

## **FRCN COMMENTARY AFTER NATIONAL NEWS**

The 2019 library week of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) comes up from Monday 18<sup>th</sup> to Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> of November. The association annually uses the library week to bring to fore and try to solve areas of vital or urgent information needs of the Nigerian masses. Such pressing areas of national information needs form the bases of the theme for each year's week.

This year's theme is "Library Services for Sustainable Development". It is based on the fact that information is key to development in all its ramifications, while libraries are meant to track, process, preserve and disseminate such information. This is echoed by the fact that today sustainable development is of global concern. From the 17 Sustainable Development Goals 2030 of the United Nations to the African Union Agenda 2063, enduring and secured future remains the consistent denominator. Close analysis of these sustainable goals and agenda brings us to the incontrovertible fact that information dissemination remains the most potent weapon for their achievement and libraries are the domain of effective information dissemination. Therefore access to information and literacy skills are key to sustainable development of individuals and nations and libraries have pivotal roles to play in this direction.

Founded in 1962 through the National Library Act, the Nigerian Library Association now has chapters in all the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal

Capital Territory. It also has 13 operational Sections. These chapters and sections are already packed full with programmes and projects for this year's library week.

From ancient times libraries are universally recognised as effective agents of change and tools for the reformation of ailing societies especially in developed nations. But now more than ever before are the services of libraries needed for Nigerians of all ages in all spheres of life. With the technologically induced information explosion and information overload, librarians are poised to come to the rescue especially of the Nigerian youths. False and misleading information daily infused into our public information streams especially through the social media remain a precarious threat to the future positive development of our children. The youths must be dutifully led to the sources of right information for sustainable development, because tender minds moulded from half-truths can be likened to houses with foundations on shallow sand that crumble with the test of time. So also can good library services and usage help with the country's diminishing ethical and moral values, and rather produce integrated personalities with requisite dignity and integrity away from intellectual slavery.

Furthermore, many of the vexing economic, environmental and social problems facing Nigeria today can be mitigated through systematic midwifery of information to be delivered at the points of need and doorsteps of Nigerians by librarians. For instance, some of our most scarring health and climate change issues can be checked through arming the citizenry with accurate information by

our network of libraries. When people are so empowered with the right information, they take informed decisions about their lifestyle and that of their families, which will positively impact on the greater Nigerian community.

As we celebrate this year's library week, we remember famous National libraries like the Library of Congress in USA, the British Library in UK, the National Library of Russia, the National Library of Spain, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt and the National Central Library of Rome. The National Library of South Africa is a master piece. The mention of these libraries housed in magnificent edifices in other countries of the world, quickly brings to mind the question of the structure housing the National Library of Nigeria. It is unacceptable that almost six decades after independence Nigeria is yet to have a befitting edifice for its National Library. For now our National library operates from a rented building in the Central Business District Abuja. We therefore urge the Federal government of the day to urgently complete the construction of the permanent site of the national library also at Abuja, the contract for which was awarded in 2006. Also of necessity is the technological upgrading and adequate maintenance of the national library branches in the states where they already exist and the establishment of new ones in other states. The attention of the federal government should once more be drawn to our nations dire need of the resuscitation of the Central Medical Library of Nigeria. Health is the foremost focus of the sustainable development agenda. For success, the central medical

Library must be there to coordinate and preserve our health and research information data banks, facilitate our mobile and digital health issues and drive the consumer health information sector.

Apart from the national library, our government at all levels should work towards the rapid growth of all classes of libraries and information centres for sustainable development. For now only very few states have established functional state –of-the-art Library and Information centres in their state capitals. Others are therefore urged to do the same. In the same way, the ministries of education at federal and state levels should enforce the policy of the establishment of well equipped libraries in our secondary and primary schools to be manned by qualified librarians only, as an integral part of the school system. The establishment of modern library and information centres in our towns and villages should be considered as excellent constituency projects by our law makers. The law makers are also expected to come up with adequate legislation for presidential libraries, and libraries for other past high office holders. Also more private libraries will do the nation a lot of good as charity begins at home. Nigerians, let us all encourage the flourishing of libraries across our beloved country, for that has been the path of the developed nations.

During this library week, librarians are urged not only to throw the library doors open, but also to undertake our usual outreach programmes to get to the unreached people and communities. They should also reach out to government and other

stakeholders with the idea of libraries as cost effective vehicles for sustainable development.

Happy library week celebrations to all librarians in Nigeria.

Long Live the Nigerian Library Association!

Long Live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!

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