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PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE ATTAINMENT OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The millennium development goals (MDGs) are series of eight international goals that set targets aimed at addressing major problems facing humanity in Nigeria in particular. It is a fantastic blueprint for national growth and an excellent roadmap for national development for Nigeria and Nigerians. The planning and effective implementation of this roadmap depends on these critical resources – information and funding. The public library is a custodian of information for all, the people's university at the urban and grassroot levels, and has the expertise to deliver results. This paper outlined the contents of the goals, took a critical look at the contents of the goals vis-à-vis the mandate of public libraries as contained in its manifesto, and highlighted ways that public library can play active role in attaining the millennium development goals, as well as the challenges. With less than one thousand days to the winding down of the millennium development goals, this paper calls for the creation, development, integration and enhanced funding of public libraries as a panacea to the attainment of millennium development goals for overall national development in Nigeria.

Introduction

The attainment of millennium development goals is the concern of all member states of the United Nations. The goals arose out of concern to mitigate those problems plaguing humanity in all facets of life, and which has adversely impacted on economy, life expectancy as well as national development. Hornby (1997) defined development as the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced according to the United Nations perspective, targets those critical areas in human existence so as to ensure

sustainable economic growth. The concern of the United Nations in effecting overall development in all member nations culminated in the creation of the millennium declaration known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September, 2000, and which targets are set to be achieved by the year 2015, (United States International – Council on Disabilities, 2013).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

According to United States International Council on Disabilities (2013), the millennium development goals are series of eight international development goals that set targets for all 192 state members of the United Nations to achieve by the year 2015. The goals address issues such as extreme poverty, hunger, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and environmental sustainability. They also advocate for fundamental rights to health, education, work and security (United States International Council on Disabilities, 2013). Putting it more succinctly, Obayuwana (2013) stated that millennium development goals are a set of 18 development targets and 40 indicators meant to measure progress outside of poverty, inclusive of health and education, among others agreed by the United Nations, to be realized by the year 2015. According to United State International Council on Disabilities (2013), the eight chapters of the millennium development goals are as outlined hereunder:

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Goal 2: Achieve Universal primary education
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women
- Goal 4: Reduce child mortality rate
- Goal 5: Improve maternal health
- Goal 6: Combat HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability
- Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development.

The aforementioned eight goals have targets which range from a day, achieving decent employment for women, men and young people, and halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger, all for goal 1. While goal 2 target expects that by 2015, all children can complete a full course of primary schooling, goals 3 has such targets as eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education and at all levels. The target of goal 4 has its emphasis on reducing by two-third between 1990 and 2015, the under five mortality rate, goal 5 has such targets as reducing by three quarters between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratios well as achieving by 2015, universal

access to reproductive health. Goal 6 has such targets as halting and has begun to reverse the spread of AIDS by 2015, achieving by 2010, universal access to treatment of HIV/AIDS for all those who need it and halting and having begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases. Goal 7 has such targets as integrating the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse loss of environmental resources; reduce biodiversity loss, and achieve by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss. It also has such target as halving by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. It also has such target as achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least, 100 million slum dwellers. Goal eight has such targets as developing further, an open rule-based, predictable, non-discriminating trading and financial system, address the special needs of the least developed countries. It also has such target as addressing the special needs of landlocked developing countries and small Island developing states, deal comprehensively with debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in other to make debt sustainable in the long-term, in co-operation with pharmaceutical companies provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries. It also has such target as making available, the benefits of new technologies especially information and communications, in cooperation with the private sector.

The United Nation Development Group (UNDG) coordinates millennium development goals efforts at the country level. Each country adopts the millennium development goals agenda and these are replicated at the state and local government levels for expected results. In Nigeria, the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) takes care of the millennium development goals agenda and this is replicated in the states and local government council as State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment Developments Strategy (LEEDS) (Adesina, 2013). These agenda form the bedrock of the several economic programmes of successive governments both at national and state levels.

In Anambra State, the recent adopted version of this economic programme is the Anambra State Integrated Development Strategy (ANIDS) of the Peter Obi Administration. The United Nations staff and teams are supporting developing nations with practical advice and assistance in designing and implementing policies and programmes, building capacity and testing innovations, as these countries map out their own paths to reach the goals.

Millennium Development Goals and Public Library

An in-depth reflection on manifesto for public libraries easily indicates that the public library is the only agency that is structured and well positioned to tackle such issues as attainment of the millennium development goals.

According to Edoka (2000), the missions as contained in the manifesto for public libraries include, creating and strengthening reading habits in children from early age, supporting both individual and self conducted education as well as formal education at all levels, producing opportunities for personal creative development and simulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people. Others include, promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations, providing access to cultural expression of all perforating arts, fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity and supporting oral tradition. The missions also include ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information, providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups, facilitating the development of information and computer literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary. All the vulnerable groups targeted by the millennium development goals are also among the target groups of the public library which does not discriminates in its type of clientele (Edoka, 2000). It can therefore rightly be concluded that establishment of the public library is a precursor to millennium development goals declaration.

According to Omotosho and Olatokurnbo (2012), no programme can succeed without information, and public library is the custodian of information. Baylan cited in Osuigwe (2011) stated that information has become a most critical resource for users in the areas of research and education, national development, personal well-being, competitiveness in business and industry and in every other sphere of human existence. Most of the United Nations efforts in achieving the millennium development goals have been on creation of necessary awareness and gingering actions at both state, national and international levels and which have consumed millions of dollars, and failed to reach the grassroots in the long run effectively.

According to Obayuwana (2008), an amount of N230 billion was spent on millennium development related projects in the years 2004-2007 and a total of N18billion was given to execute millennium development goals related projects during the Yar-Adua

Administration in Nigeria. Added to the funds from donor agencies, it is clear that so much money has been expended with very little to show for it (Obayuwana, 2008). Nigeria is one of the African countries with high burden of AIDS (Akjiaine, 2013). According to him, HIV/AIDS is still on the rise, especially in rural communities across the country. Nigeria is also among countries worst hit by teacher shortage according to UNESCO report (Ogar, 2013), four years into the implementation of the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) and its clones, the key indices of human development in Nigeria are not impressive. Poverty is still widespread, education and health systems are in shambles and the critical factor in productive endeavour power supply is unavailable (Adesina, 2008). Had a small proportion of funds and energies expended so far to attain millennium development goals in Nigeria been channeled towards the development of public libraries, and had the public library been integrated in the attainment of the targets of the millennium development goal, all would have been a success story. The public library is the teacher of teachers; the mentor of the downtrodden and a veritable link between the government and the governed especially the rural community. It is endowed with the features that can affect the needed transformation, as well as the capacity to accommodate any programme of government and the governed. In the 21st century, information is a powerful development tool that supports communities in a variety of ways. Access to information must be a – priority for all development initiatives and the public library is the custodian of information (Omotosho & Olatokumbo, 2012). Libraries offer a proven, existing and sustainable “venue that delivers result (Aventh, 2013). According of Adesina (2008), facts and data are the key ingredients of planning. Human capital is the critical factor in development and the quality of the people is central to, and must be the final goal and the yardstick to measure the relevance and impact of the vision of our leaders (Adesina 2008). The public library serves as the forum for human development of skills, knowledge, and dissemination of information, especially through its various information services, and which have the capacities of accelerate the attainment of the millennium development goals.

How Public Libraries can Help Attain MDGs

Libraries can offer a better, smarter way to achieve development goals. According to Avanth (2013), libraries are flexible institutions that can respond quickly to community information needs, whether after a natural disaster or during on-going community medical, agricultural, economic or educational challenges. According, libraries can have

a powerful impact when they proactively promote their role in information access for development.

In addition to its power of enhance education which it delivers through its diverse functions, as well as its role as centre to empower the citizenry, the enviable position of the public library in attaining the MDGs, lies in its flexibility and information activities of public libraries touch on health, education, employment, agriculture, village industries, daily necessities, awareness creation, consumer services among other (Islam, 2010). Through different forms of information services, the un-informed are informed, the illiterate receives education, on topic of interest, the unskilled become skilled and members of the community become empowered irrespective of gender, location, social status (Ibe, 2011). According to Matarraso (2011), access to library and information services contributes to the sustainability of communities and to their empowerment. Kibat cited in Ebiwoiate (2011) stated that there is a growing recognition that library services, particularly in public libraries are integral part of national socio-economic development and improvement of the general quality of life. In attaining the millennium development goals targets, the provision of information by libraries become indispensable as accurate decisions cannot be made in the absence of information (Omotosho & Olatokunbo, 2012). Libraries have access to expertise and personnel that have the training to retrieve information and to package that information in format that is easily adopted by the information seekers, (Tise, 2007). Libraries and organizations have partnered to help communities meet their basic needs most efficiently by helping farmers learn modern agricultural and marketing methods or matching workers with available jobs, and in this way, tackled goal: 1. Public libraries float programmes designed to educate or inform members of their host communities irrespective of age. The visitations to schools & prisons, mobile library services, children programmes, as well as spelling-bee competition are typical examples of ways available in the public libraries in tackling goal. 2. According to Avanth (2013), research shows that a strong library programme that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the adults in the community. The library serves as centre for promotion of cultural heritage; it is a respected meeting place where women can gather to support each other and have their questions answered. This is important, because libraries are reliable secured environments in which women and girls can obtain the information services they need to take control of their lives and influence their societies. The children's programme of the libraries, story hour for children, as well as spelling

bee competitions organized by libraries are typical examples of how libraries tackled goal 3. Librarians can also liaise with participating mothers to create story books from their own oral traditions, and develop literacy skills.

Libraries can help prevent deaths during pregnancy, birth or unsafe abortions by providing health care providers with knowledge on how to correctly apply simple, inexpensive intervention. According to the Health Information for All 2015 Campaign, tens of thousands of children & women die everyday for want of simple low-cost interventions (Avanth, 2012). When libraries are part of this strategy, they can help save lives; and thereby help attain goals 4 & 5.

Public libraries can play a central role in disease prevention efforts, and tackling HIV/AIDs pandemic through the provision of materials like newspapers that give or announce opportunities of campaign and immunization, place of study and health organizations that give health services.

Through orientation and acquisition of materials on HIV/AIDS, and other social diseases, public libraries provide and intimate its users on their causes, symptoms, prevention and control (Omotosho & Olatokunbo, 2012). The illiterates also benefit from these facilities or services through documentary films usually translated into local language, poster, illustrations, that depict important aspect of these diseases, benefits of education and continuing education and health care delivery. Public libraries can also partner with district HIV/AIDs coordinating office on a lifeline project to help educate young people about issues concerning HIV/AIDs, and excel in tackling goal 6.

For goal 7, public libraries can create awareness on environmental sustainability through diverse materials and information sources. According to Aventh (2012), public libraries are helping community members learn how to incorporate principles and practices of sustainable development into their daily lives. Libraries conduct programmes, provide library users with print and electronic access to information about environmental preservation and demonstrate best practices of sustainable technologies such as solar power safe sanitation, and sustainable farming strategies.

For goal 8, according to Aventh (2012), dynamic partnership between libraries, governments and the private sector is helping to shift, the perception of libraries from traditional depository of books to places that offer the benefits of new technologies for

personal development and economic improvement. Libraries as neutral, safe, respected places that are accessible to all can be vital community centres that have the flexibility to offer programmes that respond to community needs. In this period of tight development budgets, libraries can offer a better smarter way to achieve development goals. Libraries are flexible institutions that can respond quickly to community information needs whether after a natural disaster or during an ongoing community, medical, agricultural, economics or educational challenges.

Challenges posed to Public Libraries in Attaining MDGs

The following challenges as revealed in the literature are seen to be hampering public library efforts in attaining MDGs.

1. **Poor infrastructure:** According to Ebiwolade (2011), infrastructures are essential for delivery of library service to rural communities. According to him, the culture of infrastructure at development and maintenance is not widespread in Nigeria. According to Omotosho & Olatokumbo (2012), it is visible that the public libraries facilities in key research and education sector are not very impressive. As most public libraries are migrating from traditional to electronic or digital format, evidence abound that most public libraries have not been able to computerize their collections, not to even talk at using computer to provide services, thereby hampering the attainment of some targets of the millennium development goals, especially education and health related development goals.
2. **Inadequate funding:** According to Nwokocha (1998), inadequate funding is hindering the development of public libraries in Nigeria. According to him, most programmes and activities even in the academic libraries are stunted or unrealizable because of lack of funds. With this scenario reigning in the public libraries, the purchase of vital equipment like audio-strips, furniture, among other proofs unattainable thereby affecting certain targets of the MDGs.
3. **Epileptic power supply:** The poor power supply in the country is impacting negatively on the efforts of public libraries in attaining millennium development goals for national development (Ibe, 2011). The situation discourages most public library administrators from taking necessary steps to ensure effective participation of public libraries in attainment of the targets of the millennium development goals. The few libraries with computer and other ICT facilities adopt an “off and on” approach in their attempt to cut costs, due to lean budgets.

4. **Bad roads:** According to Ebiwolote (2011), there are many riverine areas which are not link up by good road networks. This hampers effectiveness of such information services of the libraries like mobile library services, visitations and other awareness programmes that may have been feasible in the absence of internet connection in the communities (Ibe, 2011). It also hampers the economic & social empowerment of women and young girls, as well as awareness on, good farming techniques, environmental friendly programmes, effective health care delivery in the rural communities, HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, and others, thereby affecting attainment of some targets of the millennium development goals.
5. **Inadequate human resources:** According to Ebiwolote (2012), many rural libraries have inadequate number of staff, and many others have staff who are seriously undereducated. In the same vein, Omtosho and Olatokumbo (2012) stated that public library administrators find themselves in dilemma when faced with the reality that having insufficiently trained staff to meet the demands of the user community poses a significant barrier to patrons who request health information and by extension posing barrier to improving service to health related development goals.
6. **Neglect by government:** It is obvious that the federal government as well as state government have not recognized the pivotal role of public libraries in the attainment of millennium development goals. This informs the reason for the poor funding of public libraries even in the face of millions of dollars that has been expended in pursuit of attainment of the millennium development goals.
7. **Insufficient public libraries:** There are insufficient public libraries to champion efforts in attainment of millennium development goals for national development. when we look at a state like Anambra with a population of 4,055,048 people and 117 autonomous communities, the presence of only eleven public libraries is grossly inadequate, and this is what obtains in most states of the federation. In a situation like this, the available public libraries cannot effectively play their role as centre for promotion of cultural heritage, meeting place where rural women gather to support each other and have their questions answered, rendezvous for children's programme. In a situation of lack of Internet connectivity as obtains in most communities, this infringes on attainment of all the targets of the millennium development goals.

Conclusion

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a worthwhile blueprint for survival and development of nations yearning for effective implementation. Despite huge sums of money voted annually for effective implementation of this blueprint, there are noticeable hiccups even as the target year of 2015 is around the corner. Part of the dismal performance of actions aimed at effective implementation of the millennium development goals agenda is not unconnected with the neglect and non integration of public libraries in the implementation process.

It has been revealed through literature that public libraries are well positioned statutorily to champion effective implementation of grassroots development. government both at national, state and local government levels are therefore enjoined to appreciate, promote and integrate public libraries in efforts towards the attainment of millennium development goals for national development.

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