

Delivery of community information service as corporate social responsibility by librarians in Nigerian tertiary institutions

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Abstract

Various scholarly works have reported the absence of library and information services provision to rural dwellers for addressing their information needs for sustainable development. Coupled with this is the absence of community information centers in the rural areas. Thus, a key question that keeps arising is: whose job is it to provide effective community information services (CIS) to rural dwellers in the country? This necessitated the study, with a view to ascertaining if librarians in academic institutions, considering their location in rural areas, are involved in corporate social responsibility (CSR) by way of providing library and information services in communities? Using four federal tertiary institutions in Imo and Ebonyi states, South East, Nigeria, which are located in rural areas, it was discovered that librarians perceived such idea in the positive direction and also responded positively to the types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR. Possible challenges that may affect the planning and delivery of such CIS programme were also discovered, among which are financial implications, unavailability of communication gadgets and other requisite resources, absence of approval and support from the management of parent institutions, librarians may see such as additional responsibility without financial reward which may lead to resistance, and possible resistance or non-acceptability by leaders and traditional rulers in the communities involved. Recommendations were made for academic librarians to take up provision of CIS as CSR for actualization of sustainable development goals in rural areas in the country.

Keywords: community information services, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development goals, librarians,

Introduction

Information agencies and their services are strategic instruments for sustainable development of nations across the universe. The provision of information services to members of the society for addressing their information needs has been uneven between the urban centres and the rural communities in some Africa countries. The urban areas appear better served, whereas the rural communities remain neglected. This is predicated on the fact that information

agencies like libraries, archives and museums, information resource centres, learning resources outfits, knowledge hubs, and the like are mostly located in city centres. That is why Aina (2004) notes that it is not surprising that, libraries in Africa hardly serve the rural dwellers that are barely literate, yet they constitute a substantial majority of most nations in Africa. In addition, Chester and Neelameghan (cited in Daudu, 2014) reiterate that rural communities in Africa constitute the larger percentage of the population whose information needs are not adequately met and consequently they have not been able to productively participate in the development process and enjoy the benefits thereof.

Unfortunately, one of the forms of libraries, known as community information centres, that would have been a change agent for transformation and development of rural communities via the provision of essential community-based information services for addressing rural information needs appear non-existing in the rural communities in our society, Nigeria (Uzuegbu & Uzuegbu, 2013; Igwe, Ndubuisi-Okoh, Akuma & Okoche, 2015; Uzuegbu, 2016). Even at that, some of the so-called rural information technology centres established by the federal government of Nigeria through its National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in order to serve the rural areas are not actually located in core rural areas, and many have gone moribund due to neglect and associated operational factors. In contributing to this discourse, Ndinge (2014) made case for community-based information centers for achieving equality of access to information for community survival and growth, which is a panacea for national development, whereas Kamba (cited in Uzuegbu, 2016) argued for the establishment of innovative community information centers for providing rural dwellers with appropriate information that can allow them participate in today's knowledge societies.

Furthermore, Onah, Urom and Amanze-Unagha (2015), after decrying the inability of many countries in sub-saharan Africa, especially Nigeria, to actualize the millennium development goals (MDGs) in 2015, called for the rebranding of information agencies for actions so that they would play active contributory roles in actualizing the sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially in rural areas in Nigeria. However, responding appropriately to these recommendations and suggestions by the government and other developmental stakeholders in the society remains a challenge.

Aina (2004: 66) reiterates that given the fact that large proportions of African people in

rural areas are neglected, it can be rightly said that the pattern of development of library and information services in Africa is defective, as it is geared towards a tiny majority of the societal members mostly in urban centres. Thus, a critical question put forward by Uzuegbu (2016) which still remains unanswered is: whose job is it to deliver effective information services to rural dwellers in Africa?

Libraries have long been on the frontlines of social movements, providing the sites, services, and resources to educate, inspire, and connect their communities (Charney, 2014). Yap and Labagon (2015) observes that academic libraries are now creating and extending viable programs to the community they serve by undertaking socially responsible initiatives. In so doing, academic libraries support sharing knowledge between different groups and using effective communications to build positive relationships (Charney, 2014). Providing community information service as corporate social responsibility has become expedient for academic libraries because of their functionality and proximity to rural dwellers. This will ultimately facilitate economic transformation, development and actualization of sustainable development goals.

Understanding corporate social responsibility

Over the years, many organizations and companies usually located in rural areas and semi-urban centres, act as contributory agents to the wellbeing and development of their host communities. These organizations mostly carry out this through the engagement/employment of some of the qualified inhabitants of the host community as their staff or through execution of corporate social responsibility programmes.

Corporate social responsibility refers to an organisation's sense of responsibility towards the community in which it operates. Murillo and Martinek (2009) define corporate social responsibility as a doctrine that promotes expanded social stewardship by businesses and organizations whereas Yap and Labangon (2015) state that CSR suggests institutions must increase their sphere of reach to its surrounding neighbourhood. Yap and Labangon (2015) further state that CSR demands the inclusion of stakeholders – from employees to clients and even to the community at large. From the foregoing, CSR is geared towards delivering programmes and services that tend to reduce challenges encountered by the community and also

contributes to the overall well being and development of the community. This could be educationally, socially, economically or through the development of infrastructures and provision of essential services.

Organizations such as companies, corporate bodies, financial institutions, industries and others in different areas of human endeavour engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes from their different perspectives and standpoints across the universe. On the part of academic libraries, a variety of activities ranging from conducting outreach programs, charity work and community extension sessions are readily provided (Yap, Dar Juan & Perez (2013). Yap and Labangon (2015) presented the success of Corporate Social Responsibility project by the academic library of De La Salle University in the Phillipines. However, in Nigeria, the implementation of CSR are hardly known and rarely reported in the literature.

Though academic libraries are found in various communities that host the parent institutions, some services they provide which are community-oriented (i.e community information services) could constitute CSR to their host communities, if properly articulated and delivered to the inhabitants of the affected communities.

Community information services

Community information services (CIS) are services delivered to rural dwellers to address their information needs. These information services are expected to increase their knowledge and understanding of an issue of interest as well as result in their intellectual upliftment, physical well being and economic development. In some places, these CIS are provided by community information centers, where available with requisite resources and appropriate service delivery system. These information needs of inhabitants of communities cut across all sectors of the economy such as agricultural, educational, business, economic, political, socio-cultural, medical and health, environmental, scientific and technological, legal and human rights, and international cum global information needs (Momodu, 2012; Ndinde, 2014; Kolawole & Igwe, 2016). The provision of information services in our rural communities to address different aspects of human endeavor will go a long way contribute to actualize the sustainable development goals.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an off shoot of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The eight MDGs as adopted in September 2000 summit of world leaders, was a

declaration of United Nations, committing nations to a new global partnership for overall development by 2015. The eight goals were eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop global partnerships for development. Meanwhile, the inability of many countries across the universe like Nigeria to meet the MDGs in 2015 led to the emergence of SDGs, as continuous programme towards addressing developmental challenges.

The SDGs came on board in order to replace the MDGs and continue the efforts towards meeting developmental needs of people across the universe. The seventeen SDGs, which are expected to be accomplished by the year 2030 are:

- Goal 1: No poverty – End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- Goal 2: Zero Hunger – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.
- Goal 3: Good health and well-being – Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages.
- Goal 4: Quality education – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Goal 5: Gender equality – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.
- Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation.
- Goal 10: Reduced inequalities – Reduce inequality within and among countries.
- Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production – Ensure sustainable consumption and

production patterns.

- Goal 13: Climate action – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
- Goal 14: Life below water – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
- Goal 15: Life on land – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.
- Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
- Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

United Nations (2016) further notes that access to information is a cross-cutting issue that supports all the SDGs. Interestingly, library and information services contribute to improved outcomes across the SDGs by promoting universal literacy, including media and information literacy, digital literacy skills, closing gaps in access to all types of information, advancing digital inclusion, access to agricultural, health and environmental information, and the like.

The principal aim of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is that organizations make positive contributions to the inhabitants of their host communities in different dimensions. For tertiary institutions, this could come in form of employment of indigenes of the host communities, scholarship opportunities to deserving students from communities, extension of healthcare services by the health department of the institutions whereas the academic libraries can donate books to rural schools which are less privileged.

Although academic libraries are not independent but are part of the tertiary institutions, their role as information providers impacts positively on the environment. They are considered a kind of social responsibility due to their contributions to social, educational, cultural and economic aspects (Eid, Altamimi & Shaheen, 2016). Academic librarians have long been in the business of designing and delivering customized information services, marketing library services and delivering information literacy education. In view of these, Charney (2014) unequivocally

adds that the sustainability movement is a natural fit for academic librarians who tend to excel at gathering, synthesizing, and disseminating information as well as communicating across disciplines.

Academic librarians already accustomed to delivering information literacy programs are uniquely positioned to contribute to the physical and economic well being of members of the host community through the provision of CIS as corporate social responsibility.

It is against this background that this study investigated the perceptions of academic librarians in selected communities in Imo and Ebonyi states in South-east, Nigeria towards the delivery of CIS as CSR. These institutions were selected because of their location in rural communities. They are Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) located in Ihiagwa Imo State; Federal Polytechnic Nekede located in Nekede Imo State; Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo (FUNAI), located in Ikwo community Ebonyi State and Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana (AIFPU) located in Afikpo, Ebonyi State. This study specifically focused on perceptions of librarians towards the nature and types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR, and the possible challenges that may be encountered in the process. Thus, the researchers are of the opinion that the involvement of librarians in the provision of CIS as CSR will be critical to actualizing sustainable development goals in rural communities.

The specific objectives were to:

- a. ascertain librarians' perceptions of delivering CIS to rural dwellers as CSR for the actualization of sustainable development goals;
- b. identify the nature of CIS that could be delivered to rural dwellers by librarians for the actualization of sustainable development goals; and
- c. find out the possible challenges librarians could encounter in the process of planning and delivering CIS as CSR for sustainable development of communities.

Hypothesis:

Ho₁ - Librarians' perceptions of delivering CIS as CSR will not be significantly related to the Nature and Types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR for actualization of SDGs.

Literature review

Various studies associated with delivery of information services to rural dwellers in developing countries of Africa have been reported in the literature. Iwe's (2003) survey reinforces the significant roles library and information services can play in securing sustainable development in the rural areas; thus, noting that establishment of libraries will not be enough, but should be backed up with dissemination of relevant and timely information to the people as well as application of a service-oriented scheme in order to address frustrating rural life in Nigeria. The study by Kari (2007) on ways of improving the provision of information services to inhabitants of rural communities in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, revealed that the rural dwellers showed positive response to services of information agents like agricultural extension workers, and rural health workers.

The investigation by Adewusi (2013) in Ondo State, Nigeria, discovered that availability of community information services were rare in the communities that made up Akoko North-West Local Government of the state, and the rural dwellers were unaware of the potentials inherent in utilizing services of community information centre (CIC). The study concluded that the communities yearn for provision of CICs, with a view to empowering, changing and transforming their life socially, economically, educationally, technologically, and politically for the better.

It could be seen from the above submissions that some studies have been reported via scholarly outlets on information services delivery to rural dwellers. On the case involving agricultural extension officers, the experience of Uzuegbu and Uzuegbu (2013) revealed that sometimes they are into business taking advantage of rural dwellers, and may not relay the vital facts to the farmers in our communities; moreover, community information services is not limited to agricultural information only.

The provision of information services have been the main engagement of library and information practitioners who are set of trained personnel that understand the taxonomy of knowledge and strategies of serving people with their diverse information needs (Uzuegbu & Uzuegbu, 2013). That reinforces the submission of Daudu (2014) that improving situation in rural areas in eastern Nigeria requires enhancing information provision services for the people to be better equipped and better informed regarding sources of aids and information about all their activities.

On the whole, various conceptual reports and empirical works have decried the neglect and near-total absence of information services provision for the rural dwellers in order to address their various information needs. But then, these continuous expressions of dissatisfaction involving rural dwellers end up not providing the desired solution to the plight of these community inhabitants. Therefore, the ball is rolling towards the librarian to increase efforts on sustainable projects which would yield benefits to the communities.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research method with questionnaire as the tool used for data collection. The questionnaire, which had an introductory statement on the mission of the study, was aimed at eliciting responses from the research subjects from Imo and Ebonyi States. Data collection lasted for two-weeks. Weighted mean and decision rule were applied in data analysis. Statements with weighted mean of 2.5 and above were accepted, where those below 2.5 were rejected.

Findings and Discussions

Copies of the two-page questionnaire were distributed to available academic librarians in the tertiary institutions used for the study. The number of copies per institution properly completed, returned and used for analysis was as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Number of Librarians that returned Questionnaire Used for Data Analysis

Tertiary Institution	Male	Female	Total
Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State (FUTO)	8	19	27
Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri, Imo State (FPN)	3	3	6
Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State (FUNAI)	9	1	10
Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, Ebonyi State (AIFPU)	10	4	14
Total Number of Librarians	30	27	57

Out of 32 academic librarians in FUTO library, 27 were available for the study, while 6 out of 7 librarians were available at Federal Polytechnic, Nekede. All the 10 academic librarians in

Federal University Ndufu-Alike were available for the study while 14 academic librarians out of 16 in Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic were available. The total number of useable questionnaires returned was 57 which represents 88% response rate.

Research Question 1:

What are Librarians' perceptions of delivering Community Information Services (CIS) as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the actualization of sustainable development goals (SDGs)?

Table 2:
Librarians' Perceptions of delivering Community Information Services (CIS) as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the actualization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

	<i>Librarians' Perceptions of delivering CIS as CSR for the actualization of SDGs</i>	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
a	Delivery of community information services to rural dwellers in our host communities as corporate social responsibility is essential and should be considered by librarians	34	22	1	--	3.5	Accepted
b	With the approval and support of the management of their parent institutions, librarians are expected to provide community information services to people in their host areas	24	31	2	--	3.4	Accepted
c	Librarians can articulate a programme on community information services and seek approval from the management of their parent institution for its implementation as corporate social responsibility	23	33	--	1	3.4	Accepted
d	If librarians make effort towards delivering community-based information services as corporate social responsibility, they will be seen as contributory agents towards actualizing one of their parent institution's mandates, which is community development	31	25	1	--	3.5	Accepted
e	When librarians plan and deliver community-oriented information services as their corporate social responsibility, their peers (i.e. lecturers) in other departments in their institutions will see them as change agents with ideas and initiatives that will facilitate community development	26	28	2	--	3.4	Accepted

Findings revealed that all the items listed in the question above were above the decision rule of 2.5 and were therefore accepted. This means that academic librarians had a positive perception towards delivering Community Information Services (CIS) as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the actualization of sustainable development goals (SDGs)?

Research Question 2:

What are the nature and types of Community Information Services (CIS) that could be delivered to rural dwellers by librarians for actualization of sustainable development goals?

Table 3:
Nature and Types of CIS that could be rendered to rural dwellers as CSR for the actualization of sustainable development goals (SDGs)

	<i>Nature and Types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR for the actualization of SDGs</i>	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Decision
a	Agricultural information dissemination on recent research findings on high-yielding varieties of seedlings, contemporary farming methods, access to and application of fertilizers and insecticides	36	20	--	1	3.6	Accepted
b	Financial literacy knowledge on how to associate with money-issues, financial sources/institutions, and consumer services and information on market products	17	31	8	1	3.1	Accepted
c	Business information dissemination on successful business ideas, outlets for marketing farm produce and other creative outputs, self-employment tips, assistance for setting up micro and small businesses, and use of local resources	25	27	5	--	3.6	Accepted
d	Health information dissemination on contemporary health issues, their challenges and appropriate response to them, available health services,	28	24	4	1	3.4	Accepted
e	Information provision on family planning, birth control measures, child development strategies, hygienic practices, environmental protection issues,	28	24	5	1	3.4	Accepted
f	Advancing digital inclusion through access to ICTs, digital skills training, information accessibility and lifelong learning programmes	25	29	3	--	3.4	Accepted

g	Sensitization on government welfare schemes, policies and programmes for rural communities, in the areas of housing, education, health, etc.	26	27	4	--	3.4	Accepted
h	Information on human rights, free legal services, and other social services that are useful for rural communities	21	35	5	--	3.3	Accepted
i	Information literacy, media literacy and other literacy programmes for children, women, adults and other marginalized members of communities	22	35	--	--	3.4	Accepted

Analysis revealed the types of Community Information Service (CIS) that could be delivered to rural dwellers by librarians for actualization of sustainable development goals. These include agricultural information, business information, health information, information literacy etc. These findings tally with the views of Eid, Altamimi & Shaheen (2016) that libraries are considered a kind of social responsibility due to their contributions to social, educational, cultural and economic aspects.

Research Question 3:

What are the possible challenges librarians could encounter in the process of delivering Community Information Services as Corporate Social Responsibility for actualization of Sustainable Development Goals in the rural communities?

Table 4:
Possible challenges Librarians could encounter in the process of planning and delivering CIS as CSR for actualization of sustainable development goals in rural communities

	<i>Possible challenges Librarians could encounter in the process of planning and delivering CIS as CSR for actualization of SDGs in rural communities</i>	Agree	Disagree
a	Absence of approval and support from the management of parent institutions	47 (82.5%)	10 (17.5%)
b	Financial implications for such programme	55 (96.5%)	2 (3.5%)
c	Possible resistance or non-acceptability by leaders and traditional rulers in the communities involved	38 (66.7%)	19 (33.3%)
d	Possible resistance from librarians and other library staff that will provide logistics for the implementation of the programme	35 (61.4%)	22 (38.6%)

e	Unavailability of communication gadgets and other resources like public address system, projectors, computer systems, stand-by generator, etc	52 (91.2%)	5 (8.8%)
f	Possible absence of ideas and creativity from librarians on how to plan and deliver such programme	31 (54.4%)	26 (45.6%)
g	Librarians may see such as additional responsibility without financial reward	44 (77.2%)	13 (22.8%)

Respondents were asked to indicate the possible challenges which could hinder the delivery of Community Information Services as Corporate Social Responsibility for actualization of Sustainable Development Goals in the rural communities. Data revealed that the financial implications of such programmes ranked highest (96.5%), unavailability of communication gadgets (POS, projectors, computers, generators) was (91.2%), absence of support from institution's management (82.5%) whereas possible absence of ideas and creativity from librarians ranked the least (54.4%).

Test of Hypothesis

The hypothesis tested using Spearman Rank Order Correlation technique at 0.05 level of significance through SPSS version 20 was shown in Table 5 and summarized in Table 6.

The correlation value of 0.936 indicates a very strong positive correlation between Librarians' Perceptions of delivering CIS as CSR for the actualization of SDGs and Nature and Types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR for the actualization of SDGs. Also, since the p-value 0.000 is less than 0.05 (significance level), the null hypothesis is rejected and concludes with 95% confidence that there is a significant positive relationship between Librarians' Perceptions of delivering CIS as CSR for the actualization of SDGs and Nature and Types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR for the actualization of SDGs.

Table 5: SPSS Output of the Correlation between Librarians' Perceptions of delivering CIS as CSR and the Nature and Types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR for actualization of SDGs.

Correlations

	Delivery	Types
Spearman's rho Coefficient Librarians perception of delivering CIS as CSR Correlations Sig. (2 tailed) N	1.000 . 57	.936** .000 57
Types and nature of CIS that could be rendered as CSR Correlation Sig. (2 tailed) N	.936** .000 57	1.000 57

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6: Summary of Spearman rank Correlation

	Grand Mean	Std. Deviation	N	R	P	Decision
Librarians' perception of Delivering CIS as CSR	3.44	0.06	57	0.936**	0.000	Sig.
Nature/Types of CIS that could be rendered as CSR for the actualization of SDGs.	3.40	0.15	57			

Conclusion and recommendations

The issue of ideas, creativity, innovations and initiatives are expected to be strategic part of librarians in this knowledge society. From the responses of librarians in the four institutions surveyed, it is obvious that they are willing to plan and deliver community information services to improve the life of members of their host communities. In addition, the tested hypothesis

revealed that librarians' perceptions also correlated significantly with the nature and types of CIS that could be rendered for the actualization of SDGs in the rural areas. There is no doubt that some challenges may hinder the actualization of such laudable projects by academic librarians.

In view of the foregoing, it is therefore recommended that:

- i. Librarians in academic libraries should use their wealth of knowledge and experience to plan and deliver community information services in our rural areas as social responsibility functions since libraries contribute to improved outcomes across the SDGs
- ii. Librarians that are considering such CSR should ensure that they have the support and approval their parent institution for more impact.
- iii. Where facilities are lacking, academic libraries should liaise with Community information centers and Health centers in the rural communities to provide CIS and make positive contributions to the wider community.
- iv. There is need to create awareness on Community Information Service and Corporate Social Responsibility among Nigerian academic librarians as these concepts are gaining increased importance in academic libraries of the developed world.

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