RESEARCH ARTICLE

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING THE POVERTY OF LIBRARIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THE SIERRA LEONE EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Library and Information Service (LIS) Institutions are the places for the attainment of information and knowledge for every citizen. Effective service pre-supposes, developing a good collection, right staffing, and the library's proper management—all of these influence funding availability.In a sense, the provision of funds means the delivery of useful information services. In the same vein, the absence of funds reflects the Poverty of libraries in SL. This study seeks to proffer innovative strategies for tackling the lack of adequate funding to provide effective and efficient library and information services in SL. The qualitative method was used for this study. A review of the literature is done, and an online interview was conducted of ten librarians in SL. The study provided innovative strategies, improving or developing libraries' robust policies, increasing funding or work towards more generous sharing of resources, using the budget for the intended purpose, providing leadership and management of resources, and proper user education for combating the Poverty of libraries in SL.

INTRODUCTION

Library and Information Service (LIS) Institutions are the places for the attainment of information and knowledge for every citizen. Libraries, in particular, wherever and whatever type they may be, are established to meet a specific community need. Information provided is for problem-solving. In these institutions, life advancements are possible, changes of mindset and character are achieved, and society's general development is attained. Such services are made possible where there is an adequate provision of information and knowledge. Effective service also means developing a good collection, right staffing, and the library's proper management—all of these influence the availability of funding. Sierra Leone (SL) has different types of libraries to provide information for their varied users. Thus, these library institutions' information is to be provided in the right dose for the problem at hand. However, most SL libraries are constrained to provide such information due mainly to library materials' unavailability - books, magazines, periodicals, pamphlets, and the newer technologies such as computers, CD ROMS, and databases - which are also a result of the lack of funds.

Money is what libraries use for their day-to-day business - staffing, stocks, and equipment. In a sense, the availability of funds means the provision of useful information services. In the same vein, the unavailability of funds reflects the Poverty of libraries in SL. When funding is not forthright, it is the Poverty of libraries and information institutions. Libraries have suffered and are in Poverty as a result of the lack of funding. Several issues are accounting for this state of affairs - no adequate funding, funding used for other purposes, users' incalescent behavior, and inadequate supervision inmanaging library resources (man, materials, and money). There are other factors besides the above, which are escalating the issue of Poverty of libraries in SL. Poor infrastructure, lack of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), intermittent power supply, lack of staff motivation, peoples' perception of libraries, lack of library cooperation, to name but a few. All of these issues mentioned here are consequential; the best they could be, being the Poverty of libraries, and the worse, the library's closure. The availability of pragmatic institutions like the library makes society dynamic and innovative. But also, these library institutions themselves must be innovative to serve their purposes. Libraries and librarians must come up with innovative practices to solve this perennial problem of lack of funding.

Background of the Study: SL has all the different libraries: they range from public, academic, special to school libraries.

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A public library is established under the mandate of law, so framed towards the nation-wide library service provision. Public funds support the Public library. And its use is not restricted to any class of persons in the country but available to all. The public library aims to support the individual's personal development to contribute to his life quality, thereby enriching his community and other development programs. The public library in SL is well established and serving the information need of the country. It is spread all over in the four regions of the country, with at least one location. Academic libraries are those attached to educational institutions above the secondary level, serving the students and staff's teaching and research needs. These libraries serve two complementary purposes: to support the institution's curriculums and support the university faculty and students' research. All the universities (the University of Sierra Leone (USL), the Njala University (NU), the University of Makeni, the Milton Margai University of Education and Technology, the University of Management and Technology, the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology, and the Limkokwing University) and the community colleges in the country have established academic libraries. Except for trained and qualified librarians and the aged-old collections, they provide reasonably organized library services in some cases. Individuals maintain special libraries, corporations, associations, government agencies, or any other group to collect, organize, and disseminate information, primarily devoted to a unique subject and specialized service to specialized clientele. Because of these libraries' parent institutions' affluence, they are well stocked and manned by professional librarians. They provide information services beyond the standard library services to include current awareness services (CAS) and selective dissemination of information (SDI) services.

School libraries operate at the school level to support the pupils' learning and the school curriculum development. The general lack of funding for public schools makes them lack good library facilities. There are also information and resource or documentation centers that provide library and information services in various settings. The real question one is to answer in proving how libraries can provide efficient services is 'where do libraries get their money to do information business?' since it is understandable that they are not revenue-based institutions. The fact is they get their money from the governing authorities or institutions that have established them. Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) of Government set aside annual budgets for the upkeep of documentation or information centers. In the case of scientific institutions and societies, there is a readily available budget. In SL, consequently, some special libraries are well funded and are providing effective library services. Few school libraries, especially those owned by private individuals or entities, are also well-financed and furnished. Exceptions are public school libraries. However, the Sierra Leone Library Board (SLLB) serves as the country's National and public library. It has its funding from the Government through the Ministry of Finance to pay salaries to staff and for the library's maintenance and every day running through the Ministry of Local Government and the local councils. Several issues have been raised with this kind of arrangement for the National Library. Apart from the critical issue of low funding, which cannot accommodate even half of the library's needs, the budget does not come in time, and the procedures to access it is too cumbersome. Furthermore, there is no proper coordination between the two line ministries and the local councils regarding the Board.

There is hope that the present Government, with its educational plan coupled with the Board's new leadership, library activities are adjusted positively. For now, these factors mean that there would be inadequate staffing, negligence of duty and negative attitude of staff to work, and the non-availability of required material and services. In essence, when needed funds for the management of these libraries are not available, provision of information would be minimal. Thus, this lack of adequate funds for libraries in SL to provide information means their Poverty.

The objective of the study: This study seeks to proffer innovative strategies for tackling the lack of adequate funding to provide effective and efficient library and information services in SL. This paper is divided into eight sections. Section 1 is the introduction, section 2 explores the study's background, while section 3 is the objective of the study, and section 4 is the literature review. Section 5 is the research methodology, Section 6 focuses on the discussion, while sections 7 and 8 are respectively about the conclusion and research implication.

Literature review

Importance of Libraries: All over the world, libraries are dedicated to providing free and equitable access to all information, be it in written, electronic or audiovisual form (Krolak, 2005). The Rural Libraries and Resources Development Program (1992) noted that information must be available if any meaningful development occurs. Again, Mia (2020) posited that the Rural community library plays various important roles in reducing information poverty. Leonard and Ngula (2013) stated that community libraries are very important to provide information and fulfill the people's information demands in respective communities. Therefore, community libraries– be they rural or urban – are established not because it seems like "a good idea," but becausecommunities' must-have information if they are to participate in development - and there must be places where they can obtain that information. However, these are not laudable goals. They are the very reasons for the creation of the library and information services. According to Moyo (1992), the primary aims of developing libraries are to:

- promote and strengthen cultural and recreational activities, academic, pre-school, adult literacy, and other learning programs, by providing appropriate and relevant reading materials;
- encourage and facilitate the development of libraries and resource information centers through self-help programs;
- mobilize local expertise and experience to provide people with training in library management and information skills.

In all cases, libraries are developed to meet specific community needs. In return, communities are changed and hence developed. Libraries are a sine qua non for the existence of a vibrant society that is growing. Lahti (2015) further stated that a community library is an essential tool for national and local development. Community libraries contribute effectively in different spheres of community success. Other studies (Hamilton-Pennell, 2008; Jones, 2009; Abu et al., 2011; Strand, 2016) indicated that libraries play a significant role in education, social policy, information, cultural enrichment, and economic development.

The Concept of Poverty: Poverty is seen as a relative term. People have different definitions and opinions for this word. It is defined based upon the angle from which one looks at it. It is usually the lack of something. The 'Merriam-Webster Dictionary' (2017) defined Poverty as the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. Poverty, according to Wiesinger (1993), has existed from the beginning of time and is caused by multiple climatological, natural, historical, political, economic, and social factors. The result of this multifaceted phenomenon is that today over one-fifth of the world's population live in Poverty. Planned developments over the last five decades to Alleviate Poverty has surprisingly led to a reversal, i.e., the larger the resources spent on alleviating Poverty, the greater the number of the poor. Sen's capability deprivation approach for poverty measurement (1976), on the other hand, defines Poverty as not merely a matter of actual income but an inability to acquire certain minimum capabilities. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2014) also emphasizes the capabilities' approach for poverty measurement as propounded by Sen. "Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere" is the first of the 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nations with a pledge that no one will be left behind.

This analysis was further bolstered by the UNFPA's report (1992), noting that the poorest and least developed countries' population could rise from 8 to 12 percent by 2025. In these countries per capita, GNP is 230 USD, life expectancy 50 years, and women of child-bearing are to give birth on average 6.2 children each. This exponential increase, right to the Malthusian Law of population increase, is taking place in the Third World where Poverty is spreading and in opposition to the zero growth in some western countries where higher living standards have been achieved. The Human Development Index (2018) valued and ranked SL for 2017 at 0.419 - which put the country in the low human development category - positioning it 184 out of 189 countries and territories. Although Poverty is a ubiquitous characteristic of developing economies, its severity widely varies across countries. However, in economies where the proportion of the population living with less than $2 a day is below 2%, in several countries, that proportion exceeds 80%. The problem of absolute income poverty has a radically different scale in some countries compared to others, even within the developing world (Alvaredo and Gasparini, 2015). Wiesinger (1993) further analyses three aspects of Poverty, namely: people, possessions, and power. These three aspects are in the continuation of Poverty at the global level with repercussions at the local level. Noting at that time, of the world's 5.48 billion people (today the world population is 7.8 billion people [World Population Review, 2021]), approximately 1.1 billion live in absolute Poverty. They are denied the ability to produce or buy adequate food, clothing, and housing and are also deprived of clean water, education, and health services. The UNFPA (1992) noted that as many as 2 billion people have no access to clean drinking water is the first essential human survival. Concerning possessions, irrespective of the region to which they belong, the poor people throughout the world have one thing in common: they are deprived of custody physical and non-physical. The wealthy are classed according to what they own, name entitlements, endowments, and possessions. As possessions are so closely linked to a man's status, any definition of Poverty must be defined and explained in terms of entitlements, endowments, possessions, or failure to own them.

Power remains in the hands of a few, especially in countries where the majority live in Poverty, once again providing that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Today, this is still true in countries where, under the outer grab of democracy, corruption among those holding power has pushed the majority of people into absolute Poverty, thus leaving the poor with only three alternatives: revolution, charity, and death through hunger and neglect.

The relationship between poverty and library services: Poverty, in a nutshell, usually is the lack of something. In the Library and Information world, the absence of a library in a particular community makes information low. This can be taken further. Even where a library exists, generally, lack of funding for the management of such a library incapacitates that library to provide useful information services. According to Marcella and Chowdhury (2018), information poverty is defined as no entrance to needed information for survival and development. In general, the 'information poor' are defined as groups and individuals who do not have adequate and equal access to quality and quantity information (Shen, 2013). There is a convoluted tie between funding and the provision of library services. Where budget is not forthcoming, there is the possibility of the absence of adequate library service; hence the library's Poverty. McKeown (2016) posited that a challenge for Government, educational specialists, and public libraries in modern society is improving access to information for those without the literacy, information, and digital literacy skills or the socioeconomic means to acquire knowledge, intending to create a more socially and digitally inclusive society.

Because libraries in SL heavily depend on imported materials, the question for money is prime. SL lacks money in convertible currencies to purchase books and other library materials, not to mention the installation of ICTs. The country has few publishers and booksellers and, as a result, imports more than 90% of national and school library materials. There are serious problems now concerning the economy, which is currently performing very weak. Hence, the following factors have characterized our economy: lack of adequate foreign reserves, upward inflation of over 100% per annum, weakening local currency against US Dollar and other international currencies, the rising global debt burden of over a vast quantity, and the escalating cost of library material.

Innovation Strategies in Combating Library Poverty: Innovation in the 21st-century is the bedrock for removing any obstacle in the advancement of life. Fagerberg (2003) has long said that innovation is not a new phenomenon. Arguably, it is as old as humanity itself. There seems to be something inherently "human" about the tendency to think about new and better ways of doing things and try them out in practice. Wong et al. (2008) citing, West and Anderson (1996), defined innovation as the effective application of processes and products new to the organization and designed to benefit its stakeholders. As such, in this context, applying innovative strategies in combating the Poverty of libraries in SL. The study by Lateh et al. (2018) suggested social entrepreneurship as a way of combating Poverty with the pursuit of an entrepreneurial strategy. This simply implies the trading of information itself by the library to survive and develop. Mbabaali (2017) talks about libraries and institutions in Uganda growing and initiating innovative library-based programs, like the Operation Wealth Creation, to address, inform, and supportpoverty alleviation programs.

Gordon-Murnane (2012) has asserted that scholars in the LIS discipline have claimed that big data presents a massive library research opportunity. However, the role of big data in facilitating library management and innovation remains unclear and needs further investigation. However, Nicholson and Bennett (2016) stressed that big data-driven library innovations provide personalized, remote, real-time, and virtualized services to library users. Besides, the rapid increase in volume, veracity, velocity, and variety of library data generated by different library tools offers innovative ways of understanding interactions with users in the library environment. Accordingly, Liu and Shen (2018) posited that big data enables the library to be smart and user-friendly by providing personalized and intelligent services. They noted that library big data analytics support tremendous digital library innovations, such as personalized recommendation services and library user behavior/habit analysis, which generate substantial value and insights for the librarian, user, and services. Values for librarians are manifested in the changes and benefits provided by intelligent big data analytical techniques to librarians and digital management processes that enable the library to offer competitive products and services with minimal costs. User value is embedded in the improvement of library user experience and satisfaction of users. Service value includes improving service and process quality and efficiency by analyzing library big data in its varying forms. However, Jantz (2012) has noted the barriers to library innovation as the conflict between efficiency and new ideas, library work structure, libraries are afraid to fail, and the lack of risk-taking behavior.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method was used for this study. In this study, the empirical literature is examined, coupled with online interviews of key resource persons of various SL libraries. A total of 10 librarians were interviewed: two librarians from the SLLB, which serves both as the Public and National Library, three University Librarians, two Special Librarians, and three School Librarians. The author chooses three Academic and three School Librarians because academic and school libraries are 'special libraries' that serve the university faculty and students' research. The interview was recorded and listened to again to clarify and expand the issues into summary notes. The interview relates to two matters: first, what are some of the problems making for the Poverty of libraries, and second, what innovative strategies can be suggested for combating Poverty in libraries in SL. In the two above categories, the first five issues raised by interviewees, when put on a scale of ascendance, are seen as very important and were discussed in detail; whereas, some of the other issues were just mentioned. The author knows all interviewees, but they remain anonymous for the research purpose.

DISCUSSION

Issues making for the Poverty of libraries in SL: Several issues have made for the Poverty of libraries. The following are worth discussing in the SL context:

No adequate funding: Libraries generally are non-revenue-generating institutions. Save for users' registration, fines levied on users, and the intermittent donors' support mostly in material form, libraries are dependent upon the grants from their governing bodies. Of significant, the SLLB is dependent on Government grants to run their services. The financial support they receive from the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) is inadequate to buy new books, provide library equipment, carry out extension services, renovate buildings, and provide enough furniture to accommodate the library's growing readership. The SLLB indicates that it receivesa meager sum that amounts to nothing to run its activities. In another example, in the USL, the Fourah Bay College Library suggests that the Games and Sports Department receives funding doubling the library fund. As a result of this lack of funds, the library is in a state of Poverty.

Funding used for other purposes: There are the issues of unbudgeted and unmonitored spending by the management of most libraries in SL. Some libraries receive funds and then focus on other aspects that do not have anything to do with providing information. For example, a library receives funding to upgrade the collection, and then the money was used to renovate the library structure. Although both items are essential, the library must have its priorities right. Others receive funding for particular activities, yet the money is used differently. Aspecificdepartment would have been given specific funds, say, for instance, to carry out users' surveys. Instead, the library management might decide to make general acquisitions of material. This is a scenario wherein the 'cart is put ahead of the horse.' These issues also make for the Poverty of libraries.

Users' incalescent behavior: The apparent lousy behavior of library users - stealing relevant reading materials, cutting pages from within books and other reading materials, misuse of available technologies in the library, destruction of furniture - makes for recurring expenditures. When any of theseissues occur, management then spends again on what has been done. If this situation keeps on-going, it gradually leads to the breakdown of proper financial management and hence, the library's Poverty.

Inadequate supervision by the management of library resources (man, materials, and money): Another issue closely related to the preceding point is that there is inadequate evidential supervision oflibraries' resources. Supervisors do not monitor staff on the job to ensure proper performance; inventory of materials is not correctly taken daily, and there is no proper financial management. These issues lead to the Poverty of the library.

Lack of library cooperation: It has been noted that library cooperation saves time and cost. However, libraries in SL are not engaged tightly in any cooperation. Cooperation is as crucial as having funding itself. No matter the affluence of any library, it cannot provide all the information its users might need. Therefore, to solve this information gap, library cooperation is essential. There are other factors besides the above, which are escalating the issue of Poverty of libraries in SL. Poor infrastructure - most of the buildings are very old, they are not being repaired, and they cannot accommodate the growing daily readership because of their limited spaces. Lack of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) - libraries in SL are still far behind catching up with the digital age. There is a marked absence of ICTs in them. Intermittent power supply - there is yet the problem of continuous power supply 24/7 for libraries in SL.

Lack of staff motivation - library staff are not motivated to do their work well because incentives are lacking. Peoples' perception of libraries - there is this hostile or unwelcoming attitude of Sierra Leoneans towards the library. They see the library not as an information repository but as a store of books. All of these issues mentioned here are consequential; the best they could be being the Poverty of libraries, and the worse, the library's closure.

Innovative strategies for combating the Poverty of libraries in SL

Libraries should either improve on or develop stringent policies

First, this would mean drawing up or strengthening policies on all library services from acquisition to disseminating information, from security to management, and from the reference desk to the bindery department. Good policies ensure fair play and foster cohesion. Second, all programs must be adjusted to the available funding, taking one project at a time. Bureaucracies that expend budget must be dispensedout of the way. Bad policies are, in most cases, responsible for the vicious cycle in which developing nations are trapped; hence LIS institutions in SL must makethe breakthrough.

Increase funding or work towards more generous sharing of resources: Funding is essential to excellent library services. It is the responsibilityof the GoSL, through its line Ministries, to ensure that adequate funding is provided for the public library and at the right time. The political and administrative will must be seen to ensure services are provided. Proper budget allocation to the library, upgrading library personnel, providing a conducive atmosphere to work are all necessary for a positive outcome. However, the development of inter-library loans in the country's libraries (public and private) will help share resources, thereby cutting costs. The fact is, no one library has it all. Library cooperation will significantly help in incurring some costs for materials.

Use funding for the intended purpose: There must be a deliberate action on every library management's path to use the money available for its intended purpose. A budget scheme should be developed and utilized monthly or yearly to acquire and maintain library services.

Providing leadership and management of resources: Leadership is ultimately the yardstick to measure performance. An experienced and competent management team will handle the affairs of the library. It will be able to set targets and achieve these in time. A library with effective leadership will also oblige its staff to work hard in providing the needed services to users. Effective and efficient service cut costs and saves time. Fair use of library resources means that libraries should improve their staff to take up new responsibilities rather than bring on more teams or bring expertise. Human resource is one area where many funds are expended. Further studies, internal training, and couching can develop staff capacities.

Proper user education: Users in many libraries come and go as the supply and demand for information exerts itself. Therefore, library management's responsibility is to inform their potential and actual users of its services continuously. One of the information professions' developing roles is to educate and train users in their facilities.

Users are the object for the provision of information services. As such, they should be appropriately educated on the benefits of the library. Proper user education means targeting meager resources to serve those needs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was toproffer innovative strategies for tackling the problem of the lack of adequate funding for the provision of effective and efficient library and information services in SL. Several factors have made for the Poverty of libraries in a developing nation like SL. Some of these are inadequate funding and funding being used for other purposes, users' incalescent behaviors, inadequate supervision by the management of library resources, and the lack of library cooperation have contributed to the Poverty of libraries. These innovative strategies, improving or developing libraries' robust policies, increase funding or work towards more generous sharing of resources, use of budget for the intended purpose, providing leadership and management of resources, and proper user education, libraries will be able to move away from this Poverty.

Research implication

The practical implication of this research is aimed at combating the Poverty of libraries in SL. When this challenge of Poverty is fairly tackled, libraries in SL will provide for their users efficient and quality services. Good library service will ensure that users' information needs are met. However, as Jefferson stated over 200 years ago, "it is to hold fast the belief that every man is born with the inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit for happiness. To achieve this, first and foremost, must be the alleviation of Poverty." The first Poverty to be alleviated must be the Poverty of the mind. The library is the sole agent devoted to the transformation of the mind. It houses man's thoughts and records of his achievements; they answer a deep human need. It is also the central cultural storehouse of the country. As such, libraries must not suffer any Poverty.

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