



LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES FOR EQUAL GENDER PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The focus of this study centered on gender and gender equality, equal gender participation, library and information service provision on equal gender participation and challenges faced by librarians and libraries in information service provision on gender participation. The findings show that there are many obstacles that librarians and libraries encounter in meeting this responsibility. It further revealed that the problem of internet connectivity is a big challenge that can hinder partnership between libraries and other agencies advocating for equal gender participation among others. Recommendations were made on what to be done to further improve the quality of our service delivery on the matter of discourse to make the librarians and the libraries to face future challenges. In ensuring gender participation in the country, there is need for information on this subject matter. Sensitization and awareness of the female gender should be put in place; as it is a common saying that a person who does not know his/her worth cannot meet up to the expectations of the society. In the realization of this, librarians are at the core front of providing information services to achieve this vision.

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Introduction

This topic is in line with the 5th and 10th Goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which is to be implemented and achieved in every member country by 2030. The 10th goal states that there should be reduced inequalities; empowering and promoting social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, *sex*, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. In essence, when there is no gender discrimination, there would be full participation by all and sundry in the area of politics and leadership, legislation and decision making that can move the nation forward.

Gender is not a synonym for women; it is more or less a social construct-a socially constructed inequality between men and women (Enemuo, 1999). Equal gender participation proposes an ideology known as feminism which believes in equality of rights for women and their emancipation from all forms of domination exerted by men (Osezua and Osezua, 2008).

In a report by United Nations Information Centre (2019) on the progress of the world's women 2019-2020 on family in a changing world, it showed that achieving SDGs depends on promoting gender equality within families. Although, efforts are being put in place especially through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with little progress recorded so far. Hence, librarians must at this period blow their whistle loud as relevant stakeholders in the nation to sensitize and provide information that will further enhance equality. It is only when there is gender equality that equal gender participation can be possible. This will increase political representation and sustained political involvement of women.

Statement of the Problem

In most developing nations of the world, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence. Even though, it is not a fundamental human right yet, it is the foundation for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Girls and women are faced with domestic violence, sexual violence, Female Genital Mutilation and exception from representations in political, economic decision- making processes. Menstruation remains taboo, and without information, facilities and products to manage it, the health, welfare and educational

prospects for millions of adolescent girls around the world are hindered. Adolescent girls also have an increased risk of gender-based violence-including sexual harassment-in times of both peace and conflict. It is on this basis that the researchers decided to examine gender and gender equality, equal gender participation, library and information service provision on equal gender participation and challenges faced by librarians and libraries in information service provision on gender participation and what the libraries and librarians can do because they are at the core front of providing information in different formats to meet the needs of the both male and female and to dispel their fears, anxiety and ignorance towards gender equality.

Gender and Gender Equality

Gender is a very sensitive issue in every aspect of human endeavour. It is a fact that there are differences in how males and females perform certain role expectations Danbaba (2015) while referring to Ferraciano and Mccrae (2001) observed that certain specific personality traits related to gender influence how children even learn. They argued that contrary to predictions from the social role model, gender disparity was most pronounced in European and American cultures in which traditional sex roles are minimized.

According to United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2011), gender equality means that “women and men, and girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. It does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike.” On a global scale, achieving gender equality also requires eliminating harmful practices against women and girls, including sex trafficking, femicide, wartime sexual violence, and other oppression tactics. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) stated that, "despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They have less access to property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence.

According to the United Nations SDGs, on Goals 5, it was spelt out that “Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit

societies and humanity at large. Implementing new legal frameworks regarding female equality in the workplace and the eradication of harmful practices targeted at women is crucial to ending the gender-based discrimination prevalent in many countries around the world” (UN, SDGs). Thus, organizations like United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) are advocates of gender equality. Hence, Library and information centres as repositories of knowledge that receive various clients which include males and females with the purpose of acquiring information are considered a custodian of attitudes of various people in the utilization of such information resources.

Equal Gender Participation

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right of every person to take part in the government of his or her country. Equal access of men and women to power, decision-making and leadership at all levels is a necessary precondition for the proper functioning of democracy. Equal participation of men and women in political affairs makes governments more representative of the composition of society; it makes them more accountable and transparent, and ensures that the interests of women are taken into account in policy-making.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, including the right to vote and to stand for election, as well as to hold public office at all levels of government. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures to overcome historical discrimination against women and obstacles to women's participation in decision-making processes, including legislation and temporary special measures. Equal gender participation also involves fair representation in politics, equal rights for women in marriage, divorce, property/land ownership and inheritance.

The Present State of the Nation on Gender Participation

Women are more likely to participate in both private and public decision-making if they have greater knowledge, economic assets and income-earning capacity which in turn increase their self-esteem and confidence. Support from husbands, other family members and local leaders are also essential and they need to be made aware of the importance of women being involved in such activities. It is unfortunate today, that most women in third – world countries do not know their legal rights, as such they are either silenced or sidelined. Years back, women, have been excluded from power and decision-making processes (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005).

Also, in European and American cultures, gender disparity was most pronounced as argued by Danbabale (2015). However, in our nation Nigeria, women are gradually being involved in politics and the decision – making process of the country. Women are now seen occupying high position like Director – Generals, Heads of Parastatals (at Federal, State and Local levels), Ministers, Chief Judges, Parliament members, Head of committees etc. among others. In the area of education, women can now attain Professorial cadre in any field of study, and are also given equal opportunities to head tertiary institutions of learning. This is not far – fetched from the information they are exposed to which had turned their perceptions right.

Library and Information Services for Equal Gender Participation in Nigeria

Information had been described as an intangible commodity that is capable of dispelling the ignorant state of the recipient; a vital tool for development. Across the globe access to timely and relevant information had been described as an instrument of social change which has also enriched and improved the lives of the citizens. It creates curiosity, awareness, awakening, and understanding of phenomenon that can assist the recipient to make informed decision.

In promoting and sustaining gender participation, the role of information cannot be overemphasized this is in tandem with a common statement that “he who is not informed will be deformed”. In essence, the information at one’s disposal will determine the course of action to take. Information relating to women’s fundamental human rights, health information, agricultural information sources, job related information, information on education and political information

will enhance their participation with their counterpart males. Librarians are therefore at the core front of providing information in variety of formats to meet their needs and to dispel their fears, anxiety and ignorance.

According to Onoyeyan and Adesina (2014), libraries offer secure environments in which women and girls can obtain the information they need to take charge of their lives and influence their societies. Libraries can also help to promote gender equality and empower women when selecting resources taking into account the broad areas of women's work and interests, and the sometimes lower levels of literacy which women have. They further quoted Malekabadizade, Shokrameh & Hosseini (2009) that the cooperation and assistance of librarians is a basis for any nation to gain development and by this cooperation and the provision of useful information in economic, cultural, social and political contexts, development becomes possible.

In specific terms, libraries can provide information services on gender participation through the following ways:

- i. Creating awareness on the need for gender equality and gender participation;
- ii. Acquiring and providing access to materials that will meet the specific information needs of women in variety of formats;
- iii. Organizing and hosting local forums from time to time where people can talk through problems, such as women violence (domestic and sexual), women's rights, etc.
- iv. Establishing strong partnership and cooperation with local, international and global agencies advocating for gender participation;
- v. Provision of job and career information for the women folks through their current awareness service;
- vi. Outreach and extension services to neighboring communities who cannot access library services at their remote end for awareness and sensitization on women issues.
- vii. Public speaking through the mass media (radio and television programmes) on the need for equal gender participation.

Challenges facing Libraries on Information Service Provision on Gender Participation in Nigeria

Despite the important roles expected of librarians and libraries in promoting equal gender participation, it is pertinent to note that there are many obstacles that librarians and libraries

encounter in meeting this huge responsibility. The problem of internet connectivity is a big challenge that can hinder partnership between libraries and other agencies advocating for equal gender participation. This ranges from low bandwidth, network problems which the Nigerian system has not got right. Inadequate funding is another big obstacle. Adequate funds are needed for sensitization and awareness through the mass media and extension programmes. Also, budgetary allocations to libraries are grossly inadequate to meet up with this service.

In furtherance to these, Sobalaje and Ogunmodede (2014) highlighted other barriers facing librarians and libraries to include inadequate trained personnel in librarianship that is provision of grants for training of personnel to attend seminars, workshops and conferences, lack of resources, inadequate library services, poor distribution network of libraries, lack of viable data bases for research and publishing industry that can publish and provide survey and reports.

Also, Benson, Nwagwe and Okorafor (2017) noted that there was low regard for librarians and their relevance in contemporary Nigerian society. As such the image and societal perception may affect the extent in which Library and Information Professionals can contribute significantly to equal gender participation and development agenda.

Conclusion

This study focused on library and information services for equal gender participation. The expected roles of librarians were examined. Equal gender participation can only materialize if and only if there is gender equality. In order to curb the menace of gender discrimination in the nation's policy and decision-making process, Librarians, as information professionals have great responsibility in creating awareness, sensitization and discussion among the women folk. It is pertinent to note that Librarians cannot continue to function in isolation; hence, there is the need for partnership, cooperation and linkages among them and other agencies who are involved in women's advocacy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- i. There should be boosting of budgetary allocations to libraries and information centres by government for utilization in this area and other related areas;
- ii. Library and Information Professionals should endeavour to sensitize the public through the mass media on their services to boost their image as nation building professionals and not just book managers;
- iii. Conscious efforts should be made by librarians to form linkages and cooperation with national and international agencies who are advocating for gender equality and equal gender participation.

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