STRATEGIES FOR RE-SKILLING THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Interviews with the president of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA), 20 heads of library and information centres; and 60 library/information science (LIS) professionals have revealed changing needs due to globalization and information technology. Different or hybrid services are now required, such as global access to resources, information literacy, e-learning, open repository, web development/services, and integrated library system. These call for a different class of skills or a blend of traditional and new skills. LIS professionals in Nigeria are not resting on their oars. Steps are being taken and more are on the way to meet the challenges. Strategies include curriculum review and continuing professional education as well as formal and informal mentoring, advocacy for support, collaboration and partnering at the local, national, and international levels. These efforts have yielded a measure of success though not without challenges, some of which are discussed. Additional initiatives are needed to develop skills in order to enhance operations and services.

INTRODUCTION

Information is the most valid commodity in the global information society. It is the master key to every aspect of development. The library and information science (LIS) professional serves as information translator striking a balance between the information and the users.[1] The two ends of the balance continue to evolve. In other words, the manner of information packaging and delivery evolved from stone and papyrus through print to electronic formats, delivered as closed access from cupboards, open access from shelves, and presently remote virtual or global access through electronic technology. Consequently, information users' nature and environment evolved from queuing up (to be served resources) through walking the aisles of shelves (to pick resources arranged in certain order) to staying in the comfort of their offices, classrooms or places of residence to access information, beating space and time. LIS professionals are continuously involved in self assessment to determine their ability to serve as translators between the information

and the users. Such self evaluation reveals a continuous need for LIS professionals to align themselves with the changes in the global information environment.

Thus, it is pertinent to examine the situation in Nigeria vis-à-vis the strategies taken to ensure a continuous evolution of LIS professionals to align with the global trend in operations, services and information formats. Information for this paper was gathered from literature and a number of telephone and personal structured interviews with key informants including the National President of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA); 20 public library, academic library, and special library heads of service; and 60 LIS professionals. Personal contacts were made at a workshop on "Access to Free Resources at Lokoja held on December, 2008 and visits to some libraries in the eastern part of Nigeria. The rest of the professionals were reached by sending the structured interview through electronic lists. There were 150 contacts which resulted in the 20 heads of libraries and 60 other professionals being interviewed. Some professionals were silent about the request , others indicated lack of interest, while the rest are of the view that re-skilling should be the prerogative of the young professionals, and therefore they did not grant an interview.

TRENDS IN LIBRARY EDUCATION

Though internal training of LIS professionals in Nigeria was provided in 1941 through British Library Association credentialing from Ghana and Britain, indigenous training started in 1960 by the establishment of the first library school at the then University College Ibadan, now the University of Ibadan. Not long after the establishment at Ibadan, other library schools were established namely: Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria in 1968, Bayero University Kano in 1977, and University of Maidugiri in 1978. Their curricula were designed to provide basic general training for all libraries with a view to producing professionals who would organize and administer book collections relevant for Nigerian majority. [2-5]

Library services then followed the traditional units with a little variation depending on the type of users served. Such general operations and services as administration, collection development, technical services, bibliographic services, and community based services were rendered.[6] The increased demand for LIS professional to attend to the information needs of the increasing Nigerian population resulted in the establishment of more library schools between 1986 and 2000. The earlier schools also changed their nomenclature to reflect the changing needs of the information users informed by the adoption of information and communication technology as well as knowledge society. Most of them adopted the nomenclature, School or Department of Library and Information Science. The curriculum was reviewed to accommodate the informational needs of over 140 million Nigerians many of whom are literate in the sense that they can read all or part of a single sentence in any of the major Nigerian languages. Information needs therefore evolved to include information literacy. [7 8] To cope with the demands of the teem-

ing population, 882 library and information centres were established in Nigeria, managed by 15,000 LIS professionals. [6]

Though curricula were reviewed to reflect the needs of Nigerians, operations and services in LIS centres show little or no changes, however, automation was championed by special libraries followed by university libraries. Efforts to provide state-of-the-art information services in Nigerian universities started with the production of Union List of Serials in 1978 by the Committee of University Librarians of Nigeria (CULNU) and the adoption in 1994 of the Information Navigator Library Management (TNILIB) software provided by the Federal Government through the National Universities Commission. These efforts were met with problems which are not unconnected to the lack of information-communication-technology (ICT) skills. However, the struggle continued as LIS centres were undaunted. Hence, some universities and multinational LIS centres today can boast of automated and web-based globally acceptable operations and services. The questions facing the profession in Nigeria include [9]:

- are the numerous LIS professionals manning the centres really providing the needed services to the users?
- are they poised to meet the challenges of new employment demands especially where job opportunities have expanded to areas such as corporate bodies, electronic publishing, database management, web development, hardware and software management, Internet management, web content management, competitive intelligent analysis etc?
- can Nigerian LIS educators, LIS centres and by extension the employers as well as LIS professionals affirm that their products, operations, and services possess and apply the skills needed for today's and tomorrow's services?

NEED FOR RE-SKILLING LIS PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA

Brown[10] emphatically notes that survival in today's world of work is a function of what you can offer, your potential, and ability to be in charge of your career. Others[11] warn that LIS centres which persist in the traditional service model in this era of ICT driven environments, flat budget, and rising cost of resources may not succeed. Since Nigerian LIS professionals are part of the global community affected by the above factors, there is need for re-skilling. Observation as a member of LIS profession in Nigeria reveals that re-skilling of the professionals is needed due to various factors.

- **Insufficient skills to operate in digital era**: there is absence of ICT skills among LIS professionals.[12] This is the result of insufficiency in the formal training of LIS professionals. Most curricula are theoretically based and many of the library schools do not have the facilities to provide or engage students in practical training. However, views are expressed that graduates of

LIS are only prepared to be trained by providing them some understanding of the LIS operations and services that could be built upon during other training.[13] LIS professionals need more than what is taught in school to work effectively. One of the LIS professionals interviewed stated that there is almost an absence of new technology skills among Nigerian professionals especially the new ones. Further, educators expected to impart new skills do not possess requirement both in terms of facilities and knowledge. The curricula of some library schools lack the new skills in contents.

- **Environmental changes:** there are evolutionary changes in the way information is harnessed and developed using ICT. Long standing tasks are performed better through automation and web based technology. 'Transformatory' changes are visible as new functions are emerging through expanded and demand driven information society with more focus on user needs.[14] Environmental change is also perceived in the needs of employees.

- **Changes in users needs:** there are disparities among people in "economic, culture, geographical dispersion, politics and other physical challenges."[15] Their information needs must be attended to. Again, the way and manner users seek information have changed. To them space and time should not be barriers while the era of print resources is becoming ridiculous.

- **Wider horizon of employment opportunity:** expanded job opportunities are available in corporations, consulting firms, information brokers, and Internet based centres. New roles such as competitive intelligence are evolving. More than traditional skills are needed to work in these environments.

- **Competition:** the cosy assumption that librarians know best and that users would supinely continue to accept the services they had always been given was no longer valid.[16] Therefore, new and diverse professionals are taking over LIS jobs and teaching users how to search for information. Thus, LIS professionals have to brace up with the challenges posed by them as well as commercial search engines which users consider as the first port of call when searching for information.[17][18]

- **Low budgetary allocation to information services:** despite the prime importance attached to information, many establishments provide little or no financial support for it. Where provisions are made, competition is intense for the limited resources among the units in the establishment. As such, service worth becomes the measure for funding.[16] LIS professionals are also required to acquire the skills for advocacy and fund raising to remain relevant in such a system.

RELEVANT SKILLS FOR LIS PROFESSIONALS IN NIGERIA

LIS professionals are mindful of the needs for re-skilling as necessitated by the above evolutionary requirements. There is need for enhanced competencies and

skills to function in any information-enabled-environment such as banks, tele-communication organization, community based organizations, non–governmental organizations, international agencies, as well as employers of labour.[3]

Given the diverse nature of job opportunities and need to be relevant in the labour market, professionals have need for skills in both the traditional and new operations and services. Such skills as indicated by Okojie[19] and confirmed through the interviews conducted for this paper include ICT skills, information literacy skills, Internet search skills, fund raising, advocacy, marketing, and management skills. Others include indigenous knowledge and skills needed for knowledge management (open access repository/ scholarly communication), electronic information services, virtual libraries, and intellectual property/copyright laws. They do not deviate from the global LIS skills noted by other commentators.[9–11 15-16 20-24] Since these skills are not fully held by today's LIS professionals nationwide, many strategies are adopted at the professional, institutional, and individual levels to ensure continuity and relevance, over and above being poised for best practices in the global information society. Various strategise for re-skilling were identified in the interviews that were held for this paper.

RE-SKILLING THROUGH TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

The NLA organizes at least one annual conference and two workshops every year. At such programmes, national and international experts are invited to discuss and demonstrate contemporary issues in the LIS profession.

- an April 2008 training was organized on Lobby, Advocacy and Fundraising; 35 LIS professional from across the country attended
- there was a workshop on the Use of Internet by LIS professionals organized in March 2008, which 110 professionals attended.
- December 2008 witnessed a national workshop on Access to Free Resources attended by over 78 professionals.
- a highly interactive pre-conference seminar on copyright law was organized during the 2008 National conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM) held at Kaduna. Colleagues from outside Nigeria were invited to share their experiences.
- in 2007 the NLA President had the opportunity to get re-skilled internationally with 9 other participants across the globe on Internet manifesto sponsored by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Her experience was shared with members during the 2008 National conference /AGM.

At the Sectional levels, workshops are organized based on the vision and mission of the Section for its members as well as the interest of the profession. The Information Technology (IT) Section has an annual workshop series termed Library and Information Technology Today (LITT). The aim was to identify areas of ICT

skill needs of the professionals in Nigeria and address it in this annual workshops. The LITT 2007 theme was "Automation that Works" attended by 35 participants while LITT 2008 revolved around "Web Development and Web Publishing" attended by 45 professionals.

The Academic Library Section has organized a workshop on "Effective Management of Academic Libraries". It was attended by heads of academic libraries and their deputies. Annual workshops are held by the Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing Section of the profession. The re-skilling interest of this section is on contemporary cataloguing, classification, and indexing as well as global best practices in this technical area of LIS. The

Public Library Section has not been active in re-skilling efforts due to neglect of support by various state governments who are the funding bodies. As a result LIS professional employees in public libraries are not fully motivated for maximum productivity. However, they utilize training opportunities provided by other sections and the national body to re-engineer themselves for better job opportunities.

Institutions and LIS centres expose their staff to training at the national and international levels. For instance, the University of Ibadan sent 7 and 18 professional staff to the above respective trainings in areas of need. At the University of Nigeria, it was gathered that in 2008, over 25 professional staff attended national trainings/ workshops while 2 attended workshops outside Nigeria. All the LIS professionals at ABU are given at least one opportunity to attend training every year in the areas of personal and the Library's need.

Many LIS professionals in the faculty do not attend training / workshop especially those organized at the national level. It was gathered that some do not show keen interest while others are ignorant of the availability of the training and its importance to their development. The theoretical nature of their teaching gives them leeway to read and teach new skills without deep understanding of their practical application.

Re-skilling efforts in the public libraries are not commendable. At the Imo State Library Board, only the Director and one other staff attended national training in 2008. Up to 5 of the 8 LIS professionals were able to attend National conference on 'part-sponsorship' in 2008. LIS professionals in public libraries in the south western Nigeria are more exposed to re-skilling opportunities than their counterparts in other parts of the country. The majority of LIS professionals who work with multinational organizations in Nigeria have opportunities for international trainings. This allows them to often act later as resource persons for some national training.

Other approaches include the following:

- Some LIS centres have training units which identify training needs of staff and negotiate for their actualization. Monthly meetings are held in some information centres to discuss skilling needs and how to achieve them.

- Professionals engage in self sponsored part-time training, self studying through online and offline tutorials and reading/ research.
- The National body of the Association encourages State chapters to engage in re-skilling through paper presentation during meetings. In this manner, the less privileged professionals are saved the trouble of travelling far distances for training.
- It is a policy in some institutions that trainees on return will expose other staff to the acquired skills.
- Employees are helped to develop their expertise in areas of interest through re-deployment to their units of interest where they are provided opportunity for retraining and skills enhancement.
- Opportunities are provided for young librarians to be aware and develop their skills through the institution of Young Librarians Award by NLA. Some LIS professionals who have worked for 5 years and below are sponsored to National conferences through this award. Furthermore, some individual professionals provide opportunity for LIS "professionals–in-training" (undergraduates) by giving them awards to attend NLA conferences. For example, the Badawi Annual Award of N50,000 went to two LIS undergraduates in Nigeria.
- Trainings are provided by donor agencies, software and hardware vendors on such areas as WINISIS software organized by UNESCO, use of EBSCO-hOST, use of E – Granary; ITOCA training on the use of HINARI, AGORA and OARE, use of Virtua and Alice for Window library software, and other free and fee-based resources. In that way, LIS professionals are explicitly or implicitly exposed to diverse and new skills.

RE-SKILLING THROUGH CURRICULUM REVIEW

As a way of enhancing LIS professional skills, NLA set up a committee (Curriculum Review Committee) comprising teachers (lecturers) and practicing librarians to review the curriculum of library schools in Nigeria. Their report contains lists of courses library schools in Nigeria could teach with a view to empowering LIS professionals with the skills for 21st century operations and services. The idea is for the schools to be aware, select and develop their curriculum along the lines of the menu. NLA plans to sensitize heads of library schools on the need to adapt the developed menu.

At the West African level, a workshop on LIS curriculum was co-sponsored by the Swedish International Agency (SIDA) and NLA. In attendance were the Chair of IFLA African Section, all Presidents of West African Library Association, Heads of Library Schools in three Nigeria Universities and some practicing librarians. The aim was to create awareness of the need for curriculum review of LIS education in Nigeria to allow the development of LIS professionals who could face the challenges of new LIS operations and services.

Apart from the national efforts, different library schools have involved themselves in one form of curriculum review or the other depending on the needs of their environment as well as demands of the accrediting body – National Universities Commission.[2 3 25]

RE-SKILLING THROUGH PROVIDING INFORMATION ON OPPORTUNITIES

An online discussion forum is available for all LIS professionals at the national, chapter and sectional levels. The NLA listserv (nla-online-forum) which was founded in July 25, 2002 has a total of 799 registered members. Through the forum, such information as sites where grants and other skill enabling facilities could be provided is made available to members. Diverse views on re-skilling issues are discussed. Literature is also posted to forum members. All LIS professionals are encouraged to join the forum. Through the use of electronic mail, individuals are engaged in mentoring by more experienced professional colleagues. There has not been an opportunity to organize any webinar or virtual training for members as the facilities and competencies are lacking. Information and lectures are not real-time; rather they are sent as mail attachments. By so doing the gap of distance as a barrier to mentoring is bridged.

The professional body maintains a website (www.nla–ng.org). Issues pertinent to the profession including reading list and other skill development opportunities are posted on the site. LIS professionals are encouraged to utilize the opportunity to be aware and enhance their skills. LIS centres also have websites where Web 2.0 technologies such as wikis are provided to help staff enhance skills. These are also used to provide 21st century services. Blogs are used by institutions and professionals to widen their skill horizon.

RE-SKILLING THROUGH COLLABORATION

NLA partners with associate professional bodies to ensure the development of its members. Bodies like publishers, book sellers, software and hardware vendors as well as multinational organizations like the United States Embassy partner with the Association to ensure all-round development in the area of LIS training and re-training. Some LIS centres partner with international organizations such as MacArthur Foundation to expose their staff to international trainings.

Through networking, lobbying and advocacy for partnership, government at the national and state levels as well as other establishments are convinced on the need to sponsor and provide other logistics support for LIS professionals during national and international trainings.

Advanced skills are provided by library schools through the services of lecturers from related departments namely Mass Communication, Mathematics, Business Administration and other Media specialists.[26] Some LIS professionals in training are encouraged to study some inter-departmental courses to enhance their employment opportunities.

Many LIS centres and professionals enhance their skills through job exchange in the form of sabbatical leaves or swapping of staff. For instance many LIS professionals in Nigeria have attended the Mortenson Centre for International Library Programs.

LIS professionals in training are exposed to real world of work environment through industrial training of not less than one year in establishments they are likely to be employed. By so doing, a shift from theory to practice is achieved. Professionals become aware of the demands of the job and their incompetence.

RE-SKILLING ACHIEVEMENTS SO FAR

Though achievement may be relative, the NLA President affirmed that the Association has succeeded in sensitizing LIS professionals in Nigeria to the need for continuous re-skilling especially in the area of ICT development. National and international communities have become aware of the need to provide new skills for Nigerian LIS professionals through education or as partners. For example, three LIS professionals in Nigeria (National President of NLA, the National Librarian, Professor Zakari Mohammed) were invited to Paris on UNESCO Programme to discuss ways Nigeria LIS profession can collaborate with them to enhance all-round development of the professionals. Furthermore, collaborating with the National Commission for UNESCO in Abuja, ICT training workshop was organized for LIS professionals in 2007.

Partnering with the Goethe Institute of Germany and other private establishments in the country and Diaspora has allowed many LIS professionals to be trained in advocacy, networking and lobbing skills, Internet skills, free electronic resources etc. Communication companies like MTN, American Embassy to Nigeria and some banks such as Oceanic Bank PLC have demonstrated their support for enhanced ICT capacities of academic and school libraries. There are presently a handful of LIS professionals in Nigeria who have been re-skilled to perform 21st century operations and services. These groups of professionals act as trainers for others.

At the institutional level, many heads of LIS centres noted the following benefits resulting from the re-skilling initiatives :

- Improved worker skill which led to improved services to patrons and increased use of services provided in the centres

- LIS professionals are aware of their institutions' expectations vis-à-vis operations and services
- Library schools have bumper enrolment for their programmes as university admission seekers realize that the schools offer training needed by today's employers
- Management of institutions where LIS services are provided are willing to release funds for all the valued services and training due to improved and successful services in their information units
- LIS professionals champion many state-of-the-art ICT-based institutional operations and services. For instant at the University of Jos, the University Libraries play the leading role in ICT driven activities of the University. The Librarian at the Information Resource Centre of the US Embassy to Nigeria acts as the Webmaster for the Embassy.

Individual benefits are akin to the summary by Minish–Majanja[15] that there is expanded job market for ICT compliant LIS professionals. The employment sector needs versatile professionals who are able to "actually participate on detecting cues for relevant information, gaining / providing access to relevant information sources, searching and synthesizing data, repackaging information and adding any other value that enhances the effectiveness of the organization". The strategies so adopted have enabled some skilled Nigerian LIS professionals to become self employed.

CHALLENGES TO RE-SKILLING

Some of the challenges to the re-skilling efforts were identified by the National President of the Nigerian Library Association, V. Okojie. These include[19]:

- **Funding:** Participants to trainings are expected to pay for such unsponsored programs. The cost of participation does not only deter them but reduces the number attending. Thus, the Association becomes financially constrained to provide the needed resource persons and facilities;
- **Poor infrastructure:** Ashcroft and Watts[9] described it as digital divide. This manifests as low access to personal computers, unavailable and expensive Internet services, unreliable power supply, sparse telecommunications, low bandwidth and the fact that a majority live in rural areas where social facilities are lacking. [26] [27]
- **Insufficient trainers:** Only very few human resource capacity builders are available. These few were exposed to international training by their multinational organizations, donor agencies or through their own efforts. They are under pressure of being required all the time to help the other professionals. Again, most of the professionals exposed to further trainings disappoint their

employers by changing jobs. In some cases the expected competences are lacking in the trainer. They cannot give what they don't have.

- **Apathy by traditional LIS professionals:** Many earlier qualified professionals with consolidated traditional competencies resist re-skilling initiatives. Some reject the training and discourage others from utilizing re-skilling opportunities.
- **Lack application of acquired skills**: Employers of LIS professionals lack the necessary environment for practicing and applying the acquired skills. This lack of practice dampens skill consolidation;
- **Sporadic changes in LIS skills:** Changes in needed skills for LIS operations and services have become so unpredictable that no sooner than one skill is acquired than it becomes obsolete. Professionals are in the business of acquiring one skill today while being at alert for tomorrow's skills;
- **Ignorance:** Many LIS professionals are not aware of the need to re-skill. For instance, LIS professionals in the faculty often deny the need to acquire new skills. In some cases the trainers turn out to be their students, whose contributions are seen as of less value. Again the faculty's mode of teaching–more theory, less practical – gives them opportunity to hide their ignorance while manoeuvring with theory acquired from text books.
- **Inadequate international support:** LIS operations and services struggle to catch up with international pace setters in developed countries. LIS professionals who are amenable to acquiring these best practices do not have access to international support.

RECOMMENED PLAN OF ACTION TO TAKE RE-SKILLING FORWARD

The insufficient number of LIS professionals exposed to re-skilling opportunities, a function of difficulties faced by the NLA, LIS centres, and individual professionals necessitates that more efforts should be made to increase opportunities and competencies available for them. The NLA President affirmed, however, that a window of hope exists given the increased interest by the private sector and international agencies to intervene in Nigerian LIS sector. Long and short term initiatives are taken by the NLA to ensure continuous reengineering towards achieving globally acceptable best practices. The ten point initiatives according to the President include [28]:

1. Convene a meeting of library and information professionals under the auspices of the Nigerian Library Association, National Library of Nigeria, and the Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) to asses the situation with a view to re-inventing, re-engineering, re-branding and marketing of libraries; affirming the important role of libraries and information centres in nation building; and declaring a state of emergency in the sector.

2. Urge the Federal Government of Nigeria to convene an urgent stakeholders meeting on the reform of the library and information sector.
3. Advocate for the establishment of a National Commission for library and information services which would coordinate library services in Nigeria.
4. Solicit private sector support for development of LIS sector by encouraging library and information science professionals to adopt the Public Private Partnership (PPP) Model.
5. Develop guidelines and minimum standards for all types of libraries. The guidelines should clearly state standards for staffing, funding, services including ICT services, continuing education requirements, etc.
6. Review the library schools curriculum in collaboration with the LRCN
7. Promote Open Access and the use of free and open source software in Nigerian library and information centres.
8. Advocate deployment of ICTs in LIS work and enabling environments.
9. Encourage the adoption of resource sharing and networking models in libraries.
10. Publish manuals on advocacy, fundraising and other relevant skills.

The ten point plan of action led to the constitution of seven committees by the Executive of the NLA: Library and information Curriculum Review /Accreditation; Library Minimum Standards/ Guideline (Professional Ethics); Database Management/Website Management; Occasional Publications; Investment; and Continuing Education / Capacity Building Committees.

With the membership of the Committees comprising LIS professionals from all works of life, it is expected that everybody's interest will be protected. With the mandate to re-engineer LIS profession in Nigeria, their action will take the profession and professionals to greater heights. Further, professional centres should not relent in identifying NGOs that are willing to assist in human capacity development. Various sections of IFLA could also help through awareness campaign and initiating exchange programmes that will help developing countries.

CONCLUSION

LIS operations and services in Nigeria started with print resources, but global changes informed by the information society, with the attending environmental changes, continue to revolutionize the information, the users and the needed skills. Globally LIS professionals are facing the challenges. Nigerian LIS professionals through their professional bodies, institutional and individual efforts have made giant strides in re-skilling. Success is achieved through curriculum review, retraining, collaboration, and awareness creation. The fruits of the efforts though unquantifiable now include: enhanced awareness on the part of professionals, increased skills in area of advocacy, fund raising, lobbing, marketing, knowledge management, electronic information services etc. The efforts are not without chal-

lenges, some of which are in the area of funding, infrastructure, apathy in the face of new development and continuous change in skills needed to work as LIS professional. More efforts are on the way as greater success is expected from them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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