DEVELOPING LIBRARY INFORMATION POLICY FOR PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT
Libraries all over the world serve to locate, procure, prepare, store, make available and disseminate information through appropriate means/media to their numerous and diverse users. For any library policy to serve useful purposes, it has to be needs-induced, needs-based and needs-driven (Obani 2002). This paper, takes critical look at the development of library and information services for the Visually Impaired. The present situation of some libraries and a few other latent issues such as accessibility to library building among others will form the focus of this paper. Useful recommendations towards the future development of library services to the visually impaired persons in developing countries like Nigeria were put forward.
INTRODUCTION
The library is a crucial centre in the educational development of man. According to Salisu (1989) puts it, the role of library in the development of nations include educational, social, economical, political and cultural development. This has prompted libraries all over the world to invest huge sums of money for the library development. Similarly, Byrne, Cylke, Hagle, Herndon & Perry (1990) noted that librarians are usually responsible for identifying, gathering and making available information in any form, as required by identified users. Librarians serving individual with visual disability have such responsibilities in addition to those related to providing all materials in Braille, or large print format materials required by these individuals vary, as do the users themselves due to background and specific needs. The intention of this paper is to examine the need to develop policy for providing library and information services for the Visually Impaired in developing countries like Nigeria, process involved in the policy guidelines and current library services for the visually impaired persons in Nigeria would be discussed.

Essential Features in Library Development for the Visually Impaired
Adimorah (2000), succinctly outlined the process involved in developing a library services for the visually impaired as follows:

- Planning
- Organizational structure
- Equipment sourcing
- Information Resources sourcing
- Planning services
- Capacity Building and
- Management

Planning
In developing Library services for the visually impaired, there is need to carry out adequate planning. This will include determining the actual information needs of the users, their demand patterns and the usefulness of the materials needed. It will also involve the identification of similar libraries and services especially those that can offer assistance by way of exchange materials in Braille, talking books, tapes or cassettes/cassette recorders etc. Also a customized architectural plan for a barrier free library has to be put in place and costed. Adequate funding for the infrastructure has to be sourced from government and the private sector.

Organizational structure
The functionality of a responsive library services to the visually handicapped lies in a well structured organisation chart or structure. Depending on the type of organization or institution, the principal or director must be at the helm of the management structure with a carefully selected library committee drawn from within and outside the
The head of the Library should be a trained Librarian who must have been trained in Library services to the visually handicapped. Other positions as shown in fig. 1 could be occupied by visually handicapped educated personnel.

**Fig. 1** Organisation Chart for visually handicapped Library in schools

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOVERNING COUNCIL OR BOARD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRINCIPAL OR DIRECTOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBRARY COMMUNITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>LIBRARIAN</td>
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<td>READER SERVICE</td>
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<td>COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT</td>
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<td>REFERENCE INFORMATION SERVICES</td>
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<td>AUDIO VISUAL SERVICES</td>
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<td>BRAILLING SECTION</td>
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*Source: Adapted Adimorah (2000)*

This simple organogram could be expanded as the library grows. It is important that the various positions be occupied by trained staff through formal education in Library Department or through internship in such functional libraries.

**Equipment Sourcing:**
Beside the traditional Library furniture, the equipment needed for a library for the handicapped have to be identified, purchased, or obtained through technical assistance. Necessary equipment includes:
- Perkins Braille Machines
- Kuzweil Brailled Duplicators
- Customized Tape recorders and Tapes
- Computers for the visually handicapped with multimedia audio facilities and appropriate softwares
- Facilities for large print book production
- Thermoform machine
- Talking Book Machines
- Option (electronically produces a tactile image from normal print)

With the advent of new information technology these equipment increase everyday.
**Information Resources:**
Most International Organizations, Religious bodies and NGOs for the blind donate brailled materials, large print books and cassettes to libraries for the visually handicapped in the developing countries. The library must foster such international linkages to benefit from such donations. However, it is important to specify early what is needed so that libraries are not flooded by unwanted materials.

**Planning of Services**
The range of services a library can offer depends on available resources, budget, trained staff and other factors that would be identified as the services progress.

Services to the visually handicapped must include well packaged information services as primary or secondary information materials. They include a Newsletter for the Blind, Current Awareness materials in embossed form or talking books. The visually handicapped must have equal access to information like the sighted and the opportunity to use new technology. The librarian must constantly plan for innovative services that would interest such users.

**Capacity Building**
Library and Information services to the visually handicapped according to Adimorah (2000) is a specialized area of service that requires the adequate capacity building for the Librarian to function optimally must attend formal Library / Information science training with core courses in Library services to the handicapped. Other essential courses as Educational Psychology, Human Relations, Computer Applications to Library / Information services to the handicapped, Internet searching for specialized areas of interest on the net for the user group. Capacity building could also be done through personal education from books, journals personal interface with other operators.

**Policy Guidelines In Developing Library Services For The Visually Impaired**
Obani (2002) opined that information is normally received, preserved, stored, retrieved and presented in three (3) main ways: namely:-

1) **Visual:** usually in print, images, maps, chart, shapes, sizes, colours etc

2) **Audio:** through oral, verbal and vocative means; through songs and sound simulations etc

3) **Audio visual:** a combination of (1) and (2) above.

Most libraries in Nigeria, according to Obani, store and disperse information largely through mode (1) and have only recently included (2) and (3). The information needs of the visually impaired can hardly be met by these, as they visually impaired miss out almost 100% of (1) and more item 50% of (2) (Obani 2002)
In developing policy for use in libraries particularly by the visually impaired, the following issues among others should be considered:

a. All staff in the libraries receives basic information (elements of special education) about people with disabilities, especially the visually handicapped so that they can more readily recognise their needs, and more adequately serve them.

b. Some specialists staff such as “readers”, braillists, mobility guides are employed in every institutional or public library to see to the special needs of visually impaired users.

c. Very important texts and reference material are provided not only in print form but also in Braille, on voice tapes (talking book) and indeed some in different sizes of print and different types of paper and colour, for the benefit of the different categories of visually impaired people the blind, low vision and partially sighted.

d. All library must be equipped with the appropriate optical aids, machinery and equipment for reading and writing. In this regard, every library should have magnifiers and lenses of different sizes and powers, Braille machines, typewriters, sensitive cassette tape recorders etc.

e. Such other important learning materials and documents such as maps, graphs, charts, mathematical symbols, shapes and signs should be provided in concrete tactical forms and/or in embossed forms for easy usage by the visually impaired.

f. Book lending and borrowing time for the visually impaired should be extended based on the fact that either in Braille or print, the visually impaired takes longer time to read a page of any material than it would take a slighted reader.

g. Library buildings must be in easily accessible locations to mediate the mobility limitation problems of the visually Impaired (especially the blind ones) enough room should also be provided within the library for easy movement of the visually Impaired.

h. A separate reading room with booths where trained ‘readers’ can read aloud to the visually impaired and where the visually impaired can listen to there talking books without disturbing other library users should be provided in every library etc.

If the library guides, rules and policies are put in place it would go a long way to enhance equal opportunities to visually impaired libraries users.
Current situation in Library Information Services for the Visually Impaired in Nigeria

Presented below are current Library service providers to the Visually Impaired Persons in Nigeria. They collaborate sometimes to provide information services. These include:

(1) **Inlaks Library**: The Inlaks Library at the Nigeria Society for the Blind, Vocational Training Centre, Oshodi Lagos caters mainly for blind adults and secondary school students. This centre provide reading and information materials in appropriate formats i.e Braille and talking books for visually handicapped persons. The library has a growing collection of Braille books (about 3,313 volumes), large print books (95) and recorded books (694) most of which were received on request from foreign donors. The library building includes a recording studio and carrels equipped with tape recorders for listening to talking books. There is also a lecture room and a Braille book production unit for Brailing textbook required by the students.

(2) **Nigerwives Braille Production Centre**: Nigerwives is an association of foreign women married to Nigerian men, whose contribution to the provision of reading materials for visually handicapped secondary school students in Nigeria must be appreciated and acknowledged. The association produces Braille textbooks by computer. Through its state branches the centre identifies blind secondary school students and their book needs, which are then processed on request. However, these brailled editions are offered for sales at the same price as of the print book. Sponsors are sought from among friends of the centre for students who cannot afford to buy their own books. The unique thing about Nigerwives group is that it depends entirely on volunteer effort for all the work of converting printed matter to Braille. Also members willingly volunteer their time and effort to scan, edit and produce the Braille editions. The Nigerwives has to her credit about 40 titles for secondary school students (Atinmo 2000).

(3) **Gindiri Materials Centre for the Visually Handicapped (GMCVH)**: This centre uses the community based rehabilitation approach (CBR) by which it provides a wide range of services to visually handicapped persons in Gindiri, Jos area. The centre produces Barille books in English and Hausa at all educational levels from basic literacy to University level. Books are available at the lending library and are also for sale at subsidized rates. Secondary and tertiary levels books are also produced on cassette tapes. This centre encourages visually handicapped people to school in their own communities, but are being supported with materials in Braille. The centre also teach Braille to the teachers of such pupils to facilitate the learning process.
(4) **The Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind (ANWAB):** This is another organization operating in Lagos, then use computer to produce books in Braille, they have recorded over 200 titles in different subject areas for adults, children and undergraduate students from the University of Lagos (Bashiru: 1998). The association desires to cooperate with other Braille producing organizations to make reading materials available for the visually handicapped. They have about 140 bralled books to their credit.

(5) **Hope for the Blind, Zaria:** This organization is situated in Wusasa, Zaria. It produces reading materials for blind students. It also operates a recording studio and has a number of books on tape.

Apart from the organizations described above, there are a few institution / Libraries that also produce reading and information materials for the visually handicapped. These are as follows:

- Pacelli school for the Blind, Lagos.
- Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo.
- Imo State Library Board
- Abia State Library Services
- Oyo State Library Board Services
- Ogun State Library Services

From the above, it is quite evident that a few institutions scattered throughout Nigeria produce reading and information materials for Visually handicapped students. Atinmo (2000), observed that these are mainly for the visually handicapped in schools and few adults who become blind later in life.

However, Bashiru (1998) and Atinmo (2000), reported that all libraries for visually impaired persons in Nigeria are grossly ill-equipped to cope with the yearnings of the visually impaired who constantly demand reading materials. Adetoro (2004) also observed a capacity gap created by inadequate investment, especially on the part of government and private initiatives in providing library information services for the visually impaired persons in Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

More than ever before, libraries and professional library staff have an obligation to be involved, to expand and build services for all disabled persons. Adebimpe & Ajobiewe (1995) suggested some actions to follow in order to make library services accessible to the blind users. These are as follows:
1. Library authorities should have a written statement of policy on library services for people with disabilities so that the policy may serve as guide during the planning of library services for them.

2. Library environment should be made conducive for blind people in order to create interest for library usage.

3. Varieties of print and non-print materials should be acquired and organised for exceptional people.

4. Provision of mobile libraries particularly in the rural areas should be intensified. Mobile Libraries which serve areas with a scattered population may visit such areas at Intervals and when this is the case, readers can be allowed to take quite a number of books at each visit (Adebimpe & Ajobiewe, (1995).

5. Government officials both at the Federal and State Levels, who are responsible for financing library services, made aware of the library rights of visually disabled persons, and endeavour to utilise the necessary funding to establish and improve such services

6. Government should encourage the formation of library associations by the blind users. Such associations should become involved in the creation or supervision of inventories of books for the blind.

CONCLUSION
The future development of library services to the visually impaired depends on the government efforts to formulated good policy for professional practice. There is no doubt that a visually impaired person who is exposed to the stimulating ‘atmosphere of a well managed library would benefit greatly and develop his full potentials. Therefore, there is need for the provision of highly trained professionals, essential tools, equipment and soft-wares in the libraries for the use of persons with visual impairment. Obani (2002) stated that libraries should endeavour to graduate from just being imposing doorman “book store often stalked with outdated and archaic off-print materials, and staffed by reluctant workers many of who indeed only sit with the books in the “book store”, to active learning centres in touch with the trends, stalked with current books and publications, and in touch with relevant modern learning, with modern gadgets and equipment, and staffed by willing, helpful and cheerful workers.

Even though the challenges to a virile library and information services to the visually impaired in developing countries, especially Nigeria are high, this paper has been
able to put forward useful guidelines/recommendations for developing and providing effective library information services to the visually impaired in Nigeria as well as other developing countries.

REFERENCES


