LIBRARY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
The role of Library in Developing Countries:
with special reference to Tropical Africa.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Today's Africa is caught in a rapid developing world where it is being forced to change at a pace unprecedented in modern history. Transformation over night from colonial suppression to self-assertive membership in modern society is involving millions upon millions. The processes of evolution are irritating and puzzling problems especially when, as in Africa, about eight out of every ten people can neither read nor write.

This paper looks at how library development in Africa can assist in achieving a rapid and better development needed in today's Africa. How African Librarians, through their libraries, can assist in maintaining and spreading African culture amongst their peoples is a main factor in this paper. Another major point discussed is the role of the library in educational development.

When discussing library development in Africa, consideration must be given to, among other factors, Africa's size, population, different culture, and different languages. In short, the fact that Africa is not a homogenous entity should not be overlooked. With this in mind, the writer has concentrated on the area South of the Sahara and North of South Africa. The area often referred to as Tropical Africa. This vast area comprises over thirty independent countries with a population of over 170 million.

Although what is discussed in this paper refers to Africa, mainly Tropical Africa, it may apply in many ways to other parts of the world having the same problems.
Since the close of World War II, Africa has gone through many changes that have increased considerably the pace of library development in this vast area. The emergence of most of Africa into political independence is of specific importance. In 1950 there were only 4 independent countries in Africa: Ethiopia, Liberia, South Africa, and Egypt. Today there are over 40. Colonial rule has practically disappeared.

Political independence in Africa has been followed by planned efforts designed at raising living standards through economic and social development. A major factor in this process is the rapid expansion of education. Since 1950, enrollment in primary schools, secondary schools, universities and other post-secondary institutions has increased immensely. In Africa today, there are over 30 million students attending primary schools, over 5 million attending secondary schools, and over 4 hundred thousand attending institutions of higher education. There are over 2 hundred thousand teachers. (These figures were obtained from United Nations Yearbook for 1973).

Despite the progress being made in Africa, many problems, directly affecting library development, remain to be solved. Funds, private as well as public, are scarce. Adult illiteracy is still great in most countries. There are many local languages. In many countries, book production does not exist and in those countries where it does exist, it is limited. Imported books are very expensive and often unsuitable in content as well as in language.

Although education has progressed in Africa, more than half of the children in this area do not attend school. The dropout rate is extremely high; a very small percentage of those enrolled in the first year complete the primary school. Those leaving school, including university graduates, remain unemployed. With these odds, the challenge facing those responsible for library development is how to identify and provide the information materials and services needed to improve social and economic conditions.

As Africa is not a homogenous entity, library development can best be viewed by dividing the continent into regional groups. Tropical Africa can be divided into two groups:
a) French-speaking Africa, formerly administered by France or Belgium. The educated elite use French, but local languages are spoken by most of the population. Continental European library traditions are clearly reflected.

b) English-speaking Africa, former British territories plus Liberia and Ethiopia. Local languages are also widely used. British and American library influences are predominant.

Many of the independent countries in Tropical Africa have systematized development plans, giving high priority to education but only few of these plans, as in Nigeria and Ghana, include specific provision for library services.

In 1949 Ghana passed the first library legislation in English-speaking Africa. A central library board, responsible to the minister of education, was created. The result stimulated library legislations in Eastern Nigeria (1955), Sierra Leone (1959), Tanzania (1963), Uganda (1964), Kenya (1965), and Malawi (1963). These are only a few of the countries in Tropical Africa having library legislation. In most of the countries having library legislation, public library service on a national basis is provided. In some countries the board also provides library services to schools and supervises libraries of government departments. Although the establishment of library legislation in most countries in Tropical Africa has shown positive results in the educational development in these countries, as in Tanzania, there are still many countries in this area without library laws.

Due to many reasons library legislation is lacking in most of French-speaking Africa. Progress towards obtaining library law is being made in the Ivory Coast as well as in many countries in this area.

Although library legislation does not exist in all countries in Tropical Africa, library services are provided. The following types of libraries exist in most countries in this area: national libraries, special libraries, university libraries, school libraries, and public libraries.

Among the few national libraries in Tropical Africa are the Ethiopian National Library established in 1944, and the National Library in
Nigeria established in 1964. Many of the national libraries in this area serve as the national reference and research library and bibliographic center, as in Nigeria.

Special libraries in most of the countries in Tropical Africa, are government department libraries. Even though they hold valuable documents, they provide little or no service due to the lack of trained and competent staff. The best-run special libraries in this area, are found in industrial, scientific, and technical research institutions.

In 1948, before independence, university libraries began to develop in English-speaking Tropical Africa, in Ghana and Nigeria. At present, there are over 14 such libraries in this area. Aside from these two countries, university libraries exist in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Zambia, Tanzania, and Uganda to name a few.

University libraries in French-speaking Tropical Africa began in 1952 in Senegal. Togo and Congo, along with many other countries in this area have university libraries.

Well-qualified professional staffs and well-equipped modern buildings are two of the many reasons why most of the leading libraries in Tropical Africa are university libraries.

Due to the grave educational problems in Tropical Africa, school libraries are rather scarce. A large percentage of school-age children are without schools. Trained teachers and adequate school buildings are in demand. Textbooks of high standard are needed. Against these odds, effective school library services can be reached only as an integral part of planned educational reforms.

Well-organized public library systems are operating in only a few countries in Tropical Africa. Notably Ghana, parts of Nigeria, and Tanzania. UNESCO and the British Council aided a regional pilot project in Nigeria in 1957-1958 but this was disrupted in 1966 due to the civil war. During the time that this project existed it achieved excellent results. Such a project is being carried out in other parts of Tropical Africa.

Efforts are being made in other countries in Tropical Africa to develop public library system. During 1962-1965, UNESCO aided the organisation
of the Central Library in the Ivory Coast as a public library pilot project.

Most of the people in Tropical Africa are largely unserved by public libraries. Due to the present high rate of illiteracy among adults, and the severe lack of reading materials, special consideration concerning priorities for libraries are needed.

Most public libraries in Tropical Africa render such services as suggested in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto. These services are carried out as far as the economy allows.

National bibliographies are issued in such countries as Ghana, and Nigeria. Progress in the development of national bibliographies is being made in other countries. Accessions lists and other bibliographic publications are issued by most university libraries, some special libraries, and the few well-established documentation centers.

Most of the French-speaking countries in Tropical Africa have converted their documentation centers they inherited into national archives, as in Cameroon and Gabon. National libraries have also been established from such documentation centers (Togo).
"Information and education are basic requirements for economic and social development in every nation. Books, pamphlets, periodicals, films and other library materials are indispensable tools at all levels of education from training in literacy to education and continuing adult education . . . Libraries are one of the most effective methods of making such materials available to all the people. In addition to their cultural contribution, libraries have an essential role to play in the economic and social progress of every nation, state and community".

The above declaration, from the report of the 1962 UNESCO Regional Seminar on Development of Public Libraries in Africa, throws great emphasis on the library profession in Africa today. The need of well-run libraries is also reflected in this declaration.

African librarians and their libraries are expected to play a very important part in the present educational and cultural struggle in Africa today.

It often happens that foreign librarians as well as foreign educationists draw to the attention of readers that countries in developing areas, such as in Africa, have no library service. These librarians and educationists fail to mention that this is due to many factors: such as, language, education, and, not the least, the lack of publishing possibilities. Until lately, it was never mentioned that foreign publishing firms as well as foreign press were inaccessible to African writers unless they were anti-Africans. Foreign writers who wrote about African and African affairs were also rejected unless they shared anti-Africanism. Instead, useless materials by writers not in favour of Africans, nor African culture were preferred and published. Such materials led to the spreading of inaccurate information about Africans and African culture. The independence wave that has swept - and is sweeping - throughout Africa Today has contributed greatly to the publishing of accurate information on and about Africa and its peoples.

Most African librarians, anxious to prove that they do have libraries, fill their libraries with stacks and stacks of useless foreign books - books that are suitable only for the society in which they are written - and then carry on the kind of librarianship they have inherited and what
they have experienced in foreign countries. As a result, the purpose for which their libraries were established is disregarded. The less fortunate users - illiterates as well as those not well educated - are ignored.

The African librarian with his foreign experience must bear in mind that a library - of any kind - is a place for information and that it spreads culture. Thus, the library is a necessary requisite in the educational development in a country. It must be remembered that no race is educated by incorporating only the ideals of another race and disregarding its own. Every nation trains its citizens in its way of life in order that they may be able to fit into the society to which they belong.

Most libraries that were inherited by African librarians were established for colonial educational aims. According to the colonialists, education meant making the African forget his real identity - leaving him without any knowledge of his culture. Such libraries exist and the African librarians seem to accept them. It is about time that African librarians begin to examine the need of a change of information in their libraries.

In order to remove such prejudicial scenes from African culture, the African librarian must work with all members in the community: writers, teachers, organisations, institutions, etc. He should make all efforts to obtain information that will help to give better light on his race before this passes away forever. Folk tales, myths, histories, etc. can be of great assistance. He should begin to take over from his forefathers by trying to find out what had been accomplished before a new and foreign culture was imposed upon them.

Information regarding types of books and other reading materials that can assist in developing the educational standards should be constantly suggested to the proper authorities.

African librarians should see to it that their libraries reflect in detail the background of the African and not only that of other races. African librarians would be highly considered by Africans as well as those interested in the development of African libraries if they give their libraries its own image.
"Only the educated man is free" said Epictetus.

Realizing the urgent need of all people to achieve greater freedom - cultural, economic, and political - several government agencies, alone or together with UNESCO, have spared and are sparing no effort within their power in fighting illiteracy.

African librarians should encourage the illiterates into being literates and at the same time, assist those who have become literates in retaining and improving the knowledge they have acquired. One way in which this can be accomplished is by working together with the mass media - radio and television. The librarian should be greatly interested in literacy training and reading improvement. He must realize that backwardness in reading in a society is also the responsibility of the library. The library should be active in the country's reading development program.

Close co-operation with teachers of all categories is very essential. The librarian should assist in instructing teachers in utilizing the library so that they in turn will encourage the usefulness of the library among their students. The function of the library as an instructional materials center can also be spread in this way.

Due to many reasons children leaving school tend to fall back into illiteracy. The African librarian can play an active role in this problem by promoting the idea of establishing branch libraries as well as mobil libraries in areas where they are needed. Where these exist, the librarian should encourage the use of the services offered. Information regarding all activities arranged by the library should be spread within the community. The aims of the library cannot be fully accomplished without informing the public of the types of services offered and at the same time getting the public to use these services.

The librarian must be prepared to work closely with the writers in his society. In case there are no writers, he must devise the situation where he can utilize the existing material. Where there are writers, he can render his assistance by informing them of the types of reading
materials needed in the library.

The librarian should not hesitate in informing the public of the essentialness of the library and the various services it offers. In short, the role of the library in the society should be made known to the public.
Although the establishing of a library may seem simple, it is a delicate and complex matter. Many factors have to be closely studied. In areas where colonialism has existed, where languages as well as culture are numerous, where books and other reading materials are not published, and over 80% of the population is illiterate, library establishment is extremely difficult.

Those responsible for library establishment in Africa or any developing area should constantly be aware of the fact that the role that the library plays in a society is influenced greatly by the way in which literacy spreads within the society. When deciding to establish a library, great considerations must be given to literacy as well as illiteracy; because, without a literate society to make use of it, the library will be useless. Furthermore, literacy is bound to decrease if there is a library acting as a source for reading material.

As changes in social conditions in a society are brought about when a library is established, the librarian must always try to supply the best possible services within the existing social frame-work even though his personal opinion may differ.

Problems that must be closely studied when establishing a library service are staffs and books. Although these may seem obvious, they are often overlooked. There are other problems that are of great importance but the two mentioned above require special study.

Trained and competent librarians must be available before starting a library service. In areas such as Africa, where there lack examples of libraries or patterns of librarianship, those showing interest in the librarianship profession must be sent to some foreign country - with well-organized training facilities - for training.

African librarians should be very careful when imitating foreign libraries. They should be conscious of the cultural and social conditions existing in their respective societies. African librarians should always bear in mind that the training appropriate for one type of cultural and social condition is rarely equally appropriate for another.

The existing cultural tradition within a society should not be overlooked
when establishing a library service. The African librarian should see to it that African cultural tradition is presented in his library.

The African librarian is faced with a grave problem, in the form of books collection, when establishing a library service. Although this problem exists throughout the life of the library, it is more difficult to handle when starting a library service. It must be noted that in the absence of reliable bookstores and publishing firms, African librarians must rely to a great extent on book reviews which take up mostly books that are written in foreign languages. Furthermore, these books don't often contain the type of information suitable in African society.

The African librarian must carefully select books that are best suitable for the development of his society. Books and other reading materials from donors to African libraries should be accepted provided that these are useful in the development of the society.

When selecting books for the establishment of a library service, the librarian should not only give consideration to the literates. As one of the main objectives of the library is to assist in eliminating illiteracy in Africa, the African librarian, when selecting books for his library, should include books that will interest the illiterates as well as the literates. Books best suited for the illiterates are picture books; such books can arouse the interest of the illiterates in the society to becoming literates and at the same time help to spread the usefulness of the library.

In conclusion, African librarians should remember that the library in a society is not only for the literates of that society but for all citizens within the society.
In order to increase the use of relevant information needed for the
development of a country, well-planned libraries, documentation centers,
and archives are essential. These are, without doubts, sources of
information vitally needed for the social, economic, and cultural
development of the country. Realizing this, many countries in Tropical
Africa have included library development in their development plans.

Although many countries in Tropical Africa do have library services,
they do not often satisfy the purpose for which they were established.
This is due to such reasons as, incompetent staffs, inadequate books,
and not the least, the high percentage of illiteracy in these areas.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
Organisation, established in 1946 through the interest of 46 countries,
is working closely with many governments in Tropical Africa as well as
other parts of the world in solving the existing illiteracy problem.
Aside from building schools and training teachers, UNESCO is involved
in plans to develop the public library systems in these countries.

UNESCO's views in public library are proclaimed in its manifesto
which first came out in 1949 and was revised in 1972. Here follows in
full the revised edition of the manifesto.

UNESCO PUBLIC LIBRARY MANIFESTO

The public library

UNESCO and public libraries:
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization
was founded to promote peace and spiritual welfare by working through
the minds of men and women.

This manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a
living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential
agent for the fostering of peace and understanding between people and
between nations.
The public library:

A democratic institution for education, culture, and information.

The public library is a practical demonstration of democracy's faith in universal education as a continuing and lifelong process, in the appreciation of the achievement of humanity in knowledge and culture.

The public library is the principal means whereby the record of man's thoughts and ideas, and the expression of his creative imagination, are made freely available to all.

The public library is concerned with the refreshment of man's spirit by the provision of books for relaxation and pleasure, with assistance to the student, and with provision of up-to-date technical scientific and sociological information.

The public library should be established under the clear mandate of law, so framed as to ensure nation-wide provision of public library service. Organized co-operation between libraries is essential so that total national resources should be fully used and be at the service of any reader.

It should be maintained wholly from public funds, and no direct charge should be made to anyone for its services.

To fulfill its purposes, the public library must be readily accessible, and its doors open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, language, status or educational attainment.

Resources and services:

The public library must offer to adults and children the opportunity to keep in touch with their times, to educate themselves continuously and keep abreast of progress in the sciences and arts.

Its contents should be a living demonstration of the evolution of knowledge and culture, constantly reviewed, kept up to date and attractively presented. In this way it will help people form their own opinions and develop their creative and critical capacities and powers
of appreciation. The public library is concerned with the communication of information and ideas, whatever the form in which these may be expressed.

Since the printed word has been for centuries the accepted medium for the communication of knowledge, ideas and information, books, periodicals, newspapers remain the most important resources of public libraries.

But science has created new forms of record and these will become an increasing part of the public library's stock, including print in reduced form for compact storage and transport, films, slides, gramophone records, audio and video tape, for adults and children, with the necessary equipment for individual use and for cultural activities.

The total collection should include material on all subjects, to satisfy all tastes at differing educational and cultural standards.

All languages used by a community should be represented, and there should be books of world importance in their original languages.

The public library building should be centrally situated, accessible to the physically handicapped, and open at times convenient to the user. The building and its furnishings should be attractive, informal and welcoming, and direct access by readers to the shelves is essential.

The public library is a natural cultural centre for the community, bringing together as it does people of similar interests. Space and equipment are therefore necessary for exhibitions, discussions, lectures, musical performances and films, both for adults and children.

Branch libraries and mobil libraries should be provided in rural and suburban areas.

Trained and competent staff in adequate numbers are vital to select and organize resources and assist users. Special training will be required for many activities such as work with children and handicapped, audio-visual materials, and the organization of cultural activities.

Use by children:

It is in early life that a taste for books and the habit of using
libraries and their resources are most easily acquired. The public library has therefore a particular duty to provide opportunity for the informal and individual choice of books and other material by children. Special collections and, if possible, separate areas should be provided for them. The children's library can then become a lively, stimulating place, in which activities of various kinds will be a source of cultural inspiration.

Use by students:

Students of all ages must be able to rely on the public library to supplement the facilities provided by their academic institutions. Those pursuing individual studies may be entirely dependent on the public library to meet their needs for books and information.

The handicapped reader:

There is an increasing concern with the welfare of the elderly and all handicapped people. Problems of loneliness, and mental and physical handicaps of all kinds, can be alleviated in many ways by the public library.

Improved means of access, provision of mechanical reading aids, books in large print and recorded on tape, service in hospitals and institutions, and personal service to the home are some of the ways in which the public library can extend its services to those who need it most.

The public library in the community:

The public library should be active and positive in its outlook, demonstrating the value of its services and encouraging their use.

It should link itself with other educational, social and cultural institutions, including schools, adult-education groups, leisure-activity groups and with those concerned with the promotion of the arts.

It should be watchful for the emergence of new needs and interests in the community, such as the establishment of groups with special reading requirements and leisure interests to be represented in the library's collections and activities.

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In short, the above manifesto describes the public library as,
"... a democratic institution operated by the people for the people ... :
established and maintained under clear authority of law; supported wholly
or mainly from public funds; open for free use on equal terms to all
members of the community, regardless of occupation, creed, class or
race ...".

The purpose of including this manifesto in this paper is to show how
essential the public library is in the educational, cultural, and
social development of a country. The need of the public library, in
fact, libraries in general in Africa today should not be overlooked.
The following materials were used as sources for obtaining the information needed.


Other materials read:


Expert meeting on National Planning of Documentation and Library Services in Africa. (UNESCO 1971).


Jones, Delano Franklin: Library and National Development. The role of library in developing countries; with special reference to Tropical Africa. Borås, ht 1975. 19 s.

This paper looks at how library development in Tropical Africa can assist in achieving a rapid and better development needed in today's Africa. How African Librarians, through their libraries, can assist in maintaining and spreading African culture among their peoples is a major point mentioned. The role of the library in educational development is another point mentioned.

As the main aim of this paper is to create a discussion among those responsible for library development in Tropical (Middle) Africa, it should be noted that the points raised have been briefly tackled. The views expressed are entirely those of the writer and for which he takes responsibility. Any comments can be forwarded to the writer in-care-of the College of Librarianship.

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