Libraries Role in Improving Quality Education and Reducing Poverty towards Sustainable Development in Africa

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Abstract:
International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) has specified several roles in which libraries can contribute to sustainable development, one of such roles is through quality education. This objective according to IFLA sets out to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. This essay reflects on this points raised, and further discuss on some initiatives taken by libraries towards achieving these goals while also suggesting more that can be done. It also proposes actions institutions and libraries can take towards the realization of these goals.

1. Introduction

The library in times past was seen as a collection of physical books which were accessed from shelves and used on a reading desk and a place for manual borrowing and lending. This for long has been the notion that people had about libraries. As such the library had little value in the eyes of the community. It was not perceived to be a place that can contribute to solving societal needs. This has been the notion particularly in Africa till recently with the coming of computers and advancement in technologies. Radijeng (2013) states that a study report by Sesigo (2009) indicates that in Botswana, very few people used public libraries daily and weekly, and that among those who did, half of them were students. A lot of people do not recognise the value or relevance of libraries in their lives; libraries were mostly associated with schools and learning. However, several libraries across Africa are taking giant steps towards changing this belief as well as improving the services. Botswana Library Association for example developed a strategy to change this status and in process contributed to Botswana Vision 2016. Their first strategy was to increase libraries visibility through setting up attractive buildings, refurbishing the old structure and equipping them with recent technologies and providing free access to information. More so, new programs were introduced and geared towards addressing the customers' needs and solving daily issues of life. These innovations though geared towards developing particularly the youths, however had impact on both the young and the old. This drastic measure has improved the value of the library and directly reflects the vision of which gives particular attention to youth empowerment, job creation, prosperous, productive and innovative nation building with a pillar that focuses on economic growth, sustainable development, job creation and diversification. Radijeng (2013).

Botswana library Association distinguished itself by taking this giant step through the pursuit of excellence and introduction of a new culture of hard work and discipline - where effort is

rewarded and where the necessary skills are available and where business and entrepreneurial activities are encouraged and supported Radijeng (2013). This initiatives increased the value of the library and gave it a centre stage in the community development initiatives. However this does not end there, there is so much more libraries can do to support the community. With the advancement of technologies the role of a librarian is continually evolving to meet social and technological needs and bringing up new ideas and development that does not only meet the needs of today but also for see the future. Libraries are an integral part of the community as they serve the members of the community and provide space and opportunities for individuals to have unrestricted access to information relevant to their needs. Libraries serve the needs of both the young and old as they provide spaces for recreational activities for the children and youth.

Youth unemployment in Africa has reached alarming proportions owing to the increase in population, rapid expansion of education system, high levels of immigration, political conflicts insecurity and worst economic performance. (Ndegw 1985; world bank 1988 in Global perspective 1998) These factors have led to the issues of unemployment especially among youths graduating from various educational institutions. Current employment statistics are not encouraging as young people make up 37 percent of the global working-age population but 60

Percent of the total unemployed. In Africa nearly 70 percent of the population is under 30 as many as two thirds of youth in developing economies are either without work, not studying, or are engaged in irregular informal employment (ILO, Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013). Since decades efforts have been made to solve this thriving issues of unemployment in most African governments. UNESCO (1984) gives a report of vocationalizing of the education system in most African countries, but

despite that; these problems continues to persist. Other efforts made by countries such as Gambia, Nigeria, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Uganda, Kenya includes the introduction of entrepreneurial skills development programs (ESDP) this was done with the belief that if people are trained with entrepreneurial skills it can help in promoting small business enterprises, starting new enterprises and sustenance of such ventures. (Rao in Flum 1988). A closer look at the Gambian example is the introduction of the Gambian Technical training institute which was established to prepare candidates for mid-level employment, mainly technicians (Rao in Flum 1988). This also encouraged entrepreneurs with skills. In Nigeria, the industrial development centre (IDG) in Owerri in 1991 was established all in an effort to train individuals to be self-reliant and awaken the entrepreneurial spirit. The UNDP, strategy 2014-2016 title Empowered Youth Sustainable development future is a call to

action to invest in youths, protect their rights and better equip them to adapt to changes and seize opportunities. This initiative focused on areas of employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, civic engagement and protection of rights, education including comprehensive sexual education, and health (United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Youth 2013). Youths empowerment will more actively contribute to local economic development and sustainable human development. On the contrary UNDP reports that youth unemployment, underemployment and poor wages can have long-term adverse impacts on human economic and social capital and can trigger a vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty and vulnerability that can adversely impact on sustainable development. UNDP 2014-2016

It is established by these records that efforts have continually been made to solve the problem of unemployment since decades ago. However, the problem seems to only persist. Sustainable human development cannot be achieved without decent work and living wages. Income losses and joblessness. Diminish human and social capital, are associated with poorer health and educational outcomes, and contribute to long-term and Intergenerational poverty and inequality (UNDP 2014-2016 Strategy). This suggest that more efforts have to be put in place to change this position. Increase attention is needed to ensure young people's effective transition from school to decent jobs. The library plays a key role in nation building as it consistently serve as information hubs, supporting local community and non-governmental organisation (NGO) in effectively addressing the needs of populations served. Libraries are integral to community development as they provide open access to information and works of imagination in a variety of formats free without restrictions. With the expansion of information due to the advancement in technology, libraries can do much more than just providing access to information in their libraries. They can take a step further towards encouraging and continues promotion of open access to published works and researches. European commission (2012) wrote that access to the results of publicly funded research is important to the scientific community, for innovative business and for society. Libraries can further increase their value by engaging the community in the entrepreneurial activities that involve their daily routines. These points are discussed further down and steps towards achieving such are highlighted.

2. Entrepreneurship in the Library

Libraries can assist in reducing unemployment among youths and increase the number of literates particularly in Africa by creating awareness of the entrepreneurship opportunities in the library of which many are un-aware of. Though there are many entrepreneurial librarians today, the public doesn't perceive the profession that way, nor is it aware of the innovations created by librarians. A common view of libraries includes the perceptions that they are "all about books", essentially storehouses of past knowledge, and that librarians are gatekeepers to or guardians of the printed records of society and culture. Despite the fact that librarianship is a replete with professional literature, few people are aware of what librarians have accomplished by way of innovative or original thinking in terms of information resource use and development. Librarians and entrepreneurs share common skills they Institute policies, procedures and programs to meet the needs, solve the problems and assimilate necessary changes. Librarians eagerly embrace entrepreneurship in response to patrons' demands, changing resource formats, and other challenges of the library in this 21[st]Century.

To substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, Librarians can take the lead towards training unemployed youths on entrepreneurship education. The idea

of entrepreneurship education revolves around facilitating self-employment leading to economic and social development of the society, Libraries can be a place for building such grounds and providing opportunities for individuals to become self-reliant and creating job opportunities. Take for instance using the daily services of a library, librarians can equip youths with knowledge on Printing, Scanning, Photocopy services, Book lamination, and Compilation of bibliographies. These are activities librarians are engaged with daily. In the Academic library setting, such activities forms a major part of daily routines librarians engage in especially in Nigeria where issues of power failure is prevailing. As such most individuals see the library as a place where the can make use of these services at a very affordable price. Federal University Dutsin-ma where I am currently employed makes use of these services especially printing, scanning, photocopy services, book lamination and binding to meet the needs of its users. Statistical records the library keeps reports a very high number of usage of most of these services by the university community and the immediate community members at large. With these knowledge and practical skills to handle these equipment's and machines, librarians can organise trainings, talk shows, seminars, workshops and symposium for unemployed youths to equip them with skills and share knowledge on how to use them thereby, advocating social change, applying new business models to the work they are already committed to and equipping individuals with knowledge to be self-reliant. Libraries can offer volunteer opportunities for young adults that can allow them to try out the new skills and develop self-confidence and enhance their self-esteem, train them on matters that are relevant to the needs of their community. This will be particularly rewarding to them and in time discard the idea that the library is all about the book. The people in turn will be able to share their experiences, challenges, aspirations and also learn new skills and make

use of the materials in the library to improve themselves. Flum (1988) states that being an educator is an important part of being an advocate.

3. Open Access to Publicly Accessible Recorded Knowledge

Libraries can take a drastic step towards reaching wider audience and facilitating access to their recorded knowledge such as repositories. Less restrictions to literary works and research has tremendous benefits to the society at large. Providing free knowledge can be generated into building up new ideas, creativity and inventions. Through open access, the fast, free sharing of information will speed up the pace of discovery and bring about new jobs, fuelling economies, and increasing the return on our investment in research and education, Open Matters (2016). More so, educators, young learners and students can leverage on an open approach to create customized education programs, using the latest relevant information to improve learning outcomes and make access to quality education more equitable and affordable. This will in time assist in creating new ideas, which will in turn serve as an impetus for knowledge. With open access to recorded knowledge, more people can read the results of scholarly research, including those who would otherwise not be able to access that information because they cannot afford the subscription to an expensive journal. Beyond access initiative states that

"many of the world's poorest communities lack access to existing knowledge that can be used to combat some of their most severe challenges". The UNDP Youth strategy, 2011-2016 in the same stream of line added that "access to information and communication technologies is providing young people with new means to express their aspirations and concerns more freely, to mobilize in large numbers, and to collaborate with other young people across borders to debate and seek solutions to the problems that concern them most". An example of an open access approach is that of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Which provides a network of twelve (12) Maarifa, or publicly accessible knowledge centres, annually reaches 1.5 million people in the most remote regions, serving as public libraries. These centres offer tools for people to improve their health, increase their incomes and better their lives. Access to information via this library network promotes sustainable family farming, stressing its capacity to address hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and climate change. Beyond access (2016). Libraries can have a powerful impact when they proactively promote their role in information access for development. This will substantially increase the number of literates while creating an informed society with members who can translate ideas into action.

4. How these Actions can be Realized

Libraries as earlier discussed constitute a strong foundation for empowering youths with technical and vocational skills, for employment decent jobs and entrepreneurship. To realise the points discussed, libraries should introduce a comprehensive National Youth Policy, one that not only addresses problems of youth but values youth and utilizes their talents (Pearl in Flum 1988). Libraries can also organise open campaigns to form partnerships with different bodies such as schools and institutions, labour, companies, industries, Non-governmental organisations to educate youths and improve their literacy levels. The government should be involved in the initiatives as they may assist with provision of information on statistics of unemployed youths and creating awareness on these initiatives, they can also play a role in provision of funding opportunities to libraries in order to support this initiatives. Librarians on their part must be trained and encouraged to acquire more skills. These trainings and workshops can be organised by national bodies for example in Nigeria the National Library Association NLA can organise trainings conferences to enlighten members on the need to get involved with youth empowerment. UNDP 2014-2016 comments that increase attention is needed to ensure young people's effective transition from school to decent jobs.

5. Search Strategy

The literature was explored by conducting research in library databases, catalogue, related books and web searches in portals. While some journals in databases especially in the field of Library Science such as Library trend, Library and Information Science Abstract (LISA), International Journal of Library and information Science provided knowledge on the concept of entrepreneurship, they were however of a general nature they did not accurately capture the roles libraries play to create relevant skills to unemployed youths. As such not many were utilised. Although the articles that provided knowledge on the roles libraries play in supporting entrepreneurship were mostly from 1970-2012, they were however utilized because of the credibility of the works, findings and integrity of authors. The remainder of publications found in databases such as Elsevier, ProQuest, and SAGE were on topics including, vocational studies, entrepreneurial education, open access, which were included to give more insight into the subject matter. The search pattern used to search through the databases, google books, scholar, google advance search and other search engines was the Boolean search commands and the main key terms employed for the search include "sustainable development", "Libraries" "entrepreneurship" "literacy", "vocational skills" "youth empowerment". In order to further build on the topic and for background reading, books related to the subject matter, and other related professional journal articles, review papers, conference proceedings were utilised.

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