



**PROVISION OF LEGAL INFORMATION FOR ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Legal information and justice administration is the firmest pillar of government. While legal information provides knowledge of the law, administration of justice means justice according to law. Legal information sources are diverse and emanate from different bodies and institutions, as a result present problems in accessibility and use. Law librarians provide legal information services through open access and internet facilities, CAS/SDI, compilation of bibliographies, indexes and abstracts as well as advocacy method. Though the provision of these services are hampered by factors such as inadequate funding, lack of infrastructures, absence of legal regimes and national information policy there would be no justice administration without legal information provision.*

**Keywords:** Legal information, Justice Administration, Law Libraries.

**Introduction**

Nation states the world over are ranked as a political organization by the extent and efficiency it administers justice. Justice entails the right of every person to a prompt, fair and impartial hearing. Administration of justice means justice according to law; that good be done and evil avoided or that one treats the other as he/she would like to be treated (Njoku, 2007). *Black's Law Dictionary* (2004), states that administration of justice means maintenance of rights within a political community by means of the physical force of the state, which helps obedience to law. Kumar, (2007) sees administration of justice as the modern and civilized substitute for the primitive practice of personal vengeance and self-help. Administration of justice checks the excess of man who is by nature wicked, needs teaching and discipline in order to behave right (Kumari, 2010). Legal information on the other hand is information generated and documented by the governments at all levels, the legislature and judiciary that have the force of law and intended to be used for the administration and good governance of the state.

Legal information enables the government and its agencies as well as the individual to know the law, to find, apply and to update the law. Knowledge of the law by all is a prerequisite for efficient justice administration. Hence, there would be no justice administration without adequate legal information. Documents providing sources of legal information are found in



printed and non printed materials in the law libraries and related institutions. It is a primary duty of the librarians to provide access to materials on legal information which in turn creates awareness of the law and enhances justice administration. Absence of legal information is likely to create a situation prone to disorder, lawlessness and anarchy.

### **Nature and Concept of Legal Information**

Information is a critical product in all human endeavors especially in law which transcends all other disciplines. Law itself is the entire body of principles, precedents, rules, regulations, and procedures intended to assure order and justice in a civilized society. It includes constitutions, legislation, decisions of federal, state and local authorities (Mellinkoff, 1992). All levels of government executive, legislature and judiciary produce legal information and are empowered to disseminate this information for the administration and good governance of the state. As a result legal information is varied in nature and usage depending on the purpose it is intended. This in turn makes legal information lack formal and definitive definition. However, Chandler (2006) defined legal information to include federal or state judicial rulings or administrative decisions, legislation signed into laws or municipal ordinances, rules and regulations, presidential or gubernatorial documents, agency serials or reports, and local ordinances that must be followed by all citizens and government agencies. Legal information is information generated and documented that have the force of law and intended to be used for the good governance of the state.

Again, Chandler (2006) cautions that while legal information affects all citizens the use must be with care by non-legally trained persons. This is because of their specialized nature, organization and the language of legal information. The use of legal and government information resources is problematic, she observed, for a number of reasons.

1. Legal and government information is constantly growing as cases are continuously being decided and pieces of legislation, rules, or regulations are being passed or revised.
2. The majority of legal and government information is created, released, and published by courts, the legislatures, departments and agencies. In order to access this information the researchers and librarians must know the subject of the information, the correct jurisdiction or agency that created and produced the needed information.
3. Users must consider the sets of resources rather than individual volumes, as is characteristics of traditional legal information tools. In order to find the specific legal information, a user must know the set of volumes where the law is published. The rulings of courts are published in sets with additions as new decisions are rendered. In addition, the volumes of these sets are always being revised, new information added, or removed as a result of changes in the law.
4. Legal and government information is published as either “official” publication by government agencies, printers or publishers and “unofficially” by private commercial publishers. The unofficial documents duplicate the official ones.
5. Traditional catalogs, indexes, databases and other finding aids used in libraries for other subject disciplines are some how different from those used to identify legal and government information resources.



6. Bibliographic citations used to find information resources are different for legal and government publication than for other subject disciplines and are unique for each type of resource.

### **Role of Law Librarians in Providing Legal Information for Justice Administration**

It is trite to say that there would be no justice administration without adequate legal information. Legal information enables the citizen to know the law, to find and use the law and to update the law. The law library is the intellectual storehouse, legal information disseminator and a plant of the legal profession (Anaeme 2011). The position and role of the law libraries and the librarians in this regard is therefore critical and unassailable. The role of the law librarian in this context, bearing in mind the nature of legal information, parent institutions and sources, must align with the six principles of law librarianship enunciated by Cohen cited by Okeji (2011). That is to say:

- (i) Law librarians must carry out the policies and purposes of the organization they serve;
- (ii) Law librarians must know those purposes and policies and must also know their readers and their work.
- (iii) Law librarians must be teachers of legal bibliography and methods of legal research
- (iv) Law librarians must provide access to materials through whatever administrative or bibliographic techniques are necessary to meet their readers needs
- (v) Law librarians have the primary responsibility for developing and organizing their libraries and collections and must make conscientious and informed critical judgments in fulfilling that responsibility.
- (vi) Law librarians have a duty to advance their art and their profession in whatever way they can be most effective.

The provision of legal information is an important role for law librarians. The nature of legal information and diversity of application makes it imperative that law librarians should be well equipped to provide current legal information service that would create awareness of the law among the citizens to enhance effective justice administration. These could be achieved in the following ways:

#### *Education and Training*

The law librarian should have a good education and training in law librarianship. Knowledge of basic features of law would be essential. The practice of posting librarians without basic knowledge of the law to head law libraries by some libraries should be avoided. In academic law libraries the law librarian is required to have a degree in law to be appointed the head of the law library. Training of law librarians in the universities and institutes of law could be achieved through mounting diploma programs in law, exchange and in-service trainings, refresher courses, seminars, conferences and workshops. Training of personnel should include re-skilling and re-tooling to embrace and apply information and communication technologies applicable to legal information service delivery.



### *Open Access*

Law librarians can enhance justice administration through open access to legal information to all users. Librarians should maintain professional neutrality and should not allow their personal beliefs or opinions interfere with their professional services. They should not be biased or allow religion or gender to influence dissemination of legal information.

### *Build and Maintain Balanced Collections*

Law librarians in their respective libraries should persuade their parent institutions to build, equip and maintain balanced collections to enhance legal information service. All materials that would enhance justice administration should be freely acquired and disseminated to users.

### **Provision of Current Awareness Services (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI)**

Through CAS and SDI, law librarians could provide their parent bodies and users current legal information relevant to their needs. The use of notice boards, leaflets, cut-outs would be helpful in this regard.

### *Webiography, Bibliography and Reading List*

Compilation of webiographies, bibliographies and reading lists on specific subject matters of interest will go a long way to provide up to date information that would enhance justice administration. Access to varied resources on the internet, electronic sources and printed materials would provide additional sources to legal information thereby enhance justice administration.

### *Indexes and Abstracts*

Indexes and abstracts of cases, legislation, government decisions in white papers and gazettes would provide ready access to legal information need. Law librarians need to expand the production, publication and use of legal indexes and abstracts on current legal issues.

### *Managing Change and Using Technology*

In order to strengthen justice administration through legal information provision librarians need to embrace change as a way of development and employ ICT facilities in information research and retrieval. It is not simply to acquire ICT facilities, they must be used to solve problems, provide prompt, reliable information to decision makers, legal practitioners, judicial officers, law enforcement agents as well as the public on their rights under the law.

### *Advocacy*

Law librarians in collaboration with the Nigerian Library Association, Nigeria Association of Law Libraries and Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) can lobby the government to provide a network of law libraries that would link legal information



institutions and bodies across the country. This would help collate and collocate related legal information for easy access and reference.

### **Challenges facing Law Librarians in the Provision of Legal Information**

There are many challenges and constraints militating against the provision and use of legal information for justice administration especially in developing countries like Nigeria. They include:

*Inherent Nature of Legal Information:* Legal information is diverse in nature, constantly revised and updated. The sources appear in multiple volumes and emanate from various independent bodies. These bodies are scattered and not easy to collate. Chandler, (2006) noted that majority of legal and government information is created, released, and published by different courts, legislatures, departments and agencies. In order to access the information sources the researchers and librarians must know the subject of the information, the correct jurisdiction or agency that created and produced the needed legal information.

*Inadequate Funding:* Law libraries and libraries generally are poorly funded to hire adequate staff and purchase various materials needed for service delivery. Libraries basically render free services to their users. They depend on their respective parent bodies for funding which most often is grossly inadequate to purchase new editions, maintain and preserve older collections.

*Inadequate Library Facilities:* Many law libraries lack necessary facilities to enhance legal information services. These range from poor accommodation, furniture and tools for the job. Most law libraries do not have internet facilities and appropriate search engines to browse the internet.

*Lack of Training and Sponsorship:* The continued training of staff and sponsorship to conferences and workshops is very important in building a strong workforce to provide legal information. Parent bodies and institutions lack the zeal and commitment to sponsor their staff on further trainings, conferences and workshops.

*Lack of National Legal Information Policy:* The absence of a National Legal Information Policy (NALIP) or National Information Network (NAINET) that would collate and collocate diverse and related information sources hamper effective legal information provision, utilization and service delivery.

*Lack of Standards and Legal Regimes:* Related to the above is the absence of standards and legal regimes for the operation of law libraries. This defect hampers effective legal information documentation and service delivery. The need for standards and adequate or purposeful legal regimes for law libraries in Nigeria has been advocated by Anaeme, (2001) and (2007) respectively.



*Libraries not a Priority:* Libraries generally are not a priority on the national agenda. Governments tend to focus attention on those areas that will yield money to them instantly. Libraries are such target areas for budget cuts.

### **Way Forward**

Effective and efficient legal information for justice administration can be achieved through two major ways:

- a. By taking cognizance of the problems relating to the inherent and problematic nature of legal information resources as outlined by Chandler (2006) and
- b. By ameliorating the problems encountered by professionals in providing legal information to various users.

In the first instance professionals/law librarians need to be aware of the diverse nature of legal information resources and bodies generating and producing them. They should be aware of alternative sources and bibliographic citations relating to needed legal information. Law librarians/practitioners should work towards unified access to legal information sources through library cooperation.

The second aspect of the problem could be ameliorated by librarians, institutions and bodies individually and collectively working to enhance legal information utilization. In this respect law librarians and other bodies should seek for improved funds, provide adequate facilities and provide legal information policies and standards for law libraries and their practitioners. The need for staff training, re-tooling, re-skilling through conferences, workshops cannot be overemphasized.

### **Conclusion**

Administration of justice pertains to fair and impartial hearing. It is justice according to the rule of law. Justice administration depends so much on the provision of current legal information. The law libraries are the repositories of the legal documents. Law librarians are specially trained to provide access to the legal frameworks, hence creating awareness of the legal regimes and enhancing justice administration. Though legal information provision is fraught with various problems the provision and utilization of it is sine qua non for effective justice administration.



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