

Strategies and activities of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) to the development of library and information profession in Nigeria from 2000-2015

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Abstract

This study examined the strategies and activities of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) to the development of library and information profession in Nigeria from 2000 to 2015; it was undertaken to investigate strategies the NLA developed to achieve its mandates, ascertain activities the NLA engages towards the development of library profession in Nigeria. The research adopted the narrative research design of the qualitative research methods where the documentary guide and interview were used in gathering data from a total of seven (7) participants. The pieces of information gathered were analyzed, using narrative analysis. The study revealed that NLA employed some strategies. These include educational training, publications, funding, and awards as well as its streamlined objectives. It offers beneficial activities and services that bring about worthwhile advancement to the body in order to meet members' interests such as conferences, seminars, and workshops. The study recommended that NLA should partner with government at all levels for a holistic approach while designing new policies, NLA should regularly organise and coordinate workshops, seminars and short training courses for members on current developments and on new trends at both local and national levels. This will improve member's professional development as not all NLA members participate in NLA annual conferences. The effort should be made to improve the performance of the association for the development of library and information profession in Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigerian Library Association, NLA, Strategies, Activities, Development

Introduction

Strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve a long term or overall aim while activity has to do with actions intended to achieve desired outcome. To this end, library associations are established to achieve its strategic mandate through an activity design for the benefit of its members. Library Associations serves as bedrock for professional development in any country; this has been in existence for decades in spearheading activities, management and regulation of library profession (Enser, 2012). Ofori (2013) posited that professional library associations promote and encourage lifelong learning through training on a regular schedule for their members. Nigerian Library Association (NLA) provides activities that allow members to

work cooperatively, learn research result, and apply them in their respective professional settings. It is pertinent to state that for any laid objective within library associations, there is need for strategic action plan for development. These strategic plans involve some activities employed by to keep up with development in the field. NLA overarching strategies can only be continued when there are good plans in place to keep them focused and the association has to be hospitable to a growing diversity of interests and specializations based on its contributions within which members of the profession have to function. Practitioners of most professions bond into associations for opportunity to network with colleagues, training and career development, wages and employment protection, publication

opportunities as well as to influence professional goals and keep up with development in the field.

Bala (2011) opined that in order to achieve objectives within a professional association, there is need for continued professional development of members to ensure advancement of the profession. In the case of NLA, he regarded Association as being dormant, though very active in organizing yearly conference that hardly produced meaningful changes in the profession and the status of libraries. The contributions of the NLA would assist the management of the body, and other professional associations to appreciate the challenges identified in the study and address them. This would further improve the work and activities of the NLA in providing services that will speed up the development of LIS profession development in the country, enhance professional advocacy and recognition as well as general societal benefits.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study is to assess the strategy and activities of the Nigerian Library Association geared towards development of library and information profession in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. investigate strategies the Nigerian Library Association developed towards achieving its mandates, and
2. ascertain activities the Nigerian Library Association has engaged in towards development of the library profession in Nigeria.

Research questions

1. What the strategies the Nigerian Library Association has adopted towards achieving its mandates?
2. In what activities does the Nigerian Library Association engage towards the development of library profession in Nigeria?

Literature review

The seminar conducted by IFLA on capacity building and strategy on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for West Africa Library Association (WALA) and francophone Africans confirmed the strategic actions of library association that connected its members worldwide. The strategies, according to IFLA (2011), were considered to:

1. Conduct a third follow up seminar to train the resource persons in Africa so that they may later facilitate the capacity building on MDG seminar in other African countries. The seminar will be held in conjunction with the IFLA African regional meeting.
2. Map out strategies for creating libraries relevant to information society.
3. Fashion a proactive role for libraries and device strategies to enable libraries meet the MDGs especially in the alleviation of poverty.
4. Provide a full project narrative report including statement of impact and full financial report to IFLA after the completion of the project.

Susan (2013) described the strategy of NLA. According to her, Nigerian Library Association (NLA) supports members of librarianship through accreditation of their formal education, on-going certification, the provision of continuing professional development (CPD) and training, networks, publications, opportunities to participate in the work of committees, working groups as well as provision of standards and guidelines. Melin (2014) noted that access to expertise can encourage collaboration especially when one person sees the other as an expert. He further note that cross-fertilization of ideas, a situation where research interests

cut across different fields of knowledge, can encourage specialist in different areas to work together on a given project. Rheingold (2012) supports the notion by asserting that an online community is like a living encyclopaedia when in need of specific information, expert opinion or resources. Tella and Isah (2010) carried out a study on undergraduates' use of online forum at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The study found that the most prominent benefits associated with participation in NLA online forum included: intellectual support in terms of sharing of ideas (100%), promotion of social interaction (98.5%), and opportunity of asking colleagues what is not clear (98%). The study also identified hindrances to participation in the forum as: incessant power outage (98.9%), time factor based on tight schedule (91%).

Evidence of NLA strategy in Nigeria manifested based on the signed decree to establish Library Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) in 1995. The Nigerian government did not make budgetary provision nor appoint a chief executive officer to manage the agency. Therefore, an intervention led by successive presidents of the Nigeria Library Association continued to lobby the government to ensure that the LRCN was made functional. Some of the strategies used were:

1. Involve the National Library of Nigeria since it was the only Federal Government parastatal in the library and information sector (LIS) in Nigeria
2. Accompany the National Library of Nigeria during defence of budget proposals, and used the opportunity to talk about the LRCN
3. Ensure that it was put on the front burner of discourse during all LIS conferences, workshops, seminars and so on

4. Occasional articles in the news media (print and electronic) highlighting the benefits of such a regulatory body to national development
5. Advocacy visits to and lobbying of lawmakers and other policy decision makers (Okojie, 2014).

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) as a model for library associations has succeeded in incorporating key activities and services into professional programs throughout their organizational structure, recognizing especially that the needs, concerns and view of every region of the world are to be taken into account, particularly those in the developing world (IFLA, 2014). A primary activity of professional library associations is to create a variety of avenues for the discussion of issues that concern their profession. Nigerian Library Association is a non-profit organisation based in Nigeria that promotes libraries and library education nationwide. However, its development of libraries and library profession in Nigeria started aggressively from its birth, and that the efforts gained the support of foreign agencies that provided grants at different periods, but major impact was championed by the regional leaders (Aguolu, 1976).

Nigerian Library Association activities and operations are not much different from those of other professional associations like IFLA, ALA, etc. which include training and mentoring that help association to form partnership, strengthen governance and member services, and to become better advocates for their library community. Training and other activities are customized to the objectives of library associations, and for different cultural, political, technological and social conditions (IFLA, 2012). Each association participating in the programmes have achieved membership growth, strengthen partnership, and advocate on behalf of the

profession. The first primary activities of events attended by library workers are conference, seminar, and workshops which provided the association with influx and opportunity by professionals to interact with colleagues. The role of conferences in LIS professional development was examined by Harrison (2010) who found that conferences did provide unique opportunities primarily with regard to networking. She mentions subject-specific conference outside of the library world as particularly useful for librarians with a disciplinary focus outside the general practice of librarianship.

NLA activities started right from the establishment of the body, as a professional association, had been on conferences, seminars, workshops, publications, advocacies, awards, exhibitions, book fairs etc. According to Alonge (2015), Nigerian Library Association commenced operations with its new name in 1962. Prior to 1962, the association was known as a division of the West Africa Library Association (WALA). However, Jegede, (2015) compared the present task of NLA activities, where he established that continuing professional education (CPE) is recognised as a tool for professionals, necessary for self-development in order to meet future challenges at work. The number of CPE activities within NLA is on the increase particularly in the area of conferences, seminars, workshops etc. It is, however, still a matter of regret that the NLA activities remain largely neglected, non-participated by most professionals. NLA can act rapidly in order to stem the current practice of turning its activities into commercial ventures. The foregoing seems to point out that major NLA activity such as AGM's, conferences, seminars, workshops, journal and newsletter productions etc., have been the association's activities to date.

NLA, according to Jegede (2015), should evaluate its activities in terms of

their contents and relevance to the growth of librarianship. It should monitor the execution of the programme of activities by sponsoring representatives to the actual execution of the project and draw a nationally accepted time-table for activities during each, taking into consideration the geographic spread of the country, availability of finance, subject matter and coverage. It should give guidelines on the category of participants to benefit from the courses.

In a nutshell, non-participation and low pace of seminars and workshops affect the development of the library profession. Therefore, there is the need for professional library association to provide, plan and execute with much thought the duration, content and relevance of their programmes of activities in order to make it regular, which can surely attract members and lead to satisfaction in their professional and self-development. This will in no small measure lead to the attainment of the aims of NLA activities. From the reviewed literature, it was established that NLA activities are targeted at members' satisfaction and that the purpose and frequency of participation varies.

Methods

Qualitative method was adopted using documentary research and interview through narrative based design for the study. The study population are the NLA as the body and subject of the study are the NLA officials at the national level. For this investigation, documentary analysis and interview were considered as data gathering instruments. Interview was conducted for NLA officials to answer research question 1; while research question 2 was answered through the available documents related to NLA. Data collected were analysed using narrative based qualitative data analysis.

Findings and discussion

The findings are presented and discussed according to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What the strategies the Nigerian Library Association has adopted towards achieving its mandates?

In response to the above questions, the participants agreed and mentioned that, NLA attained its objectives through its planned strategies that were put in place to ensure members got required professional training through conferences, seminars, workshops etc. In addition, the result of the interview revealed that the association's publications, such as newsletters, programme of activities and its research publications served as the key strategies in achieving its objectives. In designing strategic plans by NLA for professional development, NLA has significantly impacted on the professional identity and adequately empowered its members in capacity building and practice. NLA had planned in so many areas of concern for issues affecting librarians. There are identified key strategic plans that NLA rallied around to achieve its mandates. According to P1, Though, NLA as a body is not an intervening association; they only rallied all staff and share common issues affecting librarians. When asked about the areas of actions of the NLA on library professional development in Nigeria from 2000-2015, the participants of the study revealed that there were different strategic plans that were tackled within that period. "The association has a director in the public service, which was not the case before as a result of the unanimous decision taken to promote the association" as revealed by P1. Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) enactment as a regulatory body for national development was designed to register all professionals. It also achieves and serves as a platform where all professionals have Common

Avenue to achieve their goal and development. NLA collaborated with many agencies to strategize in the development of library profession in Nigeria through its advocacy role. "Today, NLA has 37 chapters in each state of the federation including FCT, have their own chairmen/chairperson and local administration" as reported by P1, P4 and P7 respectively. Confirmed by P4 was that "NLA through its strategic plans has facilitated policy formulation on library and information science (LIS) profession".

Participants' opinions on strategies used by the NLA to achieve its mandates

All the participants in the study indicated that all its strategies were yielding positive result especially in the area of training, publications, advocacies, forums for discussion and problem solving, awards and funding etc. Specifically, P1 reported that "Through its routine plans in conferences, workshops and seminars help professionals to be able to perform their duties better as they learn more best and current practices". In realising its objectives, P2 revealed that "NLA engaged in publishing the Nigerian Libraries (NLA journal) which serves as a platform for publishing and sharing knowledge". The association has aided in building and maintaining standards in the practice of librarianship. According to P3 "NLA successfully influenced the Government in inaugurating the LRCN in May, 2002 to enable it perform its function in the country". The association through its strategy achieved its objectives, "The association initiated thirteen registered subject and professional sections each looking after its own interest group" according to P6. It successfully mobilised its members to be aware of global changes in LIS sector by encouraging training and retraining in ICT".

P3 further revealed that NLA's tremendous achievement in the area of continuing professional development

(CPD) such as annual conferences, involvements of younger librarians through mentoring, injecting new ideas into the profession through interaction and sharing of ideas, as well as regulating the activities of section and chapters has brought tremendous achievements and recognition to the association. P3 reported that “NLA has strategized so many plans in achieving some issues in the association such as the harmonization of LIS curriculum, and the stopping employers from employing non-librarians in the place of librarians”.

Findings: Findings on strategies employed by NLA to achieve its objectives was presented based on the designed techniques NLA used in terms of training, publications, funding, awards, association’ forums and advocacy.

NLA strategies: The result of the review in respect of the designed strategies by the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) towards achieving its mandates from 2000 to 2015 as revealed P1, “NLA strategize in so many areas of concern by bringing members and taking decisions to resolve issues affecting their professional practice”. This area includes educational training such as conferences, seminars and workshop organised by the national association at regular interval. As mentioned by Aguolu (2011), the primary events attended by library workers are conferences and seminars organised by NLA as a platform to train their members in order to improve their capacity. P3 indicated that “NLA publishes its researches produced by members in its quarterly publications in order to achieve its mandates for its efforts to promote and encourage research and library co-operation in the country”. This corroborates Onuoha et al (2012) assessment of NLA on getting for research and identifying experts were key aspect of developing any association. This techniques deployed by the body resulted

in the establishment of Librarians’ Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) for registration of librarians in the country as well as the strategic actions on the provision of a Director in the Public Service as revealed by P1 and P7.

Facilitating policy formulation on library and information service (LIS) through advocacy and funding brought the much needed development. This was in agreement with Rilwan (2016) that in order to ensure smooth and fast way of developing the association (NLA), there must be constant payment of membership dues to impact on the association’s development and progress. In the area of NLA awards, prizes and grants, “NLA had been in forefront of honouring members of its prestigious awards, prizes and grants to deserving members who distinguished themselves in the profession” as reported by P1. Such awards, prizes and grants included Fellow of the Nigerian Library Association (FNLA), merit award, award of innovation in libraries, etc. NLA (2015) submitted that their award was instituted in 1989 to honour members who have distinguished themselves in their professional practice. In 1991, the association also instituted the Eminent Service Award for individuals adjudged to have rendered outstanding and meritorious services to it. Lastly, NLA forums designed for discussion and problem solving. “This forum was initiated by the association to draw closer the association’s programmes and activities towards uniting and promoting professional interest of all members” as narrated by P2. According to NLA (2013), NLA initiated and uses online forum among members to acquire information about the library profession, getting and fertilization of ideas, visibility, access of data and widening knowledge of a particular topic etc are stronger motivation for members to engage in collaborative activities.

Designed strategies towards achieving NLA mandates

As regard to the achieved NLA mandate using its strategies, the discussion is presented based on the six general objectives/mandates of NLA in terms of:

1. To unite persons interested in libraries, librarianship and information services;
 2. To safeguard and promote the professional interest of librarians;
 3. To promote the establishment and development of libraries and to assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries in Nigeria;
 4. To watch legislation affecting and to assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries in Nigeria;
 5. To promote and encourage bibliographical study, research and library cooperation;
1. *To unite persons interested in libraries, librarianship and information services:* From the analysis of the study, it could be noted that the above objective has been achieved through its educational training such as conferences, seminars, workshops for professional interaction, as well as its online forum for uniting members nationwide. The analysis showed that “NLA role has positively and significantly improved members to their professional development through regular annual meetings and other NLA strategic services provided”

as confirmed by P2. This has been corroborated by Harvey (2013) who listed three significant roles for professional and regulating bodies as: First, they are set up to safeguard the members’ interest. This is what gives them their legitimacy. Second, professional bodies (but not regulating bodies) present the interest of the professionals and here they act as a professional association or trade union (including legitimising restrictive practices), or as a learned society contributing to continuous professional development. Third, the professional body represents its own self-interest in uniting each member for best practice. This was agreed by all the participants that the association within the period has succeeded in uniting members.

2. *To safeguard and promote the professional interest of librarians:* With regard to safeguarding and promoting professional interest of all librarians, the study reveals that a lot has been achieved by NLA in promoting professional interest of all members. Library associations are organizations established by their custodian to safeguard, oversee, promote and represent the interest of all members. Doyle (2015) defined professional association as an association whose members have similar interest or credentials. Strong library associations support and enrich professionals. Among the NLA strategies used to attain the above mandates are reported by P5 to be “awards, prizes and grants rendering to members who happened to do well in their professional practice”. Throughout its achievements, NLA has contributed immensely in

promoting professional interest of its members through NLA honours and awards, grants for either study or training and also prizes for the best deserving members. NLA (2015) established awards and grants to members who rendered meritorious services and prizes to be competed for annually.

3. *To Promote the establishment and development of libraries and to assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries in Nigeria:* From the findings of the study, it is worthy to note that NLA has achieved on the above mentioned objective. It is affirmed that the association has made lots of possible plans of action in providing an umbrella as well as a voice for the entire library profession in Nigeria towards achieving its mission statement. "The achievement of this mandate led to the establishment and enactment of Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria to enable its functions as a regulating body in Nigeria" as obtained by P3. To establish and manage libraries in the country, "adequate funding through members' dues and support from other agencies are necessary for consistent legislation and regulations towards the development and management of libraries in the country" as commended by P4.

According to Eke (2011) Nigerian Library Association in her work on towards regulatory mandates, she reported that professional associations are set up to strategize in the professional development of their members through a designed registration

body like other registration bodies in Nigeria.

4. *To watch legislation affecting and to assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries in Nigeria:* The finding on watching legislation affecting and to assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the establishment, regulation and management of libraries in Nigeria has also been achieved. This is in agreement with the NLA mandate already mentioned. Okojie (2014) supported this where she asserted that it become fashionable for professionals to have a body to regulate the practice of their profession in Nigeria. "It is one of the NLA achievements that made representation to government for the establishment and inauguration of LRCN in May, 2002" as confirmed by P7. P3 revealed same as "It was established to also serve as a regulatory body for registration of all professional members thereby enhance library practice in Nigeria".
5. *To promote and encourage bibliographical study, research and library cooperation:* On the aspect of promoting and encouraging bibliographical study, research and library cooperation, NLA achieved this as revealed by the findings of the study through its strategic plans through publications, training and forum designed to achieve the above objective. P5 revealed that "NLA publishes its researches produced by members in its quarterly publications". This was done in order to achieve its goals, promote and encourage research and library

co-operation in the country. This is apart from chapters and sections that publish journals and newsletters. This corroborates with Onuoha et al (2012) the assessment of NLA on getting for research and identifying experts were key aspects of developing any association. It is the achievement of NLA through bibliographical study that successfully mobilised its members to be aware of the global trend or changes in the library and information sector by encouraging training and retraining in information and communication technology (NLA, 2015).

Research question 2: In what activities does the Nigerian Library Association engage towards the development of library profession in Nigeria?

From 2000-2015, series of activities had been conducted. The document of the 53rd NLA conference set out key areas of NLA activities as a professional association. This document was targeted towards library and professional development with comprehensive national conference and key activities. Page 31 of the document states NLA conferences, themes and venues from 1962-2015. All the conferences held to date detailed so many areas the association achieved with regard to each host of conferences-themes the association organised. Specifically, all the themes outlined from inception to date cover all the associations' mandates in existence. Also in the document, NLA honours and awards so many of its members such as award of the Fellow of the Nigerian Library Association (FNLA), Eminent Service Award (ESA), merit award, best state chapter award etc. as well as other prizes established by the association to be competed for annually. Other activities contained in the document are NLA publications which consist of the

Nigerian Libraries; (Journal of the Nigerian Library Association) Published twice yearly, first published in 1962. NLA Newsletter (Published twice yearly) and chapters and sections publish newsletter and journals.

The last document which is the "NLA Newsletter of the 50th anniversary" of the NLA was recorded from 1962-2012. The document also recorded key activities and reports from several chapters and sections. Key terminology that is relevant to this discourse is seen within the newsletter. Effective capacity and professional building is explicitly described. The focus is clearly placed on improving member outcomes. Professional development is given emphasis through the accepted need to develop capabilities and strengths of members in order to sustain the development of the Association.

Findings: The findings of the study as revealed by the document, stipulated key activities undertaken by the national body as regard to its routine operational activity performed. These activities include annual general meetings, conferences, workshops and seminars. Other activities comprise of the association's publications such as journals and newsletters, advocacy through visitations and mentoring of young librarians, membership registrations, co-ordinating the activities of all state chapters including FCTs, keeping data of all librarians practicing in Nigeria, liaising with government in areas of improving the LIS sectors, participating in international conferences like active involvement in IFLA and AfLIA annual conferences, collaborating with other sectors, agencies on capacity building, operating with the boards of National Library of Nigeria and the LRCN, collaborating with foreign bodies to solicit for funds, participating in annual Nigerian book fairs and book exhibitions, partnering in resuscitating weak state chapters, issuing letter of

introduction for members seeking visas to attend IFLA and international conferences, etc.

From 2000 to 2015, the document revealed that NLA designed activities have started right from establishing the association as professional body in the country. Jegede, (2015) compared the present scene of NLA activities, where he established that continuing professional education is recognised as a tool for professionals necessary for self-development in order to meet future challenges at work. The findings revealed that the number of CPE activities within NLA is on the increase particularly in the area of conferences, seminars, workshops etc. However, NLA can act rapidly in order to stem the current practice of turning its activities into commercial ventures. The foregoing seems to point out that major NLA activities such as AGM, conferences, seminars, workshops, journal and newsletter productions etc, have been the association's activities to date but such activities shall benefit immensely if they are adapted to suit their localities. Again, Jegede (2015) evaluated the activities in terms of their contents and relevance to the growth of librarianship. He evaluate NLA in terms of monitoring and execution of its activities and program by sponsoring representatives to the execution of the project and draw a nationally accepted time-table for activities during each taking into consideration of the geographic spread of the country, availability of finance, subject matter and coverage. These give guidelines on the category of participants to benefits from the courses and other key activities.

Conclusion

NLA employed some strategies from the period under study. These include educational training, funding, publications, awards, advocacy, forums etc. The designed strategies led to the achievement of its mandates thereby resulting to the

general attainment of its mission objectives. Some strategies was seen which led to the enactment of LRCN, having a member as a Director in the Public Service, facilitating policy formulation on LIS, publications of the Association's journals and newsletters. Others includes; initiating and maintaining standards of library practice, creation of registered subject/interest groups, capacity development through training in ICTs and other innovative programmes. NLA carried out numerous activities for the purpose of developing library and library professionals. These activities included annual general meetings, conferences, workshops, seminars and active participation at IFLA and AfLIA conferences. Other activities include; regulating NLA activities of all state chapters nationwide, engaged in advocacy and mentoring of young librarians and keeping data of all practicing librarians in the country etc.

NLA should directly partner with government at all levels for a holistic approach in order to expedite action required while designing new policies to resolve issues and move the association forward. This will enable the association to have a roadmap for actions that will possibly move the association towards realising its mission statements. NLA should regularly organise and coordinate workshops, seminars and short training courses for members on current developments and on new trends in the profession at both local and national levels. This will positively improve member's professional development as not all NLA members participate in NLA annual conferences.

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