

Information literacy as a key to sustainable development in Nigeria

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Abstract

For a nation to be developed, it requires information. Today, information is the most important singular variable which differentiates and determines whether a country is the first, second, third or fourth world. Information has a key role to play in the attainment of sustainable development goals. The roles of libraries in attaining the sustainable development goals are indispensable. Information as a commodity, if properly utilized for decision making, policy formulation, research and educational purposes can result in sustainable development. This paper looks at information literacy, skills required of individuals, importance of information literacy, roles of libraries as agents of information literacy for the attainment of sustainable development, challenges and imperatives for sustainable development.

Keywords: Information literacy, Literacy skills, Sustainable Development Goals.

Introduction

It is no longer a new phenomenon that the world has moved from industrial age into information age. A man's desire and quest for knowledge has led to the creation and accumulation of tremendous amount of information. The world today boasts of a knowledge based society and the quest for knowledge knows no bounds and limits and is never satisfied.

Information has been defined by many scholars in various ways. To some, it is news, data, facts, while others see it as communication of ideas. According to Nnadozia and Unagha (2015), information is viewed as answers to questions that begin with such words as who, what, where, when and how many. This indicates that it could be knowledge one gets about someone or something as well as factors or details about a subject. Diffen (2016) sees information as data processed, organized, structured and presented in a given context so as to make it useful.

Concept of information literacy

Traditionally, one can describe literacy as the ability to read and write. Literacy is of different types which include visual literacy, media literacy, computer literacy, digital literacy, network literacy, library literacy. Information literacy is quite different from the aforementioned types of literacy. It is the combination of all these concepts but goes beyond it.

Information literacy, according to UNESCO (2013), is

a set of competencies that empowers citizens to access, retrieve, understand, evaluate and use, to create as well as share information and media content in all formats, using various tools, in a critical, ethical and effective way, in order to participate and engage in personal, professional and societal activities.

Information literacy has to do with knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and

communicate it in an ethical manner (CILIP, 2012). The skills that are required to be an information literate person call for understanding of a need for information, the resources available, how to find information, the need to evaluate results, how to work or exploit results, how to communicate or share your findings and how to manage your findings. Information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how information is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them.

Information for all Programme (IFAP, 2008:25) has defined information literacy as:

the capacity of people to recognize their information needs, locate and evaluate the quality, store and retrieve information, make effective and ethical use of information and apply information to create and communicate knowledge. The scope of Information Literacy includes computer literacy, technology literacy, information technology literacy, internet literacy, digital literacy, media literacy and more.

Information literacy, as a concept, helps people to interpret and make informed judgments. It is a prerequisite for participating effectively in the information society and part of the basic human rights of lifelong learning.

Information literacy skills

For an individual to be information literate, he/she need an understanding of;

1. Task definition - a need for information
2. Information seeking strategies
3. Locate and access
4. Use of information
5. Synthesis
6. Evaluation
7. How to communicate or store findings

As the volume of information is constantly increasing, search skills are required not only in order to gain access to the available information resources, but also to shift from the large quantity and utilize the most appropriate information resources. This is why Pezeshki-Rad and Zamani (2005) asserted that, the real

challenge of our time is not producing information or storing information, but getting people to gain and use information resources. To gain access and use these vast resources effectively, information users must learn to overcome information anxiety in order to explore the available information to enable them interpret and use information for rational decision-making. Analyzing, interpreting and presenting information for use in any environment is an essential skill users of information resources should possess if they are to be relevant. According to Idiodi (2005), information literacy skills acquisition is an aspect of information literacy and may be seen as the process of gaining the tools that assist the development of information literacy in an individual.

Information literacy skills are necessary for our daily living, a successful career life as well as successful educational pursuit. With information literacy skills, acquiring information on any issue of life becomes stress less.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were formulated by the United Nations Organisation and were adopted at the Sustainable Development Summit on 25th September, 2015 by the United Nations member states. It is now referred to as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which, according to Galyuon (2016), includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) aimed at ending poverty, fighting inequality and justice, tackling climate change by 2030.

The SDGs are built on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which was adopted in 2000, aimed at reducing poverty, hunger, disease, gender inequality and improved access to water and sanitation. Though the MDGs made enormous progress, despite the success, the indignity of poverty, hunger and other anti-poverty has not ended particularly in Africa and most especially in Nigeria. The MDGs made progress in several areas, such as income, poverty reduction, access to improved water sources, primary school enrolment, child mortality among others.

The SDGs, according to Galyuon (2016) are as follows:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunity for all;
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation;
10. Reduced inequality within and among countries;
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss;
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

The 17 SDGs covered various aspects of human welfare, prosperity and climate change and sustainable industrialization. For the goals to be achieved, everyone needs to key into the agenda. Libraries are not an exception.

Importance of information literacy for Sustainable Development

The importance of information literacy in our society today cannot be undermined because it is vital for individual and societal development. This is why Abell and Oxbrow (2001) describe information literacy as an important competency needed for success in knowledge-based environment. A literate person knows when information is required and can also identify the category of information required before searching, identifying, locating and evaluating its content to ascertain its usefulness in meeting the information need of the matter at hand.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (2000) noted that information literacy is the basis necessary for lifelong learning. It equips learners with the ability to master content and research further as the case may be, gives you the confidence to be more self-directed and assume greater control over their own learning. Mokhtar and Shaheen (2008) added that information literacy is an important aspect that is utilitarian in every aspect of human life. Information literacy enhances independent and authenticated learning for students, instead of depending on their teachers to meet their information needs when they need answers to questions. For employees, information literacy enables them to source for the most current and authoritative information that would enhanced their productivity in their respective jobs. Ordinary citizens also benefits from information literacy as it helps them to effectively analyze information they face and utilize on daily bases.

Roles of libraries as agents of information literacy for the attainment of Sustainable Development

Libraries play vital roles in enhancing societal progress. It is necessary for the 21st century librarian to ensure that information literacy skills are inculcated on user to facilitate the effective use and application of information to enhance

personal and societal development. For this reason, the need for information literacy has been advanced from the acquisition of skills that enables users to locate and use information to include the empowerment and enhancement of personal and societal development. It is important to note that libraries are not only repositories of knowledge serve as catalysts for national development. It opens up minds and inspires people to see vision because the mind is the centre point where progress originates. Libraries are responsible for nourishing the mind.

Libraries are also germane in educational development of a nation. This is done through their services and programmes, introducing children to the habit and joy of reading and aiding scholars and researchers in contributing their quota to societal development. Students are supported with the aid of books and other relevant information resources to perform well in their academic work while teachers and lecturers get teaching aids from libraries to prepare useful lesson notes that will help them pass useful knowledge to their students (Agbo&Onyekweodiri, 2014).

Rural libraries have been established in rural areas with the aim of supporting adult literacy as a way of championing the provision of relevant information materials to different communities as well as helping in the establishment of an informed society. This has enabled rural dwellers that were originally deprived of information to know how to read and write. Most importantly, having access to a wide range of information that has to do with their societal issues, they have been able to make decisive decisions to improve their socio-economic growth (Achitabwino, 2007).

It is equally incontrovertible that libraries have the greatest impact on agricultural development of a nation. Libraries provide relevant information on agricultural improvement to all agricultural officers, extension workers, researchers, peasant farmers, policy makers, etc. on new methods of improving livestock and better farming practices that will meet the increasing need of the population. Libraries make such information available and also provide opportunities for

improving the declining food security of a country (Agbo&Onyekweodiri, 2014).

Libraries important role in the dissemination of health information and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Academic libraries are saddled with the provision of information on health in different formats to medical health workers, students, patients and researchers in medical schools, teaching hospitals and health institutions. Citizens needs information and access to health information on drug addicts, sexually transmitted diseases (STD), HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, maternal health services etc. The impact of this on health sector will be a low rate of health challenges in the country, improved health conditions of patients as well as healthy life styles among citizens

Challenges of Information Literacy in Nigeria

The challenges of information literacy in Nigeria can be attributed to the following;

1. The relative newness of and inadequate exposure of library users to information literacy, which include awareness, ability to locate and recognize information.
2. Lack of skills to explore the different information systems available, which include information seeking strategies
3. Poor reading culture of vast number of Nigerians. Gbadamosi (2007) attributed the low level of reading habits by multi-varied factors and these factors include: change in Nigerian value system, economic hardship which is prevalent in many homes, astronomical prices of books and other information materials as well as cost of publishing books, which is very high today.
4. Paucity of libraries and information centres at the state and local levels to educate and promote literacy programmes through provision of adequate and relevant information materials that will meet the information needs of their users.

5. Essentially, Sanders (2007) maintained that the distraction by the fallout from technological innovation in the world today, such as the easy availability of the entertainment media, games and gambling, inadequate funding of educational institutions including funding of libraries, laboratories, workshop and computer units. The list also includes poor economy and low standard of living, the quest for money by parents who use their children to hawk consumer items, prevalence of examination malpractices as well as increasing cost of publishing making it difficult for school pupils to have access to books, magazines, journals and news-papers. Others include inadequate number of bookshops and the use of handouts instead of textbooks for students learning by many teachers in the institutions.
4. There is the need for the establishment of functional libraries by both state and federal government in all primary and secondary schools across the federation. This will improve the information literacy of the people because the primary and secondary education is the basic for knowledge acquisition and subsequently it will translate to sustainable development.
5. There is the need for libraries to strategize ways of attracting users to the library by mounting user education and publicity and public relation programmes. This will enable users to identify what resources are available for exploitation, how to access them and ability to search appropriate resources effectively and identify relevant information.
6. Ochogwu (2009) stressed the need to recognize the importance of the relationship between information and knowledge utilization for sustainable development as it will form the bedrock for national development in the information age. Information can be proper utilized for planning, decision making and formulation of policies. This can be represented diagrammatically as shown as follows:

Imperatives for Sustainable Development

For Nigeria as a country to achieve the sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, the following are very pertinent for consideration and implementation:

1. There is the need for librarians to be proactive rather than reactive or passive. Proper diagnosis and customization of services will enable them to determine the information needs of their users and provide them with relevant and current information materials.
2. There is the need for training and retraining of users on information literacy (traditionally and technologically) in order to enable users keep abreast of the ever – changing technologies.
3. There is need for attitudinal change among librarians and government. Librarians need to show their relevance to the society and this will bring a positive disposition from the society and government towards library and information issues.

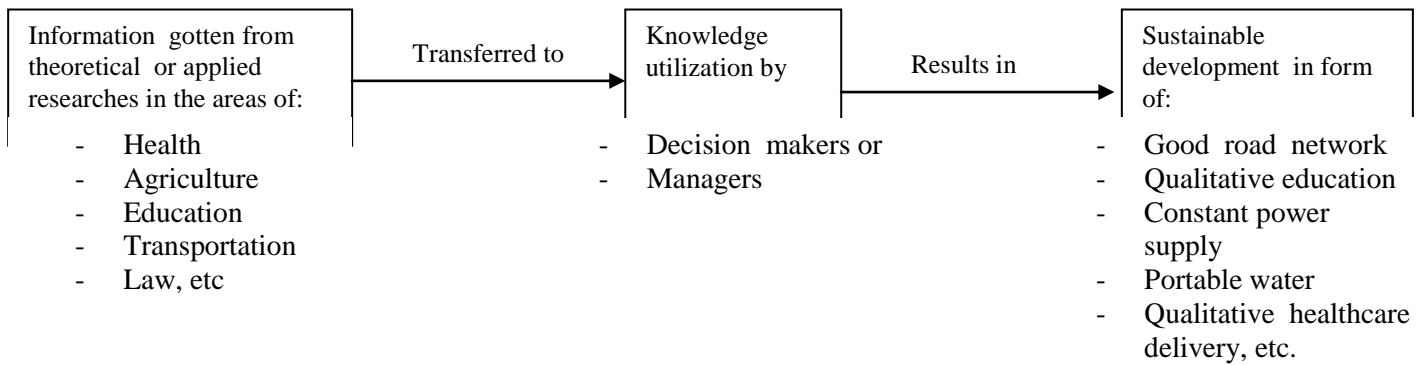


Fig. 1: Model on information for sustainable development (Ochogwu, M.G (2009))

Conclusion

Information is vital in all forms of human endeavour as it is the link pin of national development. In order to grow more efficiently in all aspects of the society, developing countries must collect and provide access to adequate and up-to-date information on food security, health, democracy, population, education, family planning, youth empowerment, gender equality, environment, etc. (Achitabwino, 2007). Nigeria cannot develop without adequate information, therefore people must be able to identify their information needs, where to explore them, access and utilize the information to better the individual and Nigeria at large.

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