



Rethinking the Potentials of Academic Law Library Services for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the Digital Era

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Abstract:

Libraries as social institutions obviously contribute to the overall sustainability and development of every society through its provision of information resources and services. The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential roles of Academic Law Libraries services for the attainment of sustainable development goals in Nigeria. The paper adopts critical discourse analysis sourcing the required data from scholarly articles for content analysis to generate insightful findings. The paper further explains the concept of academic Law library, the rationale on the use of law library services as strategy for attaining sustainable development. The paper also reviews some situation in other developing countries of the world and Nigeria in particular on the role of Library Services for Sustainable development, The need for its sustainability and challenges as factors that could undermine the potential roles of academic law libraries were carefully identified and measures as strategies for addressing the challenges were equally proffered significantly for wellbeing of library users in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Academic Law Libraries, Sustainable Development Goals, Nigeria*

1.1 Introduction

A library is an organized collection of sources of information and similar resources, made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. It provides physical or digital access to material, and may be a physical building or room, or a virtual space, or both. A library is organized for use and is usually maintained by a public body, an institution, a corporation, or a private individual. This means a library can be established and maintained by government and government agencies, private organization or institutions and even for individual and personal use. In a publication

issued by the National Open University of Nigeria, Sale (2017) defines a library as a place where books and non-book materials are preserved for the purpose of dissemination of information and knowledge and for the benefit of the society it is meant to serve. To others, the library is an institution where books and other information resources are collected, processed, stored, retrieved and disseminated.

A law library, according to Amusa and Iyoro (2011) is an organized collection\ information sources to meet the needs of the legal profession and legal information needs of the legal public. Examples of law library

are libraries found in court houses, Ministries of Justice, law firms or chambers, university faculties of law, etc. A law library is crucial to legal practice and administration of justice because law is a specialized and very technical discipline. As such, we can view law library as a unique place designed and equipped with resources and facilities and highly regulated by certain polices to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in service provision to its users. In order to accomplish these roles, the library performs the traditional functions of collection development, organization, retrieval and dissemination of legal and related information sources. Dada (1998) sees the law libraries as a special hybrid of the art of librarianship. This could be academic law libraries like those in universities, court libraries, commercial law libraries, the in-houses law library and the ministry of justice law libraries, the primary objective of the collection is directed at servicing the research and information needs of the parent organization.

In this write-up, faculty of law library is the same with academic law library and is viewed as any library located or situated within the faculty of law with its authority in a law degree awarding university, with the primary aim of serving the students, lecturers and staff and the entire faculty members of that and other academic institutions with legal information resources and services by physical or digital means to make references or borrow in order to satisfy their legal information needs. The main function of an academic law library is to provide resources and support research for legal professional development and service efficiently. However, academic law libraries in this study are referred to as faculty of law libraries.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

2.2 Roles of Academic Law Library

The concept of Law has been recognised as a system of rules that are enforced through

social institutions to govern behaviour. The *Third New International Dictionary* from Merriam-Webster (2013) defines law as a binding custom or practice of a community, a rule or mode of conduct or action that is prescribed or formally recognized as binding by a supreme controlling authority or is made obligatory by a sanction (as an edict, decree, prescript, order, ordinance, statute, resolution, rule, judicial decision, or usage) made, recognized, or enforced by the controlling authority. Similarly, Horwitz (2004) in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* defines the concept of law as a legal system, which is the most explicit, institutionalized, and complex mode of regulating human conduct. The definition of law given in the *Third New International Dictionary* from Merriam-Webster is assumed to be more comprehensive than others, because, it encompasses major features and characteristics of what law looks like in the real sense. The definition considers law as a body of rules prescribing external conduct and considered justifiable, which led to the concept of library.

Academic law library brings law and law-related or legal information resources to the law faculty or the institution at large. Without these libraries, the faculties of law in universities could not engage in any informed action in furtherance of their mission and so would not ensure professional development and service excellence. The faculty of law in a university is dependent on its library for its own survival. Since the law library is embedded within the law faculty it serves, the faculty of law obviously cannot continue without its law library. Indeed, the faculty of law provides the reason and focus of the library's existence in both the legal academy and the greater university setting. Yet, the faculty of law remains the primary dependent, because law libraries can readily exist outside of the academic context (faculty of law), but no faculty of law can exist without a

functional academic law library (Tice, 2011).

In addition to its core information function, faculty of law library also brings to the faculty a series of important intangible benefits and goodwill that enables the host university to establish and develop its identity within the greater legal academy and the outside world. As a result of establishing and maintaining effective academic law library, credibility, order, permanence, currency, relevance, intellectual community and other characteristics of information and information access which are founded in the library, come to be identified with the faculty of law and the university at large. A small, cluttered, uncomfortable, and unattractive library, for example, sends a very different signal about the quality of education than does an organized, well-designed, and tastefully decorated library, even if it is small size.

The law libraries support the teaching, learning and research activities of not only the lecturers but also of the postgraduate law students, undergraduate students and the academic community at large. These libraries bring law and law related legal information resources at the disposal of its users, and thus complementing their legal activities.

Furthermore, the development of the electronic format forever altered not only the information characteristics of law, but also the methods of engagement with legal information. After centuries of print and print-reduction formats (such as microfiche and microfilm) serving as the only access points to legal resources, the sudden advent of electronic information meant that information facilitation could take place in ways that could not have been imagined in the pre-technology eras. The presence of law libraries adjacent to faculties of law in our universities facilitates the accessibility and usability of these types of electronic legal information resources.

According to Tice (2011), legal information presented in electronic format

offered new functionalities, such as full-text search ability, which greatly enhance efficient research. Subscriptions to databases by university law libraries meant that a vast numbers of new titles could be added to library collections without taking up shelf space. Most importantly, electronic materials offered a breadth of access to information that had not been possible before, as there is no longer the need to be physically present in the law library to use many of its materials. Although law librarians generally saw the rise of information technology as offering many exciting possibilities for the expansion of information facilitation, others in the legal academy and elsewhere began to ask what has become an all-too-familiar question: Why do we need law libraries when “everything is available online?” In other words, why is intermediation by the library still necessary to provide access to the information that makes possible knowledge and action? Answer to this is that the digital environment, one of which is faculty of law library has empowered information-seekers to make such connections on their own, essentially whenever and from wherever they choose.

In another review, Doherty (1998) stated that in the absence of a law library, lawyers and law professors cannot effectively do their jobs, and therefore the law library is an indispensable requirement for law offices and the university law faculties. To law professionals, law materials are crucial as law courts rely heavily on legal precedents to judge current cases, while law students also need legal materials to train while at university or law school. Legal information is paramount to the success of the judicial system, to which Bello (1994), in his address at the conference of Nigerian Law Libraries for the Future, stated that, legal information is an essential tool to lawyers, and its importance in legal practice cannot be stressed enough.

Similarly, Mallik and Sen (2008), observed that faculty of law libraries are used

by postgraduate law students to obtain information for their regular assignments and presentation as part of their course curriculum or requirement, for research activities like project write up, dissertation or thesis as integral part of the course curriculum for the partial fulfilments of their course requirements, for legal and non-legal law researches. Other available information resources provided by law libraries include those of law related discipline like Accounting, Management, Finance, and Mass Communication which are available and provided in law library for law related researches either for an assignments, presentations and projects, Administration and Policy making for official's administrative duties, Supplementing Regular Classes. After attending regular lecture classes, students in the faculty of law use legal information resources to make references and update their lecture notes for good understanding of the lecture.

Furthermore, the significance of faculty of law libraries with regards to teaching of law cannot be over-emphasized. This is because some postgraduate students in the faculty of law are also teachers or lecturers in the host institution or other educational institutions. As such, postgraduate students often used law library to prepare lecture note or design a teaching plan for their students among others. Thus faculty of law library is seen as an institution of its own, independent of, yet inseparable from, the faculty of law and playing a pivotal role in all of the university's endeavours.

From the foregoing, law libraries are indispensable to law faculties, which provide resources in various formats that are vital to postgraduate law students. The advent of electronic legal information resources has further facilitated access to information and has made access to legal information resources more easier to law students. Hence, the need to view such law library roles from

the perspective of its potential roles towards attainment of the sustainable development goal particularly in Nigeria.

2.3 Sustainable Development Goals

The united nations have envisaged actions targets which fall into immediate (short term) targets achievable by 2020 and distant (long-term) targets achievable by 2030. Yahaya and Usman (2016) listed some of the Sustainable Development Goals as Projected by United Nations to include but not limited to the following;

By 2030, all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.

By 2030, people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020. Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Sustainable Development goal advocates Promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

2.4 Law Library Services

Information service is expected to constitute the base line of law libraries. This statement can be linked to the philosophy of

law librarianship which according to Jegede (2005), is based on the concept of effective library services and provision of relevant resources to users. In order to provide efficient library services, faculty of law libraries is expected to acquire a wide range of variety of legal information resources, provide expertise and technological support. Some of these services include general reference services, loaning of books and other materials for use photocopying services, selective dissemination of information and indexing services among others.

Law libraries are considered as special libraries due to the nature of their resources, services and users. Special libraries provide special services to their users. Umar (2019) attributed law libraries with the following characteristics:

1. Law library collections are highly specialized and generally with restricted access only to their users.
2. Involves in researching and finding answers for the clients seeking for information with the assistance of the library.
3. Their users are typically homogenous (law related staff and students).
4. They generally have small number of users. These users have information being selectively disseminated to them.
5. They provide information for practical purposes, and the information provided must be quick and precise.
6. Their collections are directly narrowed to the mission of the law faculties (Umar, 2019).

According to Runyon (2009) explains that law libraries are a dynamic and responsive force in the educational activities of universities and their associated law schools. A law library is a facility that has been specially created for law users to search, access, and use the legal information resources that have being acquired, processed and organized. This library, as explained by

Umar (2019), provides legal professionals with quality information sources and services, such as relevant law books, journals and periodicals. It is also responsible for the operational and strategic management of its user services, promoting law library services, and implementing the library's mission. Library is expected to be proactive, vibrant and be abreast of the latest developments in information dissemination to maintain relevance and keep up with the multifarious needs and expectations of law library users. It is therefore important for the law library to be able to provide services and facilities that meet the sustainable development of its users.

As special libraries, law library services revolves around things like Answering reference questions service, assisting users to locate information items, inter – library loan services, orientation services, library loan services, one –to- one library instruction services, library tours services, Indexing services, abstracting services, clipping services, translation services, referral services, photocopy services, document delivery services, bibliographic verification services, bibliotherapy services, reader advisory services, selective dissemination of information services, display of new arrival services table of contents services, in-services training of staff, production of guide for publicity and education, contributing to or preparing library publication services, production of guide for publicity and education.

In addition, Aje (2004) emphasized that the law librarian acquires knowledge of the library collection during the process of acquiring and organizing the materials. He is able to direct users to possible source, to bibliographic tools that are guides to the literature on subjects, and thus save the time of the library user from endless search. Gama (2008) identified two aspects of information services which is also applicable to law

libraries. These are;

1. Provision of information services on demand
2. Provision of information services on anticipation.

Provision of information services on demand: this involves a situation where a law library user approaches a reference desk and put request for information or any information item. The law librarian then searches his tools in order to identify sources that could provide satisfactory answers to the request made. Where the available resources within his domain could provide the required information, the user is provided with the information or item. However, if the available resources cannot provide what is needed, the law librarian then makes an attempt to either the law library user to the possible places where his request could be better attended or to get the information or sources on behalf of the user. The Current Awareness Services (CAS) for instance, is concerned with the dissemination of information to the identified law library users in anticipation of need in order to keep them up to date in their areas of interests.

Provision of information services on anticipation: This involves provision of information in anticipation of need. This is more challenging and demanding because the law librarian does not wait until when a user indicate his interest on specific information in his area of profession. But for the fact the users' area of interest is known, the identification, acquisition, indexing and notification is done for him by the law librarians. This keeps the library user up to date of the current happenings in his area of interests. Retrospective searching in law libraries is concerned with the provision of answers to specific inquiries put across to law librarian by users.

Gama (2008) summarized some major

services through which the academic law libraries contribute for the attainment of sustainable development goals. These include:

Interlibrary Loan and Document Delivery:

this is a situation where a law library user can approach a librarian and ask for an item which seems to be not available in the library. The librarian then checks to verify its non-availability. He searches his tools (manual and electronic) to identify a library that has the item which can be borrowed from. Before a request is made by a library on behalf of the user, bibliographic data of the item must be verified to ensure that accurate information is forwarded to the lending library. The librarian then puts a request to the library that has the item following a formal or informal borrowing procedure; the item is then delivered to the requesting library which is then handed over to the law researcher/law student making the request. This helps to achieve the sustainable development objective which says *“by 2030, all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance”*

Bibliographic verification: this involves provision of facts about publications. The law librarians search their bibliographic tools such as indexes, bibliographies, catalogues etc. to verify that a user's information about a document is correct and complete. This service is provided to assist users verify their bibliographic information about some items they cited. This helps in ensuring public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements as enshrined in the sustainable

development goals.

Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI): for the attainment of a goal stating that “ by 2030, people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature” Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) is directed to individuals or groups that work on a particular project. The idea of this service is to keep individual user informed about any new development or item which the library identified or acquired about his area of legal research. The basic idea about SDI is to match individuals' area of interest with the relevant information item. This according to Gama (2008) calls for knowledge about the profile of each member (user) of the library or group of members working on a particular research project.

On the other hand, Umar (2019) quoted Jegede (2005) highlighted the types of services that are peculiar to law libraries as follows:

General Reference Services

To provide access to justice for all, as enshrined in the sustainable development goals, the law librarian acquires knowledge of the library collection during the process of acquiring and organizing the materials. He is able to direct users to possible sources, to bibliographic tools, that are guides to the literature on the subject, and thus save the time of the library user from endless search. The level of reference services provided should be very high and personalized and it should also varies from giving factual answer to direct questions, locating specific facts or to searching the literature available which may result in compiling a list of everything written on a given subject of law.

Routing of Current Periodicals

Periodicals and law reports are primary

materials and contain current information on their subject area. Most of them are published regularly and issued in parts. In order to strengthen effort to protect and safeguard the world cultural and natural heritage, some law libraries route their periodicals to users, but invariably this procedure results in periodicals not being passed from one user to the next user and eventually such periodicals are lost. In order to avoid loses of issues of journals, photocopies of contents pages of all periodicals received at regular intervals should be sent to the users and complete set should be left on the public catalogue for other library users to browse through. Thus, the photocopy of contents pages announces what is currently published in their respective subject area, announces the arrival of the journals in the library, and finally serves as an invitation to the research fellows to visit the library.

Library Bulletin

All libraries issue library bulletins under different names and titles. They are issued with one principal aim, which is, announcing recent additions to the library. It should be published at regular intervals and sent free to all individual library users and other law libraries throughout the country in order to publicize the library's collection. It may include a list of publications of the parent organization/institution. This advocates promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, to provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Indexing and Abstracting Services

In order to assist the law library user in getting the maximum benefits from library bulletins, annotations or abstracts of each item in the bulletin are included. Law libraries, however, are noted for producing a variety of indexes to their collections as in-house routine. These

indexes are of immense help to lawyers in locating authorities to citations, etc. This helps in ensuring user access to information and protects fundamental human rights as enshrined in the sustainable development goals.

Compilation of Bibliographies and Reading lists

The compilation of bibliographies on various subjects of law is a routine job by law librarians. This is in order to have comprehensive records of publications available on the various law subjects. Bibliographies are necessary tools in any area of learning, and are published in different forms, e.g. on geographical area, on general subject area or on a specific subject. Subject bibliographies in particular, whether current or retrospective, are useful records of what has been written on their subjects and at the same time they show which area of the subjects that not received adequate share of documentation. Bibliographies in law libraries apart from indicting authority sources, also served as ready sources for reference questions.

Aboyade (2000) opined that law libraries are noted for producing a variety of indexes to their collections as in-house routine. These indexes are immense help to legal information users in locating authorities to citations etc. Index has proved to be useful not only to the library users but to the library itself. Lack of, or poor general subject's indexes to the legal information resources reduce their accessibility. Hence, if the indexing services are fully carried out by our law libraries, it should be taken as a tool for easy retrieval to the legal information users of the library.

Abdullahi (2011), found that user education, reference services, photocopying services, loan services, internet services and binding services are the types of services utilized by law students in federal universities of North West zone, Nigeria. Inter-library

loan, abstracting/indexing, reading list, and issuance of library bulleting services are not provided by law libraries to patrons.

Rasul and Singh (2010) collected data randomly from 375 students in four Malaysian public universities. Their results revealed that the majority (90%) of the respondents acknowledged the role of university libraries in facilitating research.

In Babcock University, Onifade, Ogbuyi and Omeluzor (2013) postgraduate students as respondents were asked to indicate the types of services they most used. It was found that the most used service of the library is the loan service. This was used by 37(48.7%) of the respondents, followed by the bibliography and document delivery service used by 37(48.7%); while the least used service is the consultancy service which is used by 9(11.8%) of the total respondents. In some selected universities of Edo State, Owushi and Emasealu (2016) revealed that legal research, dissemination of information services, routine of current materials as services rendered to patrons on estimated rate of 100%. General reference 83%, Current awareness services 73%; Legal attachment/ noting up 38%; in law libraries. While inter library loan; abstracting/ indexing; reading list and issuance of library bulletin are not provided by law libraries of universities of Benin, Ambrose Alli, Benson Idahosa, and Igbinedion.

Aderigbe and Ajiboye (2013), in their study at University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, findings revealed that the user education programme of Nimbe Adedipe Library is not adequate; the library provides more library orientation than bibliographic instruction and information literacy skills.

Conclusion

Transformation and adoption of sustainable development goals has become a global trend in contemporary libraries so as to move simultaneously with the current

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agitation of providing effective information services for improving avenues for the provision of Academic Law Library Services for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. This paper established that the strategies for assisting law library users in attaining their sustainable development include but not limited to answering reference questions, assisting users to locate information item and library orientation services, reader's advisory, display of new arrivals, one-to-one library instruction, bibliographic verification, Selective Dissemination of Information, Indexing and Abstracting, referral, photocopy, contributing to or preparing library publications and maintaining internal file for departmental use services, Interlibrary loan, library tours, clippings, maintaining vertical files, supervision of subject reading rooms, document delivery, production of guides for publicity and education and translation services among others.

Way Forward

Effective services in any type of library is judged by the result the accuracy, currency, and completeness of answers given to the library user user's inquiry and the time factor relates to the speed of with which the answer gets to the user. Law librarians in Nigeria should be proactive in serving their users. They should plan their services in anticipation of need. This will motivate them to rethinking the Potentials of their Law Library Services for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals as enshrined in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (Year 2030 Projection).

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