to stretch public library budgets is through resource sharing (Rader, 2000). Rader observed that libraries have been cooperating with one and another for many years, but that the extent of resource sharing needed at this time and in the future surpasses everything librarians have done previously in this regard. Apart from networking to share resources, Nigerian public libraries need collaborative arrangements for class action pursuit of vigorous public library advocacy and media campaigns across the country on various fronts such as education and literacy conferences and federal and state legislatures.

There are expected potential challenges that associate with library networking efforts including financial constraints, non-availability of equipment, reluctance to standardise and coordinate activities, resource building and sharing, and exchange of information and ideas that comes with such networking (Kar et al, 1999). Also often constraining class action collaboration are the different situations of public libraries in different jurisdictions across the country, as well as regional, political party, leadership and personality divides.

But these problems can be overcome with the right attitude and adequate motivation and dedication, as well as necessary and mutually beneficial compromises. Public libraries in Nigeria may not need to start with a national network or collaborative arrangement, but zonal networks which can merge later into a national one. With the backing of the Nigerian Library Association and its public library interest group, and aggressive promotion and fund-raising by the libraries, the project stands good chances of success.

Conclusion

As government funding of public libraries in Nigeria has declined in most cases, public libraries are in dire need of a diversified funding system. Total reliance on government funding will only lead to perennial incapacity to meet users' growing and changing needs and the concomitant drift of our public libraries into crises of relevance. The various opportunities that have been highlighted and discussed

above have been tried successfully in different parts of the world. However, the focus of our public librarians on government sources of funding for their operations and growth appears to have blunted their awareness, appreciation or action towards seeking other sources of funding. Such a stance, apart from depriving Nigerian public libraries of growing and improving services to their publics and clientele, is also depriving public libraries and librarians of public recognition and valuation of their professional abilities and worth. This paper is a clarion call to action for a change in the current situation through vigorous innovative approaches to income generation and budgeting by Nigerian public library directors.

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