

**LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES AND HUMAN  
RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT:  
IMPERATIVES FOR MEETING THE MILLENNIUM  
DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG).**

Vicki Lawal

**Abstract**

Developing human resources has become an issue of concern among librarians worldwide, current developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), gender issues and women empowerment, HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation have indicated that Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals will, in the immediate future, need to re-position themselves to meet up with the challenges of the ever-growing information society. Secondly, the inter-dependent nature of the disciplines have necessitated that librarians in the twenty first century must possess specialised skills in order to maximise opportunities in the knowledge economy. More than ever before, the Library and Information Science (LIS) sector has been challenged by the dearth of information professionals in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), cataloguing and classification, information literacy, knowledge management, intellectual property and other areas of democracy and governance. In Africa, some of the issues that have dominated the LIS landscape include the need to develop the needed competencies among LIS professionals in each of these areas through training of future librarians at higher education level and continuing education and staff development of current professionals to meet up with the challenges of the emerging global order. This paper highlights the urgency for a coherent plan of action to align the roles and responsibilities of LIS professionals in Africa in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

**Keywords:** Millennium Development Goals (MDG), library services, Human resource development, Partnerships, information policy.

**1. Introduction: The Millennium Development Goals**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) represent specific targets developed by the United Nations which are aimed at addressing issues of poverty, education, health, environmental conservation, increased access to Official Development Assistance (ODA) and debt forgiveness in developing countries. The

eight point agenda, supported by 18 targets and 48 indicators for the purpose of tracking progress towards development was ratified by 189 countries in 2000 and is expected to be achieved in 2015. The goals serve as guideposts for measuring progress made towards development which can be carefully monitored and revisions made to the strategies and policies aimed at achieving the goals. The terms of the goals indicate a unique agreement between developed and developing countries for which developing countries are held accountable to the United Nations for the achievement of these goals through continuous assessment of progress made in relation to the objectives, deadlines and benchmarks (Cleeve & Ndhlovu, 2004: 9, 10).

Since the declaration of the goals in 2000, significant progress has been made by different countries towards realisation. A major disparity however exists with African countries where poverty, child mortality, poor educational standards, HIV/AIDS, and environmental degradation have persisted. An analysis in the Global Poverty Report (2002: 10) shows particularly that Sub-Saharan Africa faces the greatest challenge of meeting the goals, currently, only North Africa has made significant progress in areas of poverty reduction, access to education, health and other sectors. Aside efforts towards deepening economic reforms that will attract foreign investment and strengthen democratic institutions, one of the major steps towards progress in achieving the goals in Africa include investing adequate resources for human resource development; disparities in access to educational facilities and other socio-economic constraints have hindered benefits in development policies in Africa. In the Library and Information Science (LIS) field, inadequacy of human capital have compounded problems of limited resources, weak management and poor technological skills thereby restricting the growth and recognition of the value of the LIS profession (Albright & Kawooya, 2007: 110).

## **2. Library services and human resource development:**

The growing awareness of the importance of information along with the current influence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) on the economic development of most countries has led to the emergence of concepts as the “Information society” or the “Knowledge economy” where information is considered a valuable national resource which if managed effectively can positively impact on the socio-economic development of a country (Arnold, 2004: 200). This situation has presented a challenge to the skills and competencies of LIS professionals globally in such areas as copyright and intellectual property, knowledge management, information literacy, HIV/AIDS, censorship, gender equality and other issues of democracy and governance; library services and the

very tenets which makes librarianship a public good has been put to question. To this end, calls have been made for a re-structuring of the educational curricula of the LIS profession by integrating value-based skills through strategic human resource development in order to meet the challenges of the information age (Vaagan, 2003: 156-157).

Human resource development, staff training and continuing education are considered a major factor in developing and motivating a vibrant and productive workforce in order to maximise productivity. According to Cribb (2005: 5), "Human resource development encompasses the broad set of activities that improve the performance of the individual and teams hence the organisation". He argues that the ultimate aim of training and development is the creation of a learning organisation which constantly reviews its mistakes and successes and adopts its activities regularly. Capacity building stands at the core of human resource development in librarianship especially with regards to socio-economic development, LIS education is critical and instrumental to the economic growth of a country with respect to the quality of the services provided (Britz, Lor, & Bothma, 2007: 103-104). In recent years, fundamental changes in the roles and responsibilities of librarians accompanied by continual changes in the work environment have aroused considerable debate among employers, LIS educators and professional associations as to the alignment between the academic curricula, the needs of employers and current socio-economic needs. Consequently, LIS educators have proposed a broad spectrum of skills and competencies that encompass a set of standards and values that are relevant for a technologically driven economy (Fisher, Hallaman & Patridge, 2005: 13-15). In Africa particularly, commentators have noted that the level of LIS education is not sufficient to cope with the exponential growth of information globally; re-defining the curricula has become necessary to improve the societal role and professional status of the LIS professional (Johnson, 2007: 66, 67).

A look at the curriculum of LIS education in Africa shows that the role of the LIS professional has been limited to the traditional tasks of cataloguing and classification, preservation and transmission of human record which has hindered the transformation of the profession from the library-centred to the information-centred universe (Vaagan, 2003: 158-159). Aina, (2005: 165) noted that the influence of Western educational system on the of the LIS educational curricula in Sub-Saharan Africa has failed to address the unique cultural needs of the continent thereby limiting its service role. This view is supported by Albright and Kawooya (2007: 109, 118-119) when they observed that the inclusion of oral tradition in LIS education for example, will improve efforts towards ca-

capacity building in utilizing the methods of information sharing which is already part of African culture especially in handling issues of HIV/AIDS thereby expanding the perceived value of the LIS profession in the society and the efforts towards tackling other socio-economic problems. Evidently, a re-structured African LIS curricula should incorporate a list of competencies for graduates in order to prepare them for employment in areas that reflect the socio-economic and political needs of the continent. Within the context of the Millennium development Goals (MDG), LIS education should seek to play a pivotal role in eliminating problems of child mortality, poverty eradication and gender equality by taking a leadership role in the dissemination of useful information, in this way, LIS professionals in Africa will achieve the relevance and recognition that has so far been lacking in the socio-economic sector (Britz, Lor & Bothma, 2007: 69).

### **3. Imperatives for achieving the Millennium development Goals (MDG):**

In achieving the MDG's, Cleeve and Ndhlovu (2004: 10) noted that African countries particularly face a difficult challenge as they are not only marginalised from the benefits of globalisation but are also exposed to its threats due to problems of weak governmental structures and increasing poverty; for LIS professionals in Africa, the immediate task therefore is to generate the momentum needed to achieve the goals in 2015 specifically in the following areas:

- Information policy: Information is central to every human enterprise; the socio-economic situation of a country determines the posture of its information policy. The availability and accessibility of information is often linked to its socio-economic development in aspects of education and leisure, science and industrial development and the enhancement of an equitable and democratic society. Similarly, information flow and the multinational ownership of information resources have created complex legal problems in the application of copyright and its related issues (Arnold, 2004: 200, 205). This situation provides LIS professionals in Africa the opportunity to develop relevant information policy goals on such issues as the allocation of funds on research and development especially in ICT and on issues that address conditions of rapid social change and the entrenchment of democratic ideals in the continent. Issues of governance are of paramount importance to attaining the Millennium development Goals (MDG) specifically as they have a bearing on economic growth levels and poverty reduction; LIS professionals can play an important role in encouraging participatory democratic institutions and the respect for the rule of law in ensuring accountability through appropriate information policies, their contribution will ensure sustainable development by

utilizing information as a vehicle for alleviating poverty and democratizing the society.

- **Library services:** Evolutionary processes in library services have necessitated a shift from the traditional practices to more innovative processes. Global forces currently influence issues within the LIS landscape, the prevailing paradigm have been issues of leadership and technologically driven procedures of work methods all of which provide service opportunities for librarians; continuous training and staff development is therefore necessary to keep abreast of changes and provide better services to a more larger and complex set of users (Wedgeworth, 1998: 60). User education in particular provides LIS professionals the opportunity to become key educators by inculcating the needed competencies to the information user. Within the higher education sector, concerns have arisen as to the need to help develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills among students to enable them function across different cognitive domains and subject areas and in the workplace environment (Vaagan, 2003: 159) and (Fisher, Hallaman & Partridge, 2005: 16). The digital library context, which is more heterogeneous and fast-changing, demands that subject specialists in particular are able to master the variety of complex databases and their various interfaces, this re-enforces the need for subject expertise essential for the promotion of information literacy and life-long learning. Through such specialised skills, librarians can define new jurisdictions in their domain of expertise; the need for human resource development in this regard can therefore not be over emphasised (Joint, 2003:418).
- **Partnerships:** The challenge to develop future leaders in the LIS African sector impinges on our ability to tackle other socio-economic problems with regards to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Collaborative approaches to service delivery helps to increase the flow of information cross countries and regions and facilitate the extension of ideas, through partnerships, LIS professionals in Sub-Saharan Africa can re-define their role in the dissemination of information in HIV/AIDS, the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment, environmental sustainability and poverty reduction (Albright & Kawooya, 2007: 112, 116). Similarly, libraries as related entities can seek to actively pursue a natural alliance with educational institutions in developing their own information infrastructure through the establishment of consortia organisations which promote sharing of integrated library systems, collection development, purchasing of electronic publications and staff development. An area where this has proved helpful is the negotiation for licensing agreements for the use of electronic resources where emerging copyright laws and issues of intellectual property have limited the

rights of use and access to some electronic resources. LIS professionals in Africa must take advantage of the leverage such cooperative arrangements provide to develop a collective agenda for addressing areas of common need (Nfila & Darko-Ampem, 2000: 205, 207). Through partnerships also, LIS professional associations can establish standards for professional experiences that would provide a basis for continuing professional education and serve as a tool for advocacy in recruiting new talents into the field which will shape the continuing development of libraries and strengthen existing library systems (Uta, 2002: 3).

It is evident from the fore-going that the educational ecology of the LIS profession in Africa is fragile and endangered (Smith, 1992: 37) and the dynamics of the profession in the emerging global order will necessitate that we are able to recruit the best people into the field by re-structuring the LIS educational curricula to address the socio-economic and political needs of the continent by equipping graduates with the needed skills for competitive advantage. In the next few decades, it is anticipated that widespread access to information sources will generate greater expertise in unexpected areas in the LIS field; competing professional and commercial forces will require that libraries and librarians are able to assume their professional role in the global information structure (Wedgeworth, 1998: 65). Already, as noted by Vaagan (2003: 159), the professional status of librarians is currently being blurred by a gradual encroachment of ICT-induced information functions over areas that are traditionally seen as LIS territory, some commentators have proffered the formation of new roles and identities for LIS professionals to address this situation and to provide better opportunities for service (Ocholla, 1998) and (Cribb, 2005:5). There is therefore, considerable pressure on the LIS profession in Africa to re-define and broaden its market and status as a workforce that is well motivated and strategically positioned to manage the 21<sup>st</sup> century global information structure.

#### **4. Conclusion and recommendations:**

Unlike other programmes of development, a key feature of the Millennium Development Goals is the built-in mechanism designed to measure progress towards achieving minimum standards for sustainable development. So far, efforts towards meeting the goals have succeeded in raising awareness of the issues involved especially to policy makers (Cribb & Ndhovu, 2004: 10). Libraries are a focal point of communities and provide opportunities for growth through information dissemination, for the LIS sector in Africa, issues of declining resource support and the untenable attitude towards information diffusion may constitute a

problem in measuring success with respect to library services (Ocholla, 1998); however, collaborative efforts and developing human capability for more innovative services as well as developing enhanced methods for assessing information services are imperative for meeting the goals, libraries and LIS professionals can:

- Serve as pivots for disseminating government's commitment to the MDG's which are not often generally visible.
- Provide statistical data of how the goals are being aligned to governmental policies and programmes and progress made towards achieving them.
- Create awareness of the importance of the goals by providing valuable information that share best practices between Africa and other continents.

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