

# Strategic Enhancement of Public Library Functionality: The Role of Stakeholders

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**Abstract** - This study is on Strategic Enhancement of Public Libraries Functionality in Delta State, Nigeria: The Role of Stakeholders. Descriptive research was used for the study. The population for the study was 229. However, the 28 Librarians manning the outreaches (public libraries) and their Assistants (28) as well as 44 non-professionals were purposively used as the sample size (100). The data collection instrument, the questionnaire had three clusters with statements on a 4-point Likert scale. The data were analyzed using frequency counts and Mean scores statistics. The study revealed that challenges hampering the functionality of public libraries include inadequate funding, insufficient qualified librarians, poor infrastructure, poor remuneration and inadequate public relation (PR) by libraries in that other; that the ways to enhance public libraries in Delta State and make them more functional include government provision of adequate funds, proper formulation of public library policies, employment of professional librarians to man the various sections of the library, and frequent organization of exhibitions of resources programme in public libraries; and serious stakeholders involvement in public library Management. This investigation more than before echoed on the need for government as the main stakeholder, to make serious effort in terms of supervising, appraising and implementing, the public library initiatives (as enshrined in the National Policy on Education).

**Keywords:** Improvement Programmes, Stakeholders Involvement, Public Libraries, Stakeholders' Approach, Functional Challenges, Delta State, Nigeria

## I. INTRODUCTION

By tradition, the library plays important role in the improvement of knowledge and, this function can be properly carried out with well-defined library services. As a warehouse of knowledge the library has metamorphosed over time to become not just a building but an access road through which information resources can be given to people, the location notwithstanding Ekanem & Nkanu, (2014). In view of the fact that the human race has changed in a number of ways, it equally should follow that services to man should as well change to mirror its current status in today's society where information is a sine qua non of any society and critical to the functions of the rural dwellers, government and private sectors (Omopupa, 2004). Public libraries are free access and non-profit institutions purposively established to take care of the information needs of every class of patrons in a given community. Public libraries are normally service-oriented. They are usually established and financed by State and Local

government authorities. Public library services arose worldwide together with development in education and literacy programmes. It is a worldwide library and commonly acknowledged as the peoples university because access is not limited to any particular group of patrons and to a certain extent unlike other types of libraries. Each nation has its own public library history - of monarchs, influential leaders, non governmental institutions, philanthropists and town unions. All have made donations to the community for public library development. Public library is a doorway to all kinds of information resources whether economic, political, social and technological. The philosophy of public library is to be respected when looked at against the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (Ejechi, 2018). The manifesto states that the public library is the communities' access point to knowledge that provides condition for independent, lifelong and cultural improvement of social groups and individuals. UNESCO is aware that public libraries are the nerve centre of their communities through their providing accessible space, information resources and services to all and sundry.

As a unit of a nation's social as well as economic engine platform, public libraries are capable of giving access to information in many formats and languages. They contribute maximally to social capital and societal inclusion, hence making communities with libraries stronger in comparison to communities without libraries. Public libraries have been playing a number of roles and they include among others: they have been in the vanguard in the campaign for achieving the numerous challenges relating to nationwide objectives in terms of the war against cultism, HIV/AIDS, prostitution, indecent dressing, misuse of the naira, counterfeit drugs, child labour and human trafficking, armed robbery, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping and other societal challenges. (Uhegbu & Unagha, 2007). At the moment, new information and communication order and millennium development goals (MDGs) and ICT have influence immensely the redirecting, reshaping, and refocusing public library services and operations. (Millennium Development Goals, 2008).

The Delta State Public Headquarter Library is located at Asaba. A look at the spread of coverage of communities as per public libraries appears inadequate. Interview, observation as well as research investigations reports that

the economic situation makes it difficult to balance the spread. To enable functionality of public libraries, librarians in charge must play active role by providing adequate library services to the people; while state as well as local governments, who are stakeholder, must put up programmes that mitigate illiteracy, provide education and enhance social consciousness and equally support libraries funding adequately (Ekanem & Nkanu, 2014). Lots of scholars have investigated public library situation as it concerns rural community information services and a few on tactics for improving the functionality of public libraries in Delta State. This research is to add to the few studies on strategies for enhancing the functionality of public libraries in Delta State, Nigeria.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The exact objectives are to determine the

1. Means of enhancing the functionality of public libraries in Delta State, Nigeria.
2. Issues hampering the functionality of public libraries in Delta State, Nigeria.
3. Roles of significant factors (stakeholders) in ensuring that public libraries are functional in Delta State, Nigeria.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Enhancing the Functionality of Public Libraries*

Public libraries like other libraries are supposed to be playing important function in terms of the general interests of the society through provision of information regarding goods as well as services (Chukwusa, 2018). Through the provision of information it contributes to the general growth of the society. The scholar postulated further that public libraries may as well enhance local trade and industry capabilities through providing available information on self-employment activities, revenue generating projects, loan facilities in addition to State assistance programmes. However, the reverse appears to be the case. Emojorho's (2005) evaluation of the roles and effectiveness of public libraries in nation building reported that public libraries in Nigeria performed poorly in most aspects as a result of inadequate resources. The study concluded that Nigerian Government be required to adequately finance public library services to the people in order to provide education and enhance social consciousness.

Uhegbu and Unagha (2007) on their part noted that Nigeria public libraries have been involved in campaign programmes aimed at taking care of the many challenges relating to nationwide objectives like, the fight against cultism, offensive dressing, prostitution, HIV/AIDS, naira abuse, fake naira notes etc. Also, child labour as well as human trafficking, kidnapping, armed robbery, voting procedures, and other social vices programmes are areas where public libraries should show concern. Some of these

challenges basically could be shown to the general public through film show (virtually). This could make lasting impressions on the general public, but unfortunately enough attention is yet to be given to the libraries in this regard.

Presently, what is in vogue in public library environment in Nigeria is irregular erection of buildings by a number of communities/ associations, and by private personalities; and adequate space provision is not taken into consideration (John, 2016). These individuals sometimes donate journals and books to the public libraries. These display of occasional concern (donations) by the private subdivision or sector such as Book AID International, could not be the end all in terms of making the country's public libraries to adequately provide quality information delivery. Government intervention in this regard is a sine qua non because the present Century is controlled by information and communication technology, the millennium development goals and globalization.

### B. *Issues Hampering the Functionality of Public Libraries*

Aina (2004) and Jain and Lynn (2016) noted that in public libraries the quality of staff is abysmally very low. In fact, the constant absence of government involvement has severely impinged on the quality of services, personnel, infrastructure, remuneration, the overall awareness of public libraries in Nigerian as well as public library usage. Also, inadequate government participation affects funding, affiliation amongst government and the institutions (public libraries) and information services delivery. Public libraries require constant financial support and infrastructure to enable satisfying users' information needs. This would make them to meet up with information services delivery challenges. Adequate Government intervention will ensure correct development of public library standards, improve services delivery and work setting, facilitate infrastructure development and encourage dissemination of quality information services (Ekanem & Nkanu, 2014). Also, Government intervention in terms of injection of required funds for expansion would improve the designing, packaging and delivery of information.

The lame, blind, and deaf are also public library patrons and these need information materials and services in order to develop themselves. For the reason that they require exceptional facilities like talking machines and Braille books adequate funding is required. Lots of public libraries avoid meeting the needs of these patrons reason being that they can't cope with financing their materials. This leads to neglect of the information needs of this category of users. Information materials such as Books and journals which ensure availability of up-to-date and reliable public library services become scarce commodities. Other ICT accessories such as computers that enable faster and expedient service delivery are expensive and mostly imported. Inadequate financing makes it difficult for the libraries to acquire these information resources locally or overseas (Chukwusa, 2017). Presently, what is in vogue, is virtual services. Some

libraries around the world access information resources using Internet. However, in Nigeria, just few libraries can boast of adequate Internet facilities. In fact, Uheghu (2007) acknowledged that nonexistence of Internet facilities in lots of libraries in Nigeria seems to be a root cause of inadequate information service delivery. In fact, the right to use current information resources and sources online would be impaired. Internet facilities availability and perpetuation would bring public libraries to the world, resulting to positive influence on quality of resources as well as services (Orvell-Dio, 2018).

Past years witnessed lots of outcry vis-à-vis the poor reading culture and condition of public libraries in Nigeria, but the state and federal government, give the impression of not understanding the critical functions public libraries play in reducing crimes, corruption and in nation building generally.

The government at both levels is claiming to be in an information oriented economy, yet the same government is not aware of the necessity as well as the need for a well-designed public library (Ejechi, 2018). It is a pity. The researcher cannot go on and on about the importance of establishing a state-of-the art public libraries in Nigeria. Presently, we can accurately pride ourselves of having over 316 public libraries in Nigeria, yet we cannot brag about their being functional. Although, the general assertion is that Nigerians don't have a good reading habit. Yet the Nigerian situation cannot have an enabling situation and information resources that can enable reading tradition (Christopher, 2015). This can be equated with beating a child and disallowing the child from crying?

The exorbitant cost of books is among the various reasons influencing negatively the reading culture in Nigeria. In truth, books have always been exclusively elitist; therefore there is dire need for public libraries in all communities. If a substantial amount from the tax payer's money is assign to public libraries, all and sundry in the society will have access to information and high-quality books.

Statisense in 2017 did a comparative research on the ratio of public libraries to prisons in each of the states in Nigeria (Ejechi, 2018). The report of that study revealed that Nigeria has a total of 316 public libraries. Delta state has the highest number of public libraries (27), closely followed by Edo state (25) and Katsina state (24). In the same study, it was reported that there are 242 Prisons. The 3 states with the highest number of prisons are Adamawa State (17), Borno State (15) and Kaduna (15). The question that needs an urgent answer is: Is the Nigeria government aware that with a serviceable public library, there can be a decline in criminal tendencies, which in the long run could reduce corruption and crime and as well leads to reduction in the number of prisoners? To be sincere, the government at all levels is not seeing the library as vehicle for development and means of solving several challenges we are witnessing as a nation.

### *C. Roles of Significant Factors (Stakeholders) in Ensuring Functionality of Public Libraries*

In an opinion piece written by Omoniyi Ibiatan and published in the PREMIUM TIMES newspaper, the scholar nostalgically narrated his experience while using the library here in Nigeria and overseas (Orvell-Dio, 2018). Ibiatan complained about the condition of public libraries in the country. Concerned citizens like Mr. Ibiatan are to be appreciated for their interest and taking time to put across their concern regarding the condition of public libraries in Nigeria. In fact, Citizen Ibiatan has done his national duty as a stakeholder in the Nigerian agenda and the entire nation believes that the gentleman is not only speaking for himself but also for the general public. It is now left for the library as an establishment executed to serve the public good to meet the verbal expectations and equally surpass the expectations.

The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) through its enabling Act is required to have its presence in the entire states of the federation (Ejechi, 2018). In order to satisfy this mandate, the NLN had been using a good number of its financial allocations in establishing new branches nationwide. It is worth noting that, upon the appointment of Professor Lenrie Olatokunbo Aina as the National Librarian in August 2016, the Librarian acknowledged that the NLN must refurbish its branches nationwide, and as a follow up, his management team decided that as a result of reduced funding, the building of fresh state branches should be discontinued (Orvell-Dio, 2018). Rather available funds must be directed to refurbishing branches presently on ground. This is aimed at making the library users more comfortable, thus retaining the present users and attracting new ones at the same time. That is why NLN in its 2018 financial plan did not make provision for the creation of any new branch library.

Provision was made for the refurbishing of state alms in Lagos, Adamawa, Imo, Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue. This overhauling goes beyond removing leaking roofs as well as painting of walls. The reconstruction exercise consist of providing enough reading spaces for children to promote a reading culture among kindergarten and primary school pupils, provision of stable electricity, making sure the toilets are in good condition with clean running water at all times.

This will enable library users who become pressed to ease themselves not to leave our premises as a result. Aside the renovations, new shelves and books were purchased in 2018. The practice is ongoing. For example, as a follow up, the stakeholders in NLN directed that the internet bandwidth in Area 2 branch should be improved upon immediately for the users of the library.

At the same time, the sum of fifty million naira was set aside in the 2019 budget plan to be used for Area 2 branch. Kaduna, Sokoto, Enugu, Kwara, Edo and Niger state branches were equally scheduled for renovation in the 2019 fiscal year.

Public libraries owned by states are independent of NLN but due to its position as the Nigeria’s apex library, it from time to time leads intervention proposals that could persuade state governments to give serious thought to public library issues. The NLN convene a conference of directors and chairmen of state library boards.

It was held between February 27 and 28, 2018 and 26 State libraries attended the conference. In that meeting, the general condition of public libraries in Nigeria was evaluated. Challenges were identified and likely solutions proffered. Amongst the resolutions reached at the conference was that a public library policy should be developed and presented to the National Council on Education and that if it is to be legislated, the Federal Ministry of Education would continue from there.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was adopted and the population of the study was 229 (37 Professionals and 192 Para-professionals). However, the 28 Librarians manning the outreaches (public libraries) and their Assistants (28) as well as 44 non-professionals were purposively used as the sample size. The data collection instrument, the questionnaire had three clusters with the following sub-headings on a 4-point Likert scale. Section A is on demographic information, while Section B is on factors hindering functionality of public libraries in Delta State. Section C was on ways of making public libraries efficient and finally Section D was on roles of government in making public libraries in Delta State functional. Data collected were analyzed using frequency count and Mean statistics.

#### V. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

TABLE I ENHANCING THE FUNCTIONALITY OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Sl. No.	Suggestions	SA	A	D	SD	Mean Scores
1	Training librarians to meet the information needs of library users.	87	8	3	2	3.8
2	The remuneration of the public library librarians/ workers should be reviewed.	83	17	-	-	3.7
3	Employment of professional librarians to man the library and various sections of the library.	87	10	3	-	3.8
4	Proper formulation of public library policies	90	10	-	-	3.9
5	Govt. provision of adequate funds	90	10	-	-	3.9
6	Provision of valuable information and the incorporation of ICT in their library services.	73	17	8	2	3.6
7	Relationship between the govt. and public library.	75	17	8	-	3.7
8	Reintroducing mobile library service to reach more people in rural areas	67	33	-	-	3.7
9	Computerize library fully and with adequate Bandwidth so that users can easily access the information materials	50	50	-	-	3.8
10	Frequent organization of exhibitions of library resources in public libraries	83	17	-	-	3.8

With 2.00 as cutoff means score, Table I identified all the activities as ways of making public libraries in Delta State functional. All the suggested items were accepted. The most preferred activities were government provision of adequate funds, 3.9; proper formulation of public library policies, 3.9;

Training librarians to meet the information needs of library users, 3.8; Employment of professional librarians to man the library and various sections of the library, 3.8; Frequent organization of exhibitions of resources in public libraries, 3.8 amongst others.

TABLE II ISSUES HAMPERING THE FUNCTIONALITY OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN DELTA STATE

Sl. No.	Suggestions	SA	A	D	SD	Mean Scores
1	Inadequate funding	90	10	-	-	3.9
2	Inadequate qualified librarians	85	15	-	-	3.85
3	There is a gap between services and real information needs	17	50	25	8	2.76
4	Poor organizational structure	-	8	50	42	1.66
5	Lack of library legislation	-	-	50	50	1.50
6	Poor public relation (PR) by libraries	25	50	15	10	2.90
7	Low remuneration of public library librarians	75	25	-	-	3.75
8	Poor infrastructure	85	15	-	-	3.8

Table II revealed that aside 'Poor organizational structure, 1.66' and 'Lack of library legislation, 1.50' all other items (have mean scores above the cutoff point = 2.00) in the table were accepted as obstacles to proper functioning of the public libraries. This means that inadequate funding,

insufficient qualified librarians, poor infrastructure, poor remuneration and inadequate public relation (PR) by libraries in that other were identified as obstacles to proper functioning of public libraries.

TABLE III ROLES OF SIGNIFICANT FACTORS (STAKEHOLDERS) IN ENSURING THAT PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE FUNCTIONAL

Sl. No.	Suggestions	SA	A	D	SD	Mean Scores
1	Making funds available for maintenance and development of more public libraries.	100	-	-	-	4.0
2	Employing more appropriate staff to work in public libraries	90	10	-	-	3.9
3	Providing Internet facilities to the library	85	15	-	-	3.9
4	Having a legislative support for public libraries	85	15	-	-	3.9
5	Sponsoring library staff to workshops/Conferences/seminars.	85	8	5	2	3.8
6	Donating books and other items to help equip the public libraries	90	7	3	-	3.8
7	Placing library development at the top of the list of priorities	70	25	-	5	3.6
8	Govt. through medias, sponsoring and creating awareness of public library services	67	25	-	8	3.5
9	Extending the library building to accommodate more readers and facilities	58	25	17	-	3.4
10	Improved and making power supply a reality	67	30	3	-	3.6
11	Frame library working hours according to the convenience of users.	50	17	8	25	2.8
12	Getting librarians trained/training themselves to meet the information needs of the communities	75	17	-	8	3.4

Table III identified the roles that significant factors (stakeholders) must play in ensuring that public libraries are functional. Item 1, 'Making funds available for the maintenance and development of public libraries had the highest mean score' (4.0). This was closely followed by item 2, 3, 4 (with 3.9 mean score each). 'Sponsoring library staff to workshops/ Conferences/ seminars and Donating books' and 'other items to help equip the public libraries' had 3.8 mean scores each, while the least in the distribution, though, above the cutoff point was 'Frame library working hours according to the convenience of users' 2.8. This means that aside finance which stakeholders must provide, the other 11 items are equally important in order to make the public libraries functional.

## VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Amongst the ways to enhance public libraries in Delta State and make them more functional include government provision of adequate funds, proper formulation of public library policies, employment of professional librarians to man the various sections of the library, and frequent organization of exhibitions of resources programme in public libraries amongst others. Various scholars have identified funding as a central factor. Also, inadequate library staff, inadequate qualified librarians as well as infrastructure are distinguished hindering challenges (Ejechi, 2018). This study finding corroborates Aina (2004) who reported that public libraries are poorly funded and

bereft of qualified staff. Chukwusa (2021) and Uheghu (2007) equally noted that inadequate service provision as well as delivery in a number of public and tertiary libraries in Nigeria is as a result of the absence of adequate infrastructure (e.g. Internet facilities).

On issues hampering the functionality of public libraries, the study found that inadequate funding, insufficient qualified librarians, poor infrastructure, poor remuneration and inadequate public relation (PR) by libraries in that other were identified as obstacles to proper functioning of public libraries. This finding agrees with Ekanem and Nkanu (2014). They reported that inadequate infrastructure and funding coupled with inadequate librarians are the critical factors that need attention in the public library world in Nigeria.

Library building places where different individuals can gather seems the best avenue to use in repairing the splintered communities we are part of today (Klinenberg 2018). This is because libraries (public libraries inclusive) are amongst a number of vital categories of infrastructure that we have today. However, presently there is overall loss of faith in government in terms of funding, recognition and remuneration, and the resultant continual loss of commitment with public institutions such as the library (Smith, 2019; Chukwusa, 2017).

Furthermore, on the roles those significant factors (stakeholders) must play in ensuring that public libraries are functional, the study reported that making funds available for the maintenance and development of public libraries had the highest mean score. This means that aside finance which stakeholders must provide, the other 11 items are equally important in order to make the public libraries functional.

This finding agrees with Bibl and Macaj (2014). The scholars noted that public libraries and their stakeholders should take cognizance of the role of positive collaboration and the need to assuage library crisis situations. Partners must think alike, contributing to similar goals, and emphasizing quality services. Sustaining partnership has encouraging impacts on public libraries goals. Stakeholders should contribute through collaboration in terms of book donations and financial assistance for a successful implementation of information, culture, education and literacy programmes in the communities.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the issues hampering the functionality of public libraries include inadequate funding, insufficient qualified librarians, poor infrastructure, poor remuneration and inadequate public relation (PR) by libraries. Amongst the ways to enhance the functionality of public libraries in Delta State include government provision of adequate funds, formulation of public library policies, employment of professional librarians to man the various sections of the library, partnership amongst the stakeholders, and frequent library exhibitions of resources amongst others. At the moment, most patron access information virtually with a snap of button and this has led to reduced number of users in the public libraries. This has brought the question regarding the significance of the library in terms of physical space. Even so, it has been discovered that new technologies encourage users to be more on the move, because they are in search of novel spaces where they can work and engage in recreation. Individuals go to the community library due to its free space for business, to see friends and for their research activities. Truly, the public library has reestablished itself as the third space. Users have home/dwelling place, they have occupation, and they expect something in between, and that something is the public library. We should not allow the public library to die.

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