National Information and Library Policies in support of UN Sustainable Development Goals: the case of Uganda

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Abstract:

Information policies support access to and utilization of Information for national development. In Uganda, there is no single library or Information policy but a set of policy statements to this effect. The paper analyses the various Information- and library-related policies that have been put in place to support sustainable development goals. Specifically policies scrutinized include laws that promote access to both information and the information infrastructure including ICTs, Libraries and education in line with the sustainable agenda. The country had progressed especially in universal access to education and ICT infrastructure. Other policies to guide innovation and its transformation into entrepreneurial advantage have been instituted. However, challenges remain basically in areas of funding especially for information support at various levels of the education spectrum. Gender-related constraints are still prevalent as well.

Keywords: Information policy, SDGs, Library, ICT, Gender, Uganda

Introduction and background

In 2007, Uganda adopted a national development framework that set the pace for the country's vision for the subsequent 30 years. The Government envisaged a transformed society, presumably:

> *'from a peasant into a modern and prosperous country within 30 years'*
> (Uganda, vision 2040).

According to the forecast, this was to be realized through harnessing what was considered various 'under-exploited' opportunities, which ranged from extractive industries, water resources, agriculture, labor supply, ICT and nature (tourism). Uganda has also adhered to the regional and continental developmental frameworks such as the East African Community Vision 2050 and the Africa Union Agenda 2063, (Uganda, vision 2040, 2007).

Coincidentally, while Uganda held the presidency of the 69th United Nations General Assembly in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were inaugurated, thus an opportunity was seized to integrate SDGs into the National Development Framework (NDF). The SDGs had replaced the Millennium Development goals (MDGs) after considered examination of the importance of sustainability in the development paradigm. There was thus need for international consensus on three established areas, namely: Economic development, Environmental sustainability and Social inclusion, (Sachs, 2012). The SDGs' set of 17 goals would presumably free the world from the affliction of poverty, hunger and the punitive consequences of climate change especially after recognizing the hand of humanity in threatening its 'life support systems'[1] .

Uganda, being among the 193 countries that assented to the SDGs, had an obligation to institute an implementation framework. Several policies have continuously been formulated to facilitate attaining both global and the national development commitments. However, the focus of the paper will be on Information and library related policies that support the Global goals.

Definitions and rationale for Information policy

Information policy has been defined variously, for example, as a field encompassing both information science and public policy and which treats information both as a commodity, adhering to the theory of property rights (by John Locke) and as a resource to be collected, protected, shared, manipulated and managed (Drake, M.A, 2003). Information policy can again be described as an encompassing term for:

> "*all laws, regulations and doctrinal positions and other decision making and practices with society wide constitutive effects – involving information creation, processing, flows, access and use*", (Braman, 2011).

In both definitions, there are components of commoditization of information, its processing, communication, regulation and access.

The preoccupation with Information policy gained momentum as society shifted from an industrial disposition to an Information society (Braman, 2011). In this mode of existence, the strategic resource for world economies is knowledge, rather than money capital and raw materials. Information and theoretical knowledge is thus treated as a raw material and commodity capable of driving innovation, policy formulation and societal change (Bell, 1999). Information and communications technologies (ICTs) on the other hand, provide the basic infrastructure that enables information flows (ie information creation, processing and transmission) in the Knowledge economy, (Castells, 2010). As such, Governments have taken keen interest in instituting policies that facilitate information and knowledge creation, processing, access and use.

The presupposition for policies on information, was that Governments have a duty to empower their citizens through access and use of information as a basic right for freedom of expression, participation in governance, culture and scientific life. In line with this assumption is a duty to ensure universal access to basic skills that enable use of information, for example the ability to

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[1]Wangare Maathai, a Nobel peace laureate, at her Nobel lecture on sustainable development, held 10th December 2004 in Oslo.

read, write and analyse information, and the capacity to connect with and make use of information infrastructures. Secondly, if information is perceived to be a commodity and a resource capable of transforming society, it ought to be regulated to ensure its use follows both national and development interests. Third, ICTs easily facilitate information flows and exchanges which consequently create other challenges in management and handling, thus a necessity to build capacity in its critical evaluation. Again, the proliferation of ICT applications and social media, have brought to the surface issues of ethical use of both the infrastructure and information. Castells (1998) makes reference to the negative exploitation of the network as the 'perverse integration' which shed light on the concept of Internet governance fronted in the earlier summits on the Information society. Lastly, according to McClure (1996), Information policy is supposed to regulate institutions, for example libraries in managing, organizing, retrieving and use of Information.

The Case of Uganda

In Uganda, there is so single library or Information policy but a set of policy statements and laws that impact on access and use of Information. My conceptual approach to information and library policies for SDGs, takes cognisance of earlier definitions and considers both the legal and regulatory framework for access, commodification and protection and the supporting infrastructure that includes both the communication and depository centers (libraries).

Out of the 17 goals, information-related policies instituted could be linked to Goals 3, 4, 5, 9, 10 and 16 (ie Good health and wellbeing; Quality education; Gender equality; Industry, Innovation and infrastructure; Reduced inequalities and Peace, Justice and strong institutions, respectively).

Policies on Access to Information, depository infrastructure, gender equity and education (Goal 3, 4, 5 & 16)

Perhaps one of the overarching Information laws was the legislation on Access to Information in 2005. This law has its roots in the National Constitution; specifically Article 41 (1) which highlights the right of access to information:

> *Every citizen has a right of access to information in the possession*
> *of the State or any other organ or agency of the State except where the release*
> *of the information is likely to prejudice the security or sovereignty of the*
> *State or interfere with the right to the privacy of any other person.*
> (Uganda Constitution, 1995)

The Act applies to all Government departments and agencies with some exemptions (Access to Information Act, 2 (1), 2005). The law was intended to open up Government, ensure accountability and public access to Government documents and records, including health and scientific information at no cost. Each agency was mandated to introduce a structure through which documents could be made available to those who wished to make consultations. However regulations to streamline the process were instituted six (6) years later in 2011 (Access to Information regulations, 2011).

Earlier on, there were similar legal frameworks, but with emphasis on establishing central depository centers (libraries). The focus, however, was broader on the National imprint, which also incorporated Government documents. In this case, Uganda instituted three (3) legal deposit laws. The first dating back to 1958, ratified 1964, the second 1969 and the third law established the National Library in 2003, (Makerere Deposit Act, 1958, 1964; Deposit Library and Documentation Center Act, 1969 and the National Library Act, 2003). The advantages of deposit laws, in terms of information accessibility, are that depositing and preservation of publications is mandated as well as creation of central structures to facilitate exchange of information. Legal depositories serve the purpose of national reference as well. The National Library Act (NLA) of 2003 revoked the Public Library Act of 1964 and under its new mandate was supervision of public libraries in addition to supporting adult literacy and education and establishing community libraries (NLA, 2003).

A separate law was enacted for public records in 2001. The Records law introduced procedures for creation, retention, preservation, accessibility and disposal, (National Records and Archives policy, 2001). However, the functional use of information requires related sectoral policies on education. In 1997, the Government introduced a policy for universal access to primary education, initially restricted to four children. The policy was later expanded to cater for all children to take into consideration the different household types. In 2001, the policy was extended to post-primary education, and later ratified in the Education Act, 2008. Quality control mechanisms were instituted. In 2016, the Education Ministry enacted another policy on gender equality in the sector with the main goal of mainstreaming gender in the education and learning outcomes. In all subsectors (pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary), specific action points are indicated, (Gender in Education Sector Policy (GESP), 2016).

In the legal frameworks mentioned, one could envisage a symbiotic relationship between Global goal no. 3, 4, 5 and partly 16, in which case, attainment of good health and quality and equitable education requires a corresponding supportive information access framework. In addition, attainment of literacy, especially functional literacy enables information utilization for quality health. Goal Number 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions presupposes the existence of good governance and democratic participation. Access to education and Government Information enables citizens to assess the performance of their governments and in turn enable building strong institutions. The e-Government framework is yet another policy area for consideration in goal 16, especially the last segment, since the electronic framework presumes greater access to information as well as accountability of Government (The National e-Government framework, 2011). Additional supporting policies include the National Information Management services (IMS) (draft) policy, 2011 to guide the management of Government electronic information, thus implementing the e-Governance framework.

Policies on Access to ICT infrastructure and inclusivity (Goal 10)

In line with the Government's vision of a transformed society (vision 2040) and the identification of ICT and the knowledge sector as a potential industry with multiple opportunities (National ICT policy, 2014), several policies have been instituted in line with the national aspiration. These include: ICT-related policies, for example, the Information technology Policy, 2012; the National ICT policy, 2003 and revised 2014; the Rural Communication Development fund, 2003–2008/9 and 2010/11–2014/15. The National ICT policy was built on several principles including: ensuring universal access to basic ICT infrastructure and services as well as consideration of cross-cutting aspects, for example gender, youth and disability. Countrywide expansion of the national backbone is a key result

area (National ICT policy, 2014). The Rural Communications Development policy and Fund on the other hand provided incentives to ICT investors for rural connectivity in what are classified 'underserved areas'. The main objectives were to increase coverage, provision of Broadband connectivity, and development of local and relevant content, increase ICT literacy, support local innovations ideally to bridge the rural-urban digital divide in access and use. The policy on rural connectivity was built against the backdrop that universal access could not be achieved through an economic model based on market forces.

The ICT for Disability policy is yet another effort towards inclusivity for marginalised groups. The worldwide statistics posit prevalence at 15% (WHO, 2011), while the national data reveal a percentage of 12.5, (UBOS, 2014). The policy proposed improved access to ICT infrastructure and information across formats for PWDs. This includes broadcast media, mobile phones and text.

The policy frameworks could be described as positive in universal accessibility to both the network and information, so that citizens can ably engage the network, in line with Global Goal 10.

Policies on Innovation (Goal 9)

The information society and knowledge economy is driven by research and innovation to induce societal change. According to Vision 2040, Uganda aspires to provide e-products, bridge the gap between industry and the academy and to commercialize research and development which are in line with promoting innovation, industrialization and technology infrastructure. Applicable policy areas would include universal access to higher education, especially graduate training, knowledge transfer partnerships (KTPs), commoditisation of knowledge through intellectual property rights, registration of patentable ideas and open data.

The Government of Uganda has put in place several policies in this direction and they include; the Open Data policy (2017), still in draft form, which envisages online publication of Government data, including research data and in principle making available primary scientific information to the public. This would encourage innovation through reuse and sharing of data and data-based decisions. Further laws to bolster and protect innovations include Intellectual property laws; Uganda enacted the Copyright law in 2006 and Copyright regulations in 2010; Industrial Property Act (2014), Trade Secrets (2009) and Trademark (2010) Acts and corresponding regulations. Registration of industrial property is covered by the Registration Services Act, 2003. The laws support registration, protection and commercial exploitation of innovations. However, once again Goals 5, 16 and 9 are interconnected, since inclusive and affordable access to ICT, reliable information as well as participatory governance facilitate innovation and development. Institutional policies on the public private partnerships in universities have enabled commercialization of research output. Incubation hubs have been established in three Public Universities of Makerere (central region), Mbarara (western Uganda) and Gulu (north).

In addition, a collecting society, the Uganda Reproduction Rights Organization (URRO)[2], was formed to support protection of copyright and moral rights of authors, visual artists and publishers. The organization works under the umbrella body, the International Federation of Reproduction Rights organizations (IFRRO).

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[2].https://www.ifrro.org/members/uganda-reproduction-rights-organisation

Policy Implementation and Challenges

Education, Gender Equality and Innovation (Goal 4, 5 & 9)

Uganda has instituted a legal and regulatory framework for implementation of SDGs, however, several challenges remain. In the education sector, the policies on universal access to primary and secondary education are hampered by several constraints including gross underfunding and misrepresentation of unit costs, poor remuneration of educators and limited or total absence of learning infrastructure. The ideals of quality education and learning outcomes in SDG no. 4 are constantly under threat. In addition, quality education presupposes a supportive information framework in the form of children's, school and public libraries. While the management of public libraries is provided for in the National Library Act, there is no corresponding framework for children's and school libraries. Individual communities have taken initiatives to bridge the literacy gap. Indeed an association of community libraries was launched in 2007 (UCLA, 2019[3]) and to-date, membership has expanded to over 100. In some instances, community libraries have adopted a dual-purpose model serving both public and surrounding schools with key texts and local language materials, and multipurpose telecenters. A classic example is the Ceazaria community library, located approximately 35 kilometres east of Kampala, which acts as both a public and school library. Other successful models include Kitengesa (South West Uganda) and the Nambi Ssepuuya community resource center[4] located in Jinja, Eastern Uganda. Although the libraries are recognized by the National Library, they basically survive on hand-outs from well-wishers.

Public libraries too, struggle with facilitation. Supervision is carried out by the National Library; however, funding is through the decentralized local administration. In instances where districts get weighed down by demands for services, especially in critical life and death situations, public libraries get sacrificed at the altar of priorities. While Uganda has over 112 local administration units (districts), the National Library survey found that only 46 have functional public libraries. Of the 46, 17 have a regular power source and only 11 have professional librarians (NLU, 2017; Kaggwa, A. 2018; Musinguzi, B. 2014). Funding for the public entities has been project-based and left to donors, for example BookAid, and EIFL[5] among others.

In terms of educational outcomes, Gender parity has been attained in enrolment at primary level at 50.3% for girls. However numbers drop at subsequent levels, for example 36% enrolment was registered at lower secondary level by 2016[6]. The drop has been attributed to gendered factors such as early marriages, sexual violence and menstrual hygiene. Census data (2014) also reveals that out of a total of 13% of citizens who have never been to school, 9% are females, while only 4% are male. There are more women than men who have never had any formal education. Other inequality indicators found in a study by a non-governmental regional organization focusing on education, UWEZO (2015), point to the rural/urban and regional divide, socio-economic status, orphanhood and disability.

In institutions of higher learning, there are no corresponding policies for universal access. The Government annually grants over 4000 performance-based scholarships across the nine (9)

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[3].https://uclia.org/
[4]https://www.nambisseppuuyacommunityresourcecentre.com/
[5] https://www.eifl.net/news/technology-boost-13-public-libraries-uganda
[6] Ministry of Education and sports fact sheet, 2002-2016.

public universities. Just like the Universal primary and secondary education, the unit cost is grossly misrepresented. Thus funding for the tertiary sector is mostly left to market forces and this creates disparities in access. The skilling for research and innovation is predominantly the mandate of Universities and research centers, circumstances of commercialization may lock out possible intellectual talent that has inadequate access to resources. Nevertheless, in 2012, a policy for financing higher education was put in place, but with a bias on Science and Technology, (HESFB, 2012). Implementation took a few years longer and predominantly at undergraduate level. As a scheme in its infancy, there is not much information on performance and analysis.

In addition, access to worldwide electronic scientific information in higher institutions is not directly funded by the Government and this often leaves academic libraries at crossroads. The traditional Book fund (Book bank) is so intermittent, leaving heavy reliance on online resources. For over 10 years, the total national academic libraries' budget for Electronic resources' subscriptions amounting to approximately US$180,000, has been carried by donors, specifically, the Swedish International Development Corporation Agency (Sida) and this leaves sustainability challenges. Information resources that support research and eventual innovations ought to be streamlined in the National budget. In the same way, the Government ought to institute a formal policy to guide Knowledge transfer partnerships to support academic - community engagements, so that sharing potential transformative ideas is not left to the discretion of individual universities.

Access to information – Legal deposit

The legal deposit system was built to provide access to information, however, the existence of three deposit centers burdens depositors often leading to non-compliance. Secondly, there appears to be an apparent duplication of roles, for example the Access to Information Act mandates Government institutions to set up parallel structures for accessibility, but the same information is legally mandated to be deposited in National Deposit centers. The centers should be facilitated to implement the depository laws. Legal deposit laws are not harmonized or focused due to an absence of a library policy. There is no mechanism to enforce the laws leaving deposit to the will of publishers and authors. The centers are poorly funded and space is a challenge. The National Library for example still occupies rental premises with minimal space, (Kawalya, 2011). Consequences include incomplete collection and National bibliography.

Access to ICT infrastructure and inclusivity (Goal 10)

A policy on rural connectivity was established in 2003. In 2009 a successor policy was inaugurated. Analysis of the initial policy showed progress in some areas, for example; establishing Internet Points of Presence (PoPs), Cafes, District Web Portals, Public Pay phones, Multipurpose community telecenters, School ICT labs and Health Units' ICT facilities, though mostly far below set targets, for example out of a targeted 1000 telecenters, only 24 were established and of 16,000 school ICT labs, the coverage was only 95 (RCDF, 2009). An independent analysis of the same policy was conducted by Madanda, Okello and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo (2009) and findings revealed that although there were benefits of cheaper access to ICT services especially within shorter distances, which was especially advantageous to women, employment opportunities for ICT trainers and trainees; establishing of ICT centers which exposed students, teachers and post-secondary school students to Internet and multimedia services, which were not available in prior training environments. Gender-specific

concerns were pointed out. Cultural norms dictate when women and girls should be in and out of home. Evening classes, for example were greatly discouraged for girls and women, because of the 'disruptive' effects to household 'agendas' but at the same time the fear of becoming a victim of crime. Other gendered constraints were mainly in the decisions of projects to support. The criteria favoured projects with prospects of profits and more established structures, yet the majority of these tended to be male dominated-business enterprises. Women's projects on the other hand were mostly built on the model of social returns and informal and this tended to edge them out in the competition for funds.

Policy status

Some other policies are at different levels in the formulation process, for example Open Data (2017); ICT for PWDs (2014) and the National Information Management Services (IMS) policy (2011), are all in draft form, there is no information on performance.

Conclusion

Uganda has instituted an elaborate legal and regulatory framework for Information management, access and utilization to achieve SDGs. Policies have been enacted on access to Information, ICT infrastructure, inclusivity of marginalised groups (women, PWDs, rural populations), document deposit centers and inclusive access to education. Progress has been achieved in line with SDGs, for example universal access to education and ICT infrastructure. However, challenges of funding cut across implementation of most sectoral policies. Underfunding is the main obstruction which threatens the building blocks[7] of the knowledge economy. Gender constraints have been cited in other instances, curtailing full exploitation of opportunities.

Acknowledgments

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