

## National Integration: The Role of Public Libraries in Nigerian Society

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**Abstract** - *National integration is motivated by inclusiveness, a sense of belonging, and a powerful trust in a country's life and future. Nigeria has been overwhelmed by countless clashes, disputes and difficulties that illustrate the lack of national integration. Unemployment has been fingered as a means of satisfying fundamental human requirements as typified by Maslow's hierarchy of requirements as one of the main causes of the country's absence of social cohesion, emotions of marginalization, and confidence as an organization. Studies have highlighted a gap in the abilities gained in colleges and what employers need in the 21st century. Electricity and Internet connectivity were identified as major challenges in the provision of these services.*

Keywords – National integration, Roles, public libraries, Nigerian Society

### INTRODUCTION

In addition to being a political and geographical entity, a nation's people are intended to share a common sense of identity, intent, destiny and belonging underground and maintained by domestic organizations and values. National integration, despite cultural, religious and social distinctions and diversities, generates perceptions of unity in a nation-state. It breeds in a country's people a feeling of common identity, nationhood, unity, and patriotism. National integration fosters the growth of common national values, a powerful trust in the country's life and future, and a compelling duty to the nation. It also encourages inclusiveness and a sense of belonging as individuals identify and cohesive with shared values (Makosso, 2014). Given the various conflicts, ethnic clashes, political difficulties and financial instabilities that have enveloped Nigeria since the 1914 amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates into a nation, it is quite obvious that the country needs to seriously explore new ways of attaining domestic inclusion (Ojo, 2009). Ethnicity, nepotism, political and financial difficulties were recognized as the deep-rooted problems working against Nigeria's domestic development (Fageyinbo, 2011).

It was suggested that the various ethnic, religious, social and political organizations need to discuss and agree on perceived thorny domestic problems such as zoning political posts, indigenous-settler disputes, resource control, youth resistance and militancy, and religious fundamentalism and intolerance in order to attain national integration in Nigeria (Onifade and Imnohopi, 2013). Alapiki (2005) pointed out that the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme, Unity Schools, Federal Character Principle, and State Creation exercises all illustrate national policies specifically designed to accomplish national integration. These measures, however, appear to have failed to accomplish their goals. Citizens' inability to be employed gainfully has been fingered as a significant factor to be regarded as one of the ripple impacts of unemployment in a community is absence of interest and nation-building collaboration. A elevated unemployment rate presupposes that the nation has inequalities. This is exacerbated by the absence of social welfare systems for the unemployed and, most importantly, as an indicator of the social and economic rights to which all members of the

domestic society have the right. This lack of a clear socio-economic rights baseline implies that the unemployed as a group of individuals are marginalized from participating in the country's Commonwealth. This works greatly against national integration as nation-building cannot operate where there is poverty, absence of fundamental requirements and marginalization (Gambari, 2008). Public libraries are well placed to assist as far as unemployment is concerned, as well as to assist individuals gain' tough and soft abilities' from the 21st century. Rooney-Browne (2009) observed that in moments of unemployment, communities expect more from libraries as individuals demand more' employment-related' services from their public libraries. A downward turn in the economy, according to Richard (2009), drives individuals to use public libraries as' something like an office' where they can use pcs, have internet access, and even take courses to acquire more abilities, including digital literacy abilities. Lynch (2002) made the same observation that unemployment caused by a downturn in the economy seems to drive individuals in public libraries to seek more data about financial possibilities. Therefore, in the quest for national integration in Nigeria, the role of public libraries in allowing individuals to become employed must be critically evaluated.

As a multicultural country, Nigeria is overwhelmed by various issues that threaten its survival and its ongoing existence as an organization. Even after decades of nationhood, national integration seems to have become an intractable problem for Nigeria. This has resulted in underdevelopment despite the country's enormous natural resources. As the nation seeks ways out of the predicament, many alternatives have been offered. Bello (2012) claims that the appropriate use of the' Federal Character Principle' will guarantee that the various ethnic groups at the core of authority are represented fairly and equitably, giving each group a feeling of belonging and potentially quash disputes and disputes. Falade and Falade (2013), suggest transforming attitudes through social mobilization and adopting and imbibing key principles of unity and trust in order to achieve national integration. Sifawa and Kurah (2016), believe that education is a true instrument for fostering unity and peaceful coexistence in the nation, particularly the inclusion of history in the curricula at all stages of schooling.

### **Research Problem**

The relevance of public libraries all over is to provide access and service in response to the information needs of the nation cannot be underestimated. It has been observed that service delivery and sustainability of the library is a challenge. It is on this background that this study is carried out to examine the reason for the setback and ways to overcome the challenges in the bid to fostering national integration. The following are some of the problems that need and answer.

1. Examine the type of services provided by public library for national integration
2. Examine the place of the library in fostering national integration for development
3. Identify the major challenges that hinder public library services for national integration

### **Information Services Offered by Public Library for National Integration**

Access to information is cardinal to national integration. Public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public libraries are provided on the basis of equality of access for all,

regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison (IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1994). However, some of the services provided by public library as identified by Sokari, Abdullahi & Abdullahi (2017) include information services; outreach programs; library services to children; Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI); Current Awareness Service (CAS); circulation services; reference services; serial services, consultancy services; research services; photocopying services, adult learning or literacy programme services, internet services, recreational services, bindery services, special needs services, interlibrary loan services, community education services, social inclusion, among others. Some of these services are detailed below as:

### **Provision of Information Services**

One of the information services rendered is in the area of organizing outreach programmes within the host community to ensure adequate publicity as to avail the people of the information resources and services available to them through the library. Various media are also explored to enhance publicity to the grassroots.

### **Special Services and Programmes for Children Education**

Public Libraries organize some weekend mostly Saturdays programmes tagged story hours and relaxation activities which include story-telling, library tour, drama, dancing, riddles and jokes among others. Many public librarians make special effort to conduct film shows, group discussions on library books. Programmes such as inter-school debates, quiz, spelling bees competitions, young writers' book club among other which most times attracts various awards by the organisers and sponsors of such programmes. All these programmes are geared towards boosting their education.

### **Adult Literacy Programme:**

Public libraries play an important role in adult education through the provision of information materials for increased leisure-time activity. Health talk on various issues are advanced to rich out to and encourage the general public even on the area of e-health corners where free information on health resources can easily be accessed e.g. family planning, HIV/AIDs, personal hygiene etc, initiative skills in the area of agriculture, entrepreneurship skills, unemployed youths empowerment programmes that will avail them the opportunity of developing the creative minds for the conversion of jobs creations, leisure programmes on "Literacy Evening/Open Mic" for education and knowledge just to mention but a few which in turn leads national integration.

Other services offered include organizing programmes in recognition of various national and international remarkable events such as World Literacy Day, World Book Day, World Poetry Day, National Democracy Day, Nigerian Independency Day etc. These programmes in one way or the other inculcate the spirit of unity in the minds of the children at young stage.

### **Public Library As An Engine To Foster National Integration For Development**

Provision of access to information and knowledge to meet the needs of the community and the public is a basic role of public library. Thus, the provision of access to all forms of useful

information and works of imagination by public libraries remain an ingredient to foster community development for national integration. According to Makotsi (2004), libraries go beyond formal education; they encourage and sustain literacy, and support development.

- Public libraries innovative initiatives beyond its basic roles have positioned them to remain relevant in achieving national integration for development. One of these is the role to ensure that those groups of people or individuals living with HIV/AIDS and communities who are victims of multiple deprivations and/or are socially excluded due to unequal power are meaningfully engaged within its locality by making available and accessible information materials that will educate such citizens on their rights and opportunities and which in turn would inform their contributions and decisions in society.

Public libraries engagement in services geared towards ensuring social inclusion and cohesion is a key role. That is, access to information is provided to men, women and children within its host community who may have been excluded from certain rights. Social inclusion refers to a policy designed to ensure that all people are able to participate in the society regardless of their background or specific characteristics. This means the promotion of equal opportunities to people irrespective of circumstances and those who are socially excluded politically, economically, socially and culturally (Amonoo & Azubuike, 2005). For instance, public library in its role of making accessible all forms of suitable information materials and services to meet the needs of special groups thus, those with disabilities in enhancing their education which is the right of every citizen is indeed a key to fostering national integration for development.

- Another role public library plays in fostering national integration for development is evident in the work of Nwosu & Ogbomo (2010) when they emphasized that economic progress of the nation will be dependent on the access to information because national development is very much influenced by the amount of available information. This implies that no nation can see the light of tomorrow (development) without the availability, accessibility and utilization of right information for knowledge which when fully applied leads to its development and that of its citizens.
- Public library through collaborative effort create a platform where Multi-nationals, government and non-governmental agents or representatives with State Ministry of Chieftaincy Affairs organizes initiatives and sensitization programmes by engaging various groups in the oil producing host communities within the Niger Delta Region on discussions popularly called "THE CANVAS" to deliberate, sensitize, initiate and educate, especially the youths on matters centred on social and national issues.
- The aim of these is on the need for them to embrace peaceful co-existence. Other similar programmes include social forum where information on fight against drug abuse, rape, cultism, health talks among others are provided and disseminated to the public. All these are geared towards building healthy community and state for fostering national integration for development.
- Through public library resources and programmes, the people are being enlightened on social and traditional values among different cultures. This is seen in the area of marriage, burial rites, cultural, arts festivals etc., by this national integration is enhanced. Another way public library foster national integration is the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and diversity (Amonoo & Azubuike, 2005).

- Recreational services geared towards bringing particularly young children together thus inculcating in them the spirit of one through the provision of information that brings the attention of the children to unity and cohesion can be disseminated in the children section of the public library to foster national integration for development.

### **National Integration Development Rationale**

National Integration Development rationale is critical and vital for any nation's support and development. A nation is categorized as developed if it can provide its citizens with a qualitative existence. In the developing world there is a big majority of the world's population. Urban population issues, rural stagnation, unemployment, and increasing inequalities continue to confront less developed countries that belong to Nigeria. It is hard to understand the hopes of accelerated growth. This somber scenario is of excellent interest to stakeholders and the citizenry involved. Despite its vast human, material and natural resource endowments, Nigeria has not been able to generate significant growth. This has had a major impact on her citizens' search for enhanced quality of life. Poverty, unemployment, and hunger continue to pervade the country's nook and cranny. National development is vital and critical to a country's growth and livelihood in order to effectively improve the significant standard of living among the people.

### **Roles of Public Library in National Integration**

Public Library's function in the development of national integration has to do with qualitative and sometimes quantitative modifications in a person's or an individual's life. At the national level, there is an improvement in the general well-being of the people while at the individual level, development implies activity, increased skill and capacity, self-discipline, greater freedom, responsibility, and material well-being. Libraries are so abstract for some individuals that they can have no effect on their practical lives. Such individuals therefore think libraries are meaningless to growth. This misunderstanding persists due to the ignorance of people about what libraries are all about. They fail to understand that libraries are one of man's most (if not the most) helpful undertakings ever. This is proof of human development, showing that libraries were the biggest force that helped shape human civilization. Thus, as cited by Ireland (1884), Owen Meredith stated that "It is not, however, for the museum, the lecture room, or the drawing school, but for the library, that we must go to complete our humanity. It is books that carry the intellectual riches of the globe from age to age." Human knowledge has made enormous progress since the last century. Every field of human activity has made a quantum leap forward, leading to numerous findings and inventions, two of which are Internet and cloning, using and abusing them. New difficulties have emerged along with the fresh information. And these fresh innovations provided a spectacle of the biggest confusion to the ordinary citizen.

People stop thinking that bringing order, clarity, and consistency is the company of libraries. Here, libraries become "a tool for organizing understanding, providing a focus, and then giving the person a feeling of direction out of a confusing labyrinth" (Anyika, 2005; p. 131). Libraries are instrument for satisfying the curiosity of man even at the individual level. Man's willingness to understand stuff is awesome. This urge motivates their curiosity to be satisfied. Their curiosity extends to all places and to all things. It's bounded only by their imagination's constraints. Sometimes, one makes a breakthrough and finds the answer to one's inquiries but human progress does not consist in finding the answers and so ending the search, rather, it is an adjustment to the search itself. Life becomes nothing but a perpetual inquiry. We live by

the results of the inquiry but we are never satisfied with them, and so while we accept them in order to exist, we also endeavor to continue the inquiry. (Anyika, 2005 ; p. 131) And the library is "the working instrument of inquisitive males, which then provides the Socratic dictum credence that ' unexamined life is worth living '" (Anyika, 2005; p. 131).

In their behavior, the library makes individuals more rational because someone who understands the rational means will generally behave according to that means. "This is similarly in tandem with the Platonic maxim that ' wisdom is virtue,' whereas vice is due to ignorance." (Anyika, 2005; p. 131) Therefore, the existence of libraries in a community will definitely improve beneficial human activity in that community. This is achieved through their services and programs, introducing kids to the habit and pleasure of reading and helping scholastics and scientists contribute to the growth of their quota. Students are endorsed to perform well in their educational job with the assistance of books and other appropriate data, while professors and lecturers are provided with library learning aids to prepare helpful lesson notes that will assist them pass on helpful knowledge to their students. The Library Service "has championed the provision of appropriate data resources to various groups through the establishment of rural libraries with the aspect of promoting adult literacy and helping to build an informed community" (Achitabwino, 2007). People who have been deprived of data are now able to read and write through such libraries. High above all, having found a broad variety of data about problems influencing their societies, they were able to create informed choices that helped to implement socio-economic development. (Achitabwino, 2007) It is not possible to underestimate the role of libraries in encouraging tourism marketing.

Libraries as data reservoirs are the most credible reference data centers where visitors can find data about hotels, motels, national parks, hills and other exciting locations. In the health industry, libraries also play a crucial role. To consolidate health records, planning, and management, a vibrant health industry requires well-documented and structured health information for dissemination to consumers and prospective customers. Libraries provide individuals with adequate data on disease and prevention measures, health care, premarital side effects, early pregnancy hazards, and any other data related to health. Another important function of libraries "is to promote and spread a political ideology for domestic growth and cohesion." (Anyika, 2005; p. 134) Effective citizen intervention is only feasible if people understand how to obtain access to all types of data and have the ability to become accountable and informed participants in democracies. This is particularly the case with the evolution of e-government. Libraries provide true and virtual civic spaces where people can freely talk, share comparable interests and issues, and pursue what they think to be in their public interest. Free discourse among educated people ultimately ensures that civil society and civil society, in turn, provide the social capital needed to attain common objectives. As cited by Ogbonna (2013; p. 70), Lady Bird Johnson noted that "Maybe no place in any society is as completely democratic as the town library. The only requirement for entry is interesting. Wright (2001), as cited by Bhatti (2010), believed that information promotes and empowers the involvement of people in the democratic process; it upholds the rule of law and generates a feasible outlet for public opinion injection. Information informs the political management process, all of which nurtures the construction of sustainable peace to enhance the state. The fact that libraries have the biggest effect on a nation's agricultural growth is similarly incontrovertible. Libraries provide all agricultural officers, extension employees, scientists, farmers, policy makers, etc. with appropriate data on the new technique of enhancing cattle and better farming methods that will satisfy the growing needs of the population. Libraries provide such data and also provide beneficial measures to improve a

country's decreasing food security. It is also possible to achieve national integration through financial stabilization and job creation for all. According to the Open Society Foundation (2012), being employed not only provides the means to fend for oneself and dependents, but also provides satisfaction, a feeling of accountability and, most importantly, provides financial advantages and helps to reinforce social cohesion as a prerequisite for national integration. Functionalism, which is one of sociology's three primary views, describes how to achieve stability in a culture that is essential for national integration.

The functionalist theory views each fragment of culture as interconnected in terms of how it contributes to the entire community's general stability (Mooney, Knox and Schacht, 2007). The point of view expresses the conviction that one of the ways to attain national integration is through economic development, whereby a nation is typified as an organism with interconnected components that can attain harmony, balance and balance when the essential and essential element of the economy is healthy (Crossman, 2017). Any group of people's most critical need and function is to provide safety and welfare. Therefore, if any group of individuals get a fair quantity of what they want and should have them, they will be peaceful and stable (Frank and Ukpere, 2013). Moreover, Maslow's (1943), the hierarchy of the theory of requirements, postulates that human needs fall into five categories which are positioned in a hierarchical order and that an person can only meet a need in a greater category if he has fulfilled the reduced requirements.

The pyramid's first four levels are basic and referred to as "deficiency needs" -esteem, friendship and love, safety, and physical needs. If one does not meet the most basic of these "deficiency requirements," one will not only feel nervous and tense, but also have physical ionic. Physiological needs are the first category of Maslow's need hierarchy at the bottom of the pyramid. These are the most fundamental needs like air, heat, water, food, stimulation, and exercise. Generally speaking, it can be thought that the capacity to have resources that will allow one to provide food for oneself and dependents is the most fundamental of basic human requirements and meeting that need is a prerequisite for peace of mind and body. Security is the second category in the need hierarchy.

Gainfully employed to provide fundamental physiological requirements provide a feeling of security and security, driving financial growth in any society (Ozdaglar, 2015). Meeting a people's reduced requirements in the hierarchy of requirements will enable them to value the community that enriches them financially and psychologically, and their demands will rise greater to regard, communicate and acknowledge others that are vital elements of domestic integration and nation construction (Asaba, 2017). Unemployment has been recognized as one of the indices that is a basic problem militating against national integration as supporting the well-being of the people who make up a country. Since Nigeria's unemployment rate has continued to rise as more and more individuals join the labor market either by obtaining appropriate skills from academic, technical and professional institutions / bodies or by reaching 15 to 64 years of age and are prepared and able to work.

According to the National Statistical Bureau (2016), Nigeria's economically active population or working-age population (persons aged 15 and 64) rose from 106.69 million in the second quarter of 2016 to 108.03 million, representing a 1.26% increase over the previous quarter and a 3.57% increase over the third quarter of 2015. The labor force population (that is those within the working age population -15-64yrs willing, able and actively looking for work) increased from 79.9 million in the second quarter of 2016 to 80.67 million in the third quarter of 2016, representing an increase of 0.98% in the labor force during the quarter. Furthermore,

during the third quarter of 2016, National Bureau of Statistics (2016) recorded the fact that the number of unemployed Nigerians in the labour force, increased by 554,311 persons, resulting in a steady increase in the national unemployment rate to 13.9% in the third quarter 2016 from 13.3% in the second quarter, 12.1% in the first quarter of 2016, 10.4% in fourth quarter of 2015 and 9.9% in third quarter of 2015. The number of underemployed in the labor force (those who work in jobs that are not commensurate with their qualifications or those who do not work full-time and only work for a few hours) increased by 501,074 or 3.25%, resulting in an increase in the underemployment rate from 19.3% in the second quarter of 2016 to 19.7% (15.9 million people) in the third quarter of 2016. Furthermore, the unemployment rate in Nigeria has risen for nine (9) consecutive quarters moving from 13.9% in the third quarter of 2016 to 14.2% in the last quarter of the same year (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). When an estimated 27.12 million people in a country are jobless or are under-employed, it shows that a sizable percentage of the citizens are unengaged, unproductive and most likely angry, sullen and resentful and this is a grave impediment to national integration as unemployment has negative multiplier effects (Uwa, Chuke, and Elton, 2016). Brookings Institute (2017) had identified a 'skill-set' gap between what is taught in schools at all levels of education and the requirements of the 21st-century employers and workplaces as the most plausible reason for the high rate of unemployment in Africa. The critical areas include IT and information literacy skills, teamwork and problem-solving skills amongst others. Digital literacy skills have been highlighted as needful for job seekers in the 21st century as more and more jobs are getting automated; not just manual duties but also those that require routine cognitive skills such as the duties of lawyers and accountants among others (Winthrop and McGivney, 2017). Public libraries have been safe centers and platforms for formal, informal and lifelong learning, creativity, and innovations where anyone in the society irrespective of age, religious beliefs, educational and social status can access, use and generate information for a multitude of purposes. The advent of the Internet and the ever-evolving technologies in information and communication has spawned the need for a new set of knowledge and skills in information usage. Digital skills are the gateway to economic, social and educational opportunities. Public libraries have keyed into this with the realization that those without the skills to navigate information in the digital landscape are quickly left behind in exploiting opportunities for advancement in the 21st century. These institutions have become essential for equipping communities and people to function fully in the 21st century as they deliver information services, teach digital skills and assist in the inculcation of literacy. Most importantly, public libraries have the capacity to help people get or improve the skills they need to get the kinds of jobs that are in demand in the 21st century (Garmer, 2014). They help people increase their employability quotient thus driving the attainment of national integration.

## **Conclusion**

Information "is an essential instrument in all human endeavor types. It's the domestic growth link pin "(Achitabwino, 2007). Developing nations must collect and provide access to appropriate and up-to-date "data on food safety, health, democracy, population, education, family planning, youth empowerment, gender equality, environment, etc." (Achitabwino, 2007) in order to develop more effectively in all parts of culture. In this respect, all hands must be on board to establish efficient libraries for adequate information management, provision and dissemination. Only through social cohesion and the elimination of all variables that encourage marginalization, particularly unemployment, can national integration be constructed. Literature has recognized as one of the causes of unemployment a gap in the skill set of school leavers at all levels of education.



Political integration which is an integral part of national integration is necessary to sustain democratic governance, peaceful coexistence and national development. Democracy strives in an atmosphere of quality and equitable access to political information and the library as a social-based information institution is rightly positioned to perform “outside the box” to meet the political information needs of the public and equip them to become better citizens that are politically inclined, hence contributing much more to nation building.

### **Recommendations**

In view of this, the following recommendations are made:

1. Libraries should give the public equitable access to political information using various electronic, social and print media platforms at their disposal. Such political information should include voters right, elections schedule, among others, should be done with the intent to increase political participation and awareness. This free and equitable access to information will enable individuals to bridge the gap in the state of their political knowledge which will enhance their political participation and invariably spurs national integration.
2. Libraries should provide information and media literacy skills to members of the public in order to enable them to respond properly to political campaign messages regardless of the media. These media literacy skills will also equip them with the skills to detect "fake news" propagated during campaigns thereby enabling well-informed decisions.
3. Nigerian Library Association should liaise with the government through the Ministry of Education to instate the 1948 Universal Declaration Rights, the one for education in particular.
4. Libraries should create awareness on the need for members of the public to participate in political activities as a means to democratic sustenance. This awareness could be through the libraries blog/website, radio jingles, telecast, library notice boards, flyers, posters, banners among others.
5. Library services and resources should be extended to those in the rural areas with limited access to scientific information. Such services and resources should focus on meeting their information needs in all aspects of human endeavor to include educational, medical, political, economic and social. This information will provide equitable access to opportunities for members of the public which is germane to building national integration.

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