

Priorities and Challenges of Actualizing Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives of Library and Information Professionals in Owerri, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: This study set out to investigate areas of priorities and challenges of actualizing sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Methodology: A survey research design was adopted with questionnaire developed in line with the three objectives used as data collection instrument. The population of the study comprises of library and information professionals (LIPs) in Imo State, Nigeria. A total of 62 library and information professionals available during the Imo State Chapter of Nigerian Library Association (NLA) meeting were used as sample size.

Findings: Findings show that sustainable development goals (SDGs) numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 16 and 17 should be prioritized among LIPs. Constraints to effective contribution of LIPs towards realization of SDGs include lack of reliable and accurate data, negligence of LICs by governments, poor perceptions of the library profession, low level of private sector interest in library services, poor lobbying and advocacy skills amongst LIPs, paying lip services to library development programmes by government and low level of partnership drive among librarians.

Practical Implications: Creating awareness/sensitizing the citizens, equipping of library information centres (LICs) to support research, provision of educational information to improve quality of education, provision of funds to revive LICs, use of talks, shows/exhibitions in creating awareness and reviving of public libraries in Nigeria amongst others, were identified as strategies that LIPs can adopt to contribute towards realization of SDGs.

Originality/ value of contribution: The originality of this paper lies in the fact that it has unlocked areas of priorities for library and information professionals. It has laid the foundation for actualization of the much heralded sustainable development goals for LIPs in Nigeria. The study concludes that library and information professionals occupy a central position in national development and can play significant role towards the full realization of SDGs in Nigeria.

Keywords: Priorities, Sustainable Development, Library Practitioners, Information Professionals, Information Centres

Paper type: Research work

Introduction

The key to growth and development is a structural change, some measure of distributive equity, modernization in social and cultural attitudes, a degree of political transformation and stability, an improvement in health and education so that population growth stabilizes with an increase in urban living and employment (Olabode et al, 2014). The Nigerian authority

should embark on pragmatic socio-economic policy reforms in the interests of all and sundry with such policies addressing the problems of infrastructure, health, education, macro economic instability and lack of accountability and transparency (Abdulgafaret al, 2013). One of such programmes that government can embark upon is the universal sustainable development goals (SDGs)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a global initiative aimed at making the nation a better place to live. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an offshoot of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contains seventeen goals that are target specific towards various sectors of the economy. Each goal is focused on a specific area of the nation's economy and is development-oriented. The fundamental philosophy underlying the sectors-inclined contributions towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) underpins the necessity of priorities amongst various stakeholders. However, the actualization of the SDGs will be feasible provided all the essential infrastructures, including information agencies, are given the desired attention to contribute their quota in that direction (Onah et al, 2015).

The impact and contribution of the library professionals were not highly felt and pronounced in the era of Millennium Development Goals (MGDs). Here, in Nigeria as it is in most developing countries, library services occupy a central position in development of the economy even though their contributions are not conspicuous to all. Though, it could not be empirically proven that this is the extent to which library and information centres (LICs) contributed towards the realization of MDGs, yet it could not be denied that they contributed to its minimal realization. This raises some pertinent questions; if SDGs calls for prioritization? Should libraries focus on specific goals instead of attempting to contribute towards all? The above fundamental questions gave birth to this study.

Objectives of the Study

The study was carried out to determine the areas of priorities and challenges of actualizing the Sustainable Development Goals from the perspective of Library and Information Professionals in Imo State. The specific objectives are as follows:

- i. to determine librarians' perception of areas of priorities in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- ii. to identify the strategies that can be used by Library and Information Science practitioners to contribute towards the actualization of the SDGs

- iii. to ascertain the factors limiting the effectiveness of Library and Information centres from contributing towards the actualization of SDGs.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, Nigerian government has come up with various programmes and initiatives aimed at making life better for the citizens. In some of these cases, the Federal Government has aligned itself with global initiatives that emanate from the United Nations. In spite of the benefits associated with most of these laudable initiatives, it seems that most developing countries hardly realized those goals. The year 2015 was the target year for the actualization of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), yet the level of poverty, hunger, inequality in education, rate of unemployment, among others have increased instead of reducing. What could have been responsible for this? Could it be that the various stakeholders have no clear definition of what these goals were all about? In all these, do the librarians have any role to play? Now that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been unveiled, will it still go the way of other initiatives? This study, is therefore, set to unravel through empirical evidences, the areas of priorities and challenges of actualizing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the perspectives of library and information professionals.

Scope of the Study

The focus of this study is priorities and challenges of actualization Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is concerned with exploring library and information practitioners' views on areas of priorities, strategies to be adopted towards realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) and challenges associated with it. It covers only registered library and information professionals in Imo State.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study would help library and information professionals to know the areas of priorities and the challenges associated with actualization of SDGs. It is expected to help LIS professionals to fully understand their roles in contributing towards the realization of the SDGs.

Literature Review

The expiration of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gave way to the much heralded

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Though there is yet to be much empirical works on SDGs from library and information science perspectives as at the time of the study, the available and related works were reviewed. According to Onoyeyan (2013), the libraries in Nigeria are faced with a number of challenges and it has affected the impact libraries can make on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The study further recommends that libraries should appreciate the vital role they play in development by ensuring consistency in service delivery, acquiring of relevant materials on MDGs, being aggressive in providing mobile library services, information repackaging, literacy programme, partnership with other agencies and community information services.

Adejumo & Adejumo (2014) identified some factors as obstacles to achieving sustainable development in developing countries like Nigeria, and they are: the priorities of governments and individuals are often short termed, corruption which makes it difficult to prioritize long term issues, lack of qualified people to develop and implement alternative technologies due to poor educational system and lack of education about finite resources. Onah, Urom & Amanze-Unagha (2015) contend that unhindered access to information in information agencies is required for the actualization of all the SDGs. In their view, information such as business information, economic information, agricultural information, for starting and managing small business etc, will lead to drastic reduction and possible end to poverty and hunger, economic growth, among others. Igbuzor (2011) citing Ibrahim & Igbuzor (2009) posited that for Nigeria to meet the MDGs goals in 2015, there is need to formulate and implement policies that will promote transparency and accountability, overcome institutional constraints, promote pro-poor growth, bring about structural change, enhance distributive equity, engender social and cultural re-orientations, engineer political transformation and promote human development etc. These variables identified are some of the essential factors that should be considered as Nigeria warms up to see that SDGs are actualized

Aleyomi (2013) maintained that individual countries have the primary responsibility for developing long term plans to reduce independence on foreign assistance and associated policy intervention through increased domestic resource mobilization, retention and

efficient allocation, and through attracting productive foreign flows, especially Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This implies that even as the global initiatives of SDGs has been unveiled by the United Nations (UN), it is left for individual countries to work out the modalities through which the SDGs could be transformed from vision to reality Ijaiya et al (2008) contend that achieving the MDGs looks bleak unless a number of measures such as heavy investment in human development, reduction in income poverty, stable macroeconomic policies to take care of the high rate of inflation, hinge external debt and exchange rate volatility are taken into consideration. Ajiye (2014) indentified the following as challenges facing millennium development goals in Nigeria and these include: lack of human capacity and implementation, inadequate and unreliable data system, finance, indiscipline and endemic corruption.

Aleyomi (2013) x-raying Africa and the millennium development goals, identified inequality, structural constraints, and unemployment as factors contributing to slow progress toward the MDGs targets in Africa. He further asserted that inadequate data collection is a huge constraint because the government at all levels in Africa are short of adequate data which has hindered the progress of meeting with the MDG targets by 2015. The implication of this is that Africa may likely not meet the target. Also, data which is the basis for quality planning are in short supply and will have an adverse effect on the realization of the MDGs by 2015.

Abdulgafar, Ibrahim & Alasinrin (2013) suggest that Nigeria as a country blessed with abundant human and natural resources should use these resources judiciously and make adequate planning for short, medium and long term achievement of goals based on the resources. Ofor & Ofole (2014) stated that the situation in Nigeria indicates that there are challenges in meeting the MDGs by 2015. However, they further suggested that for Nigeria to meet these goals, there is need to formulate and implement policies that will promote transparency and accountability, overcome institutional constraints, promote pro-poor growth etc. According to Olabode et al (2014), it may be very difficult for some countries in developing societies to attain the MDGs because most of them share the same socio-economic and religious template. Olabode et al (2014) citing Gwary (2011) identified level

and extent of poverty as one of the greatest threats to achieving MDGs.

Research Methodology

The survey research method was used for the study. The population consisted of registered library and information science professionals working in various libraries in Imo State. Questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaires were distributed only to library and information science (LIS) professionals present during the first quarterly meeting of the Nigeria Library Association, Imo State Chapter held on the 31st of March, 2015 at Federal University of Technology, Owerri. A total of 62 questionnaire was administered with 51 retrieved

back while 49 (79%) filled appropriately and found usable for the study. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics method. The simple percentage and frequency count was used to analyze the data. The results were presented in tables.

Results and Discussions

The results of the study based on the data analyzed are presented as follows:

Research Question 1: Which of the following sustainable development goals (SDGs) should be prioritized for library and information science practitioners?

Table 1: Areas of Priorities

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Freq	%	Ranking
End poverty in all its forms everywhere	44	89.8	5th
End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture	47	95.9	2nd
Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages	48	98	1st
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all	41	83.7	6th
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	45	91.8	4th
Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	23	46.9	
Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all	24	48.9	
Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all	48	98	1st
Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	46	93.9	3rd
Reduce inequality within and among countries	25	51	
Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	21	42.9	
Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	24	48.9	
Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact	23	46.9	
Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	22	44.9	
Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss	22	44.9	
Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels	48	98	1st
Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	47	95.9	2nd

Table 1 shows areas of priorities based on the response of the participants. Results revealed that SDGs Goals number 3, 8 and 16 received the highest score of 48 (98%) respectively. This is followed by Goals number 2 and 17 with 47 (95%) as score. Goals number 8, 5, 1 and 41

(83.7%) scores respectively. The percentage scores for goals number 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 were all below 50%.

The findings therefore imply that goals numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 16 and 17 should be priority areas for library and information science practitioners.

Table 2: Strategies Adoptable for Realization of SDGs

Strategies	Freq	%
Creating awareness and sensitizing the citizenry	45	91.8
Provision of agricultural information to rural dwellers	36	73.5
Use of talks, shows/exhibitions in creating awareness	41	83.7
Provision of business/economic information to urban and rural dwellers	39	75.6
Provision of medical / health information urban/rural dwellers	36	73.5
Provision of political information to both men and women	31	63.3
Provision of educational information to improve quality of education	43	87.8
Equipping of library and information centres to support research	44	89.8
Identification and collaboration in projects towards the realization of the SDGs	35	71.4
Provision of adequate funding to revive libraries and information centre	41	83.7
Reviving of public libraries in Nigeria	40	81.6
Provision of information on access to availability of credit facilities	37	75.5
Provision of information on viable small and medium scale enterprises to rural dwellers	37	75.5
Sensitize the public on the necessity of child safety and birth control.	32	65.5

From Table 2, all the 14 items (strategies) listed received a response rate of 60%. Creating awareness and sensitizing the citizens received the highest response rate of 45 (91.8%), followed by equipping of library and information centres to support research 44 (89.8%), provision of educational information to improve quality of education 43 (87.8%), provision of adequate funding to revive libraries and information

centres (LICs) and use of talks shows / exhibitions in creating awareness 41(83.7%) and reviving of public libraries in Nigeria 40 (81.6%). The implication of the findings presented in table 2 is that library and information professionals agree that there are viable strategies that can be adopted to ensure that SDGs is actualized. In other words, opportunities abound for LIPs to contribute towards realization of SDGs

Table 3: Constraints to effectiveness of LIPs contribution towards realization of SDGs

Challenges	Freq	%
Lack of reliable and accurate data	43	87.8
Negligence of library and information centres by Nigeria governments	42	85.7
Non-challant attitude of Nigerian policy makers	28	57.1
High level of corruption/misappropriation of funds	25	51
Lip services to development programmes by government	39	79.6
Low level of partnership drive among librarians	28	57.1
Inconsistent government policies	24	49
Poor perception of the library profession	42	85.7
Low level of private sectors interest in library services	41	83.7
Low self esteem among library and Information professionals	41	83.7
Poor lobbying and advocacy skills among librarians	40	80.6

From Table 3, 43(87.8%) respondents affirmed lack of reliable and accurate data as a limitation to LIPs contribution towards the realization of the SDGs. 42 (85.7%) indicated negligence of LIPs by government and poor perception of the library profession. 41(83.7%) identified low level private sector interest in library services and low self esteem among library and information science practitioners. 40 (81.6%) indicated poor lobbying and advocacy skills for the profession among librarians. Also, 39 (79.6%) affirmed lip service to development programmes by governments and low level of partnership drive among librarians, 28 (57.1%).The finding corroborates the findings of Aleyomi (2013) and Ajiye (2014) that

identified inadequate and unreliable data system as one of the challenge to MDGs in Nigeria.

The implication of the findings as presented in table 3 show that despite the abounding opportunities for LIPs to contribute towards the realization of SDGs, there are still multiples factors that can limit the effectiveness of LIPs contribution towards the realization of SDGs. Library and information science practitioner has a lot of homework to do before they could contribute significantly to the reality of SDGs.

Conclusion

A study has been carried out among library and information professionals and challenges of

actualizing sustainable development goals. The study definitely identified the areas that should be prioritized by librarians to ensure that SDGs is actualized. In the light of the findings of this study, it could be concluded that the areas of priorities for library and information professional include Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 16 of the SDGs. Awareness creation, equipping of libraries and information centres, provision of educational information and provision of adequate funding to revive libraries and information centres were identified as viable strategies that library and information professionals could adopt to contribute meaningfully towards actualization of SDGs. The major challenges are lack of reliable and accurate data, negligence of LICs by Nigerian governments, low level of private sectors interest in library services.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that:

1. Government should carry out researches to enable it generate reliable and accurate data of unemployed graduates, uneducated citizens, areas more prone to poverty etc.
2. Government should appreciate the role of libraries in the overall development of the society. Efforts should be made to ensure that libraries and information centres are integrated fully into the scheme of activities at the various levels, i.e federal, state and local government.
3. Corporate social responsibility services: Various libraries should see corporate social responsibility services as a necessity. When libraries and information centres remember to give back to the society, especially the host community, it will go a long way in changing the poor perception that people have towards the profession. It is true that the libraries are underfunded. Nevertheless, the library as an organization can still do something, no matter how small.
4. Engaging in effective lobbying and advocacy programmes: Heads of libraries should endeavour to engage in sustainable lobbying and advocacy programmes. Librarians should acquire lobbying and advocacy skills at all costs to ensure that they contribute their own quota to the reality of the SDGs.
5. Participating in collaborative and partnership activities: Librarians should endeavour to improve on their level of partnership drive. Library and information professionals would not succeed in isolation, hence the need to partner with private sectors and non-governmental organization to ensure that SDGs is actualized.

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