

# The Role of the Public Libraries in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria and the Need for Adequate Funding

Ugwoke, Benjamin U. CLN  
Medical Library  
University Of Nigeria, Enugu-Campus

## Abstract.

**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to examine the role of the public libraries in helping to actualize the United Nations' Development Goals in Nigeria.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** the exploratory approach was adopted for this study. The role or public libraries in achieving the millennium development goals in Nigeria and need for adequate funding were discussed.

**Findings:** The major finding of this paper is that public libraries in Nigeria do not occupy befitting buildings neither do they have requisite resources, services and personnel because of poor funding.

**Practical Implications:** From the findings it was noted that unless public libraries, are properly funded, their services would not be exciting and there would be no innovating.

**Originality/Value:** the values of this paper lies in the fact that public libraries in Nigeria are expected to follow their counterparts in developing and advanced counties where library services are available on streets and internet services are free in the millennium development goals

**Keywords:** Public Libraries, Millennium Development goals, United Nations, Funding

**Paper type:** Conceptual

## Introduction

When we talk about public libraries, we are referring to the 'people's universities'. The term represents broad-based educational, informational, cultural and recreational support resource centres. It also represents democratic government or non-government established institutions where the poor can have their talents developed for active participation in nation building. The term points to the institutions equipped for the realization of the United Nations' developmental targets called Millennium Development Goals, which have been agreed upon by up to 190 countries of the world.

According to Ochogwu (2007:16), the goals are the following:

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
2. Achieve universal primary education;
3. Promote gender equality and empower women;
4. Reduce child mortality;
5. Improve maternal health;

6. Combat HIV and AIDs, malaria and other diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability; and
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

Public libraries can play important roles in the realization of each of the above stated objectives.

1. **To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger:** Extreme poverty and hunger are associated with unemployment, ignorance, lack of professionalism, decent occupation or inability to demonstrate skills capable of uplifting the socio-economic status of members of the public. Acquisition and demonstration of helpful skills require basic education. Public libraries can help illiterate men and women acquire literacy through active support to their adult education programmes. Through the provision of resources such as audio-visual materials, well-equipped public libraries can help man and women learn how to write, read and do calculations.

When this is done, they are able to communicate with the wider society meaningfully. Basic works involving application of this basic knowledge can then be given to these men and women whose new lives have been nurtured through adult education programmes supported by services of the public libraries. Provision of employment opportunities for the poor is a direct war against extreme poverty and hunger.

2. ***Achieving universal primary education:***

It is assumed by many people in authority that most Nigerians have had primary education. However, this is not true. Many Nigerian, especially the adults are without the benefits of primary education. This can be tested by my readers who volunteer to buy things from nearby markets in the country and ask for receipts. Many of the adults, who attempted primary education cannot write receipts correctly and what about those who did not do so? Thus, public libraries through their support to adult education programmes, can help people within this category to gain primary education. Public libraries can do this by visiting them through their mobile libraries with relevant learning materials for their adult education programmes. According to Ackland(2010), information helps us in taking better decisions to enhance the quality of our work. Acquisition of relevant and authentic information is a means of increasing one's knowledge for better performance of duties. This is one of the reasons for adequate funding of public libraries in Nigeria to make them more beneficial to both professionals and non-professionals.

3. ***Promoting gender equality and empower women:***

Equal opportunities can be given to women as men in Nigeria. This can be done through appropriate education and information which the public libraries support. Women can be empowered through education and provision of information communication technologies. Public libraries with their abilities to help in the area of adult education can also render

consultancy services in which skills for computer operations at subsidized cost can be acquired. By the use of films, slides, and CD-ROMs available in the public libraries to pass information on the operations of various trades, women can also be empowered.

4. ***Reduce child mortality:*** Many Nigerians still record increasing number of deaths among children.

5. ***There is high population of children of the poor:*** Many of them die because of hunger and diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and measles. Health education plays important roles in Nigerians' efforts to reduce child mortality. Public libraries can help in reducing the degree of afflictions of various diseases and deaths among children. Parents need to be informed what they should do to prevent poverty and common diseases in their families. They also need information on where their children can be given free and effective medical treatments. Public libraries can show through films and slides the effects of poverty and poor health conditions in homes and how to overcome them.

6. ***Improve maternal health:*** An improvement on maternal health is a direct product of an improvement on maternal education and information. Informed women know what they should do to maintain their health. According to National Planning Commission (2005:25), emphasis on health education will help make Nigerians more aware of their rights and obligations regarding health services as well as promote disease prevention. Public libraries in Nigeria are in good positions to facilitate health education of women with pregnancy, using films and CD-ROMs to show complications and how to avoid them to reduce maternal mortality.

7. ***Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases:*** According to UNAIDS /WHO(2008), Africa had the highest records of HIV/AIDs afflictions. This was as a result of ignorance and unbelief of the danger of the disease. Malaria

also kills more people in Africa than in any other continent of the world. Poor health conditions and constant advertisement of sexual immorality on the television are some of the causative factors. Public libraries can move with talking books and other audio-visual materials to where Nigerians gather for information on active methods of preventing HIV/AIDS. According to Heymann (1999), illness and deaths from infectious diseases can generally be avoided at an affordable price. Diseases and the accompanying deaths are better avoided through the provision of relevant and easily understood information, especially in the language of the adults.

8. ***Ensure environmental sustainability:***

The present environmental degradation through pollution, slums and erosion no doubt require basic knowledge of environmental management. Nigerian cities are packed to excess of their capacities with human beings. Deforestation is on increase and the result is desertification. Understanding the need for maintenance of natural environment would require exposure to basic education. It also requires financial empowerment to enable people see the importance of buying lands to build their own houses at new lay-out areas of the cities. This capacity building would require effective mobile library services and use of films for broad-based adult education and information on the danger of environmental degradation and the remedy for faster socio-economic development.

9. ***Development of global partnership for development:***

It is required that the participating countries in a global partnership for development should have viable economy in which human development has been given priority attention. Global partnership for development does not work well in a situation where majority of the people from one of the countries in partnership are afflicted by poverty. Such a country is qualified for economic aids only not partnership. Poor countries such as Nigeria simply need to reduce the level of poverty among the people through

education, provision of employment opportunities by establishing industries and in this case adult education for empowerment. The public libraries when funded adequately are in the position to support all levels of education and professional training.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Public libraries are required to be found in every developing society for their roles in meeting educational, informational, cultural, and recreational needs of the people. They are important agents of development in a nation. They are the people's universities. However, the problem is to what extent are these important institutions aware of their sources of funds which can enable them carry out their missions in Nigeria effectively?

### **Ways of Funding Public Libraries in Nigeria.**

#### ***a. Funding By the State Governments.***

According to Ochogwu (2007), inadequate funding of public libraries in the country has made it difficult for them to render services that are electronically based. Basic audio-visual library services are not found in most of these libraries. However, it is the responsibility of the state governments to fund these libraries adequately. There should be a re-direction on the state governments' pattern of spending the tax payers' money to ensure that public libraries in the country are funded properly. Oyo State Government has gone on the right path by increasing its capital vote for the public libraries from N50 million to N650 million in 2009. Qualitative and broad-based public library services require a good funding. As indicated by Ike (1999), each of the state governments should invest not less than five percent of its budget on public library development. If the state governments in the country find it difficult to fund their public libraries adequately, they should give order for their closure.

This should be done especially when we remember the money each of the politicians take home as salary.

#### ***b. Fund Raising Through Selected Library Services.***

If selected services such as compilation of subject bibliographies, computer training, indexing, and photocopying services are developed, they are likely to become reliable sources of supplementary income to the libraries.

Okogwu (2009) has observed that for this profession to be appreciated and enhanced, the librarians should start charging fees for their services. Edem (2010) has also pointed out that since subvention from the government has continued to be small, libraries should charge fees for their services. When resources are available as expected, services can be categorized and payments graded accordingly. Money realized from these mentioned sources can be used to maintain basic services. It should be remembered that while there is need for generation of income, public libraries are for use by all members of the public and their services should be diversified accordingly.

**c. *Fund Raising Through Non-governmental Organizations.***

Non-governmental organizations in Nigeria such as Umuada Igbo are available as veritable instruments for funding services of the public libraries. They can make donations of books, and non-book materials including computers for public library development in the states where they operate. They can also be motivated to make donations of money designed to promote services of their public libraries. Those of them in diaspora should be motivated to do same. Non-governmental organizations abroad should be proud of participating in the development of services which must have been instrumental to their current status, individually and collectively.

**d. *Fund Raising by the Local Governments for Development of Public libraries.***

Local governments in the areas where public libraries are built should be compelled by appropriate legislation to pay reasonable percentages of their annual budgets into the controlling purse of the public libraries. This is a necessity since staff of the local governments and indeed other members of the public, especially from the areas where these libraries are located are direct beneficiaries of the service.

Both

Onebunne(1987),Edoka(1991),Kantumoya(1993),Ike(1999),and Nnadozie(2005) support adequate funding of public libraries through either internally generated income or by budget allocations of the governments.

**The Need for Judicious Management of Funds Meant for Public Library Development in Nigeria.**

Apart from adequate funding of the public libraries through the avenues discussed above, there must be judicious management of the funds as clearly pointed out by Bowden (1994). Proper management of funds should reflect on resources, payment of salaries, and services offered by these libraries. Poor management of funds meant for the development of these libraries will simply result in a situation which can be likened to starving cows and expecting them to produce abundant milk. According Onwubiko (2007), ability to demonstrate a consistent focus on minimizing expenses and maximizing results as well as time management are the key factors in resource management. Achebe (2005) had a survey of the extent public libraries in the country were provided with information communication technologies (ICTs). Out of the six geo-political zones, only South-West scored 51.3%, followed by South-East which scored 44.1%. Others including the Federal Capital Territory scored less than 40%. Poor funding and poor financial management are the major reasons most public libraries in Nigeria are regarded by Nigerians as hide-outs for examination students who study their personal books. This trend can be changed by librarians who should come out and ask for our votes to enable them participate in Nigerian politics. Many librarians in the country can demonstrate the same abilities as do professionals in other fields who pass out as governors and presidents of the country.

**Conclusion**

Most of the public libraries in Nigeria do not occupy befitting buildings, neither do they have requisite resources, services and personnel because of poor funding. Services are not exciting as innovations are overlooked because “there is no fund”. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by information explosion, availability of information communication technologies, higher quests for information to increase knowledge, and new training methods on information skills. Wider opportunities are being explored for better management of the affairs of this life through the use of available, useful, and appropriate information. The public libraries in Nigeria are expected to follow their counterparts in countries such as China and Denmark where libraries are available on the streets and Internet services are made free as some of the measures to meet Millennium Development Goals. This can be done through

adequate funding and judicious financial management.

### References

- Achebe, N. E. E. (2005). The status of ICTs in Nigerian public libraries. *Coal City Libraries*, 2 (1&2), 13-29.
- Ackland, P. (2010). Ten years to vision 2020: Why information matters. *Community Eye Health Journal*, 23(74), December, 41-42.
- Edem, N. (2010). Fee-based service: A means of making information materials more readily available for tourism development in Nigeria. *Library and Information Practitioner*, 3(1), 121-128.
- Edoka, B. E. (1991). Prospects of priced information services in public-funded libraries in Nigeria. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 1(2), October, 83-92.
- Heymann, D. (1999). Removing obstacles to healthy development. *Health Horizons*, 37, 16-17.
- Ike, A. (1999, January-June). Public libraries have failed the nation. *Newsletter: A biannual Publication Of the N LA*, 11(1), 12-16.
- Kantumoya, A. (1993). Public relations for the library profession: The case of Zambia. *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 3(1), 55-62
- National Planning Commission (2005). National economic empowerment and development strategy (NEEDS). Abuja: Central Bank of Nigeria.
- The Nigerian Library Association (2009, July-December). Oyo State Library Board gets N650m budget. *Newsletter*, 21(1), 10.
- Nnadozie, C.O. (2005). Qualitative library services in developing countries: An assessment of the Nigerian situation. *The Nigerian Library Link*, iii(1&2, October), 61-69
- Ochogwu, M. G. (2007). The internalities and externalities of library and information delivery services in Nigeria by the year 2015. *Nigerian Libraries*, 40, 15-26.
- OKogwu F. I. (2009). Enhancement of library profession: A Nigerian perspective. *Nigerian Library Link*, 7 (1 & 2), October, 73-81.
- Onebunne, C. O. (1987). The challenge of readers services in today's public library system. (A paper Presented at 1987 Anambra State Library Board's senior staff seminar held at the State Central Library, Enugu).
- Onwubiko, S. N. (2007). Core competences of librarians: The foundation for dynamic services in support of the teaching, learning and research in tertiary institutions. *Nigerian Library Link*, 5(1), April, 22-28.
- UNAIDS (2008). Report on the global AIDS epidemic (Map).