

## PUBLIC LIBRARIES AS CATALYSTS FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS: BUILDING ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIP CAPACITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The paper explores the skills and competencies required by public librarians in Africa to effectively engage in sustainable advocacy and partnership programmes aligned with the continent's development agenda. The various roles of public libraries in the development agenda in Africa; The various skills and competencies required for effective and sustainable advocacy and partnership programmes were outlined and discussed

**Methodology:** The study employs a systematic literature review, drawing on documentary research and thematic content analysis of existing literature on the subject matter. The paper reviews global and African literature on development agendas and SDGs.

**Findings:** the challenges identified include, non-existence of well-defined policy to guide implementation of advocacy and partnership programmes, lack of well-designed advocacy and partnership programmes for public libraries, lack of commitment to personal development among librarians, low level of partnership drive between libraries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), lack of institutional support for non-conventional library programmes and others were discussed extensively.

**Originality/Value:** This paper contributes to existing literature on public librarianship and development agenda by providing a framework for understanding skills and competencies required by librarians to effectively engage in sustainable advocacy programmes towards achieving development agendas.

**Implications:** The paper concludes that advocacy skills and competencies of librarians in public libraries to a great extent influences public libraries impact on development agendas in developing countries.

**Keywords:** AU Agenda 2063, Development Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals, Library Advocacy, Partnership Programmes, Public Libraries

**Paper type:** Exploratory research

### 1.0 Introduction

Libraries over the years have been part of the forces that triggers development both at the national and international level.

The roles of libraries in engineering development remain undisputable. Libraries can significantly attain the sustainable development goals (SDGs) by providing

Public Libraries as Catalysts for African Development Agendas: Building Advocacy and Partnership Capacities for Sustainability

access to information that will foster and promote sustainable development. Libraries irrespective of types contribute to development agenda, public libraries not exempted.

Public libraries by their design and default occupy a central place in the overall development of the society especially with their role as information providing agency. They have a distinctive responsibility of serving as a focal point of information and knowledge dissemination for development of society. They also have the cardinal function of contributing the achievement of development at the global space, regional and national levels. In this era of abundant information generation and utilization, “information for all” is a slogan common to every nation and public libraries are instruments for achieving this goal (Ibeun & Eiriemiokhale, 2014). Therefore, as an institution, public libraries and services they provides have been acknowledged as necessity for sustainable democracy, education and information for all aspects of daily living. No doubts, the fundamental philosophy behind the existence of public libraries is to build a society that is informed and can participate actively towards development (Osuigwe, Jiagbogu & Udeze, 2012; Okafor, Okey-Okafor & Nwachukwu,

2020). Although, the primary purposes of the public library according to IFLA/UNESCO (2001) is to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the information needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. The modern day public after providing services for the development of mankind at the long run will contribute to societal development at various levels.

Africa as a continent has been engaged in variety of development programme targeted at making Africa a better placed for all. One of the recognizable goals pursued by African leaders in the wake of independence was the pursuit of development through integration. In which case, it is unarguable that Africa as a continent has a long way to go to fulfill the wishes and aspirations of its forebears and project its people in the best way possible in the nearest future (Ademola 2022). Undeniably, as Africa enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it faces escalating challenges as well as new opportunities. There is greater consensus among Africans now than ever before on what needs to be done to accelerate growth, reduce poverty and promote sustainable development in Africa (Cheru, 2008).

Nevertheless, with the advent of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), new models of collaboration are transforming the way different sectors approach and tackle shared sustainable development risks and opportunities (Gilbert & Nelson, 2018). Regrettably, African states are facing the major challenge of giving their populations prospects of a better future as they grow at an unprecedented rate (FMECAD, 2023). To achieve the Africa we envision, collective effort is essential, and libraries regardless of their type, structure, or design play a vital role in this pursuit. Libraries are key players in promoting sustainable development goals, serving diverse communities across various settings with their unique resources and expertise. Public libraries, with their established legacy of fostering literacy, education, and information access, are well-positioned to contribute significantly to these development objectives. Reiterating this point, Mbagwu *et al* (2020) averred that since the achievement of SDGs is a collective effort, libraries also have a role to play in the provision of a powerful tool known as information. By contributing to sustainable development goals (SDGs), libraries can enhance their advocacy efforts, demonstrating their importance to society, building ties with political stakeholders, and

solidifying their status as vital institutions. Universal access to information and knowledge is crucial for realizing objectives, such as those outlined in the SDGs and AU Agenda 2063, underscoring the pivotal role of libraries.

The quest for development is an issue that bugs any human society that does not aspire for expiration (Igberaese & Oriyeaghalaji, 2009). Hence, achieving the sustainable development goals require the input of all institution concerned (Anyaoaku, 2017). Evidently, the changing role of public libraries is placing new demands on library skills and resources and generating a need to engage with different traditional partners (Fairbairn, 2012). Librarians are taking on advocacy roles to promote their resources, both physical and digital, and services, aiming to increase visibility and clarify the role and impact of contemporary libraries. This paper seeks to establish if library advocacy skill is appropriate in contemporary development plan; and also, if the library have special role to play towards realizing development plans in Africa.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

Generally, the paper seeks to explore the nexus between public libraries and development agenda by advocating skills and competencies as prerequisite for

Public Libraries as Catalysts for African Development Agendas: Building Advocacy and Partnership Capacities for Sustainable Advocacy and Partnership Programmes. Specifically, the paper would:

- i. Present brief exposition on the nature and meaning of various basic concepts used in the paper such as public libraries, advocacy, partnership and sustainable development;
- ii. Examine the prevailing situation in Africa as a continent in terms of development;
- iii. Present a review of African Union Agenda 2063 and sustainable development goals (SDGs);
- iv. Examine the justification for public libraries engagement in development agenda;
- v. Identify skills and competencies required for effective and sustainable advocacy, collaborative partnership;
- vi. Articulate the challenges to sustainable advocacy, collaboration and partnership initiatives as tools for contributing to realization of development agenda in Africa; and
- vii. Make possible recommendation in line with the identified challenges.

## **2.0 Exposition on the Nature and Meaning of Basic Concepts Used in the Paper**

The basic concepts used in this paper such as public libraries, advocacy, partnership and sustainable development will be explained briefly under this section

### **2.1 Public Libraries**

The public library system is a basic pillar in the provision of national, educational and cultural services, which support the aspirations of the entire population to achieve a high state of intellectual development. The public library is like community's doorway to knowledge and provides the basic conditions for lifelong learning, independent decision making and social, economical and cultural development of the individual and social groups (Uzoigwe, 2017; Osuigwe, Jiagbogu & Udeze, 2012). In the 21st century, public libraries must adopt a dynamic approach to service delivery, tailoring programs to meet the diverse needs of their users.

Public libraries serve as learning hub in any given society. The thrust of public library activities is to reach out to a wider population of the citizenry, improve their reading habits, their knowledge and contribution to various aspects of their daily living such as governance, source of good medicine, good schools for learning, food and water supply electricity, recreation and improved occupational choices. The public

library as an organization established is supported and funded by the community either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization to provide information needs of the populace (Enyia (2002; Uzoigwe, 2017). Nevertheless, public library by default is expected to deal with some of society's major challenges through the provision of essential community infrastructure, access to culture, literacy etc. It is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and additional attainment (Davis, 2015). Public libraries act as essential hubs, making the records of human imagination, ideas, and creativity openly accessible to all.

Public libraries have been facilitating socio-economic empowerment of communities by supplementing formal education, vocational education, adult education, self-learning and lifelong learning processes (Das, 2010). The expansion of public libraries in developing nations is essential, as they offer resources for lifelong learning, support educational curricula at all levels, provide diverse information, and promote economic and

agricultural growth while strengthening democratic values.

The public library is widely acknowledged to serve as the major source of a society's general and equal access to information, knowledge and works of imagination through the provision of a wide range of resources and services regardless of age, sex, creed, educational and social status (Osuigwe, Jiagbogu & Udeze, 2012). It also serve as the forum for human development, knowledge and dissemination of information especially through its various information services and which have the capacities to accelerate the attainment of the sustainable development goals in which education for all and empowerment of all women and girls child is inclusive (Ikegwuro & Wyorkson, 2017). Interestingly, public library is recognized as the peoples' university because of its proximity to the people. They provide information services which are unique and closer to the people in the community settings (Benson, Anyalebechi & Amaechi, 2015). This explains why public librarians must offer educational, social, and political support to individuals in their local areas. Additionally, serving the community in this way leads to why it is regarded as the "university for the masses."

## **2.2 Partnership**

Partnership is one of the major avenue through which public libraries can contribute significantly to the realization of global and continental development agenda like the SDGs and AU Agenda 2063. Partnership is important for public libraries to make an appreciable impart in the life of its users (Ibeun & Eiriemiokhale, 2014). Oparaku, Anyanwu and Benson (2017) citing Greyliving & McNully (2011) opined that the public library is an appropriate anchor in a programme of this nature because of the stability within the government structures through which it is established. As noted by Sadare, Moothi and Daramite (2022), partnership management is becoming a progressively crucial part of library management, as the number and variety of public library partnership change collaborative approaches to service delivery helps to increase the flow of information across countries and regions and facilitate the extension of ideas through partnership. In other words, partnership must be seen as a key factor of the re-actualization of change and development, especially at the grassroot level. However, a partnership based on respect and reciprocity pre-supposes a readiness on both sides to embrace structural change, and the will to recognize the

priorities of the other side and to champion them (FMECAD, 2023).

In other words, there is need to partner for joint venture towards meaningful development, hence, the public library authority should consider this as a point of concern. Above all, the realization of the process of a national framework for sustainable development is highly dependent on the stakeholders' involvement; and the stakeholders cannot be fully involved without strong synergy or partnership initiatives (Habibu & Babayi (2017); Sadare, Moothi & Daramola, 2022).

### **2.3 Advocacy**

Advocacy can include many activities that a person or organization undertakes including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing opinion polls. It represents the series of actions taken and issues highlighted to change "What is" into "What should be" considering that this "What should be" is more decent and egalitarian to societal cause (Eze, 2013). Advocacy is an effective way to deliver the library message to a wider audience but also to help librarians become part of larger organizational, local, regional or national and international conversations (Woldetsadik, 2022). In an era overwhelmed by information, it is crucial for libraries and

librarians to develop skills in effectively communicating their value and forming alliances to bolster the significant contributions they make to society.

Library advocacy translates into public support and promotion of individual libraries or library services in the public domain. It is a powerful tool for library development. Therefore the professionals should appropriate it knowing full well that the vision of librarians is shifting rapidly, but the multiple personalities of our work persist (Ezeala & Hundu, 2019). This is why Adepoju and Akobe (2023), averred that library association and regulatory bodies should provide platforms on different themes either through seminars, conference, road walks, social media technology and others like television and radio interviews to sensitize members of the public about the collectivity in the libraries on SDGs, and for knowledge practice and implementation of the long terms goals which is for our collective goal and prospective future. In view of the above, there is need for public libraries to become part of the instrument through which the sustainable development goals and African Union agenda 2063 can be achieved. This can be done through the utilization advocacy as a tool for

contributing its own quota to the realization of the agenda.

#### **2.4 Sustainable Development**

Development is the product of human endeavours intended to improve facilities, opportunities and infrastructures in order to offer a better life to world communities. It is the synergy of creative activities, which depends on the contributions of the individuals within an entity (Owuamalam, 2006). It has implications for various levels of the human society. It is simply an improvement in every aspect of human society be it material, social, moral and spiritual (Igberaese & Onyeaghalayi, 2009). Similarly, Benson, Emetarom and Ekuruche (2017) citing Adetiba (2013) and Daniel (2015) see development as not only an economic exercise but also involve both socio-economic and political issues and pervade all aspects of societal life. It is a process of improving the quality of all human lives with some important aspects which includes creating conditions conducive to the growth of peoples, self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promotes human dignity and respect.

Sustainable development refers to the development that adequately provide for the needs of the current human populace without hampering the capability of upcoming generations to adequately provide for their own needs, and this relates to the environment, as well as socio-economic development (Olatonye, Bokwe & Muchaonyeriwa 2021). Arko-Cobbah (2010) as cited in Mbagwu *et al* (2020) affirmed that promoting sustainable development depends on access to information. Sustainable development is the development that satisfies the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs (Ikegwuro & WyorKson 2017). Enduring development is marked by consistency and resilience, maintaining its progress in the face of substantial obstacles. It does not regress or diminish, even when challenged by forces that threaten to undermine it.

### **3.0 Prevailing Situation in Africa**

Africa is a continent that is rich in natural resources and cultural diversity amongst its many communities. However, it has lagged behind in development and protection of its riches both in terms of diverse communities and source of wealth for the rest of the world (Muigua, 2019). Africa has the world's highest population of

poor people (46 percent of the population) and is home to more than 30 percent of the world's poor (Cheru, 2008). In geographical, cultural, political, economic and historical terms, Africa is an extraordinarily diverse continent. What all African states share however is their sheer dynamic force. Africa is a continent with enormous wealth and potential it is home to many of the world's fastest growing economics and is experiencing rapid and profound transformation (FMEDC, 2023; IDLO, 2017).

Regrettably, Africa as a continent is still battling with developmental issues such as governance, corruption, unemployment, mismanagement of funds, insurgencies, terrorism, political upheavals, insecurity population influx and depleting economy (Mahlatisi, 2021). No doubt, the development challenge in Africa is multi-dimensional and conventional development orthodoxies are inadequate to address it (Cheru, 2008). Contemporary African nations are marked by a prevalence of subsistence and commercial activities, a limited and fragmented production base employing poorly adapted technologies, an overlooked informal sector, environmental degradation, and uneven development driven by urban-centric public policies.

Additionally, these economies exhibit fragmentation, excessive reliance on external inputs, and weak institutional frameworks. Despite numerous economic policies and programs over decades, African economies remain underdeveloped, with an increasing proportion of the world's poorest populations and limited influence over resource allocation (Nkurayija, 2011).

The convergence of poor economic outcomes, declining soil quality, environmental deterioration of resource systems, and rapid demographic expansion creates conditions for large-scale migration, profoundly shaping political and social landscapes at national, regional, and global levels. Numerous African countries face challenges from ineffective governance, weak leadership, and widespread corruption, which obstruct development. Stagnant economic progress, resulting from insufficient structural reforms and the lack of comprehensive development frameworks, undermines Africa's capacity to tackle contemporary global issues. However, since the 1990s, Africa has witnessed the adoption of an impressive number of new revised constitutions which contain most of the core principles and values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance, including the separation of powers and

independence of the judiciary (IDLO, 2017). According to Ademola (2022), Africa entered into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with huge unresolved developmental issues such as poverty, food insecurity, inter and intra state conflicts, political and social fragmentation, massive unemployment, debt trap, etc. Hence, to resolve Africa's problems and achieve the unification of Africa on the pedestal of shared values and a common destiny, the AU agenda 2063 framework was designed.

### **3.0 Review of Major Development Agenda in Africa**

It is not news that Africans like other continent have been adopting development plans over the years to ensure that the continent becomes a better place. However, two major development agenda namely the sustainable development goals and AU Agenda will be reviewed under this section

#### **3.1 African Union Agenda 2063**

The African Union Agenda 2063 is a vision and an action plan adopted by the AU which defines Africa's development trajectory in key areas for 50 years. The agenda is supported by the shared desire of the African people to determine their destiny for any integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent, driven and managed by its

Public Libraries as Catalysts for African Development Agendas: Building Advocacy and Partnership Capacities for Sustainability

citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena (Ukaeje, 2022). In the AU's Agenda 2063, African States have committed to good governance, democracy, human rights and the rule of law (FMECAD, 2023). The African Union Agenda 2063 is aimed at establishing an African economic community that would drive the economic progress of the continent through a functional integration process (Ukaeje, 2022). African Union Commission (2015) outline the Agenda 2063 seeks to:

- Galvanize and unite in action all Africans and the diasporas around the common vision of a peaceful, integrated and prosperous Africa.
- Harness the continental endowments embodied in its people, history, cultures and natural resources, geo-political convention to effect equitable and people-centred growth and development.
- Build and accelerate implementation of continental frameworks and other similar initiatives.
- Provide internal coherence and coordination to continental, regional and national framework and plans adopted by the AU, RECs and

Members state and plans and strategies.

- Offer policy space for individual, structural and collective actions to realize the continental vision.

According to African Union Commission (2014), "in operational terms, the Agenda 2063 is a rolling plan of long, medium and short term plans i.e., its overall span as fifty years with five term year plans that could be also broken down into shorter periods of five-year terms on the discretion of each member state. Hopefully, agenda 2063 promise to coordinate various countries development agenda through outlining a development blueprint that should be used as yardstick to ensure that the continent moves forward as one (Muigua, 2019).

Although, the implementation of the agenda 2063 is to be carried out in phases; the "African Agenda" is based on the understanding that socio-economic development cannot take place without political peace and stability and these are pre-requisites for socio-economic development.

### **3.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) are universal goals aimed at making

the global world a better and safe environment. It is all-embracing goals that require all hands to be on deck (Benson, Anyalebechi & Amaechi 2015). The adoption of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development signifies a great change in development planning. The implication of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development is that Africa's structural transformation is anchored by the principles of sustainable development (Mahlatsi, 2021). The SDGs mission and vision are targeted at building all-inclusive development to transform the world, be it in developing or the developed world's (Ogunmodele *et al*, 2023).

The SDGs were adopted by the United Nation General Assembly (UNGA) after the expiry of the millennium development goal (MDGs) timeframe of 15 years in September 2015 (Kamau & Owearu, 2016). In 2015, the entire globe embraced a set of goals to put an end to provide to safeguard the earth, and to ensure prosperity (Sadare, Mooth & Daramola, 2022). The United Nations, generally assembly (2015) set 17 goals and 169 targets essential for human development (Kamaru, Owarnu, 2016). Nevertheless, Margaritat *et al* (2022) citing Barnett and Parnell (2016) averred that despite the aim of shaping of a

global vision for all, many have also pointed out that the SDGs contain a range of diverse epistemological positions and values. More so, the framework that could guide national governments towards sustainable development has also been criticized for being inadequately transformative.

Regrettably, African Union *et al* (2024) analyzing year of 2030 for the achievement of the SDGs, progress report shows that Africa is unlikely to achieve any of the five goals analyzed in the report (1,12,13,16 & 17) which are no poverty, zero hunger, climate action, peace, justice and strong institutions and partnership for the goals. This agenda is geared towards achieving sustainable development in the greater African continent (Muigua, 2019).

#### **4.0 Justification for Public Libraries Engagement in Development Agenda**

Libraries are social institutions and as part of the society where they exist, they are expected to play significant role in development agenda or initiatives. Libraries have many roles to play for sustainable development (Ikegwuro & Nyorkson, 2017). According to Okafor, Okey-Okafor & Nwachukwu (2020), it takes informed citizen to build information society and contribute to sustainable development.

Libraries are expected to be in the forefront in contributing to the attainment of sustainable development particularly in developing countries (Bishi & Adbullahi, 2017). According to Fairbairn (2012), majority of government officials and librarians believe that public libraries have a role to play in improving lives in areas like health, education, economic development, communication social inclusion, citizen empowerment, democracy and e-government.

It is important to understand why public libraries as a social institution should be involved in development agenda. Apparently, access to information is a cross-cutting issue that supports all areas of development (Kamau & Kwano, 2016), hence, public libraries must be incorporated into development agenda. According to Aregbesola, Owolabi and Adebisi (2023), achieving the SDGs requires collective action from governments, civil society, and the private sector. They further noted that the role of public libraries in promoting and contributing to the SDGs has been largely overlooked. Also, Ibeun and Eiriemiokhale (2014), pointed out experience across the globe reveals that the attainment of meaningful and sustainable development requires the genuine participation of the

public, the organized private sectors, donor agencies, individuals and civil society. It is imperative that public libraries are part of the development agenda because it is established for the publics with public fund.

Undoubtedly, the attainment of SDGs have been greatly promoted by libraries across the world through the promotion of literacy through provision of free access to information, safe libraries, as well as welcome spaces in communities (Olatoye, Bokwe & Muchaonyerwa, 2017). Aregbesola, Owolabi and Adebisi (2023) posit that by leveraging their expertise, resources, and community network, public libraries can help promote awareness, education, and action toward achieving the SDGs. As put forward by Ademola (2022), no one can do it for Africa, except Africans. He noted further, that Africans cannot continue to live in self-denial. In which case, Agenda 2063 is possible if all hands are on deck, public libraries, inclusive. In other words, public libraries are specially positioned to drive sustainable development goals.

Most importantly rural public libraries must strengthen partnerships among local libraries, local governments, and community groups in order to develop services that meet community needs and

promote empowerment for long-term, rural development (Abu, Rafiel & Sha'ari 2023). The role of libraries in the UN 2030 is significant and we can directly or indirectly support many of the goals and targets. Libraries also are uniquely positioned to raise awareness of the SDGs with broad reach in to communities.

In order to achieve the ambitious goals, set out in the 2030 agenda and Agenda 2063, African countries will need to further harness and vitalize the national drivers of their economics mobilize domestic resources, and promote responsible entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation (IDLO, 2017). The mainstream development discourse advocated by major donors in the international community has focused on the need for economic growth in order to reach sustainable development while, there are different ideas and strategies on the concept of economic development for Africa (Nkurayija, 2011).

Public libraries are seen as the backbone of every sector in the society because they collate both physical and online resources that are needed for human and national development. Public libraries are instrumental in advancing sustainable development goals through providing essential resources and information that

support oversight and assessment, promote civic participation and transparency, and stimulate creative and innovative initiatives. According to Uzoigwe (2017), it is important to note that libraries are not only repository of knowledge but has an active role to play as a catalyst for national development. The library is a key agent of transformation, capable of promoting development and social transformation through the provision of valuable library and information services such as the provision of easy access to information, the preservation of information sources, storage facilities and information retrieval as well as literacy advocacy (Sadare, Moothi & Daramola, 2022).

Although libraries are well-positioned within communities across the continent to advance development, many of these libraries still require increased capacity, resources, and support to fully achieve their potential (Young *et al*, 2021). Public libraries play an important role in promoting social responsibility through their resources, services, and initiatives, they support individuals and organizations in achieving several responsibility goals and contribute to the well-being of society as a whole (Aregbesola, Owolabi, & Adebisi 2023). According to Sadare, Moothi and

Daramola (n.d.), libraries, by offering access to information and expertise, are able to assist in providing opportunities for people to advance their own lives and support informed decision-making by governments, communities, and other to offer services and support that eradicate poverty and enhance people's progress fair and wide.

The development of any nation is hinged on the provision of significant, well-timed and satisfactory information on all areas of human endeavours. Libraries no doubt, facilitate access to information and have an impact on actualizing development agenda. Librarians therefore should promote the rights of citizens, develop relevant collections, model standard of information ethics, and give access to technology.

### **5.0 Skills and Competencies Required for Effective and Sustainable Advocacy, Collaborative Partnership**

Librarians working in all types of libraries must be competent advocates and policy influencers (Durney, 2023). According to Ezeala and Hundu (2019), originally, library advocacy was centered on the library itself but current trends show library positioning themselves to demonstrate how useful they are to their communities. They further contend that for

advocacy to succeed as a concept, it has to employ marketing strategies and this point to the need for skills and competencies. Librarians are forced to acquire many more skills because of the changes being witnessed in the library parlance. In view of the challenges identified the following recommendations were put forward:

- *Marketing Skills:* Public Libraries are expected to market developmental agenda. According to Oduagwu, Ossai-Onah and Oduagwu (2013), librarians need marketing skills that will help the professional to know what the users want, where they are and how they can be revealed. They further contend that if profit-oriented organizations require the skills of professional marketers to remain in business, then library and information science professional need it the most.

- *Digital literacy:* This is a critical survival skill in this fast-paced, technology-driven world where the ubiquity of technologies makes it almost mandatory that everyone acquires digital skills in order to function effectively and participate actively in societal activities (Igbinovia & Aiyebilechi, 2023). It equips people with the ability to critically navigate digital environments, ensuring they can access resources and communicate effectively.

Additionally, digital literacy supports lifelong learning and problem-solving, enabling individuals to thrive in an increasingly connected and technologically advanced global landscape.

- *Partnership Management*: As the number and variety of public library partnership changes, partnership management is becoming an increasingly indispensable part of library management (Fairbairn, 2012). Strategic partnerships with local governments, nonprofits, and private entities enable libraries to expand their offerings and reach diverse populations. Additionally, adept partnership management strengthens community ties and supports the library's role in promoting education, culture, and social cohesion.

- *Advocacy Skills*: According to Durney (2023), librarians execute advocacy skills through a variety of actions, such as community regularly with the library's communicating regularly with the library's community writing an informative letter to the editor to raise public awareness of library issues, researching policy issues and effectively communicating the policy impact on the library to stakeholders and decision-makers, etc. When thinking about library advocacy, it is important to know what you want to accomplish through your advocacy

campaign. Moreover, for advocacy to succeed as a concept, it has to employ marketing strategies (Igwebuike, Ihejirika & Onah, 2020).

- *Capacity to maintain strong synergy between public libraries and parent bodies*: Eze (2013) posit that managers of public libraries should establish and maintain a close and positive relationship with the bodies that govern the public library services, finding bodies and other stakeholders, if they must avert adverse policy statements unfavorable fiscal policies and other negative tendencies. Strong collaboration ensures that libraries align with the priorities of their parent bodies, securing sustained support and resources. Furthermore, such synergy enhances advocacy efforts, enabling libraries to effectively demonstrate their value and secure favorable conditions for their operations.

## **6.0 Challenges to Sustainable Advocacy, Collaboration and Partnership Programme**

Outlined in this section are some of the reasons why public libraries are not achieving much in development agenda through advocacy, collaboration and partnership programmes

a. *Non-existence of well-defined policy to guide implementation of advocacy and partnership programme:* A critical assessment of librarianship clearly indicates that in most instances, policy to guide implementation of advocacy initiatives is often not clearly defined. Accordingly, Benson, Igbokwe & Onyam (2020) posit that a well-articulated policy is a necessity in the actualization of any goals or objectives. Librarians in public libraries need to develop and articulate a sound and viable policy that should guide advocacy, collaborative and partnership programmes as it relates to development agenda in Africa.

b. *Lack of fund:* Libraries in most developing countries are not adequately funded. For instance, Igbinovia and Aiyebelehen, (2023) using the Nigerian scenario opined that public libraries in Nigeria like every other nations in developing countries have not achieved so much in this regard due to low funding, paucity in digitally skilled manpower and digital infrastructures for facilitating digital inclusion. Agenda 2063 and SDGs as espoused by Ademola (2022) will not come alive except they are backed with substantial funding. As rightly noted by Aregbesola, Owolabi and Adebisi (2023), one of the significant challenges that public libraries

face in promoting SDGs is limited funding and staffing. They further affirmed that many public libraries struggle to allocate the necessary resources to promote sustainable development effectively.

c. *Lack of requisite advocacy skills:* Most librarians working in public libraries do not possess the requisite advocacy skills needed to lobby and advocate for the public libraries. Public librarians do not have all the skills or financial resources needed to deliver effective community development services (Fairbairn, 2012). Additionally, the shortfall in financial resources exacerbates this challenge, restricting librarians' ability to implement robust programs. Without these advocacy skills, public libraries struggle to secure the necessary backing to expand their role as vital community hubs. Furthermore, professional development opportunities focused on advocacy could empower librarians to better navigate stakeholder relationships and influence policy decisions.

d. *Lack of awareness:* as enunciated by Ademola (2022), a major challenge to the full realization of agenda 2063 is that even though it was called people-driven agenda, it is interesting that the local people who are supposed to support these initiatives do not even know what agenda 2063 is. This is

where it becomes challenging for librarians especially public librarians to be part of the global and regional agenda. Public librarians are thus tasked with bridging this awareness divide through targeted outreach and education programs. Without widespread knowledge of Agenda 2063, community engagement in its initiatives remains low, undermining its success. Furthermore, librarians need enhanced resources and training to effectively communicate and promote such agendas to diverse local populations.

*e. Low level of partnership drive between libraries and non-governmental organization (NOGs):* Many libraries are yet to explore the benefits of partnering with non-governmental organization. Inability of librarians and public libraries as a social institution to harness the potentials of this strategy limit to a great extent how librarians can contribute significantly to realization of SDGs and AU agenda. By forging strategic alliances with NGOs, libraries could access additional resources, expertise, and networks to amplify their impact. Without these partnerships, libraries struggle to address complex community needs effectively. Furthermore, proactive collaboration with NGOs could enable libraries to implement

innovative programs aligned with regional and global development priorities.

*f. Lack of institutional support for non-conventional library programmes:* The absence of adequate institutional support from government and parent organizations significantly hampers public libraries' ability to drive development in Africa, particularly in implementing non-conventional library programs essential for achieving development agendas. Without sufficient backing, libraries struggle to introduce innovative services such as digital literacy initiatives, community outreach programs, or specialized educational workshops that align with regional goals. This lack of support limits the libraries' capacity to address diverse community needs and contribute effectively to frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and AU Agenda 2063. Furthermore, insufficient funding and resources restrict the scalability of these programs, hindering their long-term impact. Enhanced institutional commitment is crucial to empower libraries to innovate and play a pivotal role in Africa's development.

*g. Low level of librarians' commitment to personal growth and development:* most librarians working in public libraries lack

personal commitment to personal growth and development. This to a great extent limits the extent they can contribute to realization of development agenda. Without a strong dedication to enhancing their skills, knowledge, and competencies, librarians are less equipped to innovate or adapt to the evolving needs of their communities. This lack of personal investment hampers their capacity to implement programs that align with broader developmental objectives. Furthermore, a failure to pursue continuous learning limits librarians' ability to leverage new technologies and methodologies critical for modern library services. Targeted professional development initiatives could address this gap, empowering librarians to play a more substantial role in advancing regional and global goals.

h. *Lack of well-designed advocacy and partnership programmes for public libraries:* Most public libraries in African continent do not have well-designed advocacy and partnership programmes that will enable public libraries engage fully in developmental agenda, this therefore limits the extent to which librarians in public libraries contributes significantly to development initiatives like the AU Agenda and SDGs.

## **7.0 Conclusion and recommendation**

The paper establishes that there is a nexus between public libraries and actualization of development agenda. No doubt, advocacy skills and competencies of librarians in public libraries to a great extent influences development in developing countries. Public libraries can contribute significantly to AU agenda and sustainable development goals through extensive advocacy and partnership initiatives. However, before librarians can contribute to the development agenda, librarians working in public libraries should possessed the requisite skills and competencies required to make meaning impact

Nevertheless, the followings are the recommendations put forward in line with identified challenges:

1. *Developing strong synergy and collaborative initiative:* Collaboration is the action of working with one or more other people to produce or create something (Tella, Akinboro & Hamed, 2012). Okafor, Okey-Okafor and Nwachukwu (2020) averred that for public libraries to effectively perform with their expected information services delivery there is need to partner with other libraries and organizations. According to Gilbert and Nelson (2018), advocacy collaboration can unlock three powerful opportunities to drive

transformational policy change in support of the SDGs these include building better policy and political capital for change, shifting entrenched mindsets and strengthening trust. As underscored Das (2010), leaderships of library associations need to collaborate with champions of other social movements for formulating appropriate strategies of library advocacy and campaign in the policy forums and legislative platforms. Public libraries should use different advocacy media programmes to increase awareness of the valuable services and resources that they offer to the community. This however is attainable when there is strong synergy between librarians in public libraries and other stakeholders in the information sector.

2. *Possession of strong and reliable advocacy skills:* Leadership of various organs of library associations requires strong lobbying, campaign, advocacy and outreach skills in order to reach political consensus on burning issues. Furthermore, they also should have strong negotiation skills to deal with the policy makers, legislators, politicians and bureaucrats who are responsible for policy formulation, programme design and implementation. Librarians should explore various avenues towards possessing strong

and reliable skills, avenues like participating in public relation programmes and trainings

3. *Collaboration between librarians and allied information agencies:* Librarians should take pragmatic steps towards collaborating with related information providers and non-governmental organization in ensuring that librarians in public libraries are fully equipped with the requisite advocacy skills and competency necessary to contribute to actualization of sustainable development agendas in Africa. Collaboration between information agencies local and national governments, non-government organizations (NGOs) and western donors are cost-effective and sustainable, hence librarians should explore them.

4. *Revisiting the curriculum:* the cultural change in library school education and library philosophy is necessary to create an efficient and appropriate library system (Nyana, 2009). Revisiting the curriculum of library school education and re-evaluating library philosophy are essential steps toward developing efficient and contextually relevant library systems that can effectively support modern societal needs. A cultural shift in training programs is necessary to equip librarians with the skills to address contemporary challenges, such as digital

Public Libraries as Catalysts for African Development Agendas: Building Advocacy and Partnership Capacities for Sustainability transformation and community engagement, aligning with development agendas like the SDGs and AU Agenda 2063. Incorporating interdisciplinary approaches, such as data literacy and advocacy training, into the curriculum can enhance librarians' ability to innovate and serve diverse populations. Furthermore, updating library philosophy to emphasize inclusivity and sustainability will ensure libraries remain vital institutions in fostering knowledge-driven development. This reform will empower librarians to create adaptive, user-centered systems that contribute meaningfully to societal progress.

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