

An Evaluation of the Impact of Libraries towards the Realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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ABSTRACT Libraries play a vital role in SDGs implementation by enhancing access to relevant information. It is on this premise that this paper evaluates the impact of libraries towards realising the sustainable development goals (SDGs). A synopsis of the functions, roles and impact of librarians as well as discussions on the paradigm shift of libraries from performing the roles of information custodians of information resources to harbingers of initiatives that are new and technologically-advanced, and its positive effects on service delivery and accomplishment of SDGs are discussed. The reviewed literature were a selection of Library and Information Science publications as well as other relevant academic journal articles ranging from 2010-2019. This paper also recommends measures geared towards the attainment of SDGs through librarianship, such as continuous capacity development programmes as well as the need to update library and information management curricula especially in African higher educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Seminelli (2016) defines a librarian as a skilfully trained professional who is accountable for managing a library, its contents, the collection, dispensing, and organisation of resources as well as the delivery of information, loan services and guidelines geared towards meeting users' needs. In an academic environment, librarians are fundamentally involved with the provision of research services to students, faculty, staff and faculty in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Though, acquainted with research procedures and serving as support staff in their academic establishments, librarians generally do not publish their research (Butler 2013), and leading professional bodies are known to award professional training and qualifications to librarians on the anticipation that their professional capabilities will be sustained through continuous skill and knowledge development. Further, librarians are required to operate by professional code of ethics in addition to being licensed by their national governments and professional bodies (Prytherch 2016). The development of any country is hinged on the provision of relevant, timely and adequate information on all disciplines (Avgerou and Walsham 2017), and

libraries provide access to information of various types, features and formats, which enhance the development of skills and competences of users (Chen 2011; Prado 2013). According to Michalak (2012), the functions of librarians include handling of collections and acquisitions, library resources classification and cataloguing, library circulation, digital resources management, archiving, and providing diverse services, which include information delivery, reference, specialised training services, instructions, etc. (Haliso 2011), and the classification of librarians (depending on the libraries they serve) include academic librarians, school librarians, special librarian, etc. (Johnson 2018). All human interventions require a storehouse for knowledge and information delivery, and hence, it is imperative for every society to make provision for libraries and librarians, as it is often opined that a good library enhances service delivery, a great library develops communities and a bad library collects information resources (Mainka et al. 2013). According to Sugimoto et al. (2013), and Frederick (2016), who discussed the changing role of libraries, with this development, the challenge for libraries particularly those in developing economies to remain abreast with evolving technology are enormous. It is on this premise, therefore, that this review does justice to three key questions:

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1. What influence are libraries and librarians really having on the communities they serve?
2. Are the contributions of libraries towards the actualisation of SDGs?
3. What are the contributions of librarianship to global discourses on human and environmental development? The next section discusses the aim of this study.

Aim of Study

This study aims at evaluating the impact of libraries towards the realisation of the SDGs.

The Envisioned SDG Agenda for Year 2030

Sustainable development (SD) refers to the development that adequately provide for the needs of the current human populace without hampering the capability of upcoming generations to adequately provide for their own needs, and this relates to the environment, as well as socio-economic development. The 2030 SD Agenda is a global agenda approved by Heads of States and Governments in the year 2015 at a special summit of the United Nations, which builds on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and is anchored around 17 SDGs which incorporates interventions such as the management of natural resources, effective institutions, sustainability regarding production and consumption, fair/balanced governance, non-violent societies, and entrenching the rule of law (Costanza 2016; Bierman 2017). The SDG document has worldwide applicability and shared responsibility to actualise them. The overarching goal of the SDG document is poverty eradication (Griggs 2014; Assembly 2015; Osborn 2015), which assumes a more determined approach than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The specific role of libraries and librarians as well as their centrality in the provision of information and knowledge will be discussed below.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this research is the descriptive study. A descriptive study answers what, where, when and how questions. A major advantage of descriptive study is that

descriptive research design can utilize a vast array of research methods in evaluating one or more variables, and are generally relatively quick, easy and cheap to conduct. A descriptive study approach utilized for this research helped to accurately and systematically describe a phenomenon, which in this study refers to the contributions of libraries towards the achievement of the SDGs. The consulted literature for this study focused on study materials centred on the impact of libraries in relation to the SDGs' actualization. In doing justice to this study, relevant selections from academic journal databases, e-books, Google Scholar, as well as library and information science articles and publications were reviewed accordingly. These primary sources of information were utilized on account of their rich, diverse, robust and detailed information they provide regarding this study. The consulted literature from the year 2010-2019 were accessed, compared and critically evaluated to ensure reliability and validity of information. From the foregoing, the searched literature centred on the changing misconceptions about libraries and librarians, as well as the global contributions of libraries towards SDGs actualization. Consequently, all this article reviewed all the SDGs and the ways libraries have enhanced the realization of the same, by using various descriptions of E-library SDG initiatives as yardstick for justifying libraries contributions. These initiatives were spearheaded by governments of different countries at national, local and regional levels respectively. Hence, these e-library initiatives have led to the emancipation of the less privileged populations, development of national economies (at both micro and macro levels), and have led to the reduction of illiteracy rates in various countries of the world.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Changing Misconceptions about Libraries and Librarians

The importance of information is sine-qua-non to achieving sustainable development and the emancipation of any society (Khan 2015). It is therefore germane for every nation to actualise the SDG principles for its citizenry so as to fulfil their numerous demands (Anger 2010). In

order to realise this, the library has a pivotal role in creating, organising, processing, storing, disseminating and providing access to information (Heidorn 2011), as the information provided will decrease ignorance levels and help in raising living standards of people (Brown 2017). Further, the effectiveness of libraries in higher educational institutions (HEIs) must vigorously ensure accessibility to information, which are pertinent to the main objectives of the HEIs, which is to ensure quality research, learning and teaching, and hence, the libraries' roles in ensuring inclusive access to information is essential in HEIs in order to achieve the SDGs.

In the years gone by, African governments have initiated various programmes channelled towards better living conditions for their citizens, but despite these laudable efforts, the realisation of the SDGs have remained a mirage in most developing economies (Oleribe 2016), and this has culminated in misconceptions as to who, or what could be responsible for the non-compliance of the SDGs. Further, one may tend to even wonder whether the various stakeholders do not have a clear understanding of the SDGs. In all these, are the libraries and librarians aware of their roles towards the actualisation of these goals? As libraries over the years have been instrumental to community and national development, the roles of libraries in achieving these goals becomes fundamental. Over time, libraries are known acknowledged as knowledge institutions, as they are providers of conducive public spaces, which are required for learning as well as information purposes (Leal 2011). According to Bawack (2018), libraries and librarians can significantly contribute towards the attainment of SDGs in Africa in the following ways:

1. Providing a conducive environment for access to relevant and user-friendly information on development issues.
2. Establishing a strong library programme.
3. Selecting resources that are pertinent to the development indicators entrenched in the SDG document.
4. Hosting periodic discourses where people can deliberate on issues such as community health, education, civil and human rights, environmental issues, climate change, etc. and how to tackle them.

5. Partnering with other agencies in promoting changes required for sustainable development in all spheres in Africa.
6. Establishing branch libraries or information centres rooted in local communities.
7. Motivating and building the professional capacity of LIS professionals.
8. Improvement of government- library partnerships and synergies among others.
9. Engaging LIS stakeholders in regular trainings, so that they can professionally fulfil their mandate and official roles.

Global Contributions of Libraries towards the Achievement of SDGs

The attainment of SDGs have been greatly promoted by libraries across the world through the promotion of literacy, provision of free access to information, safe libraries, as well as welcome spaces in communities. Further, they advance access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Internet connectivity and skills acquisition, thereby promoting creativity, accessibility and innovation for the present and future generations. According to Maepa (2016), Anasi (2018), Okuonghae (2019), few examples of the contributions of libraries towards the attainment of SDGs are tabulated in Table 1.

The vision of the SDG is a universal call to terminate poverty, environmental protection and ensure peace and prosperity across the world. While the SDGs are not legally mandatory, governments are expected to establish national frameworks for the realisation of all the goals. Further, in respect to the SDG 2 (zero hunger), it is positioned in assisting farmers to fill in applications for subsidies, and this corresponds with SDG 8 (that is, economic growth and decent means of livelihood). With respect to the SDG for economic growth requirement, librarians are exemplary in assessing community needs through the provision of information on economic growth, statistics, provision of public records, suggestion box/comment cards, reports gathering, supply of newsletters and newspapers. Other roles of librarians in this regard include informal conversations with library users'/ community dwellers, conducting surveys, discussions, hosting interviews with opinion-moul-

Table 1: A review of global contributions of libraries towards the achievement of SDGs

<i>SDG programme</i>	<i>Description of e-library SDG initiative</i>	<i>Purpose of initiative</i>
SDG 1: Poverty Eradication	Electronic Library Programme in Nenasala, Sri Lanka	Enhanced literacy in digital library information and access to technology among Sri Lanka's poorest inhabitants who reside in inaccessible rural communities, so as to eradicate poverty in the country.
SDG 4: Advancement of Quality Education	National Library of Indonesia	Advancing education and literacy levels of the teeming population across thousands of inaccessible islands in the country.
SDG 8: Provision of Good Jobs and Economic Growth	European Union (EU) Public Libraries	Over 250,000 job seekers have been gain fully employed through online platforms provided by EU public libraries on an annual basis, by providing access to ICT facilities and training, which enables job seekers to apply online for jobs. Europe's 65,000 public libraries empower individuals and build resilient communities, and non-formal learning is conducted to 24 million participants.
SDG 15: Life on Land and prevention of Biodiversity Extinction	USA Heritage Library for Biodiversity	E-library open access to over 44 million documents and one hundred and seventy thousand literature centred on biodiversity from the 15 th to 21 st centuries, which are produced in over forty international languages. Hence, the new data utilized by scientists in identifying new populations of species, as well as for mapping and ecosystem functioning purposes, and appraise forecasted climate change research findings.
SDG 3: Good human Health and Well-being	Publication of Makerere University Library, Ugandan Health Information Digest	Adoption of strategies to guarantee optimal operations for marketing of food commodities and their by-products and expedite real-time accessibility to market information and food reserves, geared towards limiting extreme food price instability, in addition to repackaging scholarly information for hospital professionals who are inaccessible to such information.
The 17 SDGs	Australian libraries in collaboration with the IFLA	Supporting autonomy to information accessibility, providing successful examples are germane to Australia's reportage, and facilitating the communication of the 2030 SDG Agenda to the general public.
SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	National Information System of Medical Sciences, Ministry of Health, Cuba	Ensuring e-information delivery amongst libraries and other entities through supply of information on health problems and human diseases, which is distributed to over one thousand, five hundred hospitals, district medical offices, dispensaries, social services committees, health-centred NGOs, municipality health offices and members of parliament so as to ensure universal access to family planning information, and education, reproductive and sexual health-care services, and the incorporation of reproductive health into national programmes and strategies.
SDG 5: Gender Equality and Women	National Library of Uganda	Empowering of female farmers through ICT training program, through access to online markets, crop prices and weather forecasts, in their indigenous languages, ensuring that by 2030, all citizens, specifically the deprived and the vulnerable, have equal access to basic services, financial services, land ownership and other forms of property, microfinance, natural resources, inheritance, appropriate new technology, which endorse economic empowerment to women.
SDG 9: Innovation and Infrastructure	Kisumu Public Library's smartphone, video, laptop and conferencing project, Western Kenya and Uganda	This initiative provides support to schools that are very distant to towns, which are located in very rural Kenyan and Ugandan communities. Also, very few schools in the rural communities enjoy internet connectivity, and libraries proffer ways of ameliorating this challenge through the provision of mobile phones.

Table 1: Contd...

<i>SDG programme</i>	<i>Description of e-library SDG initiative</i>	<i>Purpose of initiative</i>
SDG 16: Access to Information	Moldova Libraries	This is an initiative existing between government, business and civil society to motivate commitments to imbibe the culture of accountability. Further, the librarians participate in civil society discussions to progress the country's national action plan, and to entrench the functions of libraries regarding information access in Moldova.
The 17 SDGs	Academic Libraries in Cameroon	The Cameroonian academic library staff have been trained on the classification of all academic thesis and undergraduate research projects which are in concomitance with SDG programmes, and each librarian is apportioned two SDGs, synthesises and catalogues the contents and presents its metadata viz-a-viz the SDG.
The 17 SDGs	Government of Zambia	Training on support for SDGs for 100 library managers working in HEIs, government and parastatals across the 10 Zambian provinces to expedite sustainable development through libraries.
SDG 4: Advancement of Quality Education	The Library Board in Federal Republic of Ghana	Students are tutored on ICT literacy and computer appreciation so as to promote their accessibility to e-information.
The 17 SDGs	African Librarians	Formation of SDG Action Groups on Facebook, posters, tweets and radio broadcasts as platforms to receive proposals regarding the efforts and contributions of libraries to the attainment of SDGs, as well as teaming up with governmental institutions and NGOs in this regard.

ders in communities, etc. Further, the inclusion of libraries in the national development plan of Madagascar has been established. Additionally, the successful interventions by libraries towards the achievement of SDGs cannot be over-emphasized. For instance, the roles of libraries in providing access and training on high-speed and establishing digital communities is recognised in the National Broadband initiative of the United States of America. The inclusion of libraries is due to the fact that access to information is indispensable in accomplishing the SDGs, and that, libraries are not only major stakeholders with governments but are in collaboration in order to achieve the 17 SDGs. For example, the course of SDGs are greatly supported and advocated by libraries in order to enhance outcomes, as regards increasing information accessibility, ICT literacy as well as promoting accessibility to community space. Internationally, information bodies such as EIFL and IFLA have provided funding to African libraries for ICT skills training and access to electronic resources. In the same vein, Olatoye (2019) reveal that EIFL awards grants to public libraries globally to address several socio-economic challenges through the Public Li-

brary Innovation Program, and have initiated projects in Zambia, Ghana and Kenya, among others. Further, two new projects, namely, ConnectED Library and eBooks initiatives were established by former President Barack Obama in Anacostia Neighbourhood Library on 30th April, 2015 so as to foster good learning environments for all children, mainly in low-income areas. Further, Olatoye, (2019) disclosed that librarians play a vital role driving a country's vision through the identification and maintenance of information resources. The library is a storehouse of discoveries, findings, inventions, occupational skills depository, scholarship and research (Mainka 2013). Libraries and information specialists enhance access to knowledge through manpower training, provision of real-time/up-to-date information, and capacity building, all of which can positively advance the actualisation of SDGs.

The National Library of South Africa (NLSA) provides a web linkage for government services and programmes for the preservation of national heritage, as well as initiating programmes that promote the realisation of SDGs (Osborn 2015). Through free access to ICT's, research and read-

ing spaces and workshops geared towards empowering job seekers as well as providing relevant information that pertain to some of the SDGs. According to Jain (2017), Botswana public libraries have greatly supported government efforts through enhanced ICT access, ICT skills development of library users and empowered users in education, business, employment and education. Additionally, Kiconco (2018) disclosed that the Library Association of Botswana supports the sustainable development initiative through their Government's vision 2016 in public for a by conducting programmes on sustainable energy and infrastructure development. Also, the Ugandan National Library provides ICT capacity building programmes to female farmers to access online markets, crop prices and weather forecast their native languages, thereby intensifying the economic prosperity of women through their acquisition of ICT literacy skills (Nalere 2015).

CONCLUSION

Libraries are indispensable vital inclusions in any society which perform significant roles towards the actualisation of SDGs, and if SDGs are to be sustained in Africa, the general public must be well orientated through information collection, dispensing, consolidating and propagation of e-resources, as well as bearing in mind the indicators for development, as mentioned in the SDGs, community engagement through local forums where people can discuss challenges pertaining to education, community health, climate change, environmental issues, etc. It is evident that African countries can overcome many challenges which mitigate against information delivery if serious considerations can be given to library and information centres. By so doing, many of these countries will be ranked among the developed economies in the world in the year 2025. The collaboration stimulated with communities is commendable, as the SDGs can only be realised through community engagement, due to the fact that these communities are the core recipients of the initiatives. However, while commending the giant strides of libraries towards the actualisation of several SDG projects, the acknowledged challenges such as, immobility, inadequate ICT infrastructure, under-funding, obsolete library collections, etc. have impeded the journey towards achieving the SDGs. Finally, it

is also evident that libraries and information specialists are harbingers and custodians of technology, and are exceptionally suited to convey the most valuable resource (that is, information and knowledge), that is sine-qua-non for achieving sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that African governments should ensure that LIS centres are fully incorporated into all human interventions at both community and national levels. Further, LIS centres should frequently organise seminars, workshops and symposiums which serve as for a for academic reasoning and debates, where citizens regardless of their age, gender, or professional inclinations can be accessible to information relating to their social or educational requirements in a bid to build their physical and mental capabilities. Further, the government and HEIs should support the LIS centres financially in a bid to end their socio-economic challenges of inadequate facilities, poor internet connectivity, etc. Also, adequate trained staffs should be provided so that they will give quality contributions to national development in different human disciplines. It is also important to note that heads of libraries should also endeavour to engage in sustainable lobbying and advocacy programmes. Librarians should engage in lobbying and advocacy in a bid to contribute their efforts towards attaining the SDGs. Furthermore, the provision of appropriate technologies and learning aids should be ensured, and these include computers with specialised software, text magnifiers, videos, and e-learning infrastructure, which are essential in teaching and learning should be introduced in libraries where they are not yet in existence. Consequently, governments should recognise the central functions which libraries perform to achieve the SDGs. Furthermore, it is abysmal to state that librarians in developing African economies lament the lackadaisical disposition of their governments to their profession. To this end, library and ICT stakeholders are required to function as agents of change, and this can be championed through organizing of campaigns and regular dialogue with government, as libraries are best positioned to engage in partnership with government for the implementation of national strategic documents geared towards benefitting the end user

communities. Finally, this paper advocates for the reviewing of current LIS teaching and learning curricula in HEIs in developing countries specifically Africa so as to be better positioned to meet the requirements for actualising the SDGs.

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