Resource Sharing and Networking in Library and Information Centres in Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Ali (2010) posits that the ultimate aim of library and Information service is to supply its user with all the materials that he or she needs in order to do research, become more educated, empower him/herself, or simply be entertained. The explosion in published output, the sharp increase in bibliographic access of literature through online and off-line databases on CDs decreasing library budgets along with high cost of published output have made it virtually impossible for libraries and documentation/ information centers to fulfill information needs of their primary clientele. Under such squeezing situation the best option left with the libraries is to optimize the output and utilize their resources through extensive sharing and networking.

In view of the above, the traditional concept of ownership in collection development is gradually being replaced by access to information and knowledge without regard to location and format. According to Benzies (1999) Resource sharing is the process by which a group of libraries, information centres, etc., decide to make their resources available for the common use and benefit of all members of the group. It means a partnership in which each member has something useful to contribute to the others and is willing to make this available when needed. It is, essentially, a pooling of resources, a cooperative undertaking for increased capability, greater user satisfaction and economy of effort.

Chatterjee (2010) is of the opinion that Information Resource Sharing does not merely mean mutual sharing of information sources among libraries but utilizing information resources of one library for generating services of another library. For instance, librarians in any library in Nigeria can easily find out any information concerning any book in the Library of Congress in United States of America within a couple of minutes without leaving the confines of their library buildings.

The fact is that ICT has become indispensable to libraries in the provision of timely information to users and, in fact, to the progress of librarianship as a profession.

A "network" is, essentially, an interconnected group or system. A library and information network is, therefore, a group of libraries or information centres that are interconnected or linked for the purpose of resource sharing. Kaul (2002) gives the view that a library network can bridge the digital divide and play a major role in developing appropriate content, managing content for dissemination, improving access to resources, contributing the growth of trained manpower and so on.

In the same context, consortia-based subscription of e-journals is one of the major and most popular activities undertaken by library networks. The exponential growth of information and escalating cost have prompted the libraries to look for an collective arrangement which would provide them with a better bargaining power to have access to maximum information with possible minimum cost (Siddanagouda, 2013).

According to Webster (2006), Open source software is another example of collaboration at work in libraries. The open source movement in general is an important means for libraries to share software resources. Each individual open source project creates its own dynamic resource-sharing network. However, modern information technology has made the task of resource sharing very simple and convenient. The new technology brings forward to the information field many products and services which have changed the nature of fundamental library objectives and operations.

In the last few centuries, libraries and information centers have entered another era; many libraries are taking steps to reach out to other Libraries in the learning community in other to tackle the ever increasing needs of their users and to provide quality service. The ultimate goal of information/library networks is to interlink information resources in a metropolitan area,

so that those users could access information irrespective of its location, format, medium, language, script etc. The conclusion of this article will highlight the formal and informal ways in which library professionals can make the most of the advantages and benefits of such collaboration.

BACKGROUND

Resource sharing in information centers is not a new concept. It has long been used to improve access and service through borrowing and lending from other libraries. According to Ali et al. (2010), Resource sharing among libraries and information Centres has become the common desire and practice amongst information professionals. Increase in the volume of library materials and information, the increasing costs of acquiring and processing them, the need for trained personnel, storage space, and the increasing demands by users are motivating factors for libraries to share books, journals, preprints, catalogues, list of publications, recent additions, newsletters, policy decisions, current events, news flash, etc.

Historically, the library has had a long tradition of resources sharing and networking's with ICT. It is common now for library to be members of several consortia at the same time for various types of cooperative work and resources sharing. Examples of this are the Online Public access Catalogue (OPAC) and the Online Computer Library Catalogue (OCLC). With the development of the digital library software, Greenstone digital library software, CDSware, the CERN document server software, the possibilities of sharing resources have become much easier (Aina et al., 2010).

A number of researches have been carried out on the need for resource sharing, collaboration and networking among libraries in Africa. Notable amongst them are Etim (2006) on Resource Sharing in the Digital Age: Prospects and Problems in African Universities; Waiganjo (2006) on Academic and Public Libraries Partnership in Sharing Information Through Technology in Kenya and the Role of the African Virtual Library; Agboola (2003) on Information Technology Potentials for Interlibrary Loan and Cooperation; Lamikanra (2003); Jalloh (1999) on Library Networking and Consortia Initiatives in Africa; Ossai, Ngozi (2010)

on Consortia Building among Libraries in Africa, Adam and Usman 2013 on Resource sharing services in academic library services in Bauchi; John-Okeke, Rita (2013) on Bibliographic networking and Law libraries in Nigeria etc.

Resource sharing and cooperative functioning through networking have become a necessity for libraries and information centres worldwide. Efficient resource sharing can be achieved by using the recent advances in information technology to collaborate with other network of libraries.

HISTORY OF RESOURCE SHARING AND NETWORKING

The concept of sharing is a need-based activity framed around the age-old concept of give and take. In general it is as old as the civilization. In "the field of libraries we might trace the history of resource sharing since their inception in various forms viz., shared cataloguing, library cooperation, interlibrary loan and union catalogue etc. The term library resources include any and all of the materials, functions and services, which constitute a modern library system. It is amalgamation of people, processes, ideas, materials and money which forms the substance of a library and can be described as its resources. Resource sharing is a sort of implied agreement amongst participating libraries wherein each participant is willing to share its resource with other members and in turn is privileged to share the resources of its partners as and when the need arises, Mishra (2000) in Basri and Mulyawati (2012).

Geronim and Claudia 2005 posit that the first initiative to develop library networks came about in the United States, in the middle of 19th century, with the foundation of the American Library Association and the start of a cooperative cataloguing program. The delivery of catalog cards by the Library of Congress was the next step towards the development of library networks and consortia.

During the last six to seven years, library and information activities in Libraries and Information Centres have entered a new era. Individual libraries are coming out of the proverbial "Berlin Wall" around them. They are trying to form a larger community in an effort to tackle the ever increasing demands for better services, quantitatively and qualitatively, in an environment

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