Education and training of information professionals:
the collaborative role of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN)

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ABSTRACT

The challenges of the information age make collaboration among the information management stakeholders imperative. The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) carried out some of its professional regulatory functions and training of information professionals to deliver quality information services through collaborative effort and by fostering enduring local and international partnership. This study assesses some of the successful collaborative projects of LRCN with local and international agencies on training and capacity building for Nigerian librarians. It discusses the success factors in these efforts, presents the benefits and challenges of fostering and sustaining these partnership. It

also makes appropriate recommendations for improving collaboration between LRCN and other LIS stakeholders, especially in the education and training of professionals in Nigeria.

Keywords: collaboration, LIS education, training, LRCN

INTRODUCTION

The multi-disciplinary and multi-dimensional nature of the library and information science profession in the 21st century has created opportunities and challenges for information professionals, particularly in developing countries, including Nigeria. The information age is characterized by challenges of information explosion; dynamic and rapid changes in information sources and infrastructures; users' sophistication; dwindling library funding; increasing need for justification of information service by employers or organization, etc. It is obvious that these challenges require multidimensional approaches to tackling them. Collaboration is one of the approaches to be employed in enhancing the capability of information professionals to deliver quality information services. According to Samson, Pengelly and Brown (1997) the art of alliance remains a key asset in the arena of information technology.

The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) was established as a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education by Act 12 of 1995. The Council is charged with the responsibility of pursuing the attainment of professional excellence by determining who are librarians; the standard of knowledge and skills required for registration and practice; guidelines for accreditation and minimum standards for librarians, and maintenance of professional discipline among librarians in Nigeria. In 2010 in order to achieve these mandates, the Council developed a Strategic Plan: 2010-2013 to deliver the mandate of LRCN. The strategic plan includes the review of the content of knowledge and skills of courses offered by library and information institutions; develop and run mandatory continuous professional development programme for librarians; design and develop library and information special skills acquisition programmes in response to changes in the national and international socio-economic, political, educational and technological scenes. One of the major practices of the Council is to regulate the librarianship profession to promote standard through registration and certification of librarians. However, registration and certification

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may not be enough to address the numerous challenges of the librarianship profession in the country. The capacity of librarians needed to be improved; curriculum of library and information science institutions needed to be reviewed in line with global standard; and necessary policies and infrastructure has to be put in place to ensure efficient access and use of information for national development. In order to achieve the afore-mentioned development, the Council has been involved in various collaborative activities on accreditation development of standard and continuous professional development (CPD) in library and information science profession in Nigeria. As identified by Ochalla (2007) the challenge facing LIS education in Africa include efficient access to provide new knowledge, skills and attitude of LIS workers. The challenges of LIS education in Nigeria include low capacity building among librarians; delay in review of LIS curriculum and lack of uniformity in the curricula of LIS institutions in Nigeria. LRCN developed a model for the CPD of librarians in Nigeria and established an annual calendar for the training of information professionals. Accreditation of LIS programmes in related institutions in the country is also being done through collaborative efforts of LRCN and the National Universities Commission (NUC). Other collaborative activities involving both local and international organizations were carried out. Through these collaborative works, the capacity of librarians has been improved, LIS programmes in institutions are being accredited and the quality of information services in Nigeria libraries is improving gradually.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) was established by Act 12 of 1995 to regulate and promote the service of librarianship in Nigeria. Specifically, the major responsibilities of the Council are to:

(a) determine who are librarians;

(b) determine what standards of knowledge and skill are to be attained by person seeking to become registered as librarians and reviewing those standards from time-to-time as circumstances may require;

(c) establish and maintenance of a register of persons entitled to practice the profession and the publications, from time-to-time, of the list of such persons;

(d) maintaining discipline within the profession; and

(e) perform such other functions as may be conferred upon the Council.

Establishing LRCN was a noble idea conceived by the founding fathers of librarianship in Nigeria several years ago. But this idea witnessed a number of obstacles before it finally became a reality in 1995 when the Act was enacted. However LRCN became fully operational on 26th October, 2009 when the pioneering Registrar/Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Victoria Okojie was appointed and subsequently confirmed in 2010. Within the few years of existence, the Council has carried out a lot of activities ranging from registration and certification of librarians; formulation and development of policy instruments and standards; continuous professional development (CPD); collaboration and partnership; to accreditation of library school programmes, among other.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration has been variously defined in different contexts. According to Parkinson (2006), "collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals". The major factor that drives successful collaboration by various agencies is common goals, vision and objectives. This is normally the first consideration in any cooperative agreement. Gray (1989) in Callahan, Schenk and White (2004) described collaboration as a process through which people who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible. Basically, collaboration helps to look at a challenge from different perspectives and come up with new ideas that will help to overcome such challenge. Shepherd (2004) stated that collaborative understanding must have common or new goals; beneficiary to all the participants; have commitment of organizational leaders; projects with long term effect and result; and shared resources.

NEED FOR COLLABORATION IN LIS EDUCATION

Collaboration within and outside the LIS sector is very necessary for information professionals to adequately explore the opportunities of information age and overcome the associated challenges. Sacchanand (2012) identified the need to collaborate in librarianship education to include: changes in the higher education environment, paradign shift in the library and information profession, and the instructors' and librarians' changing roles. Collaborative projects also arise from a need to be met. Shepherd (2004) stated that the initial reason for considering a collaborative enterprise is normally the perception that there is a need. As rightly observed by Lippincott (1996), no individual or profession has all of the

skills now needed to create an information infrastructure for a community of users. Al-Sugri (2010) noted that LIS education is becoming highly competitive requiring the latest technology and teaching methods, but without collaboration with others in their profession, LIS departments are unlikely to be able to keep up with these developments. TechSoup (2013) stated that successful collaboration can have many benefits which include sharing talents and resources, providing superior quality services, increasing funding and grant opportunities, and accomplishing more than any single organization could. Collaboration encourages the pooling of both tangible and information-based resources, sharing of ideas and information, and gaining access to skill sets of a person or group of people that may only be required for a certain project (Parkinson, 2006).

BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

Good as the concept of collaboration is to the development of the library and information science profession, there are a number of factors militating against the adoption of the strategy. Al-Sugri (2010) identified some of the barriers to collaboration in the LIS sector to include inadequate funding, relatively weak information technology (IT) infrastructure, lack of relevant professional skills, and government support as a pre-condition for collaboration. Ocholla (2007) also indicated barriers to collaboration in LIS in Africa to include lack of time, costs, geographical distance, management bureaucracy, and culture.

COLLABORATIVE ROLE OF LRCN

As a regulator and major stakeholder in the library and information sector of the economy, the quality of education and knowledge of librarians are priorities. In order to ensure that all hands are on deck in the quest to improve the knowledge and education of librarians in Nigeria, collaboration was considered a major option by LRCN. The need to collaborate arises from:

(a) Similar/Complementary Roles

The first step in collaboration is identification of individuals or organizations with common interest. Collaboration with other agencies or organizations by LRCN has been based on shared responsibilities and common interest. There are government agencies and private organizations that have some similar responsibilities to those of LRCN. Others have complementary roles with LRCN. An example of such organizations is the National

Universities Commission (NUC) whose responsibility among others is to accredit academic programmes in Nigerian universities.

(b) Avoidance of Duplication of Service

The collaboration of LRCN with other agencies also arises from the need to avoid duplication of services by related organizations. This will promote better utilization of fund and resources. It will also help to standardize services rendered through collaboration.

(c) Insufficient Financial Allocation

It is a common knowledge that one of the major challenges of project execution in developing countries is lack of fund.   To mitigate the effect of inadequate funding and render quality services for the development of the library profession, LRCN resolved to collaborate and reduce financial burden.

(d) Multi Task Nature of Information Age

The information age required a multi-dimension and new skill for an information professional to efficiently and effectively deliver information services. Hence, collaboration particularly with information technology related experts and organization is necessary for the advancement of the education and knowledge of librarians.   Realizing this, LRCN collaborated with information technology development organizations, such as NITDA to educate librarians in Nigeria.

(e) Need for Quality and Standard

Collaboration helps to improve the quality of services and standards. The desire to maintain standard in librarianship in Nigeria facilitated the partnership between LRCN and related organizations.   Development of quality standard in this electronic era requires the contribution of various experts and knowledge in the information industry.

COLLABORATION ON LIS EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Having realized the potential of collaboration in the development of LIS profession, the Council put necessary strategies in place to harness the potentials in education and training of librarians to achieve quality information service delivery for national development. The capability and input of relevant agencies are required to successfully achieve this objective. Several collaborative capacity building programmes which include the following were successfully executed:

(a) Collaboration with National Library of Nigeria (NLN)

As a major stakeholder in education in Nigeria, addressing the challenges of education is one of LRCN priorities. The school library system is identified as one of the vital organs of any educational system. This subsystem of education has witnessed poor quality service delivery. To address this, the capacity of human resource in the library must be improved. The NLN was identified by LRCN as a possible interest to collaborate with towards improving the capacity of Teacher-Librarians in Nigeria. An understanding was reached with NLN to train Teacher-Librarians in the six geo-political zones of the country. By 2011, this collaborative initiative has been able to train Teacher-Librarians in two geo-political zones of the country. The capacity of Teacher-Librarians in the affected zones has improved as a result of the training and this has also improved the services rendered by school libraries.

(b) Collaboration with the United States Mission, Nigeria

Information technology revolution is not limited to a particular profession or region of the world; it has affected almost every sphere of life. The advent of the new and emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) has facilitated the development of new tools, procedures, processes and facilities to enhance the service delivery capacity of information professional. There was a need to identify experts and facilities to train librarians to acquire basic and necessary skills to set-up and manage e-libraries. The United States Mission, Nigeria was approached for collaboration and understanding was reached on training of librarians on e-library services. Part of the collaboration was for the US Mission to provide some experts for the training and LRCN also to provide other resources and facilities that were required. The training workshop on "e-library services as a tool for achieving the transformation agenda in Nigeria" took place from 17th – 19th April, 2012. The knowledge of librarians of electronic library services was improved as a result of the training received. A lot of awareness on the electronic library services was created, and other related organizations now follow the footstep of LRCN. It is important to note that this collaboration with the US Mission is continuous as training on "open access" for librarians is scheduled to hold in September, 2013.

(c) Partnership with National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA)

LRCN collaboration with NITDA is based on complementing roles. NITDA is a notable government agency that is saddled with the responsibility of promotion and development of ICTs use in Nigeria. The Council considered it necessary to partner with NITDA to improve

the IT knowledge capacity of LIS sector. The implementation of the collaborative understanding has resulted in the training of library and information professionals on "application of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) in Library operations". The training which equipped librarians with the basic knowledge of deploring FOSS for library services took place from 4th- 9th November, 2012. Other areas of collaboration include the development of guidelines and minimum standards for the establishment of electronic libraries. Discussions with NITDA are already at an advance stage with NITDA to produce the guidelines. Establishment of a model mini e-library at LRCN headquarters is part of the collaboration. Meanwhile, the training of librarians is an annual project of the LRCN and NITDA.

(d) Partnership with National Universities Commission (NUC)

The partnership with NUC unlike training of library and information professional is on the accreditation of LIS programmes in universities in Nigeria. Management of LRCN paid a courtesy call on the leadership of NUC on the 8th of June, 2011 with a view to seeking understanding on joint accreditation of LIS programmes in the country. The NUC as an government agency is empowered to accredit courses in universities in Nigeria. It is also the responsibility of LRCN to accredit LIS academic progammes in the country. To avoid duplication of services and process, collaboration was considered a good option. It is obvious that the two agencies have common interest only that NUC's is general while LRCN's is specific. This common interest brought the LRCN and NUC together. After the visit, further negotiation was initiated and a collaborative agreement was reached on the joint accreditation of LIS course in universities. LRCN now undertake a joint accreditation with NUC on LIS courses to ensure that universities produce quality manpower for the LIS sector. Meanwhile, a proposal from LRCN for review of library and information science curricula in Nigerian universities is before the management of NUC.

(e) Collaboration with UNESCO

The LRCN/UNESCO collaboration was on the training and orientation of librarians, archivists, and museum professionals on harmonization of Libraries, Archives and Museums (LAMs) as Centres of Education and Learning in Nigeria. The outcome of the workshop was the setting-up of a harmonization committee which is made up of the Registrar/CEO of LRCN, the National Librarian and the Director of National Archives.

(f) Collaboration with Emerald Publishing, UK

The cooperation with Emerald Publishing, UK was on the training of librarians and other information professionals in Nigeria on "electronic publishing" using Emerald platform. The training which took place on the 8th February, 2013 equipped the information professionals with knowledge for publication of intellectual works.

(g) Collaboration with IFLA Africa Section

It is necessary to show the path of leadership and development to young librarians. Mentorship for librarians is one of the priority projects of LRCN. To set the pace and encourage young librarians to aspire to attain leadership positions in LIS profession, the LRCN in partnership with IFLA Africa Section organized a career and professional round table discussion among young librarians and senior professional librarians in Africa. The discussion centered on self-service and prospects as well as challenges of LIS profession, association and career. It also included practical experience and career challenges of the senior professionals. This mentorship programme took place in February 7th 2013 during the mid-term meeting of the Council of IFLA Africa Section in Abuja, Nigeria.

Table 1: LRCN COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITES WITH PARTNERS

Activities	Location	Collaborating Agency	Date	No of participants
Mission-oriented approach to library development and management for education effectiveness in Nigeria schools and colleges	Katsina State Secretariat, Katsina State	NLN*	Nov 1 – 5, 2010	120
Functional approach to library development and management for effective learning in Nigerian Schools.	Oyo State Library Board, Ibadan. Oyo State	NLN	Mar 22-24, 2011	97
E-Library services as a tool for achieving the transformation agenda in Nigeria	Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja,	US Mission, Nigeria	April 17-19, 2012	146
Application of free and open source software in library operations.	University of Calabar, Cross River State	NITDA**	Nov. 4 – 9, 2012	102
Workshop on electronic publishing	National Universities Commission, Abuja. FCT	Emerald Group Publishing Ltd	Feb. 6, 2013	92
Career Talk to young LIS professionals on opportunities in the field of librarianship	Best West Hotel, Abuja. FCT	IFLA Africa Section	Feb. 7, 2013	67

   * National Library of Nigeria

   ** National Information Technology Development Agency

SUCCESS FACTORS

The numerous successful collaborative projects of LRCN can be attributed to the commitment of LRCN management, the common interest with collaborating organizations and the need to promote standard in the information profession.

(a) Commitment of LRCN Management

Commitment of the leadership of LRCN to the development of the librarianship profession in Nigeria is the major success factor of the collaborative projects of the Council. This is coupled with adequate strategy for the identification and communication with potential partnering organizations. The chief lobbyist of LRCN is the Registrar/CEO of the Council, who uses her influence to build a good relationship with partners. Her Office scout for potential partners and see through the completion of the collaborative projects. The dedication and commitment of members of staff of LRCN and the collaborating partners is also among the success factors.

(b) Common Interest

Another force to successful collaborative projects Is the related and common objectives of the LRCN and partnering organizations. LRCN and the partnering agencies have some similar or complementary responsibilities. This makes the collaboration a "win win" situation. All the partners benefited one thing or other from the cooperation. The partners' organizational objectives are also being achieved.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

The nature of the information society and knowledge requirement to deliver quality information services by librarians makes collaboration within and outside the librarianship profession very imperative. Collaboration on training and infrastructure development are required to enhance the knowledge of librarians and promote qualitative information provision and use for individual and national development. Collaboration helps to ensure maintenance of standard and avoid duplication of services by organizations, thereby ensuring efficient and effective management of scarce resources like fund. Efforts should be made by LIS stakeholders to embark on environmental scanning and identify potential partners; establish relationship; and execute projects that will enhance information services. Curriculum development and accreditation of LIS programmes should not be one man show, static and narrow in concept. It should be all encompassing, dynamic and robust. A regional, harmonized LIS accreditation concept should be designed and implemented in Africa to

achieve a globally competitive manpower for information services. It is necessary to establish a regional training centre for LIS professionals to undertake short courses that will enhance their potentials as the information society requires.

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