PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEM IN NIGERIA: TOWARDS THE CREATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to describe the public library system's role in Nigeria towards the creation of social capital for sustainable development in the knowledge society. It highlights concepts of social capital, knowledge society, and the public library system in Nigeria and its situation. The paper indicates a number of strategies for the generation of social capital by public libraries that include organising programs for children (quizzes and debates), provision of internet-based services, conducting film show programs, organizing voter education programs, collaborating with voluntary associations and organizations, and provision of universal services, among others. It identifies the lack of a proper meeting hall/ room to host or organize community meetings; non-availability of open space for festivals, and social gatherings; traditional library layout and un-conducive atmosphere of the library environment to provide library programs and activities; and lack of community awareness of library functions and services. Inconvenient distance between the library and the community members, inadequate and out-of-date library collections, inadequate ICT infrastructure/ facilities for library services and programs, and lack of library understanding and its role in the services contributing to social capital creation as the challenges in the generation of social capital by public libraries for sustainable development. Finally, the paper came up with suggestion for the creation of social capital by public libraries.

Introduction

Libraries have a recognized social function in making knowledge publicly available to all. They serve as local centres of information and learning, and are local gateways to national and global knowledge (National Knowledge Commission, 2007). The public library is considered to be a living force for education, culture, and information and seen as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women. Public libraries are the ideal vehicle to provide access and support and to foster the spread of vital new technological skills among the population (Library and Information Commission, 1997). They are backbone for the improvement of any society. UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (2022) defined a public library as "the local gateway to knowledge, [and] provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of the individual and social groups". A public library is a library that is accessible by the public and is generally funded from public sources and operated by civil servants. There are five fundamental characteristics shared by public libraries.

The first is that they are supported by taxes, a board to serve the public interest governs them, they are open to all and every community member can access the

collection, they are voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided, and they provide basic services without charge (Rubin, 2010). The role of public libraries should not be limited to providing information but that they can also perform numerous social functions. For example, they may serve as a meeting place to integrate, stimulate and engage people, and prevent alienation (Wojciechowska, 2020). Conducted research shows that libraries have the right resources potential to engage and support local communities. This paper intends to identify how public libraries in Nigeria can provide social capital strategies towards sustainable development in knowledge society.

Social Capital

The term social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), is an "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". Social capital is one of the basic explanatory variables for social inequalities, under-development of a few countries and neighbourhoods, and quality of life. In recent years, the concept of social capital has spread in academic, government, public policy and popular arenas. According to Woolcock (1998), the literature on social capital has expanded exponentially while debates about its meanings, application and measurement have transcended its traditional bases in the disciplines of sociology, economics and political science.

Coleman (1998) used the term 'social capital' as a conceptual tool to synthesize the two intellectual streams of sociology and economics, which he applies to the field of education. He distinguishes between three types of capital: physical, human and social and further identifies the mechanisms by which social capital is generated such as obligations, expectations and trust worthiness of structures, information channels, and norms and effective sanctions. Putnam (1996) is one among those credited with popularizing the concept of social capital in the United States, when he defined social capital as "features of social life-networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives". Putnam (2000), highlights three concept of social capital as that which:

(i) allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily;

(ii) lubricates the wheel that let communities to advance smoothly, where people are trusting and trustworthy, and where they are subject to replaced interactions with fellow citizens; everyday business and social transactions are less; and

(iii) improves our lot by widening our awareness of many ways in which our fates are linked. When people lack connection to each other's, they are unable to test the variety of their own views, whether in the given or take of casual conversation or in more formal deliberation.

Concept of Knowledge Society

The term 'knowledge society' means a society in which the creation, dissemination, and utilization of information and knowledge has become the most important factor of production. In such a society, knowledge assets are the most powerful producers of wealth, side-lining the importance of land, the volume of labour, and physical or financial capital. It refers to a broader area of social structure, including economic, cultural, and political spectrums, where modern technologies and scientific breakthroughs have considerable influence, but more importantly, knowledge activities

play a more significant role across all dimensions (David & Foray, 2002). The knowledge society is driven by technological advances, innovations, and continuous structural and cultural reforms. It is an ideal framework for bringing social equality and prosperity to all relevant individuals. It is a society that operates within the paradigm of the economics of information. It values human capital as the prime input for production and innovation. It is well connected via modern ICTs to the dematerialized economy, and has access to relevant and usable information.

Public Library System in Nigeria

The importance of providing sound public library legislation as an instrument essential for the promotion of information service delivery to the public became necessary in any country. In the Nigerian context, individual state governments are empowered with the responsibility for running public library services in their own states. As outlined by Bello (2012) public libraries in Nigeria, sequel to UNESCO Manifesto on Public Libraries, were established by law, usually by edicts enacted by Chief Executive of the State and rectified by either the State House of Assembly or State Executive Council, as the case may be. However, public libraries in Nigeria are supported by laws enacted by national and state assemblies and probably in some cases, bye-laws made by the local government legislative houses. The present laws that established public libraries in Nigeria have not enabled them to perform effectively the expected functions. However, some of the public library laws have been found to be defective in content and structure (Opara, 2008).

Table 1: Distribution of Public Library in the Six Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria

Geopolitical Zones	No. of State Libraries (Headquarters)	No. of Branches of State Libraries in Local Govt. Areas	Total
North-central	7	18	25
North-east	6	35	41
North-west	7	69	76
South-east	5	37	42
South-west	6	36	42
South-south	6	58	64
Total	**37**	**253**	**290**

Source: Ladan *et al* (2020)

It is observed from table 1 that, there is a state library board serving as the headquarters of state public libraries in the 36 states of Nigeria and the federal capital territory, Abuja. In addition, there are 253 branches of the state library boards located in the local government areas. It indicates that out 774 local government areas only 253 have branches of state public library.

Situation of Public Libraries in Nigeria

Most public libraries are merely reading rooms without a large supply of books, adequate infrastructure, or trained staff with a lack of sufficient sanctioned posts, forcing most services to be operated by non-professional staff, which damages

information organization and services (Ladan *et al*., 2020). Public libraries in Nigeria are in a state of flux. To portray the exciting situation of public libraries, it is appropriate to quote Salman et al. (2014) on *Issues and Trends in the Provision of Public Library Services in Nigeria*, who stated that:

> *Public libraries in Nigeria lack adequate policies, absence of adequate professionals; infrastructural facilities and services, and an absence of awareness and good understanding of the notion of public library services, which lead to low level- utilization of the accessible services by prospective patrons. A number of the teething troubles facing the development of public libraries and their aspiration to offer effective services to their users include insufficient funding, poor stock, dreadful location, absence of sufficient and qualified staff, low morale amongst the little staff, and insecurity of library materials.*

Towards the Creation of Social Capital by Public Libraries in Nigeria

Social capital is an instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between individuals. Public libraries are considered among the relevant institutions that facilitate the creation of social capital in a society. Social capital has been defined as forms of social organization (networks and social trust) that enhance civic engagement and democratic participation (Putnam, 1995). According to Hillenbrand (2005), there is consensus in the literature that public libraries create social capital in a number of ways, to include:

1. promoting civic participation through programs that bring citizens together regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, economic status, culture, or beliefs, breaking down social barriers and encouraging tolerance;

2. promoting democratic ideals, providing free information to all citizens, promoting digital literacy, and fostering informed citizenship;

3. encouraging participation in other communities, thereby increasing social capital (bridging);

4. fostering trust through social inclusion and cohesion, promoting neighbourhood resources and providing an accessible meeting place for all, creating communities;

5. promoting local dialogue and disseminating local statistics; constructing exclusive social capital (bonding); and

6. providing a public space where citizens can work together on personal problems, encourage community participation.

Varheim (2007 & 2008) stated that librarians and public libraries both create social capital. From the point of view of social capital theory, public libraries are considered as universalistic institutions as well as social meeting places. They have been regarded as producers of trust and social capital since they provide universal access to information resources. There seems to be a great notion, certainly in library and information science, that public libraries can generate social capital. Empirical studies on public libraries and social capital have, from the beginning, being orientated towards discovering how libraries make contributions to social capital in the local context.

Strategies for the Creation of Social Capital by Public Libraries in Nigeria

To understand how sustainable development can be achieved in public libraries for creating social capital, certain strategies may be adopted depending on the situation and organizational climate of the libraries. The following strategies may be considered by the public libraries in Nigeria:

1. Hosting cultural and arts activities to encourage diverse community groups.
2. Conducting of book fairs or book exhibitions.
3. Organizing community meetings, virtual meeting or awareness programs on contemporary issues.
4. Conducting outreach programs to remote communities.
5. Organising programs for children (quizzes and debates).
6. Provision of internet-based services.
7. Conducting film show programs.
8. Organizing a voter education programs.
9. Collaborating with voluntary associations/organizations.
10. Provision of universal services.
11. Designing public space to promote casual meetings.
12. Organizing a library workshop/seminar.
13. Organizing/hosting public lectures (Rajendran & Ladan, 2017).

Challenges in the Creation of Social Capital for Sustainable Development

The following challenges have been identified for creation of social capital for the sustainable development:

1. Lack of a proper meeting hall/room to host or organize community meetings.
2. A scarcity of open space for festivals, social gatherings, and parking.
3. Traditional library layout and un-conducive atmosphere of the library environment to provide library programs and activities.
4. Lack of community awareness of library functions and services.
5. Inconvenience distance of the library from the community members.
6. Inadequate and out-of-date library collections.
7. The government's disregard for libraries.
8. Inadequate ICT infrastructure and facilities for library services and programs.
9. Lack of library understanding and the role to be played in the services and programs contributing to social capital creation.
10. Inadequate financial support for public libraries to provide resources and facilities for social capital activities.
11. Limited library working days and working hours.
12. Lack of children's' materials and facilities.
13. Lack of constant power supply to support library services and programs.
14. Lack of library vehicles (mobile vans) for outreach programs.
15. Inability of library directors to implement social capital strategies (Ladan & Rajendran, 2020).

Suggestions for the Creation of Social Capital by Public Libraries

Resources Generation

Resources generation strategies like extended services, investment on infrastructure that could give sustainable development have to be implemented with institutions' and library professionals' joint efforts. It is suggested that budgeting allocation for these libraries should increase, as well as the librarians' freedom and authority to use their budgets to meet users' current needs.

Role of LIS Professionals

In order to survive and thrive, libraries and librarians must develop efficient services from minimum usage of resources and demonstrate an integrated approach of sustainable development from all ways and means. LIS professionals must develop and implement detailed and comprehensive sustainable development strategies and conduct periodic evaluation of the libraries by involving the staff and other stakeholders. If the library professionals are to survive and prosper in an ever-changing digital environment, they must be able to respond effectively to new contexts and challenges. It is suggested that they can collaborate with experts on various fields such as health, environment, internet, banking, marketing etc., to drive community growth and sustainable development.

Role of Professionals/Associations

Library associations at both state and national levels shall take team efforts to impart awareness on significance and implement sustainable development practices such as creation of social capital and other related developmental activities.

Towards the Effective Creation of Social Capital

In view of the present conditions prevailing in public libraries in Nigeria, three major strategies have been suggested for the creation of social capital. Firstly, public libraries can collaborate with voluntary associations to participate in the local community activities. Secondly, they can develop their capacity as informal meeting places for public. Thirdly, they can create social capital as providers of universal services to the public at large.

Conclusion

The greater seriousness of the public libraries in Nigeria with regard to the creation of social capital in order to achieve sustainable development and their role draw much public attention and support in the knowledge society. Public libraries in Nigeria can build social capital by providing public spaces where citizens can work together on personal and community issues. They can also reach out local community foundations that raise and convert financial capital to social capital through grants that brings people together. Therefore, public libraries in Nigeria need to be more imaginative, more willing to adopt and experiment with new technologies and innovations, more open-minded and more pro-active, only then can they be sustained with the technology wave and achieve sustainable development.

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Dr. Abubakar Ladan was born in Kankara, Katsina State and obtained his DLS, BA LS, MLS at BUK and Ph.D. in Library and Information Science at SRM University, Chennai. He joined Umaru Musa Yar'Adua University, Katsina, in December, 2005 as an Assistant Librarian and rose to the rank of Principal Librarian. He served in various capacities as Acquisitions Librarian, Circulation Librarian, Head, Technical Services, Head, Reader Services, and taught UG and PG courses in the LIS Department, respectively. Dr. Ladan was appointed as University Librarian at Al-Qalam University, Katsina, on July 1st, 2022.