





# Revitalisation of Public Libraries in the Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Public libraries have been able to impact people's lives directly and positively by providing information to everyone in the community, thereby driving community and societal change. The libraries have also continued to increase their chances of delivering access to information to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in advanced countries. The paper focuses on efforts developed by public libraries in developing countries, especially Nigeria, to attain the vision for the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGV 2030). This includes the provision of entrepreneurship empowerment services for women in various vocational skills such as netting and soup making to alleviate poverty and the provision of computer-based services for both adults and children for them to be able to have literacy skills that will inform their access to effective information. Through outreach services, public libraries will be able to create awareness of the benefit of education, especially in Northern Nigeria, where girl child education is usually discouraged. Government policy, funding, and lack of professional staff were challenges limiting public libraries from contributing more to attaining the SDGs. Hence, the study recommended that the government of Nigeria should include public libraries in their strategic plan as well as improve funding so that they can contribute more to the attainment of SDGV

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2030 in the area of advocating for justice and creating awareness of climate change. The study concluded that the revitalisation of public libraries will increase the chances of Nigeria attaining the SDGs agenda by the end of 2030.

**Keywords:** public libraries, sustainable development goals, SDGs, ICT, education, poverty alleviation.

### Introduction

The UNited Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Global Goals, build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Goals are unique in that they call on all countries, rich and poor, to take action to promote prosperity while protecting the environment. They recognise that addressing poverty requires strategies that promote economic growth and address a variety of social needs such as education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, as well as addressing climate change and environmental protection.

While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and create national frameworks to achieve the 17 SDGs: no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice and strong institutions and partnerships for the goals. Countries are primarily responsible for monitoring and reviewing progress towards achieving the SDGs, which will necessitate the collection of high-quality, easily accessible, and timely data. Regional follow-up and review will be based on national-level analyses and contribute to global follow-up and review.

Access to authentic and reliable information is one of the hallmarks of today's information age, in which almost 'everyone' has access to information via the Internet or the media. Every individual, therefore, requires the right information in order to function and make the right decisions in life. Promoting access to reliable information is thus ingrained in the functions of libraries all over the world.

In the process of achieving these SDGs, the library plays a significant role in advocating for the attainment of the SDGs through various strategies. The importance of libraries and librarians in achieving the SDGs cannot be overstated, as public and educational libraries are the primary or sole providers of such access (Ogunmodede, Adio, Aboyade, Ebijuwa, & Oyetola, 2023). Increased access to information and knowledge, underpinned by universal literacy, is an essential pillar of sustainable development, according to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

(IFLA). As a result, libraries are expected to fill these gaps by providing access to relevant information. One of the SDGs' is for all libraries to play a significant role in providing access to data, research, and knowledge that supports informed research and public access to climate change information (IFLA, 2018).

Public libraries play an important role in disseminating information for educational, cultural and recreational purposes. These libraries are close to their local communities and provide information in different forms to individuals. According to Okojie and Okiy (2020), public libraries have been able to impact directly and positively on the well-being of people, thereby driving community and societal transformation. Hawkins in Akomolafe (2012) states that knowledge and information obtained from libraries have become the essential currency for productivity, competitiveness, increasing income, and prosperity, all of which are indications of national integration and growth. Public access to knowledge allows individuals around the world to make informed decisions that can improve their way of livelihood in society. Communities with current, timely and relevant information are better placed to alleviate poverty and inequality, improve agriculture, provide quality education, and support people's health, culture, research, and innovation (IFLA, 2018). Therefore, it is unsurprising that associations and international organisations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation continue supporting public libraries to advocate for SDGs.

Associations like the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) and the Nigeria Library Association (NLA) have intervened to empower public libraries to achieve SDGs through the training of public librarians on leadership (Okojie & Okiy, 2020).

Today, librarians are compelled to use new skills and strategies in order to change, survive, and compete in the world of virtual information, according to Yahaya and Ubale (2016). Library campaigns have become very important in the provision of library and information services that are not well-marketed and may not be well-patronised (Gupta & Savard, 2010). A library campaign is a series of actions and activities librarians undertake to improve service delivery and user satisfaction. Igbinovia (2016) argues that libraries and librarians in Nigeria have been doing a great deal, especially in the area of creating awareness and supporting the attainment of the SDGs.

Yahaya and Ubale (2016) argue that the nation must have and provide relevant, up-to-date, and adequate information on food security, democracy, health education, gender equality, and other topics. Libraries and librarians can provide access to information that would enable people to lead productive lives based on their skills in acquiring, organising, offering for use, and

publicly preserving information in such a way that it can be found and used when needed.

The achievement of the SDGs by the target date of 2030 will almost certainly face some challenges. Librarians, as information professionals, are thus rightly positioned to create awareness, design strategies, and promote the attainment of SDGs within the time frame.

In the pursuit of its political and economic agenda, the Nigerian government has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to achieving its objectives. However, the stark reality of Nigeria's high poverty levels reveals that governments alone cannot bear the burden of combating poverty; it is imperative for diverse organisations to unite in this battle. As nations worldwide strive towards fulfilling the SDGs, the Nigerian government relies on the collective support of all institutions, where libraries hold a pivotal position. Regrettably, the recognition of these beneficial SDGs, encompassing the conservation of natural resources for future generations and meeting essential human needs, eludes many developing countries. What could be attributed to this phenomenon? Is it plausible that librarians lack a comprehensive understanding of the inherent nature of these goals? Are librarians cognisant of their crucial roles in advancing these objectives? What attitudes do librarians harbour concerning the pursuit of these goals? Given these circumstances, the study endeavours to scrutinise the integral role of public libraries in the realisation of SDG aspirations.

### Objective of the study

The main objectives of the study are to:

- ◆ Discuss public libraries' role in achieving the SDGs in Nigeria
- ◆ Describe public library strategies for achieving the SDGs in Nigeria.
- ◆ Identify the challenges public libraries face in Nigeria in achieving the SDGs.

### Roles of public libraries in achieving SDG

A public library plays an important role in society, being the people's university, as it provides the needed information for the general public irrespective of the form and size of their audience. Ayaowei, Memory and Mercy (2021) and Igbinoia & Osuchukwu (2018) report that libraries provide a medium for information dissemination and knowledge-sharing. The major role of public libraries in achieving the SDGs is the ability to provide the needed information to the general population (Abata-Ebire, Adebowale

& Ojokuku, 2018). So, the roles public libraries play in achieving the SDGs include:

- ◆ Information access and dissemination: Public libraries act as knowledge centres by providing everyone in society with free and equitable access to information (Mainka *et al.*, 2013). Koscieljew (2020) reports that these libraries are essential in spreading knowledge about the SDGs, creating awareness, and fostering comprehension of the objectives and their aims.
- ◆ Promotion of education and literacy: Public libraries play a crucial role in achieving the SDGs (Omona, 2020). These libraries promote education and literacy activities, critical components of many SDGs. They give tools and activities to improve literacy skills, educational materials, and chances for lifelong learning to people of all ages (Bahrami & Harandi, 2020; Abata-Ebire *et al.*, 2018).
- ◆ Acting as community centres: Public libraries act as community centres, promoting social inclusion and empowerment within the community (Adhikary, Karak & Adhikary, 2019). They develop forums for discussion, teamwork and interactive activities that support SDGs through library programmes, workshops, and outreach initiatives that enable people and communities to actively contribute to sustainable development.
- ◆ Sustainable development advocacy: Public libraries can act as advocates for sustainable development and SDGs (Koscieljew, 2020). They can raise awareness about environmental issues, social justice, gender equality, and other key aspects of sustainable development. Islam, Sultana and Widén (2022) argue that libraries can organise events, campaigns, and initiatives that encourage individuals and communities to take action towards achieving the SDGs
- ◆ Collaboration and partnership building: Public libraries can collaborate with other institutions, organisations, and stakeholders to enhance their contributions to the SDGs (Willems, 2022). Osuchukwu, Otubelu, Ogbonna and Ndukwe (2016) report that public libraries should form partnerships with government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to leverage resources and expertise. This will help in the implementation of SDG-related initiatives more effectively.
- ◆ Libraries play a crucial role in achieving the SDGs (Omona, 2020): Abata-Ebire, Adebowale and Ojokuku (2018) state that in achieving the SDGs, libraries can provide information on how to alleviate poverty in society, provision of information on sustainable agricultural practices to reduce hunger, provision of information in different mediums in order to reduce maternal mortality and other health-related issues amongst other important information.

### Public libraries' strategies for achieving SDGs

Okuonghae and Igbिनovia (2019) conducted a study on the role of libraries regarding the attainment of SDGs; the study findings show that libraries contribute to the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria by providing a conducive learning environment and resources to users. The findings further revealed that libraries also foster attainment by creating awareness amongst citizens. In addition, according to Okuonghae and Igbिनovia's (2019) research, libraries can promote SDG attainment by providing both quiet and collaborative spaces conducive to all types of learning, forming a consortium or collaboration that supports goals in ensuring information and research to help decision-makers achieve the SDGs, providing access to information, and assisting government, civil society, and business in better understanding local information needs. Furthermore, different scholars state below the ways public library campaigns can lead to the achievement of SDGs.

The Reading 4 All campaign (Ohio State University, 2023) promotes reading habits and enhances literacy, supporting SDG 4: Quality education. Public libraries are accessible to all, and, provide information both for literate and illiterate people. Reading tends to enhance knowledge (Winter, 2023). Public libraries have the ability to arrange reading initiatives, storytelling sessions, and book collection events as a means of promoting reading habits amongst both children and adults. In addition, it is possible for them to engage in partnerships with educational institutions and local community groups in order to extend their outreach to marginalised communities and foster a passion for literacy.

In line with SDG 9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure: This initiative seeks to close the digital divide. Internet use, computer classes, and digital literacy courses are all resources that may be obtained from a public library at no cost. Public libraries can also collaborate with technology firms or local governments to provide science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)-focused activities like coding boot camps, financial advice to entrepreneurial start-ups and robotics workshops (Fairbotham, 2021; Tbaishat, 2021).

Public libraries have the potential to launch initiatives that advocate for gender equality and the advancement of women, consistently with SDG 5. The organisations have the ability to arrange events that commemorate the accomplishments of women, facilitate dialogues on gender-related matters, and offer material on women's entitlements, governance, and business acumen. Public libraries can potentially provide networking opportunities targeted towards women and girls. Izah (2020) reports that they offer entrepreneurship support to women and girls, thereby leaving no one behind.

The Sustainable Living campaign (World Wide Fund, n.d) is centred on the advocacy of sustainable practices and the cultivation of environmental consciousness, with the aim of advancing SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production and SDG 13: Climate action. It is possible for public libraries to arrange educational sessions pertaining to recycling, composting, energy preservation, and sustainable agriculture. In addition, individuals have the ability to assemble and manage compilations of literature and materials pertaining to sustainability, climate change, and environmentally conscious ways of living. Kornfeind (2022) states that libraries across various continents, including Europe, Asia, South America, and Australia, transform contemporary library practices by incorporating innovative environmentally-friendly design elements, intelligent technologies, sustainable construction materials, and the adaptive reuse of historical edifices. In addition, public libraries also offer extension services to livestock keepers by educating them on sustainable agricultural practices (Zimu-Biyela, 2016).

According to SDG 3, public libraries have the potential to organise initiatives that endorse health and wellness. The individuals can arrange health screenings, conduct workshops on nutrition and a healthy lifestyle, and promote awareness campaigns on significant health concerns. Cabello and Butler (2017) report that librarians in public libraries are seen as social ad hoc health workers who help people navigate the complexities of life, from navigating the health system to helping those with housing needs. Libraries have the potential to collaborate with nearby healthcare institutions to offer information and materials about mental health, illness prevention, and healthcare accessibility.

Furthermore, in their study, Pearson and Hall (2015), identify library strategies for effective public awareness, which include developing key messages for effective service delivery, ensuring that staff, board members, and volunteers understand and can deliver key information for achieving library objectives, creating public awareness by engaging the use of all forms of media in propagating information.

## Challenges in achieving SDGs in Nigerian public libraries

### *Funding constraints*

One of the biggest problems is that public libraries do not receive enough funds (Babayi, Makintami & Tumba, 2019). Insufficient funds can affect the campaign, which cannot build up the library's infrastructure, buy appropriate resources, and offer good services and programmes. If the campaign does not have enough money, it might not be able to reach underserved areas or meet the different needs of the population.

### *Digital divide*

Nigeria, like many other underdeveloped countries, is faced with the problem of rural and marginalised communities where access to technology and the Internet is a major problem, thereby making libraries face difficulties in providing digital literacy programmes and online resources, closing the gap in information access and technological skills (Tayo, Thompson & Thompson, 2016).

### *Infrastructure and resources*

Many public libraries in Nigeria lack adequate infrastructure and resources (Ejedafiru, 2010). Libraries may find it difficult keeping their physical spaces in good shape, acquiring books and materials that are current and up-to-date, and acquiring access to modern technology and digital resources (Baada, Ayoung, Bekoe & Azindow, 2020). Insufficient infrastructure and resources limit the public library campaign's ability to effectively engage with the community and provide the necessary services.

### *Low awareness and patronage*

Public libraries in Nigeria often struggle with low awareness and patronage (Eyiolorunshe & Eluwole, 2017). Some communities may not fully understand the value and benefits of libraries or may perceive them as outdated institutions. Anyaoku (2015) states that limited awareness of public libraries can lead to underutilising library services and resources. Promoting libraries as vibrant and dynamic institutions that contribute to education, lifelong learning, and community development is crucial to address this challenge.

Professional development opportunities for library personnel are crucial for the success of the public library campaign. However, challenges such as limited staffing, insufficient training, and low remuneration can impact the quality and range of services provided. Goulding (1995) states that investing in the professional development of library staff and attracting qualified professionals is vital for the campaign's effectiveness.

### *Policy and institutional support*

Libraries may not be able to contribute to the SDGs if they do not have strong policy frameworks and institutional support. Policies related to funding, infrastructure development, and collaboration with other stakeholders may be lacking or inadequate. Advocacy efforts are necessary to garner stronger policy and institutional support for public libraries in Nigeria; as reported by Million and Bossaller (2020), advocacy is important to advance and maintain library services.

Addressing these challenges requires collaboration amongst government agencies, library associations, NGOs, and community partners. Strategies such as advocacy for increased funding, awareness campaigns, capacity-building programmes for library staff, public-private partnerships, and innovative outreach initiatives can help overcome these obstacles and enhance the library campaign's impact on achieving the SDGs in Nigeria.

## Conclusion

Nigerian public libraries have the potential to make major contributions to the achievement of the SDGs. However, they encounter many problems that must be addressed in order to enhance their efficiency. Inadequate financing, the digital gap, restricted infrastructure, low awareness, socio-cultural considerations, personnel issues, and policy support are amongst the major obstacles that public libraries face in Nigeria. Despite these obstacles, public libraries continue to play an important role in enhancing access to education, bridging knowledge gaps, stimulating community development, and supporting self-education. They help play a critical role by enhancing access to quality education, digital inclusion, gender equality, sustainable living, health and well-being, and cultural exchange, amongst others.

Public libraries contribute effectively to the realisation of the SDGs in Nigeria by launching focused campaigns, providing diversified resources, delivering innovative programming, and cooperation with partners. If these challenges are addressed, public libraries will certainly contribute to achieving the SDGs.

## *Recommendations*

The article suggests the following recommendations in line with the attainment of the SDGs:

- ◆ Government should increase manpower and improve allocated funds for public libraries to enable them to carry out services that can help in achieving the SDGs. Mansour (2020) states that funding is paramount for public libraries to function effectively.
- ◆ In order to equip the public libraries with the required facilities, they should be innovative in generating funds by soliciting funds from friends of the libraries, overdue penalties, fee-based services, and space rental for seminars and conferences, amongst others. Alternatively, Agosto (2008) states that public libraries can generate funds through grants, provision of fee-based services, and donations from private individuals or corporations like the Carnegie Mellon Foundation.
- ◆ Public libraries should strengthen community engagement by providing specialised information services, capacity building through workshops

and “do-it-yourself” training programmes to the public, especially rural dwellers. Hapel (2020) found that community engagement has enhanced trust and a sense of belonging with clientele whenever the library engages with its community.

- ◆ Libraries should engage in advocacy programmes on SDGs like street-walk, distribution of flyers, radio jingles, and social media campaigns to inform the public of the goals. Effective lobbying and advocacy are important skills needed by librarians to contribute to the attainment of the SDGs (Abata-Ebire, Adebowale & Ojokuku, 2018).
- ◆ Public libraries should provide SDG-related awareness programmes and materials to the public in a suitable format and local language that their users will easily understand; providing materials and communication in the local dialect of the people goes a long way in achieving the SDGs (Ugwu & Ogunremi, 2019).

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