


Proposing a Library Consortium Model for National Development in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Globally, library cooperation and collaboration are transforming the scholarship landscape as academic libraries battle to survive amidst escalating costs of subscriptions. Zimbabwe is no exception to this phenomenon as evidenced by the development of local consortia for resource sharing. The main purpose of the research is to gather the views of librarians on the need for a library consortium to support national development in Zimbabwe. The researcher used a mixed method approach. Zimbabwe does not have national library consortium for nationwide access to information. Such a consortium is key to harnessing the collective buying power of member institutions to negotiate and guarantee license agreements for digital content. The study recommends a federated library consortium model built on lessons drawn from other countries. The model elevates library consortium principles of cooperation and collaboration into Zimbabwe's national development agenda.

KEYWORDS

Access to Information, Cooperation and Library Collaboration, Library Consortia, National Development, Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's national development blueprints commonly known as the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET) (2013-2018) and Transitional Stabilization Programme (TSP) (October, 2018 -December, 2020) are policy documents whose success is underpinned by socio-economic factors including access to information. The documents do not explicitly state how libraries can contribute to national development. The blueprints focus more on the full exploitation and value addition to the country's abundant resources hence the need to rethink the need for a library consortium model for nation-wide access to information to support informed policy making and decision making.

The ZIMASSET (2018-2019) development blueprint was replaced by the Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP) (2018-2020). The TSP outlines policies, strategies and projects that guide Zimbabwe's social and economic development interventions and simultaneously targeting immediate quick-wins and laying a strong foundation for economic growth for the period 2021-2030. ZIMASSET (2018-2019) and TSP (2018-2020) are not explicit on the role of libraries, even though its success will depend on access to information. These policies resonates with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015-2030).

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The SDGs serve as reference goals for the international development community for the period 2015-2030 (Le Blanc, 2015). Evans & Steven (2012) view SDGs as a universal set of goals, targets and indicators used by the United Nations (UN) member states to frame their agendas and policies in line with the 2030 agenda. The Zimbabwe Voluntary National Review (VNR) of SDGs for the High Level Political Forum (2017, 5) confirmed that Zimbabwe had committed itself to implementing all the SDGs with an emphasis on SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13 and 17. The realization of the SDGs is dependent on a number of factors including access to information.

Randel (2013) opined that the post-2015 settlement must harness the power of technology and information to empower citizens with choice and control over the decisions that affect their lives. The author argues that full access to information has the potential to empower the poor citizens so that they become active participants in determining how they should be governed. Dong & Zou (2009, p1) argue that library consortia are indispensable in the drive to consolidate and integrate Chinese government agencies and state-owned businesses. The authors state that the development of library consortia in China helped the country to remain relevant and competitive especially after joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001. Dong & Zou (2009,1) argue that the library consortia in China serve as a key pillar of a resourceful and efficient national information system useful in sustaining economic growth and the development of a world-class education system.

Csajbók, Szluka, and Vasas (2012, 335-339) highlight how library consortia contribute to Hungary's socio-economic and political renewal in the 1990's. According to the authors, the contribution of library consortia to socio-economic progress affirms the correlation between access to information and national development. The government played a significant role by supporting the development of library consortia in Hungary to support teaching, learning and research (Csajbók, Szluka, and Vasas, 2012, 335-339).

Nkondo, et.al (2014) view access to information as a pillar for national development since it helps to build an effective and efficient work force and responsible citizens. The authors perceive the library as a critical force in supporting and providing democratic access to information and hence the need to integrate it into the mainstream economy and society as a preserver and transmitter of knowledge. Namhila & Niskala (2013) argue that the library and information service sector has been recognized globally as a critical support structure for all aspects of development. Namhila & Niskala (2013) urge governments in developing countries to rethink the role of libraries in national development and incorporate it into the mainstream development agenda.

Read (2010) highlights how rising journal costs, especially in the scientific and technical, fields, have been staggering. When costs of subscriptions are unaffordable, then development will be affected, for example, the quality of education and research goes down and decision making at a national level will not be supported by scientific evidence. It appears cooperation is the only option for libraries if they are going to remain relevant and survive socio-economic turbulences of the twenty-first century.

The failure to align library consortia to the national development vision will result in the peripheralization of libraries thus undermining nation-wide access to information. The alignment of libraries to the national development agenda resonates well with IFLA's global vision that seeks to develop strong libraries and participatory communities to realise SDGs (IFLA, 2018) support sustainable development. Access to information is a fundamental human and constitutional right as enshrined in the constitution of Zimbabwe (2017, Article, 20). However, in order for libraries to fully contribute towards national development they should be organised and consortia is hereby proposed as a platform to build mutual relationships and capacity for national development.

Zimbabwe is not an exception to this trend as evidenced by the establishment of sector specific library consortia, for example, the Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC) and the College and Research Libraries Consortium (CARLC). Dong & Zou (2009) attribute the rise of library consortia to the information explosion, escalating costs of reading material, severe budget allocations, and the increasing demand for improved service. Nfila & Darko-Ampem (2002) state that library consortia operations encompass co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration between and amongst libraries

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