

Issues and challenges in the creation of institutional repositories with local content: critical reflections

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Abstract

A major impact of globalization and emerging information society is the urge to generate local content for local and global consumption. This is of immense benefit for developing countries and Nigeria in particular because of prospects accruing from it. Library as an indispensable agent in national development through provision of relevant information has a key role to play. The onus rests on Nigerian libraries to generate much more local content to meet local and global information needs. The paper discusses issues in the creation of institutional repositories with local content from library perspective, focusing more on ways to enhance creation of local content, inherent challenges and suggestions on the way forward for Nigerian Libraries.

Keywords

Information, library, local content, institutional repositories, developing countries, Nigeria

Introduction

In recent times, creation, acquisition and dissemination of local content on a global scale have become more imperative than ever before. The importance of local content lies in the fact that it is a tool for documenting, preserving and dissemination of historical, cultural and intellectual heritage of a nation. It is therefore a veritable instrument of sustainable national development. In this era of new information economy, access to useful information embedded in local and foreign content is basic to the progress of the global village. For Nigeria and other developing countries, it is an avenue for bridging the information divide being experienced by them now by harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies for realizing locally owned sustainable development. Today, the global village is being described on the basis of ICT as information rich northern hemisphere and information poor southern

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hemisphere of which Nigeria is one. A major characteristic of an information poor society is low-level ICT with minimum local content on the web for local and global consumption. Therefore, Nigeria must rise to the occasion by taking advantage of ICT revolution to boost generation of local content for local and global consumption.

Similarly, creation and dissemination of local content is crucial towards the realization of Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) and National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS). The global agenda, which is targeted towards eradication of global problems, especially poverty eradication by the year 2015, requires adequate information to achieve this goal. Hence, all hands must be on deck in the global village.

Furthermore, It is observed that ICT is providing access to foreign content with foreign perspective as a result of which, developing countries are being invaded by foreign ideas and values that may further undermine local cultural heritage and economic livelihood. For instance, many of the local content on the web are those of countries like United States of America and Britain. To reverse this trend in favour of developing countries, foreign content must be matched by the expression and communication of local content that is relevant to local situation and also have global application.

In view of the foregoing, there has been a growing recognition of the need to generate local content with a view to making resources available through new and traditional media in order to empower communities and lead them to an all inclusive knowledge. The onus rests on libraries to intensify creation and acquisition of local content in order to meet the challenges of information age.

Conceptual clarification

There is profound disagreement on the meaning of "local content". For organizations like Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), local content refers to development of skills, technology transfer, use of local manufacturing, while the media sector views it as the proportion of programming that is not imported. In the library parlance, it refers to collection of bibliographic materials originating from a community or society.

An all-embracing definition of local content and the most relevant to this paper comes from International Institute for Communication and Development (2002), which defines local content as the expression and the communication of a community's locally owned and adapted knowledge and experience that is relevant to the community's situation, where community is defined by its location, culture, language or area of interest. The process of creating and disseminating local content provides opportunities for members of the community to interact and communicate with one another in their own (native) language(s).

It is obvious from this definition that local content refers to information in any format or distributed media originating from a community or adapted by it. Worthy of note is the emphasis on linguistic heritage as an important feature of a local content to facilitate effective interaction and communication of their knowledge and culture. This becomes imperative in order to protect or prevent a community's linguistic heritage from going into extinction under the influence of foreign culture. The definition encompasses information that supports the

development of local manpower, local technology etc. Also, an item may not necessarily originate from a community but can be adapted and thus becomes its local content

Local Content in Nigeria: contextual issues

Local content resources from Nigeria are published and unpublished works of historical, research and intellectual value, which originated from the country. They can be categorized as follows: Serials (Nigerian dailies - newspapers, magazines, journals), textbooks/monographs, government documents, audio – visuals, indigenous knowledge, literature, reference sources, historical documents (archival document, artifacts, ancient antiquities), theses/dissertations, research reports, musicals/home video, photographs, broadcast, retrieval tools (indexes, abstracts, bibliographies, thesaurus, classification schemes).

All kinds of libraries should be well stocked with these bibliographic materials with the exception of archival materials, artifacts and ancient antiquities which are mostly found in archives and museums. However, most libraries maintain archives of some records with research and intellectual value. A collection of artifacts and ancient antiquities can feature in any virtual library projects

A key resource in generation of local content is the National Bibliography of Nigeria which is published by the National library of Nigeria annually and contains list of bibliographic resources, print or audio-visual acquired as legal deposit. The Legal Deposit Act mandates private publishers, state and federal governments to deposit three, ten and twenty-five copies of any published materials respectively in the National Library of Nigeria within one month of publication at their own expense. All these materials are then published in the National Bibliography of Nigeria (NBN) as some of the local content from Nigeria. The organization maintains a database of these Nigerian's intellectual output with the aim of achieving effective National Bibliographic Control in line with the principle of Universal Bibliographic Control. National Bibliography of Nigeria serves as a selection tool for scholars, lecturers, students, librarians etc.

Libraries over the ages have been potent instrument for creation, acquisition and dissemination of local content thereby preserving and promoting transmission of cultural practices and values from one generation to another. They are reservoir of recorded knowledge of a community, which is being preserved for posterity. Nigerian libraries store local content in form of cultural, educational, scientific and aesthetic creation of Nigeria.

In modern times, various types of libraries exist in Nigeria to serve a micro community of some sort, and engage in resource sharing in order to serve the macro community. All these libraries are stocked with both local and foreign content but the local content resources in some of these libraries are very inadequate. However, if Nigerian libraries are to sustain their role as indispensable agent in the preservation and conservation, and promotion of cultural practices, they need to generate and store a great deal of local content to promote national renaissance. Therefore, Nigerian libraries ought to rise to the occasion by increasing their stock of useful and valuable local content with National Library of Nigeria playing a leading role.

For instance quick reference materials from Nigeria that contain comprehensive information about places, people, events, personalities etc. are either scarce or unavailable in Nigerian libraries. One can hardly find in many libraries any rich biographical dictionaries containing information on Nigerian/African heroes who have contributed immensely to the development of the country or region of Africa, for example *Who is Who* for living personalities only and *Dictionary of National Bibliography* for deceased personalities or a combination of both. Nigerian Library Association and National Library of Nigeria should spearhead publication of rich and authoritative biographical dictionaries to cover Nigeria and Africa to enrich the local content of Nigerian libraries. In the same vein, the acquisition of the following reference materials by Nigerian Libraries is of paramount importance:

- (1) *Nigerian Encyclopedia and Directory of Nigerian Establishments* published in 1996. This contains comprehensive information about Nigeria such as states and the federal capital territory, federal government establishments, local government areas, important tourist centres, higher educational institutions in Nigeria, as well as demographic figures of other countries of the world.
- (2) *Encyclopaedia of Policies of Government of Federal Republic of Nigeria* published in 2006
- (3) *Africana: Encyclopaedia of African–American Experience*. This covers the entire history of Africa and Africans in diaspora. Although, *Africana* is not a local content from Nigeria but Africa, it is very valuable in view of its vital information on African personalities. The afore-mentioned essential reference materials are not available in many Nigerian Libraries.

Also, there is need for publication of the following reference materials: African Almanac containing information on sporting events in Africa with great emphasis on Nigeria; Dictionaries and Encyclopedia or Thesaurus of notable Nigerian languages most especially Nigerian national languages (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo); Handbook or Manual containing comprehensive information about the various cultural tourist centres, national monuments and mineral resources. All these materials will be very useful for Nigerians at home and abroad, and foreigners.

Similarly, because of oral nature of indigenous knowledge, materials on indigenous knowledge are scanty although some attempts have been made to document it by scholars, historians, writers and anthropologists (Mabawonku, 2005). Nigerian literary works and musicals are very rich in certain aspects of Indigenous Knowledge e.g. oral tradition, folklores, proverbs, idioms, festivals and can be very useful in the codification of Nigeria's Indigenous Knowledge. Librarians need to support the recommendation of some of these materials in Nigerian schools to expose Nigerian children to these aspects of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices. Besides, they should be included in any National Virtual Library Project. However, acquisition of these materials is not enough but creating access to them through retrieval techniques such as catalogues, indexes, abstracts, bibliography and placing them on the web for global consumption, which has been traditional role of libraries.

The imperative of generating and promoting local content

Local content is both important and necessary in today's world. First, it offers a potent instrument for cultural rebirth - revival of Nigeria's moribund rich customs, traditions and other cultural practices. It equally serves as avenue of preserving and conserving Nigerian cultural heritage for posterity as well as its promotion on global scale. Secondly, it serves as an indicator of sustainable national development. It is an avenue for empowerment of Nigerian citizenry for various purposes i.e. problem solving, decision making, provision of employment, deployment of local manpower, effective governance thereby contributing to poverty eradication programme of federal and state governments.

Thirdly, the creation and dissemination of local content is imperative for enhancing national image – for instance, South Korea is known a “wired” country. Creation of local content provides opportunity to bridge the information divide being experienced by it and other African countries and thus place it among the comity of great nations in the global village. In addition, it has the potential to change the way Nigeria is being viewed by the world media as it can be used to convey accurate and positive image. Local content is therefore, a tool for projecting image of Nigeria and Africa as a whole, and a key factor in the success of Nigeria rebranding project.

Fourthly as a record of civilization, local content, especially archival documents, artifacts, ancient antiquities are very valuable for historical research. Historians make use of them in authenticating historical facts as they offer insight into earlier cultures at a particular period. They are equally useful for research purpose. Fifthly, local content offers an avenue for libraries and related institutions to generate revenue to improve their services. This also implies revenue generation for publishers/authors through compensation from libraries.

Sixthly, local content allows for the Preservation and diffusion of Indigenous Knowledge. It is a tool for documenting, preserving and dissemination of indigenous knowledge most especially in the area of health and medicine, which is being referred to as alternative medicine. This is gaining acceptance globally and should be preserved so that science and other communities can benefit from it.

Finally, local content is a key factor for national cultural development. In the context of Africa, it can play role in the so-called “African renaissance”: e.g. creating cultural awareness; minimizing outward migration; **reducing** the incidence of brain-drain in our schools etc. For Nigerians at home and abroad, access to local content implies access to valuable information to meet their needs in addition to facilitating communication and interaction among them. It is platform for them to share information, ideas and advice, which will foster patriotism and nationalism.

Challenges to promoting local content

There are a number of challenges in promoting local content. In this section, the challenges are examined in the particular context of Nigeria. The first challenge is how to reinforce the Stock of existing local content. As already stated, Nigerian Libraries are hard-pressed on the need to increase the stock of local content to meet local and global information needs. The available local content in some of the nation's libraries are inadequate. One main factor responsible for this is dwindling funding and high exorbitant prices of books occasioned by

high cost of publishing. They need to explore several avenues of raising funds to increase the stock of available local content in the country. This includes soliciting for funds from national and international organizations, 'friends of the library' and making a strong case for increased subvention.

A second challenge is that of sensitization. It is imperative for Nigerian Library Association to sensitize the Nigerian government to sponsor publication of some vital reference materials already mentioned in addition to ensuring regular publication of the existing ones. There is no doubt that many Non-governmental organizations and international organizations, and government agencies will be very much interested in this project. The job will require liaising with other information professionals, writers, scholars, and government agencies towards the publishing of these materials in print, audio-visual and electronic formats. It also involves sensitizing other professional groups to publish relevant reference materials relating to their profession. The Nigerian Library Association should blaze the trail by publishing a biographical material in library and information science profession.

A third challenge is that of codification of indigenous knowledge. As suggested by Mabawonku (2005), library should play a leading role in the documentation and publishing of indigenous knowledge. This can be achieved through several means e.g. sourcing for local researchers and authors, and supporting them to collect data or information and publishing them or alternatively, supporting the documentation of folklores, music, languages etc, in non-book format, using slides, audio and video – recordings, compact disk for publishing in print, audio – visuals and electronic format. It should be noted that a great deal of indigenous knowledge are reflected in the works of many Nigerian writers such as literature and drama, history, geography and social studies books, as well as Nigerian musicals in local languages. These bibliographic resources can be very useful in codification of indigenous knowledge.

A fourth challenge is that of acquisition of materials in indigenous languages, and institutionalization of local translation services. Nigerian libraries particularly national, public and community libraries will have to place more emphasis on generation of local content in the notable Nigerian languages most importantly the designated national languages (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo). Quite a large number of bibliographic resources abound in these languages e.g newspaper, monograph, pamphlet, audio-visual clips and journal. Their job will also require translation services as well as dissemination of information in the mother – tongue to rural dwellers. This is very important because one important objective of generation of local content is to promote rich cultural practices and thus save the indigenous languages from extinction under the profound influence of a foreign language like English language which is considered superior by the virtue of its being official language of Nigeria and a core subject in the Nigerian schools.

More importantly, extension of library services to the grass root will indeed require the use of mother –tongue. This is because services will include reference or referral service, which will require the use of local languages for the generality of people to understand. Furthermore, it should be noted that there are customary courts all over Nigeria, which adjudicate cases in the local languages. They require library services preferably in the local languages to function very well. Again, attempts are made to translate Nigerian constitution into the national languages. This implies library services in the local languages. Besides, there are valuable resources on the Internet useful for local application. These should be downloaded and translated or adopted

for local use. A fifth challenge involves how to create and stimulate content in digital and electronic formats. In the view of IICD (2002) it is wrong to conclude that there is local content scarcity in developing countries simply because little local content is found on the web. Most local content is invisible to the international community that is not connected to local off-line channels. One major solution to this problem is digitization of available local content and placing them on the web for both local and global consumption. Digitization plays twin roles of preservation and globalization of local content when placed on the Internet. On the one hand, creation of e-content will enable Nigerians at home to feel the impact of local content because ICT ought to be a conveyor of locally relevant messages and information. On the other hand, Nigerians abroad and foreigners will be able to have access to valuable information resources of Nigeria and thus enabling Nigerian scholars, educationists, librarians, authors, etc to share their knowledge with the rest of the world. The Implementation of virtual library services is a platform for globalizing Nigerian local content. Two National virtual libraries are already on course with the Virtual National Library of Nigeria focusing more on local content. They should be well funded. One major prospect in respect of this is creation of global market for Nigerian local content.

A sixth challenge, which is closely related to the above, involves the documentation and digitization of "Cultural Heritage Resources". In order to enrich local content of Nigerian libraries, some cultural activities and Nigerian cultural heritage has to be documented in both audio-visual and electronic formats and then place on the web for global consumption e.g festivals, ceremonies dances, dressing, traditional attires, national monuments and tourist centres. For instance, some cultural tourist centres are remarkable because of the ceremonies and festivities associated with them e.g. Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, which has been designated a World Cultural Heritage site by UNESCO, and Olumirin Waterfalls at Erin Ijesha. The two tourist centres are celebrated annually with pomp and pageantry. Also noteworthy is Argungu Fishing Festival in Kebbi State (formerly Sokoto State). There are many others which are not celebrated but are important tourist attractions e.g Ikogosi hot spring, Oke-Idanre hill, Olumo Rock which is said to have apartment and also serves as a place of refuge during time of war. Documenting information and activities associated with them is essential.

A final challenge is how to address local norms and values in local web design and services. In furtherance of preservation of Nigerian languages to encourage their usage vis a vis English language and thus save them from extinction, and to enhance local content creation and communication, it is imperative to cater for them in web-design. This requires local adaptation of hardware and software as in case of translate.org.za project which is translating computer software into eleven official languages of South Africa, and in Asia and elsewhere, where standard orthographies are being developed to represent non-Latin scripts on computers. To cater for indigenous languages effectively in web-design, nations and communities are advised to participate fully in the choice of scripts for representing their languages. The onus rest on Nigerian Government, Nigerian Library Association and other professional groups to rise to this challenge towards ensuring that notable Nigerian languages are catered for in web-design. It is hoped that the emerging national virtual libraries will reflect this trend.

Obstacles to the creation and promotion of local content

A number of obstacles are noticeable in the creation and promotion of local content, again, based on the Nigerian context. The first obstacle relates to funding. Adequate funding is required by Nigerian Libraries and information professionals to stimulate creation, acquisition and communication of local content on global scale. As already stated, many Nigerian libraries lack adequate local content resources, let alone e-local content because of the exorbitant prices of books occasioned by high costs of production and inadequate funding of libraries. Besides, a huge sum of money is needed to convert these materials to e-local content for global consumption. This problem is compounded by the fact that libraries are not profit making ventures. This makes task of raising enough funds a herculean task.

A second obstacle relates to withholding of information by indigenous knowledge holders. Another problem is reluctance on the part of the custodians of Indigenous knowledge to disclose information. Experience has shown that some of them particularly traditional healers are not disposed to sharing or revealing their knowledge let alone documenting and publishing it. This became manifest in Nigeria when some of them were reluctant to disclose information about their therapies to National Agency For Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) during screening exercise. This can be attributed to ignorance on the importance of documenting their knowledge for posterity and wider consumption as well as fear of being denied their intellectual or industrial property rights. Libraries have great task in convincing these repositories of indigenous knowledge on the need for documenting and publishing their knowledge.

A third obstacle relates to the "deficit" of information and communication technology. Developing countries like Nigeria are at the receiving end of ICTs which are yet to be fully entrenched into state and society. Sophisticated information and communication technology is essential to making local content visible globally. This requires provision of virtual library services, which requires extensive computerization and networking, digitization and training of staff. In Nigeria, ICT is still at low-ebb. This is a great challenge.

A fourth obstacle relates to local cultural and religious values which are either suspicious of, or unfriendly to, "imported" technology. Many Nigerian librarians practice either Islam or Christianity, which frowns at certain indigenous practices associated with "paganism". Some of these 'pagan practices' would certainly discourage some of them from moving closer to people who are repositories of indigenous knowledge let alone documenting it. In addition, disclosing some information by the custodians may require the knowledge seeker or librarian performing some rituals or taking active part in some activities in order to get adequate information.

A fifth constraint relates to the relatively poor preponderance of local Nigerian languages in generating local contents, particularly archival and digital resources. A high degree of proficiency is required in documenting indigenous knowledge and in practicing rural librarianship. According to Mabawonku (2005), documenting and publishing indigenous knowledge in the vernacular is ideal because it makes for authenticity and providing knowledge in the natural language, although this can later be translated into English language. In addition, rural librarianship will, to a large extent, require the use of native languages especially in respect of referral or reference service. In some cases, translation of materials/dissemination of information in local languages will be required. Nigerian librarians may find this difficult

since there is less emphasis on this in the Nigerian library schools' curriculum. On the other hand, ability to speak, read and write in local languages is not being emphasized.

A sixth constraint involves selecting "Best Cultural Practices". Nigerian Libraries are confronted with the challenge of selecting local content with enlightened indigenous knowledge or Nigerian cultural heritage. Since the library exists to promote rich local content, creation and communication of local content must be restricted to best cultural practices. For instance, libraries must avoid acquisition and dissemination of local content resources that promote immoralities, corruption and other negative acts that can portray Nigeria in bad image. Rather, they should opt for local content that is decent, informative, educative, recreational and facilitate national development. Finally, related to the foregoing point is the "preservation and conservation" of library resources to save them from deterioration. There is need for libraries to embark on comprehensive program of preservation and conservation, for this an area that is lagging in library practice. It also include putting in place adequate security measures to prevent bibliographic resources from mutilation and theft

Conclusion

Libraries and librarians have a key role to play in promoting African renaissance through generation of local content for local and global consumption. However, they face a lot of challenge in performing this onerous task. Therefore, they require the co-operation and support of other stakeholders in national development most importantly federal and state governments. A number of steps are imperative in generating and promoting local content in a developing country like Nigeria: examples include, among others (a) increased funding for libraries to enable them increase the stock of their local content; (b) inclusion in the curriculum training of librarians in the acquisition, documentation and publishing of indigenous knowledge; (c) emphasis on employment of Librarians with subject background in notable Nigerian languages as well as employment of translators for translation services and dissemination of information in the local languages and vice-verse; (d) subsidizing the cost of book production to boost book publishing in the country; (e) the establishment of printing press in libraries and related institutions for maintenance of bibliographic resources as well as publishing of essential reading materials; (f) establishment of more functional libraries in the rural areas in addition to developing the existing ones (g) assurance of protection of intellectual property rights for indigenous knowledge repositories.

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