

# Empowering Nigerian Youths through Information Democratization: The Role of Libraries

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to identify and critically examine the role libraries could play in helping to empower Nigerian youths through information democratization. The Purposes is also to examine the importance and challenges of information democratization.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** For this study, the exploratory approach was adopted. At the onset, concepts found in the title were defined for quick understanding of the work. Critical factors that would enhance information democratization for development were considered.

**Findings:** The paper found out that factors like poor governance, ignorance, and refusal to pass Freedom of Information Bill by the legislators are among the challenges. Also the paper found out and discussed what roles libraries are to play for effective information democratization for youth empowerment. These roles include provision of an enabling environment for youth interaction, repackaging information for greater utilization, and massive provision of manuals, newsletters etc.

**Practical Implications:** The future of the nation is at stake if the youths who are the great contributors to National development and the future leaders are not empowered through democratizing information. It is only by getting them equipped with useful and much information that their holistic development and that of the nation can be sustained.

**Originality/value:** The value of this paper lies in the identification and discussion of factors that hinder the full import of information democratization for youth empowerment. It also lies in its critical value of advancing issues for liberalization of information for youth growth and development.

**Keywords;** Empowerment, Youths, Democratization, Information, Youth development.

**Paper type:** Conceptual.

## Introduction

Nigeria, like every other countries of the world has the greatest numerical strength of young men and women called youths. Sociologically, the age range of these youths falls between eighteen to forty five years. They are the fastest explorative group of any population. If this teeming population of vibrant and resilient young men and women were empowered to develop their potentials, creativity and skills as productive and dynamic builders of their societies, their contributions would be highly inestimable. The question is, what is the most effective way of empowering them so that they would be able to improve and transform the lives of the societies whose future governance is in their hand? This, to the author's assessment can best be done through information democratization, which depicts the creation and dissemination of information to youths without restrictions. This means that they should never

be barricaded from or denied access to any information on the grounds of age, sex, social class, financial status, academic level, state of origin, religion, cultural background, level of criminality or goodness, etc. The efficacy and potency of information globalization and democratization in human growth and development can hardly be fathomed. This is because to be informed is to be live.

Yet, many Nigerians probably because of many years of British conquest and imperialism have had their psyche warped and distorted. As result, a great volume of information that would impact positively on youths is hoarded even by the government and the governed. To make matter worse, much attention is not given to Nigerian youths. Hence, no good preparatory ground for their ascension into socio political and economic governance. These poor attitudes manifest themselves in high youth unemployment, increased social and political exclusion from issues affecting them, rising, youth

crime, high infection rate of HIV/AIDS, high drop – out of schools, digital divide among the youths, etc. it is in recognition of these evils arising from poor liberalization of information that this paper becomes necessary, and takes a critical look at the roles libraries could play in empowering Nigerian youths through information democratization. In doing this, the following areas will be explored and analytically discussed. These are conceptual definitions of terms, types of information democratization role of libraries, and conclusion.

### **Conceptual Definitions**

For a more articulate and comprehensive understanding of this topic, we need to toe Aristotle's dictum of "initio disputandi est definitio nominis" (every intelligent discussion must start with the definition of terms). The following terms must therefore be defined; empowering, youth, democratization, and information.

Empowering means the act of giving somebody the power or an authority to act in a certain capacity. This is done through the provision of necessary ingredients that would enable the person to hold such position. It means allowing an individual to become more responsive to problems and opportunities by directly applying his knowledge. Empowering was derived from the concept of empowerment, which has been extensively used but widely misunderstood. According to Spreitzer (1995), empowerment is a psychological concept in which people express more self-determination, meaning, competence and impact regarding their role in a society. Agreeing with Spreitzer, McShane (2004) observed that an empowered person experiences freedom, independence and discretion over his activities (self-determination) and care about what he does and believe that what he does is important (meaning). He also have the feelings of self-efficacy, meaning that he is confident about his ability to perform his part well, and have the capacity to grow with new challenges (competence), and views himself as an active participant in his society and that his actions have an influence on his society's success (Impact). Empowerment makes one to use his initiative and become responsible for his action.

The word youth has no single acceptable definition. Ordinarily, youth has to do with being young. According to UNDP (2000), the term youth or a young person is used as a statistical

artifact to specifically refer to those aged 15-24 years. According to her, this is done for ease of comparison, as it is the age grouping for which data are available. Continuing, she observed that this designation is often too narrow when young people and their circumstances are considered on an individual country basis. This is, perhaps, why some people have given youth the age range of 15-45. Sociologists define youth to be a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood (Nobbs, Hine & Flemming, 1980). More precisely, they stated that it involves a series of transition from adolescence to adulthood, from dependence to independence, and from being recipient of society's services to becoming contributors to national economics, politics and cultural life.

Democratization is a concept that was derived from democracy, which means government of the people through direct or indirect representation. Democracy is the government that allows individuals full rights to participate in the political processes of their countries. Today, it has expanded beyond political participation to include freedom of speech, freedom of access to information, freedom of assembly, etc. Hence, Nwabueze (1993) opined that democratization is concerned not just with the form of government known as democracy but more importantly with certain conditions of things such as virile civil society, a free and just society infused with the spirit of liberty, justice and equality. Democratization is therefore maintaining democracy, equity, liberty and freedom in all that concerns man.

### **Types of Information**

Information has become a household word, yet different people have different conceptualization of its meaning. While some see it as daily news, verbal or written statements from friends and neighbors, others view it as stories and discussion. According, to Osuala (2001) cited in Nwachukwu and Udensi (2008) information encompasses facts and opinions provided and received during the course of daily life. Aiyepoku (1982) defined information as a man's accumulated knowledge in all subjects, in all forms and from all sources that could help its users to make decisions. It is a processed data of value in planning, decision-making and execution of programmers. Information is therefore, such a thing that informs or gives one

knowledge on broad or specific areas of human endeavour's whether written or spoken.

There are different classes of information. Some classify information into primary, secondary and tertiary sources. Primary information encompasses all the original materials that have not been interpreted, treated or analyzed. Examples are journals, magazines, reports, research monographs, etc. Secondary sources proceed from primary sources as a result of interpretation and analyses. These include textbooks, abstract, bibliography, reviews etc. Tertiary information sources act as tools in locating and understanding information from primary and secondary sources like date bases, bibliographies, subject gateways, directories, etc. (Echezona, Ugwu and Ukwuoma, 2009 ).

Other information classifications include classified and unclassified information. Classified information sources are only used by government officials for carrying out official duties while the unclassified or general are for public consumption and utilization. Information is also categorized according to subject areas like health information, legal information, cultural, political, financial information, etc.

### **Importance of Information Democratization**

From what we have seen so far, it becomes ostensibly desirable to discuss the why of democratizing information for empowering Nigerian youths. The youth of our land is a big asset upon which the future of our country depends. The more knowledgeable, skillful, healthy and happy the youth is, the brighter and more developed the future of our society would be. This can be achieved through the exposition of these youths to various information types without any iota of restriction.

The more exposed through information democratization the youths are, the more they will take relevant and dependable decisions that would enhance the socio-economic growth of Nigeria. Information is fundamental to the success and full development of human, let alone the youths who are to be the country's future leaders. They should be enabled to access both local and foreign information with ease. For no one can grow above the volumes of information he accesses and uses. For a holistic development, young people must have free access to every bit of information from anywhere, be it educational, legal, political or

agricultural etc. It is only when the youth are exposed and empowered to access and utilize enough information that they would be experiencing personal and societal development (Ugwuanyi & Ezeani, 2010).

To democratize information is vital because information is power. The man who has useful information has the world in his hands. As such, the governments and the public must endeavour to let every vital local and foreign news filter into the ears of Nigeria youths. Information democratization is important because it enables the recipients to develop their intellect and become patriotic citizens. According to Kofi Annan (2000), no one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime through information.

Information democratization is a must if Nigeria is to achieve her vision 20:20:20. The youth is a receptacle of intelligence, economic and financial security powers. To attain the standard of the developed countries, the youths must be put through on how developed countries struggled to reach their desired levels. For this to happen, information about the developed countries has to be publicized.

Considering the fact that information has great monetary value, it is enough to liberalize its use. It is a commodity worth reaching out for. Information does not only enlighten the soul, the mind and the body but also helps in poverty alleviation. It points out and directs the youths to where employment and admission vacancies exist. For the youths to harvest these advantages, information has to be democratized without any inhibitions.

Moreover, the information democratization which this paper is advocating for is in consonance with the world order – that is where the world is going. For instance, the universal declaration of the Human Rights, Article 19 states thus: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. These rights include freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers. Again, IFLA (2008) in its Internet Manifesto called for unrestricted access to information, which is indispensable and fundamental to freedom, equality, global understanding and peace. Continuing, it observed that the right of access to information is essential for a civilized

society. If our youths are to exercise their democratic rights and make informed choices, they must have access to political, social, scientific and economic information. If our culture is to thrive and to grow, people need access to the widest range of ideas, information and images.

### **Challenges to Information Democratization**

In spite of incessant call from the international bodies and agencies for information liberalization, the governments and peoples of Nigeria have remained obtrusively obstinate and uncaring, especially as it concerns youths. Many reasons like poor governance, poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, poor ICT compliant, and the refusal by the legislatures to pass Freedom of Information Bill are behind this. Some of them will be briefly discussed.

The first challenge to information democratization is poor governance of the country. Governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, the processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (UNDP, 1992:10). Since the inception of independence, those entrusted with the governance of the country, had never taken the interests of the youths at heart. Hence, fifty years after independence, unemployment, rising youth crimes, high disease infection rates, squalor, etc are today the lots of our youths. The youths are denied useful information that ought to accelerate their rate of socio-intellectual development.

Another strong challenge is ignorance of the masses. Since the youths are ignorant of their rights and privileges, they cannot stand up to demand and defend them. Governments now have the opportunities to run the youths down by not allowing them to be fully aware of what obtains in their country as well as other developed countries.

There is also the problem of the refusal to pass Freedom of Information Bill by Nigerian legislatures. This bill has for many times been presented before them but they had each time used their positions to drag it to the cooler. This poses a great challenge to information democratization for youth empowerment.

The poverty level of the people challenges democratization of information. Since the youths have been pushed into financial and political quagmire, it becomes difficult for them to buy computer based technologies to enable them know what obtains in other areas of the world.

The above are some of the factors that are seriously militating against information democratization for youth empowerment in Nigeria.

### **The Role of Libraries**

The true responsibility of libraries is the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of information. Anything that tries to dislodge and slant any of these functions threatens the profession and endangers the stock in-trade of libraries. This is because today's libraries are more interested in acquiring and democratizing information. Hence, the libraries in Nigeria have the following great roles to play in empowering the youth through information democratization. Some of them are:

- Provision of an enabling environment that would enhance interaction of youths. Apart from Internet and documentary services, youths who visit libraries interact and exchange ideas orally thereby accessing current and correct information.
- Repackaging information necessary for clearer understanding of accessible information. Repackaging simply means shifting of emphasis from documents to their contents and from collections to the users. According to Ugwuanyi and Ezeani (2010), in repackaging of information, materials are translated into various languages to ensure wider understanding and applicability and encourage top-down and bottom-up interaction.
- Massive provision of literacy manuals, readers' guides, newsletters and other information guides in local and foreign languages.
- Provision of teaching and discussion materials on entrepreneurship. These materials keep youths abreast of survival strategies and point out divergent areas of self-employment. In this way, libraries help youths in self-

employment, which helps to alleviate youth poverty.

- Provision of computers and other computer based technologies. These will enable youths to access information from multimedia resources and from many countries.
- Mounting campaigns to sensitize educators, publisher, policy makers and others to research into youth empowerment and information liberalization. With these roles, libraries in Nigeria would become square pegs in square holes and contribute significantly to empowering youths.

In support of information democratization and the great roles libraries could play for its realization, the IFLA (2008) stated thus:

- Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual both to hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information. It is the basis of democracy; and it is at the core of library service.
- Freedom of access to information, regardless of medium and frontiers is a central responsibility of the library and information profession.
- The provision of unhindered access to the Internet by libraries and information services supports communities and individuals to attain freedom, prosperity, and development.
- Barriers to the flow of information should be removed, especially those that promote inequality, poverty, and despair.

### Conclusion

This paper points out the importance of empowering the youths of Nigeria to be ready to take their rightful positions as the future leaders. This can only be achieved through information democratization, which means bringing democracy into information dissemination. This depicts the need for Nigeria to begin to think highly about the youths who are the nation's most costly asset. If any nation could sever itself from its youths, that spells doom for her future. Youths must never be seen as a burden when preparing and empowering them for their

anticipated responsibilities. This paper's findings are in consonance with Takawira's (2003) assertion that:

- Young people are not a problem, but a resource and a force for development.
- Young people are not leaders of some distant future, but leaders of today and tomorrow.
- Young people are not a demographic burden, but a demographic imperative and a gift to society.
- Young people are responsible and ready to play their part as active citizens.
- Youths are not passive objects or recipients or beneficiaries of development, but active and trusted partners in development.
- Youth development is not an incidental operational cost, but a deliberate strategic capital investment made by nation that would like to be alive tomorrow.

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