

# The Role of Libraries in the Development and Implementation of National Information Policy in Nigeria

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## Abstract

The Library has a big role to play in national development. Consequently to guide in taking the advantage of the information resources at its disposal, it is pertinent for professionals with the requisite knowledge and competence at all levels to oversee the collection, management and dissemination of information. Library is an important institution in designing the establishment of an information policy since it has the expertise as an information provider. Hence, every country always consider library as being central and an essential counterpart in information policy because only the library knows and understands the type of information to provide to meet the needs of the government for developing the nation. In light of this, library is thus always at the forefront of monitoring the direction of information policy. However, not all institutions are able to see the importance of library. The purpose of this paper is to review literature in information policy. The study defined information policy and discussed information environment as well as information policy instrument in Nigeria. An overview of the historical background of National policy of information was given. The paper also indicated that the role of library should not be abandoned, but should instead be returned to its place, in other to come to a holistic, balanced and reasonable information policy.

**Keywords:** Library, Information Policy, Knowledge society, information technology.

## 1. Introduction

Information is invaluable at all times and in all circumstances, especially to national development. Every rational being needs some information for his day-to-day transaction and existence. No society can grow beyond its level of information awareness, acquisition and appropriation. The need to have a 'national policy' that will stimulate a cohesive information generation and dissemination environment has been discussed severally by Unegbu (2004) and Alabi (1994). Information policy is one of the many different types of public policies that make a government.

The library is an important institution that plays prominent role in shaping the knowledge society if closely driven and monitored by information policy. Basri et al (2012) affirmed that the establishment of information provision stems out from library as it has the expertise in acquiring, disseminating, organizing and administrating information. Hence, Reding, (2005) said that library is not only a collector but also acts as stewards, safeguarding the nation's heritage and assuring equality of access for the citizens. The impact of library to culture and civilization is tremendous and not deniable. Furthermore, library is also central in the creation and establishment of information society which sometimes called knowledge society. The development of library demands re-defining the position and objectives of institutions dealing with information and knowledge (Ryynanen,1999). In light of this, library is identified as one of the key elements for open access to information without neglecting the basic role of library which concentrates in collecting and organizing information and offering access to its collection.

The important role of library in information policy making has been asserted by scholars and researchers such as Chartrand (1989); Hill (1994); Rowlands (1999); Arnold (2002a,2004, 2007);Smith(2004);Duff (2004); Kamar (2006);Bustamante (2007); Pajaro & Betancourt (2007); Chen et al. (2010) and Basri et a (2012).Library and information service is not only fundamental but should also be the main player in information policy making.

Basri et al also commented that only information professionals are capable to deliver their expertise in monitoring, regulating, shaping and implementing activities such as trans- border dataflow, national information system, information expert and profession, information skill, content dissemination, laws related to books, collection policy, data usage and distribution, reading campaign, information retention, public access centre, knowledge sharing, national bibliography, repository library, acquisition of foreign and local publications, availability of information and books access. In response to the above matter, Orna (2008) suggested that the development of information policy should be coordinated by an advisory committee representative of private sector, local government, academicians and professionals related to library and information science.

However, in some countries, the roles and works of library is often under estimated. Information possessed by the library is not regarded as important as information technology (IT) which is only a tool for organizing and managing the information. This paper highlights the role of libraries in Nigeria in connection with designing and developing information policy for the country.

## 2. Information policy

There are many definitions of information policy. Duff, (2004) opined that there is no single definition of Information policy. The definitions depend on the researcher's perceived stand from either limited or wider scope according to Braman, (2011) other than the dynamic and innovative nature of information.

From the micro perspective, information policy is defined in general as a product of legislation, procedure, guide line which regulates the production, management and use of information that shape the role of information in the society. On the other hand, the macro perspective, Bustamante, (2007) and Soler, (2007) observed that information policy could not be separated from other disciplines such as education, science and technology culture, public administration transparency, information technology and health.

The Freedom of Information Act of 2011 expressly states that it is an act to make public records and information more freely reliable available, provide for public access to public records and information, protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy, protect serving public officers from adverse consequences of disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and establish procedures for the achievement of those purposes and; for related matters.

Maxwell, (2003b) said, information policy is a social political regulation, economic and technological decision related to the role of information in society. Pajaro & Betancourt (2007a) on the other hand offered a broader definition by asserting that information policy is a guideline for planned actions to ascertain access to universal information to carry out social, economic and political activities in the course to achieve the nation development goal. In a nutshell, information policy is a set of regulations and policies guiding information. Information policy determines the kind of information collected, created, organized, stored, accessed, disseminated and retained. Usually associated with government information, information policy also establishes the rules within which private information providers and the media operate. Information policy includes the following areas:

- Literacy
- Privatization and distribution of government information
- Freedom of information access
- Protection of personal privacy
- Intellectual property rights
- Retention of archival copies of material
- Citizen's Charter of Information Rights

## 3. The Information Environment

Information environment is the aggregate of individuals, organisations or systems that collect process or disseminate information. The information environment has a great impact on issues bordering on information policies. One way to capture the information environment is to consider how information activities takes place amongst individuals and institutions that are involved in the day-to-day processes of information creation, dissemination and use in the society.

Information broadly represented can therefore be said to be any message to be conveyed from one source to another source or destination. Information created is embodied in different forms, which are represented as formats or channels of communication. The forces that are shaping the information environment are the information components. These are: (i) information creating activities; (ii) information products; (iii) information distributors; (iv) information dissemination; and (v) information users. All these components can be referred to as stakeholders in information policy. The importance of information in our society can hardly be overestimated. As we increasingly recognize the critical nature of information, policies that affect information organisation, use and dissemination become equally critical.

There are a variety of stakeholders in the information policy process, stakeholders who are deeply concerned about information from a legal or political perspective. Such stakeholders include: (i) Business and industry—these are very active in influencing policies that will affect the dissemination of information and also are interested in both the discovery of new knowledge and the organisation of current knowledge.

(ii) Government ministries and parastatals which are responsible for information activities of government. These include: (a) Federal Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture. (b) Federal Ministry of Works and Housing (c) Federal Ministry of Justice (d) Federal Ministry of Education. (e) Federal Ministry of Science and

Technology. (f) Federal Ministry of Tourism (g) Federal Ministry of National Planning (h) National Census Commission. (i) Independent Electoral Commission. These are only a few examples.

#### **4. Information Policy Instruments in Nigeria**

Since the 1990s, efforts are being intensified for the formulation of information policy instruments by different bodies or stakeholders. Some of these efforts can be traced to:

(i) Mass media practitioners (ii) Librarians/information scientists

(iii) Computer Association of Nigeria (iv) Ministry of Science and Technology; and several other government ministries and parastatals. The Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture, for example, has several parastatals and departments which are responsible for administering and implementing information policies. For examples, the Department of Culture is responsible for the formulation and execution of the national cultural policies for the promotion of all national cultural activities through the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the Council for Arts and Culture. This body is responsible for the policies guiding national museums. The national museums contain artifacts that are of value to the historical heritage of our nation. The National Library of Nigeria is a parastatal under the Ministry of Education. In its crusade for an information policy in Nigeria, the Nigerian Library Association has organized several seminars, workshops, conferences with a view to coming out with a blue-print to enable the government formulate an information policy. For example, "Draft of the National Policy on Information Resources and Services" was produced at an NLA conference held at ASCON, Topo, Badagry from February 18-20 1991. Amongst others, the 'draft' recommended as follows: (i) All information must be available to all people, in all formats purveyed through all communication channels and delivered at all levels of comprehension. (ii) All types of information resources and services produced in Nigeria constitute a vital investment in the national development efforts. Such information should be systematically collected, preserved and effectively managed.

(v) Endogenous information and indigenous knowledge must be regularly integrated with externally generated information on Nigeria's development, as well as with relevant information on the development of other countries. (vi) Nigeria's information resources and services must be organized in space and time so that waste is avoided or minimized. In particular, the acquisition, storage and sharing of information resources and services must be rationalized to ensure the optimal utilization of human, material and fiscal resources in national development. (vii) Information resources in all forms—oral, book, serial, print, electronic media, etc. must be harnessed and repackaged, using the most cost effective processing, communication and transport technologies available to deliver appropriately targeted information to all categories of Nigerians, and especially the illiterate and rural population who constitute more than 80% of the population. Under the National Library, a National Information and Documentation Centre (NIDOC) was established as a bibliographic and numerical databank of information for the social and economic development of the country. And, as a focal point for the exchange of information, NIDOC intends to coordinate a network of participating centres in Nigeria Alabi, (1994). Parts of its objectives are: (i) Provision of active, dynamic information services, information retrieval, current awareness and information analysis/consolidation regarding published knowledge in harmony with the priorities of Nigerian research and technological development. (ii) Provision of referral services with a view to making best use of the information resources in the country and abroad. NIDOC is envisaged as a pivot information centre for the dissemination of intellectual information resources in formats such as database, indexing and abstracting services.

#### **5. Historical Overview of National Information Policy**

The concept of National Information Systems (NATIS) originated in the 1970's, it was initiated and promoted by UNESCO, and this was the foundation of national information policy. Alemna (1995) said that "during the last two decades, UNESCO has been involved in laying down procedures and guidelines for the development of information infrastructure in different nations of the world. The NATIS report of 1976 justified the need for information policy on the grounds that exponential growth of information sources necessitates that access is ensured, furthermore, users must recognize the value of this information and discover what they need. The report, stressed the importance of cooperation and coordination among different organizations involved in information handling. It realized the importance of assessing the national situation and developing an information plan closely linked to the needs of the users. It also emphasized the educational potential of users along with training of librarians and other information workers.

Hudson (2009) explained that Jamaica responded to the UNESCO call for national information systems in 1973 and the government established a National Council on Libraries, Archives and Documentation Services (NACOLADS). NACOLADS was charged with the responsibility of advising government on how to develop this integrated infrastructure. NACOLADS accomplished the mandate by establishing a secretariat located in the office of the Prime Minister and establishing working parties to advise it on the shape of this infrastructure. The output of the working parties was published and this formed the masterpiece of Jamaican Librarianship. This masterpiece is the plan for a National Documentation of Information and Library System in Jamaica. The publication documented the rationale for a National Information System; proposed a configuration for the NATIS and made recommendations on national information policy some of which are as follows:

1. Priority is given to the provision of effective library and information services for the benefit of government agencies especially the Parliament, the Courts, Ministries and other units of government.
2. The government libraries should be placed in a strategically located position within the respective administrative structures for effective services.
3. The Librarian should report directly to a policy level officer who should ensure the provision of a specific budget.
4. National Bibliographical control.

According to Abba and Song (2013), the international, national and local attempt to formulate NIP for Nigeria started in 1980. Some African governments through the Organization of African Unity (OAU), with the support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), created the Pan-African Development Information system (PADIS) and charged it with the responsibility of assisting African member states to develop information and documentation infrastructures. Such necessitated and accelerated the conception and formulation of policies on health, trade, transport and culture in the country.

The nation's quest for NIP has been existing for quite some times. It was reinforced in 1985 following the NIP guidelines issued by UNESCO through the division of the General Information Programme (GIP) and UNISIT (Unegbu, 2004). Such policy guidelines clearly highlight the framework for the formulation of local situations and specific countries circumstances.

Yusufu (2007) noted that since 1990's efforts are being intensified locally for the formulation of information policy. He maintained that the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) has organized several seminars, workshops and conferences with a view to produce a blue-print to enable the government formulate a national information policy for the country. For example NLA held a conference in February, 1991 that produced a "Draft of the National Policy on information resources and services. Yusufu (2007) highlights the recommendations as in page 5 above.

## 6. Why National Information Policy?

Indeed information policy is a broad concept. It covers any aspect of policy making at any organizational; local, national or international level that has impact on information flow whether electronic or any other format, and that the potential benefits are not all economic. What is drawing the attention of government to information policy area is the concept of "information society" and "knowledge society".

The aim of the information society is to gain competitive advantage internationally, through using information technology (IT) in a creative and productive way. Information society is a society where the creation, distribution, uses, integration and manipulation of information is significant to economic, political, and cultural activities. The term knowledge society refers to any society where knowledge is the primary production resource instead of capital.

Smith (2002) said that "the knowledge wave" is the politically-correct phrase of the moment in New Zealand. It encompasses the more formal "knowledge society" (with its connotations of a positive enthusiasm for learning) and knowledge economy (with its connotations of value-added products and services building national wealth). It also encompasses, in a general way, the rather more bureaucratic concepts of "national information strategy" and "national information policy".

Smith (2002) also observed that as societies consolidate into units of sovereignty and over the last two centuries, into nation states interconnected by regional or global alliances, information frameworks developed. In New Zealand these frameworks have followed the typical "western" pattern and are codified in expressions such as: laws for copyright and patents; privacy and official information statutes; rules of judicial evidence; national archives and libraries; treaties such as WIPO; and the commercial law enabling news media, publishers and investors to trade ideas and knowledge. In short in New Zealand 'National information policy' has not become a public issue other than in sporadic instances over censorship in the way in which environmental policy or defense policy has. Also in UK there is no one information policy. According to Owel et al (2012) there is no one information policy but rather a set of (mostly) inter-related policies developed by different UK government departments. By its nature, information policy does not have easily defined boundaries.

However, Ponjuan (1993) is of the opinion that a national information policy is required to ensure the harmonious implementation and operation of information resources, services and systems e.g. timely access to relevant information to varying needs of users throughout the society, coordination and compatibility of the overall national information systems, better compatibility between the various legislations concerning the provision of information, better responsiveness to the implications of new information developments and more effective participation in regional and international information systems and networks. The goal of the national policy on information is to attain access to an optional utilization of the specialized and professional knowledge, the scientific, technical, social and economic information and expertise generated and/or available within the country and elsewhere in the world as a problem solving resource and as a resource for development in all sectors of the society.



Arnold (2004) proposes five considerations for the development of national information policy. Thus:

- (i) Socio-economic development;
- (ii) Public policy on the application of information;
- (iii) Access to and the availability of information;
- (iv) Social factors; and
- (v) Economic factors.

Arnold maintains that governments need to consider all of these factors when they develop national information policy that will benefit socioeconomic development. Stressing the perception and significance of information and national information policy among various nations, Arnold (2004) concludes that, "The increasing awareness of information as a valuable national resource since the period after the second world war has influenced many countries to develop to a particular focus and aim according to the circumstances of each country and in accordance with the approach of each country's government. Such a policy is also a reflection of how information is valued by the particular government as a commodity or resource".

Unegbu (2008) as referenced by Abba and Song (2013) also elaborates on the importance of national information policy for the Nigerian economy, thus:

A national information policy would ensure that information is provided to the right person, at the right time, and in the right format, it would ensure that appropriate information is provided to all Nigerians in all spheres of activities by properly-equipped libraries and information centres. It would also encourage the provision of minimum standards of operation in acquisition, accommodation, personnel, equipment, and quality service. It would ensure that the right technology, information-generating resources, publishing materials, and facilities are allowed into the country.

## **7. Consequences of Non-Formulation of NIP**

Abba and Song (2013) listed the following as consequences of non-formulation of national information policy

- Violation of copyright laws
- Uncoordinated nature of information environment
- Underdevelopment of libraries and information centres due to underfunding
- Censorship and free flow of information.
- Importation of low cost books and other educational materials.
- Non-compliance with legal deposit laws.

## **8. Library and Information society**

In this information age, citizens must be able to find and use information to meet their needs. Information is the key raw material but with no value if access to it is problematic. Ryynanen, (1999) indicated that there is no other institution that carries out this long-term, systematic work except library. Information is closely related to culture in away that information yields knowledge which then contributes to people's creative power. It will be more systematic if the public can be offered access to knowledge and cultural treasures in the custody of library. The significant role of library should be depicted in the designing of information policy of the country. It is typical in many governments that information policy is designed as there is a requirement to develop information society. In this regard, the issues are largely related to the increasing pervasiveness of information technology (IT) as asserted by Julien & Helliwell (2001).

The role of library is crucial to the development of information society. It acts as gateways to the information resources on the global super highways. Library plays an important role as providers of electronic information and access points to information in the efforts to bridge the gap between the information rich and poor. In fact, Nwosu & Ogbomo, (2010) reiterated that the stability of the economy is also dependent on the access to information because national development is very much influenced by the amount of available information.

Moreover, Basri et al (2012) argued that library as an institution, is noted for its function as catalyst for human progress and aid in the development and transmission of knowledge and culture and innovation in the society. Also, in a plural society like Nigeria, library ensures social inclusion and cohesion by providing access to information and knowledge to all the citizens.

In the midst of information society era, library facilitates both local and international information networking and knowledge sharing through digitization and virtualization of access to local and external content (Amonoo & Azubuike, 2005). This means that the information society is driven by information and communication technology (ICT) along with new skills for the population, government's support, and sustainability (Rao, 2006). The impact of ICT is tremendous in all aspects ranging from politics to social.

Information society according to Martin (1995) is a society in which the quality of life, as well as prospects for social change and economic development, depends largely upon information and its exploitation. The living standards, patterns of work and leisure, the education system and the market place are influenced

markedly by advances in information and knowledge. Knowledge based activity particularly economy's critical mass of knowledge workers, innovative and competitive service sectors, knowledge induced poverty reduction, high value added information intensive commerce, high technology industries and inclusive participation in economic activities. In the light of this, library is the only institution capable to shoulder information related responsibility, i.e. by providing and ensuring quality information and services, digital and traditional content, knowledge and information networks and ICT facilities to facilitate life long learning and communication. This will in turn nurture and acculturate the availability of diverse knowledge sources, foster free access to government information, encourage freedom of expression, tolerance of opposing political and public views, availability of diverse communication channels and defense of human rights.

In the contrary, research by Owen, Cooke & Matthews (2012) reveals that government lack understanding of the value of information.

Thus, information profession could help to improve government's appreciation of information and the role that the profession itself could play.

Information policy ought to have a higher profile than ever before as it is central to the government's need to improve efficiency on how it operates, showing that it is worthy of trust through the transparency and open data initiatives and getting economic benefit out of the data it collects.

### **9. Library's role in information making policy**

Kargbo (2007) argues that matters relating to information policies should be the responsibility of the library. The library has a policy to select, organize and disseminate information, in addition, to handling issues related to it. According to Gill (2001) and Kargbo (2007) as well as other information providers, libraries also need to be a developer. They play an instrumental role in the information policy making, especially national information policies.

Researchers in the field of information policy commonly use two approaches in the development of policies. Gray, (1988) observed that both general and specific

Approaches focus on economic, social and cultural activities. While Bustamante (2007) advocated for an approach based on library and information policies that can be seen clearly in the classification of information policy. According to him,

Information policy can be classified into eight groups. These are public library access policies; the promotion of reading habits and control of books policy; science and technology policy; a policy regarding mapping and statistical information; a policy pertaining to the general public accessing to government information; a traditional information policy; communication technology – related policies; and societal information policy.

Rowlands (1999) also posited that the root of information is closely related to information and library science. From a total of 771 articles related to the root of Information reviewed, a total of 540 articles were published in information and library studies journals, 92 were articles in legal journals, 32 in the field of public administration, 32 in political science, 26 in the field of communication studies, 24 in the social sciences, and 15 other articles were on management and business studies. The analysis shows that information policy is synonymous with information and library science.

According to Niegaard (1999) the role of the libraries includes; all traditional library tasks – comprising both traditional collections and IT-services but this is not all. In short several countries see the future role of libraries as public access point to knowledge and information “*gateways to information*”, as a bridge between information strong and information weak citizens, as information centre toward a national IT development and as partners in the process of standardization etc.

The library role of gathering together knowledge, and then of enabling meaningful access to it, so that this climate of creativity can flourish, is a precious one and has been proven over decades to work. Creativity will be impeded if IT skewed thinking marginalizes the knowledge itself to the point that it is allowed to become the overlooked dimension.

According to Smith (2002) “a powerful contribution which government libraries can make to policy development for national information policy is to assert the enduring values of librarianship: drawing together different knowledge formats covering all shades of opinion in a structure which enable the end user to challenge and to be challenged by a range of different data.

Rhoe et al (2010) said that evidence-based policy making relies on findings that emerge from research and analysis. The availability of information and data is the foundation for policy advice according to (Carden 2004), but developing countries lack access to existing knowledge and data fundamental to drawing reliable conclusions from research. Without a strong information management system, policy arguments are likely to be effective. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationship between knowledge and decision making.

Governments are the largest producers of information and libraries should be the major source of these government information. Libraries particularly government libraries should ensure that copies of most

government publications are placed in libraries. Many documents are never sent to the libraries. Some information are only available in files in government departments and in these days of IT they are in electronic forms in various government offices and therefore not available in libraries.

A strong and legal deposit law assures access to government information such as health information, labour standards, consumer information, environmental enforcement reports, and government committee and legislative reports.

Libraries particularly those attached to government ministries and para-statal should give priority to the provision of effective library and information services to government including parliament, the courts, ministries and other units of government.

In order for government libraries to provide effective service, the library should be placed in a strategically located position within the administrative structure. Government information professional may be able to help the wider profession with tactics on how to engage government and how to put message across to policy maker.

Librarians in government establishment (Ministry and MDAs) should report directly to a policy level officer who should ensure the provision of a specific budget. Information professionals should consider what wider skills they need to be able to take on less traditional roles in government where information background would be advantageous, for example information policy making and managing social networking within departments.

It is generally accepted that federal government holds the most control over the direction of policy. However, there is room for other groups to influence policy. This is unofficially referred to as the 'policy community', which is seen as a group of interconnecting bodies that have an interest in a given policy area, normally this community is made up of pressure groups, trade unions, academics and the media. Librarians should identify and work more with policy champions like those particularly professionals from other disciplines where there is a common purpose.

The professional bodies and the research community should work together to articulate the value of information to government and develop case studies to show how the profession can be of benefit to information policy making.

The National Library of Nigeria (NLN) or its' equivalent in every country should ensure strict compliance with the provisions of the legal deposit laws, for instance in Nigeria, the deposit legislation mandates the National Library of Nigeria (NLN) and its branches all over the country to receive copies of authors, printers and publishers works' to be kept for custody. The NLN may have the mandates as stipulated in the legal deposit law of the country to carry out such function but it lacks the ability and will to execute and as well implement it since compliance is not effective.

## 10. Conclusion

Our society has been so impacted by a series of technological innovations. And as evidenced by emerging technologies, we have only seen the beginning of this information revolution. To deal with the challenges of our growing information society and globalization, information policies must be developed. Indeed a national policy is required to ensure the harmonious implementation and operation of information resources, services and systems e.g. timely access to relevant information to varying needs of users throughout the society, coordination and compatibility of the overall national information system, better complementary and compatibility between the various legislations concerning the provision of information, better responsiveness to the implications of new information developments and more effective participation in regional and international information systems and networks.

A clear national information policy for Nigeria cannot be traced. However, the scope of the library's role was confined to getting information, and managing, maintaining and disseminating information, appropriate to the roles outlined by UNESCO and enshrined in the Library. The policy does not cover information on socio-cultural and economic aspects, such as in the others as outlined in the PGI. The limitations of the scope of the information policy for national information are not exhaustive. In fact, the national information policy should be cross-disciplinary. Although the country gives priority to ICT for increased development to the country, it sidelines the role of the library.

Even the role of the library needs to be strengthened in line with developments at the global level. Libraries are key players in the development of an informed and Knowledgeable society, not just as providers, but also as storage and information retrieval centres (Ruenwai, 2006). An informed and knowledgeable society cannot be established without a comprehensive integrated information policy.

The library and information science remains a significant element of the source of information, even though the current focus is on information and communication technologies for transforming the economy for national development. Thus, the library must be put forward by the Library Association as the lead role in developing an informed society, such as that done by the American Library Association (ALA), the leading

information policy as played by the Canadian Library Association (CLA) and increased the social system, as recommended by Pateman & Vincent (2010). In addition, Smith (2002) opines that no other sector of the information industry has the professional skills or perception to recognize the value of information as the library. But one distinct problem lays in the lack of champion within the profession who can influence it at the highest level.

Professional bodies in the area should take a wider approach to policy formulation, looking beyond the boundaries of institutions that provide and manage information.

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