

# National Association of Law Libraries and Future Possibilities in Literacy and Information Service Development

Rita John-Okeke MLIS, MLS, CLN

*Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of Lagos*

[Ritajohn\\_okeke@yahoo.com](mailto:Ritajohn_okeke@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

**Purpose-**This paper discusses the important role the National Association of Law Libraries (NALL) has been playing in promoting best practices in legal information management.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** – A literature-based paper which chronicles the activities of National Association of Law Libraries (NALL) from inception in 1975 to 2013. The roles of NALL in promoting the welfare of members and services to legal professionals are discussed.

**Findings-**NALL has successfully organized workshops and conferences but needs to be involved in practical training to law librarians in specific areas of importance by way of training courses.

**Practical implications-** Professional associations seek to further the interests of the professions and individuals engaged in that profession, and also the public interest. Many professional bodies are involved in the development and monitoring of professional educational programmes, and the updating of skills. NALL has followed its mandates of promoting best practices in legal information management and also in protecting the welfare of its members. It is however recommended that NALL should in addition to organizing conferences should be involved in training courses in special areas of law librarianship; teach information literacy, network with national and international colleagues and also float a journal of its own.

**Originality/Value-** Highlights the activities of NALL in promoting best practices in legal information services

**Keywords-** Future possibilities, Law libraries, Information Development, Information Literacy, National Association of Law Libraries, Nigeria .

## Introduction

Information literacy and services have always been the focal points of libraries and library associations, both regional and national. A library is a democratic institution which major preoccupation is to provide information to its defined clients. To provide information, the library takes into cognizance issues concerning access to information. Knowledge management requires that appropriate current, relevant and authoritative information materials are made available either physically, electronically or both; access to these materials are created in such a way that the users discover them with ease and timely too; and reference services and guides are also put in place, all to make sure that the user meets with the information needed. An important aspect of the reference services is to give library instructions to new clients. This enables library users to acquaint themselves with

the workings of the library; the knowledge of resources, services and use of the library resources.

Literacy programmes usually run by public and school libraries mostly where children and illiterate adults are encouraged to read and write are all too familiar. The critical challenge is not of making people to read and write. The challenge is that so many literate people are not information literate. More so, in the age of digital media, many people even professionals do not have digital culture and so are unable to access quality and enough of the information needed to solve their problems. Among these information illiterate professionals are lawyers, information professionals and others. Many researches support this view. For instance, Ifidon in Mole & Dim (2013) revealed that many head librarians and other employing agencies had the strong view that the library school graduates are

unable to perform ICT-based duties satisfactorily without supervision. They are also of the opinion that funding is not the major challenge facing libraries in the developing countries but poor ICT skills acquisition by librarians. They pointed out that the major challenge confronting librarians is the lack of training on appropriate ICT skills tailored for specific library and information services; and that the curriculum of library schools in Nigeria has not responded positively to the changes in the immediate environment. The lawyers are also experiencing this quagmire. Thomson West (2006 – 2007) report showed that lack of literacy skills has adversely affected new lawyers coming into law firm practice and also in academia.

It follows that librarians must find ways of acquiring the needed skills either by personal self-development or attending conferences and workshops and when they do have to train information users in information literacy. Information literacy is acknowledged to be one of the core values for library and information professionals. It “empowers people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals. It is a basic human right in a digital world and promotes social inclusion of all nations” (IFLA, 2005). Professional associations seek to further the interests of the professions and individuals engaged in that profession, and also the public interest. Many professional bodies are involved in the development and monitoring of professional educational programmes, and the updating of skills. Dada (1998) cited John Harris who summed up the essence of every professional association:

... The basic aim of any library association is to encourage the development of libraries. All other aims stem from that. They include in particular the development of librarians and the organization of a body of knowledge

The International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) also supports training for law librarians, promotes interest of members and legal information services. From the foregoing it is obvious that one of the cardinal aims for any professional association is training for its members. That it is the reason they organize annual conferences and workshops to update members knowledge and ensure that the goals of the associations are being pursued. Mostly, they publish papers presented in conferences in

journals and newsletters. For information professional associations, training of members is ever becoming critical since librarians are change agents; they need to constantly update their knowledge so that they can impact on the information users. Otherwise, it will be a case of a blind man leading a lame man. The focus of this paper therefore, is on what Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL) has done in the past to promote information literacy of law librarians and information service development of law libraries in Nigeria; and a prognosis of what possibilities hold for law libraries in the future.

### **Information literacy, services and access to knowledge (A2K)**

This era is rightly called information/digital age. The economic environment of this age is referred to as information/knowledge economy. The focus of this age is information - which is the most important factor in businesses and production. Experts in business management now think of ideas more than capital in establishing businesses. The importance of access to information has been evident by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) commitment to ensuring the widest possible access to information for all people in accordance with the principles expressed in the Glasgow Declaration on Libraries, Information Services and Intellectual Freedom. Also, the World Summits on Information Society came up with an idea of a ‘society where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and people to achieve their full potentials in promoting their quality of life...’ (IFLA, 2004).

Libraries are critical institutions in achieving the all inclusive society because the library is a democratic institution. In developing countries many studies have shown that access to information is hindered by poverty which translates to poor access to computers and Internet. The library remains the only place where access to computers and Internet can be accessible almost free of charges. Again, libraries enter into consortia and are able to have access to invaluable resources which no individual can afford. Moreover, librarians are trained information literate professionals who can train people to harvest information they need from the print and digital media.

Information literacy remains critical in the quest to know when one needs information; what authentic source(s) to find the information; how to use, communicate it and generate new information. Today, information literacy has included all the necessary research skills that arm individuals to remain vibrant in the digital age. Thus, internet skills, use of social media (blogs, twitter, facebook) to communicate and collaborate have become part of literacy skills. Evaluation of information and sources has become more critical as unprecedented amount of information find their way to the internet (Dillon et al; Igbo as cited in Madu & Dike, 2012). Lawyers, more than any other professionals, must be ethically informed in information use to avoid misinformation which can undermine justice dispensation and legal reforms.

To stay in business, lawyers must in addition to acquiring legal skills learn the necessary literacy skills. Unfortunately, lawyers have been trained to acquire mostly legal skills and not legal information literacy skills or research skills. This has adversely affected new lawyers coming into law firm practice and also in academia (Thomson West, 2006 – 2007). Tuhumwire, & Okello-Obura (2010) observed that many practicing lawyers fail to articulate cases and provide proper back up to their clients in the courts of laws. Howland and Lewis as cited in Makri (2007) surveyed U.S. law firm librarians to examine the quality and extent of the electronic legal research skills of summer clerks and first-year associates. They found that these graduates were unable to efficiently or effectively research issues that appear routinely in actual legal cases and concluded that they were not efficient or cost-effective users of LexisNexis and Westlaw (the two biggest digital law libraries in terms of case, legislation and journal coverage).

It therefore follows that information literate law librarians should as a matter of urgency engage with their organizations to integrate the teaching of information literacy in their services. ALIA (2013) stated that, as a matter of priority, and at all levels, library and information services professionals should embrace the responsibility to promote and facilitate the development of the information literacy of their clients.

### **A window on the Nigerian Association of Law Libraries (NALL)**

To be able to prognosticate what possibilities holds for literacy and information service delivery, it is important to review what NALL has done in the past, what is doing now and probably what it should be doing to ensure that the abundant possibilities being driven by ever evolving information communication technologies are to our advantage. NALL was inaugurated on March 7, 1975 at the Nigerian Law School in Victoria Island Lagos. It is a section of the Nigerian Library Association and the first special library association in the country to be affiliated to an international association – International Association of Law Libraries. At inception, it has lofty objectives as:

- (a) Support for its members in their specific and increasingly complicated task of making the literature of law available and of providing reference and research services in support of it;
- (b) Helping to improve law library conditions, resources management and planning on a national scale; and
- (c) Expounding the role of law libraries in the process of national development and their peace-making functions in this age of global independence.

The first national workshop of NALL was initiated and run by the Hon. Judge Taslim Olawale Elias at its inauguration. After that the association became moribund until 1981 when the 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop titled ‘New Directions in Law Libraries’ was initiated and partly funded by Mr. Philip Cohen with the assistance of the Nigerian Law School, Victoria Island. In 1984, the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies organized the workshop with grant from Oceana Publications and Sweet & Maxwell. It is important to note that among the six-point communiqué made at the workshop is that the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies to organize similar workshops on regular basis for law librarians so as to sharpen their knowledge and skills. This prompted the Bi-Annual Workshop being organized by the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies for librarians.

Worthy to note is the outcome of the 3<sup>rd</sup> workshop in 1984 that led to the inauguration of accreditation of the faculties of law in Nigerian universities by the Council of Legal Education in 1987. This has positively affected the development of law libraries in the country. In

this NALL has shown to meeting its objective of law libraries in Nigeria. Some of the themes which is to work for the continuous development covered up to 1999 were:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes</b>
1981	New Directions in Law Libraries
1984	Effective Law Library Services
1994	Law Libraries of the Future
1995	Is your law collection ready for computerization?
1996	Law libraries and national development in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century
1997	Libraries and their patrons

**Conferences before year 2000**

From the themes covered, it is obvious that NALL has kept with the mandate to continually update the knowledge of law librarians towards providing information services to legal professionals. In the 1995 Conference, issues of computerization were discussed extensively. This shows that NALL has followed trends in information services delivery by arming law librarians with the tools for the next millennium.

Years 2000 to date have been the period of rapid growth in information communication platforms. The emergence of the information society in 2003 with the World Summit on Information Society in Geneva and Tunisia in 2005 ushered in a new culture and economy- digital culture and knowledge economy. ICT drives this culture and economy. Some of the web technologies that came within this period are social media like, Facebook, launched in February,

2004, Delicious, Blogs, RSS Feeds, Twitter, etc that enabled instant communication and collaboration. These platforms bolstered the creation of enormous data and knowledge. Again many digitization projects happened in this period. Worthy of note is the popularization of institutional repositories through the availability of open source soft ware. This period has witnessed the greatest transformation in ICT in terms of computer and phone technologies. From desktop to laptop, palmtop, Ipad; from simple phones to smart phones that use cloud computing technologies- model of browser-based software that is device independent. The significance of this development to the academic librarian is the total shift to computers and internet by everyone in the user community.

NALL is still wielding on in this critical period looking at its themes during the period:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Themes</b>
2001	Effective law library services in Nigerian new democracy
2007	Standards for law libraries in Nigeria
2008	ICT and law library development in Nigeria
2009	Law library development through cooperation
2010	Consolidating democracy through law library development in Nigeria
2011	Law libraries in the information age: ICT for law library services
2012	Law library: a tool for national transformation in Nigeria
2013	Future law libraries: infinite possibilities in Nigeria

**Conferences from 2000 to date**

Issues around ICT and national development through standard and effective law library services were covered during this period. In 2008 Conference, web-based law library services, networking/collaboration, mentoring were some of the topics discussed. Last year’s conference focused mainly on transformation of the nation’s economy through law library services. Open source software was among the issues discussed. ICT is the driving force in the new information environment and NALL has devoted time to training law librarians in issues bordering the application of ICT for improving

access to legal information. Obilade (1998) has pointed out that the ideal law library of the 21<sup>st</sup> century uses all the electronic-mail networks for the purpose of dissemination of information about the law. Today, in our various law libraries we have these electronic databases such as Lexis/Nexis, Westlaw, HienOline, Law Pavilion and some free online resources which we make accessible to our users. Law librarians must be conversant with the new information infrastructures in addition to the old ones.

## **NALL and Future possibilities for law libraries**

There is a fairly consistent view of what the world will look like in 2050. The detail may be interpreted differently, but overall, there is agreement that there will be more people, fewer resources and an even greater reliance on technology (ALIA, 2013). It articulated the future possibilities:

Advances in technology – and nanotechnology – will mean new types of materials and new ways of making things. It will be possible to transform a simple glass window into an interactive screen. Infinite computer power will open up new horizons. Artificial intelligence will no longer be science fiction, it will be science fact. Light yet powerful handheld devices will respond to touch, speech and thought. Graphics, including holographic effects, will make computer interaction increasingly ‘real’. The internet will be ubiquitous and while people will talk about the crisis of internet failure, the system is unlikely to fall over. The big brands today – Google, Facebook, Twitter – may have gone the way of MySpace, with a new generation of service providers dominating the internet.

Technology-based entertainment including games, music, films and interactive books, will be greatly in demand. New content will be ‘born digital’ and physical items such as print books, records and DVDs will be collectors’ items. We already live in a 365/24/7 society, where, somewhere in the world, there is always someone awake and online with whom we can interact. In 2050, we will be able to chat, study, work and shop whenever we want, in the real world or in one of our virtual worlds.

ALIA (2013) also envisioned that employment will be in the knowledge-based and creative industries and to compete successfully, countries will need highly educated workers with good communication skills. Innovation will provide short-lived advantage and there will be a strong emphasis on customer service. Bintliff (2010) shared the numerous challenges facing academic law library and advised that law library

administrators will need to find innovative ways to offer the new services demanded by our patrons. We can be sure that our collections will increasingly be electronic, and that the changes in technologies and patrons expectations will necessitate corresponding changes in physical space, resource allocation, and staffing.

Professional library associations, law library inclusive need to assess law librarians’ relevance in future. Bintliff (2010) stressed the point that the greatest challenge facing law libraries is the question of relevance - How do we keep the academic law library relevant in an age when it’s all on the internet, and it’s all for free”? Similarly, libraries and librarians need to remember that effective and relevant library services are driven by user needs, not by technological advances alone. Web 2.0, which has given rise to the concept of Library 2.0. Also having a profound effect on the way users find, access, and process information is the increased popularity of mobile computing. Indeed, many experts insist that in the future, all personal computing will be mobile. Smart phones are on track to replace PCs (both desk- and laptops) as the primary means of access to online information and communication. Phones, media players, and computers will increasingly merge into portable devices that will free the information seeker completely from wired sources. In the near future, a number of services already offered by many libraries—for example, mobile catalog access, two-way text communication and reference, and podcasts—will include digital collections specially designed for mobile computing devices such as iPods, smart phones, and e-books. While some critics argue that this will mean the eventual disappearance of a physical library, others see an opportunity to make more resources available to more users in more locations. The library of the future can remain both a portal and a destination for information seekers, whether they access the information via a handheld computing device or the front door of their local library (Hendrix, 2008). If we have been attending our annual conferences and participating actively nothing will be totally new to us. All we need is to update constantly. This is the tradition of Librarianship which strives to achieve new competencies and skills as well as explore how these can be put into use for furthering library and information service (Thomas, Satpathi and Satpathi, 2010). Watson (2013) has this to say to librarians:

After all, what is a librarian today if he or she is not tech savvy? He or she is a professional who should be capable of responding quickly to inquiries. You're the kings and queens of knowledge. If you're not on the Internet, you're out of the game. You have to show your relevance and importance by giving people access to information... So if your employer won't pay 3,000 Naira for you to get a modem to have Internet connectivity, you may want to consider purchasing it yourself,... as a professional investment in your own survival in the field.

### **Training courses**

A major function of a library association is promotion of professionalism and standards. Education/training activities are one of the means of promoting professionalism (Thomas, Satpathi and Sapathi, 2010). NALL has done well in terms of conferences but should look at planning training courses. Though this has being the mandate given to the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies which Nigerian Law School has recently joined the race, NALL should take up the lead. For instance, the Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centers (IASLIC) upholds educational activity as its apex activity. A training course tends to be more direct to teaching specificity than a workshop/conference. It also lasts longer and so affords the opportunity to consolidate learning. International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) offers Annual Courses on International Law Librarianship. Palfrey (2010) is of the view that human resource development is a critical cornerstone in the 21<sup>st</sup> century law librarianship. Librarians need to be change agents who listen and respond; need to be given support for experimentation and even play in the digital world, to understand and engage with it better. The IASLIC also organizes 'Study Circles' on regular basis. It invites eminent speakers who deliberate on different specialized fields related to LIS. Invited expert came from other shores too whereby the scenario as existed outside India too was brought up for discussion (Thomas, Satpathi and Sapathi, 2010). NALL should also look into organizing shot courses for law librarians and inviting international experts to share knowledge.

### **Sponsorships/scholarships**

The IALL provides an international forum for networking and information sharing among legal information professionals worldwide and supports professional development by awarding scholarships for annual course attendance and grants for internships. This is another area NALL should look into. NALL should renew membership with IALL and sponsor members to attend IALL conferences and training.

### **Float a Journal**

The IALL publishes the International Journal of Legal Information. It is long overdue for NALL to start up journal publication. The idea of producing a book out of papers presented at conferences is not good enough. In most cases authors of the papers would have published them in renowned journals and then having them duplicated in a book form.

### **Networking/Collaboration**

Networking is a must if one has to make any progress in the digital world. Networking with regional and International colleagues can be virtual, participating through lists and discussion groups, membership of national and international associations, reading their publications, and building up contacts by email. It is also important to attend international conferences to meet international colleagues. NALL should build and maintain a website or create a forum where networking and resource sharing can take place just like other professional associations. The IALL website includes an international calendar of events, its scholarships and Internships, and particularly its conferences.

This collaboration must be not just within, but across countries. And the collaboration must include non librarians, whose work can have a positive impact on the legal information ecosystem. That collaboration means borrowing insights and methods from other disciplines, as well as working directly with technology providers and others who are actively shaping the information environment (Palfrey, 2010).

### **Teach information literacy**

The NALL should encourage members to be involved in information literacy programme for their law libraries. The truth is that many lawyers and law professors only scratch the surface of available information in their research endeavors. This can result in policy documents



that lack richness and breadth in coverage and that may even have inaccurate and incomplete information. The lack of attorney research skills coupled with the ubiquitous availability of electronic legal resources has created a situation in which the academic law library and the law librarian face serious questions about the future (Bintliff, 2008). Lawal, Stilwell, Kuhn and Underwood, (2012) study recommended for the inclusion of academic librarians and legal information specialists in the process of the reforms at the Nigerian Law School where they could constitute part of the collaborative team for the design and implementation of an information literacy framework for the legal education system in Nigeria

### Conclusion

To be relevant in the knowledge society where nation's economy relies on knowledge as the key engine of economic growth, law librarians in all sectors must be ready to continually learn and impact on the economy. By embracing the possibilities of the 21st century, librarians can ensure the relevance and value of the services they and their institutions provide. Yet even as the nature of the library and the work of the librarian change, the librarian will continue to play an essential role in the provision of those services (Hendrix, 2008).

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