

**Fee – based Library Services in Nigerian Public Libraries:
A Case Study of Rivers State Public Library**

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Abstract

The paper examined fee-based and consultancy services rendered in Nigerian public libraries. The poor condition of many public libraries across Nigeria has made them unattractive for learning. Adequate fund is vital for the satisfactory running and maintenance of any kind of library. The fundamental principle for satisfactory resources and services is to have sufficient fund. Modern libraries must therefore look inwards in generating internal revenue in order to survive. This paper x-rays the major ways by which the Rivers State Public Library generates fund. These include sale of library space, information repackaging, consultancy services, and provision of periodicals for litigation among others. The work recommended policy formulation that will give a legal framework for fee based services, creating a marketing unit responsible for fee based services and sensitizing potential users about the availability of fee-based services in the libraries. These will go a long way in promoting fee-based services in public libraries.

Key words: Fee-based services, Nigerian public libraries, Rivers State Public Library, library consultancy services.

Introduction

Fee-based and consultancy services are age long services rendered by libraries. Such services are available to both the library primary clientele and other identifiable user groups who are not the institutions primary clientele. Ifidon & Ifidon (2007) noted that fee-based library and information services is not new, even in the highly industrialized countries such as the United States, where it was introduced in 1967. These services are provided for a fee to both the library primary clientele and other identifiable user groups who are not the institutions primary clientele. Webb (2003) states that fee-based services are a range of information and services provided on demand in return for payment.

Fees can be charged for online searches, article delivery, photocopying

services, etc. Fee-based services place monetary value on the provision of specific services as against the conventional trends of free information and services provision in libraries. The fees charged on the services are used to ensure consistency in the provision of these services.

Commenting on financing of public libraries, the Library and Information Services Council (1988) through the Library Association guidelines accepted that:

It is not considered practicable for all conceivable libraries and information services to be provided by the public sector free of charge to all who demand them in all circumstances... the task is then to define (a) which services should be fully

supported from the public purse;

- (b). which services should be partially supported;
- (c). which services should not be supported at all
- (d). which services should be provided at a profit, either within or outside the public sector.

Consequently there will be many variations of what might actually happen in local circumstances, with different types of customers and demands.

Usually, public libraries generate fund from registration of users, fines and extra services provided to clients. Where facilities are made available to any person beyond those ordinarily provided as part of the library service, a charge can be made. It is also possible for a library to charge for the provision of service to industries or other special groups. Practically, every library charges fines for overdue books (Roberts, 1985).

Public libraries can be termed democratic institutions. The people have a direct financial interest in them because their taxes and rates determine the standard of the library's service (Blagden, 1982). This means that the major services rendered by public libraries should not be charged for but rendered free of charge in every ramification.

Corroborating Blagden's view (1982), the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto of (1973) stated that the public library should be maintained wholly from public funds and no direct charge should be made to anyone for its services, since charges would limit accessibility. The manifesto also posits that charges are in contradiction to the promotion of literacy and self-education and would cause great difficulty in inter-library and technical information services.

However, the Manifesto reiterated that it is common in some countries to ask users to pay a fee or fine when keeping an item after it is due. This is sometimes necessary to ensure that items are kept in circulation and not retained for a long time by one user. Charges are also made for personalized

services. These personalized services according to Igbeka (2008) include the photocopies, literature searches, scanned documents, document transfer, inter library loans, document delivery. Others are indexing and abstracting services, bibliographic compilations as well as bindery services.

The public libraries in Nigeria have the same universal function of serving the general public by providing educational opportunities for the self development of the potentialities for both rural and urban dwellers. In order to realize the objectives, public libraries engage in the acquisition, organization, and dissemination of information available in the form of print and electronic resources for effective use by patrons. Patrons of public libraries are large as they cut across all walks of life. These clients include illiterates, pensioners, children, adolescents, adults, farmers, physically – challenged persons etc. The public library is therefore the main arena through which the overall information resources in various areas of knowledge are made freely available to all the members of the society irrespective of age, sex, religion and cultural background.

The Rivers State Public Library

The Rivers State Public Library Board was established in 1971 by law, under the Rivers State Library Board Edict No. 23 of April 1971. The Board replaced the defunct Eastern Nigeria Library Board which was a government parastatal responsible for library services in Eastern Nigeria. The Rivers State library Board inherited the state assets and liabilities of the defunct Eastern Library Board, including the Divisional Library commissioned in 1962 at Bernard Carr Street, Port Harcourt (Library Annual Report, 1983).

The Rivers State Library Board sought among others, to establish libraries in the state and administer them for public use, to offer professional advice and technical assistance towards the development of other public libraries in the state, particularly the school libraries and libraries for state government ministries and local government areas. It was also expected to provide repository facilities for the enforcement of the

legal deposit provisions in the Rivers State Library Board Law, relating to publication of books which states that every book published in the state shall, within one month of publication, be deposited in the library through the Director of Library Services. This is for the purpose of preservation in the state library.

Currently, the Rivers State Public Library is under the parent body of the State Ministry of Education. The Director of Library Services is its Chief Executive. The library services function through three departments namely, Reader Services Department, Acquisition and Technical Services Department and Administrative Department. These Departments acquire, process, preserve and disseminate information materials for public use.

Fee-Based and Consultancy Services in Rivers State Public Library

Currently direct charges are made by public library authorities for a number of services and these can be grouped into five main categories indentified by the Library Association (1988). These categories are:

- Those services for which a profit can be seen on each operation e.g. photocopying
- Those services considered to be of added value for which a charge is made to cover replacement costs e.g. loan of video/audio cassettes
- Those services provided within the overall framework of the library and available from time to time on a charge eg renting a meeting room, packing lot, etc.
- Those services which are partially or wholly recharged to other departments of local government or sectors of government

Fund is vital for satisfactory running and maintenance of any kind of library. Availability of sufficient fund helps libraries to maintain best practices. The condition of many libraries across Nigeria has made them unattractive for learning. Thus, modern libraries need to seek alternative sources of

income apart from the charges made on overdue fines so as to enable the libraries provide the required information services to users. Akporhonor (2005), argued that the emerging spending patterns and societal pressure requires libraries to launch money-yielding ventures such as consultancy and pricing information services

Apart from the general library services provided to clientele for free, other personalized services are offered for charges. Such services include:

Reprographic Services

Photocopying services are lucrative in libraries. They serve for good income generation. The Rivers State Public Library owns a business centre, which is run on contract basis. The contractors, on agreement, pay a fixed amount to the library on monthly basis while the library leases out its photocopiers to them. The servicing cost of the machines and equipment like photocopiers, computers, scanning machines, printers, laminating and spiral binding machines is taken care of by the contractor. Though the contractor tries to maximize profit, there are regulations guiding arbitrary pricing.

Cyber Café Service/Internet Browsing

The advent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria is the reason for the rapid growth and development of cyber café business. The business is lucrative but usually plagued by dearth of power supply in the country, yet, it is a good business especially for the Rivers State public library service. The café is equipped with state of the art facilities and run by a Contractor who makes monthly payment to the library for hiring the place. It generates revenue to the library.

Advertisement and Promotion

Advertisement and promotion can generate income, using public library free space. The Rivers State Library has a large notice board mounted at the foot of the entrance to the adult library, open to those who want to advertise. The library generates revenues from such advertisement and

promotion placements. Income generated from this service is often small but regular. Library publications also provide spaces for the public to advertise and promote their products, thereby generating income for the library.

Sale of Library Space

Public libraries also engage in space reservation for the purpose of income generation. The Rivers State public library occupies a large space, which is utilized for business purposes such as car park, bookshops, etc. Substantial amount of money accrues to the library through this business. The library leases out the spaces while the hirer bears all the risks.

Repackaging of Information

Information repackaging and organization of access points are best avenues for reaching the clients. Information repackaging according to Oguntuase and Falaiye (2004) is an intellectual process that involves the extraction of information from an information source or data which is then followed by the evaluation of the quality of information, analyzing and interpreting it in a broad sense to enable the librarian produce a new package meant for a target group or class. The target group consists of members of the host community as well as professionals in various fields of human knowledge who are constrained by time and search skill even though they need information. Such clients do not mind paying for repackaged information on daily basis. Feedback from clients on the relevance of information also helps the librarians to keep abreast of recent information relevant to meeting the changing needs of the clients.

Consultancy Services

Librarians are in a good position to identify relevant information sources e.g. bibliographies, full-text databases or the internet resources. They have experience in searching the library's indexes and databases and acquiring information from seminars and local and international conferences. They can therefore plan and organize seminars for bankers, businessmen, politicians, etc.

Ajebomogun, Oduwole and Agboola

(2008) observed that a librarian who is knowledgeable in the identification, location and evaluation of information resources is in a better position to guide users who are uninitiated in the complexities of information retrieval and evaluation. Such users will be overwhelmed if information is made available to them at a token price. Fees should be charged for these services when they are rendered outside the frontiers of the library and to non-registered clients. This constitutes another source of income to the library.

The Rivers State public library service engages in consulting for corporate organizations such as Shell, Liquefied Natural Gas Company (LNG), etc for setting up of school libraries for secondary schools in their areas of operations as a type of corporate responsibility to the host community. Other services include evaluation and organization of the company's archives. All these services are rendered for a fee.

Sale of Materials Weeded from the Shelves

Generating revenue from the sale of books withdrawn from shelves has been a long practice in the public library service in Rivers State. Usually an evaluation of library collection is carried out at intervals to sort outdated books or materials for weeding. These weeded materials are not thrown away but are sold to second hand book dealers. Though this does not happen regularly, revenue accruing from such sales constitutes the library's treasure from time to time.

Hall Hire Services

Hall hire service is an important source of revenue source in public libraries especially in Rivers State Public library. The library rents its hall for conferences, workshops, book launches, meetings, film shows, exhibitions and other social events.

The hall is well patronized by members of the library community and beyond. Akintola (2006) states that the library charges fees for renting of its halls, quick references, enquiries and registration of users

Provision of Periodicals for Litigation

One fundamental source of revenue

accruing to the Rivers State library service is charges from periodicals for litigation. Certification of newspaper for litigation is one very important service rendered by the Rivers State Public library. Newspaper publications used as evidence can only be accepted in court of jurisdiction with certified stamp and signature from the public library. The library charges fees on every page of the newspaper certified, and in some cases an additional fee is charged if the court requires a librarian to appear in court with the certified copy of the document.

It has been realized that free library and information services are not likely to be fully achieved as the scope of information field has widened and increased expectations. However, libraries should decide the services that can and should remain free at the point of usage and ensure that they remain so. Winkworth (1992) argued that libraries are public institutions and that any income generated is justified for reasons other than profit.

Conclusion

It is high quality services that prompt customers to return to the library. Without relevant materials that address the specific clients, community, or market segment of a library, the library's support base will dwindle rather than expand. If the public library fails in collection development and information dissemination, the patronage will reduce. This will also affect the generation of income through fee based services.

Fee-based and Consultancy Services and Operations of Public Libraries

The justification for fee-based services in the operations of public libraries cannot be overemphasized.

1. The information society has resulted in information overload; thereby making the demand for information a daunting task for individuals and organizations. This makes information seekers to require the librarians help for timely and advanced services. Such specialized services should be rendered for fees.

2. The emerging trend of internet-based information presents possibilities of some researchers not being able to surf relevant resources from junks. This could be due to lack of search skills. It therefore behooves librarians to apply their professionalism in harnessing relevant materials from several irrelevant sources. Such services justify some charges when they are rendered outside the frontiers of normal public library services
3. Lack of fee-based services in public libraries could have serious consequences on library funding. As public libraries depend on the government for fund, other sources of income will help these libraries meet users' needs.
4. The urgent need for public libraries to be innovative for alternative sources of fund justifies fee-based services in libraries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will help improve fee-based services

1. Formulation of a policy that would give the legal framework to institutionalized fee-based services for users that require personalized services. The class of users that may require advanced information services include researchers, companies and other profit making organizations as well as professionals in various fields of life.
2. There is need for deliberate efforts to integrate ICTs and make librarians more active users of the internet in order to ensure effective delivery of fee-based services in public libraries.
4. Public libraries should carve out marketing units that will be responsible for information business.
5. All stakeholders in the knowledge and information industry, including the potential users should be sensitized about the concept and philosophy of institutionalizing fee-based services in libraries.

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