THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN FACILITATING EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets to find out the role of libraries in facilitating effective governance in the contemporary Nigerian democracy. To achieve this, the paper described the various library materials and services and their potentials in ensuring effective governance relating to government functionaries in Nigeria. The paper also perceives that the problem with ineffective Nigerian governments is mostly related to poor information utilization among the government functionaries. The paper therefore advocates that resources utilization and services are the sure strategies that could be used in ensuring effective governance in Nigeria.

Introduction

In Nigeria, it is common to see in organizations, government ministries and parastatals .a room set aside or hall, cramped in some rickety, old tables, chairs and cupboards, put together a bizarre collection of books and magazines with a library inscribed at the door post. But this does not satisfy such institutions' user needs. Nwalo (2003) asserted that a library is primarily set up to acquire, organize, store and make accessible to the users, within the quickest possible time all forms of information materials which they require. The information needed could be for recreation, leisure, self-education or meeting tasks that are considered critical to survival or information that is necessary for the common good of the neighborhood, community and the nation at large. Perhaps, the most important information needed is information that will enable the individual to settle uncertainties and problems, or that will help in decision-making. It then follows that legislatures whose tasks are that of law making for effective governance of the society require accurate, unrestricted, prompt access to library services to enable them perform their duties efficiently.

The American Library Association (1995) stated that democracy and libraries have a symbiotic relationship. As such, it would be impossible to have one without the other. In the view of the association, democracy rested power on the people, libraries on their own part, make

democracy work by providing access to information so that citizens can make the decisions necessary for the governance of themselves. They accomplish this by making knowledge available to all, regardless of age, race, creed, gender or wealth. Libraries provide information that promote civil debate and foster good citizenship. Therefore there is need for libraries to be established in government legislative circles for effective governance in Nigeria. Okiy (2007) stated that government departmental libraries are libraries established in government ministries to collect, organize and disseminate information held in government documents to facilitate government business. Government departmental libraries are available in various government departments such as the National and State Assembly Libraries. Oduranwo (2001) enumerated many of such ministries, which owned libraries that their resources and services facilitate effective governance in Nigerian democracy.

His writing corroborates the findings of Anyanelue (2006), indicating that resources and services are inadequate in these libraries. On their part, Ogundana, Olowosejeje and Barkainde (2003) observed that the present state of development of government libraries in Nigeria is still very pathetic with serious consequences on the socio-economic and political development of the country. Information on government transactions are usually held in government publications such as legislative proceedings, laws and committee reports, bulletins, circulars, monograph (e.g. Reports of surveys, census etc) periodical tables, pamphlets, maps, estimated, gazettes, newspapers and magazines. In the views of Akintunde, (1995) and Akporido, (2005) it becomes the responsibility of the governmental libraries to collect, organize; preserve and disseminate information in these departments for facilitating effective governance in contemporary Nigerian democratic dispensation.

According to Ogundana, Olowosejeje and Barkinde, (2008) government departmental libraries provide the following services with the aim of accomplishing these objectives associated with governance. These services include: the acquisition and processing of materials, bibliographic compilations, reference and information services, database creation, selective dissemination of information, current awareness services and processing services which will in no small measure have impact on governance. Libraries play great role in facilitating effective governance in contemporary Nigerian democracy from various dimensions. In the view of Shera (1976), the library has been from the beginning as they are known to us, a social instrument, they constantly reviewed invention of men working together in an organized society. Early library shows that the clay tablets of Ashurbanipal's Royal library at Nineveh, the papyrus Rolls at Alexandria, the parchment and vellum, codex at Perganusih were all brought together, organized and preserved because these societies needed recorded information for the maintenance of the state, preservation and communication of religious belief, and transaction of commerce. The services also include education of youth, the bequeathing of culture to subsequent generations.

Undoubtedly, it is true that a society stagnates unless it makes constant provision for the injection and absorption of new knowledge. This is because a society as perceived by Shera (1976), is a duality of action and thought, bound together by a communication system that itself is a duality of mechanism and message-that which is transmitted, as well as the manner of its transmission. Based on their premise, one could be informed that in a given society or culture in which language is the medium of communication. Libraries would constitute a network within the total communication system, a subsystem whose effectiveness depends upon the librarian's

understanding of the nature of knowledge and is important to both the individual and society. The library, on the other hand, can be socially effective since its operations are harmonized with an understanding of the ways in which knowledge is generated and flows through the communication channels of a constantly evolving social and intellectual organization. Obviously this had the potentials of changing social structure that in large measure determines how knowledge is translated into action especially as it relates to governance.

According to Lal, Gaumer and Manhica (1999), governance is two-sided: political and economic. The political aspect deals with the way a nation is governed which comprises how the citizens, institutions and business articulate their interests, mediate their differences, exercises their rights and obligations, and agree to relate to an end. In this regard, governance deals with how power is exercised, how open the political process is. How decisions are made, and how much of a voice citizens are given in decision-making and in the management of public affairs. The other aspect of governance is economic. This, on its own part, deals with how societal resources are managed and the role of government in the process of socio-economic development. It also provides the context in which corporate governance is practiced by setting the laws under which corporations are established and the regulatory framework for the conduct of corporate affairs.

It therefore follows that the capacity of African societies and leaders to respond to and address critical challenges as: advancing sustained high economic growth and development meeting basic needs such as food, shelter, housing, clean water and electricity, providing better access to education and health, increasing agricultural productivity, ending civil strife and wars, and reducing poverty, substantially hinges on whether African government departments and leaders are able to effectively match relevant information and action in situations with regard to speed and relevance. Hence, the central place of libraries in governance.

Strategies for Utilizing Governmental Departmental Libraries for Effective Governance

Apart from the traditional strategies of libraries in information provision like the acquisition of needed materials, storage and preservation, and other related functions, the libraries in government circles could effectively use information services to ensure use and application of data, knowledge and information contained in their resources. According to Harrold Librarians' Glossary, (1997), information services entail a service provided by or for a special library which draws attention in anticipation of its potential demand by users. Nwaoha (1998), on his own part opines that information services are set to identify, provide the use of documents on formats accessible to the potential users which could best help the user (like government officials) in their study research, teaching, or work. However, Bunch (1985), listed a number of functions, which can be performed by special libraries as information service, which the writers have adjudged to have potentials on providing refinement as well as effective tools to help government and their officials in formulating policies that would in turn promote governance in Nigeria. Some of these strategies are as follows:

i.   Self-help: As the name suggests, requires that users find the answers to their own problems. The information service input is directed towards selecting appropriate materials, re-processing information in a form that can be readily understood, packaging information, and arranging all these in a form that can be readily understood, packaging

information, and arranging all these materials in a way that is appropriate to the user. This kind of service is most suitable where there is insufficient or lack of trained staff to operate a personal enquiry service.

ii. Support for other information services or for groups of professional workers, etc. where there are adequate services to the public, the greater need may lie in an information service to support the work of other agencies and worker in the field. This could take the form of providing (a) Selective Dissemination of information (SDl) which, in essence, involves channeling information to meet expressed subject interests of groups or individuals: (b) current awareness services (c) a register of problems: (d) press cutting service: (e) loan collections of reference books: (f) publicity and educational materials: and (g) local information.

iii. Information giving can range from simple directional information to complex, such as eligibility to social benefits or civic responsibilities, and may involve steering and to where further help or advice can be obtained without making contact with service itself.

iv. Referral, on the other hand, ·is a more active form of steering in which a contact or appointment is made for the enquirer with an agency who can help. In some cases, it may be necessary to escort the client where they do not have sufficient confidence to make contact with the agency who can help them.

v. Advice is information tailored to individual need. It can be a fairly neutral activity, such as setting out a course of action or options, from which an enquirer must make his actions or her choice, or it can involve evaluation of available information or services and help with choosing.

vi. Practical help with writing letters from filing to making telephone calls.

vii. Advocacy is needed where a client is not capable of obtaining the information, services benefits or justice to which he or she is entitled. A positive identification is made with the client's case, which is then argued in front of officials or courts on the client's behalf.

viii. Community education concentrates more on educating the community as to the service that can help them, their entitlement to benefits or rights under the law, rather than providing an information and advice on a personal basis. Community action can rise out of an analysis of enquires received when it becomes apparent that there is lack of service or facility in the community. The information service plays an active role in precipitating change either by acting itself or alerting individuals and groups to campaign.

x. Counseling requires much time and in - depth probing although it can at one extreme cover simply the act of leading a sympathetic ear to clients who, in externalizing their problems, at its other extreme, counseling can lead on to diagnosis and analysis, with ultimately referral of clients to clinics for treatment. Where casework and diagnosis are involved, then the interviewer needs specialized professional skills.

It is expected that with the use of even some of these strategies, libraries would have imparted essential information necessary for governments and their functionaries to strive for policies that could precisely lift and promote the lives of their citizens, having refined their values, attitudes and appreciators.

Recommendations

It is this paper's submission that for African governments to enhance their governance there is the need to stand up for libraries. Standing up involves support, and firm collaboration in utilizing libraries and their resources in carrying out government responsibilities. This could be done by establishing and maintaining libraries first in every government domain, departments, buildings, residences of government officials would easily have access to and then extend same to the people under the governance. It would also make cultivating and imbibing rights values and attitudes towards libraries with regard to their potentials of refining the sensibilities of the elites when appropriately used.

In the light of this, libraries especially government departmental libraries, should be regarded as more than a building that houses books and data, rather, it should be seen, according to Obama (2005), as windows to a larger world, a place where people have always come to discover big ideas and profound concepts that help move nations forward and the human civilization and existence forward (Obama, 2005). That is why, as he explains, since ancient antiquity whenever those who seek power would want to control the human spirit, they have gone after libraries and books. The idea, he maintains, is that if we can control the written WORD, if we can control what people hear and what they read and what they comprehend, then we can control and imprison them, or at least imprison their funds and vice - versa. Hence, the notion of informed government officials and citizenry which is essential for good governance could be greatly enhanced through the institution and maintenance of good libraries in the land especially in government departments.

It is hereby opined that Africans and their governments should have a re-think on the concept and potentials of information as effective tools for effective governance. For instance, looking at the concept of information according to Vickery and Vickery (1987), information is defined as knowledge or intelligence communicated by word or in written formats, facts or data, knowledge derived from reading or instruction, which has the capacity of influencing behavior. These could be contained according to Utor (2003), in library resources like books, journals, magazines, public and private sector documents of all kinds whether published for mass circulation or unpublished and of restricted or confidential nature, results of research efforts which are made available to colleagues in form of reports, books, articles, and non- print materials. Thus, this paper concludes that for efficient governance in Nigeria, these governments should re-orient their citizens and officials on the need to promote their roles and responsibilities in governance tasks.

Conclusion

The paper hereby concludes that libraries and librarians in government departments must be appreciated and promoted by the governments. According to Obama (2005), they should be seen "as guardians of truth and knowledge and appreciated for their roles as champions of privacy, literacy and independent thinking" which on their own, are essential ingredients for effective governance in Nigeria. Unit libraries manned by librarians should be opened in all government parastatals in Nigeria.

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