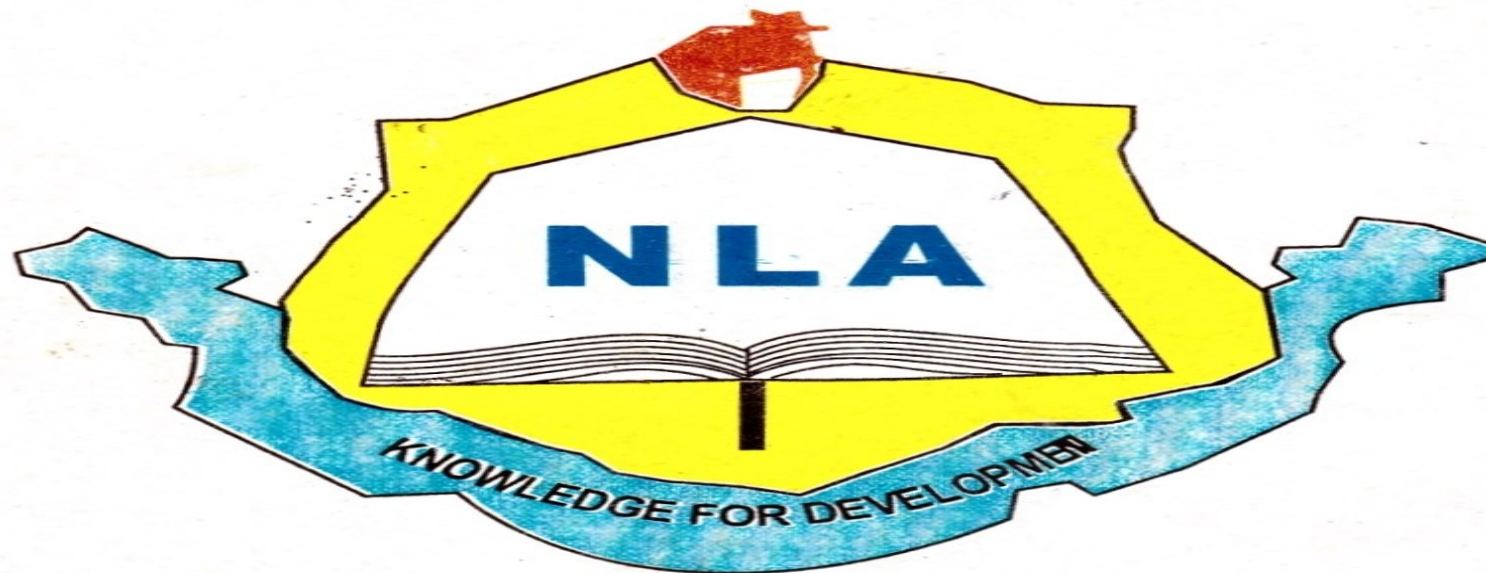


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STRATEGIC PLANNING AND POLICY DIRECTION FOR LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

Recent developments in the field of information and communication technologies as a result of the convergence of computing and telecommunication technologies have had significant impact on the library and information profession. The result is that Libraries in Nigeria, particularly those in Akwa Ibom State are faced with situations where emphasis is being placed on coordinating activities to enable them to gain global network access, rather than the old custodial emphasis on ownership of materials. Obviously, the implications of all these for librarians in Akwa Ibom State is for them to critically re-examine their roles and plan strategically to implement their new roles for library development. The emerging planned library environment is geared towards identifying the direction and mission of the libraries, shape the policy direction and assist the librarians to cope with the challenges of a state grappling with science and technology as an engine of growth.

INTRODUCTION

Increased competition for shrinking resources have forced libraries the world over to face new challenges. These range from the escalation in the prices of materials, both in printed and non printed formats, rapid changes in information and communication technologies (ICTS), to the growing number of competitors as well as needs and demands of their clientele. Not only do library users require more service interventions to assist them to make maximum use of the available information resources, but they also expect the library to move away from the traditional collections-based (ie acquisition and inventory) model to a more proactive service- delivery model whose performance is measured by satisfaction of user requests. Thus, as librarians and information managers move away from the old paradigm of libraries as storehouses of information collected "just in time", there arises the need to plan strategically to give a new direction to library development in Akwa Ibom State. These strategic plans are expected to direct energies to new initiatives and fresh outlooks, suggest changes in roles and values and enable librarians move forward into the future.

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Strategic Planning & Policy Direction

by outlining visions and goals. This strategic planning is both evolutionary, establishing pragmatic directions, and flexible enough to be adaptable to circumstances of new opportunities posed by the Science and Technology revolution in the state. This paper discusses these strategic options.

The Concept of Strategic Planning

Planning is a process that leads to the definition of objectives to be achieved by an institution, organisation, community or government. It is a process that begins with objectives, defines strategies, policies, and then goes further to provide the means for achieving the objectives. Thus planning is the attainment of set objectives through identified pathways or strategies. It is therefore a very important management function that gives direction, improves continuity of action and reduces overlapping and wasteful activities. The whole process is about fundamental decisions and actions since choices must be made to enable the organisation to successfully respond to changes in the environment.

Drucker (1993) defined strategic planning as the continuous process of making risk taking decisions systematically and with the greatest knowledge of their futurity, organising systematically the efforts needed to carry out these decisions against the expectation through organised and systematic feedback. It is not about future decisions following a rigid plan, but about making present and on - going decisions by anticipating the future. In effect strategic planning is fluid, changing as often as circumstances, opportunities, or predictions of the future changes. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it with a focus on the future.

Stemer (1997) opines that the specific motives for initiating any strategic planning exercise are to: Provide for dynamic changes by changing the direction of the organizations for the future, allocate limited resources to important and priority areas. Get better information for decisions. Develop better internal coordination of activities. Improve awareness and a changing environment. Cope with increasing uncertainties and risks. And get more realistic and attainable objectives.

In the light of these, Entsua-Mensah (2001) recognised strategic planning for a library as setting critical directions in which the library should move to establish strategic priorities. Generally, it requires thorough understanding of the clients' needs and perceptions, the competitor's effectiveness in satisfying these needs and perception, as well as the opportunities and threats that are derived from social, political and economic changes.

Why Strategic Planning for Libraries?

For the library profession, given the dynamic changes in the information and communications technologies, it has become very necessary to plan strategically to enable the influence, directing and control of the level of growth of the service to achieve pre-determined objectives. Librarians, in so doing will be positioning themselves to create library systems that are receptive and responsive to changes; creativity, cooperation, collaboration and innovation, build and maintain quality collections that reflect the needs of the users and support the library's missions. They should provide excellent services to the primary users, educate users in library skills necessary for information literacy and life long learning, and utilize ICTs based on needs, expectations and information seeking behaviour of users: They must deliver a wide array of quality information services through resource sharing and effective networking.

Many librarians, especially university librarians, have taken the lead in coming out with strategic plans and have come to appreciate the immense benefits that have accrued. The Akwa Ibom State Library Board is taking steps in this direction.

Strategic Planning for Akwa Ibom State Libraries

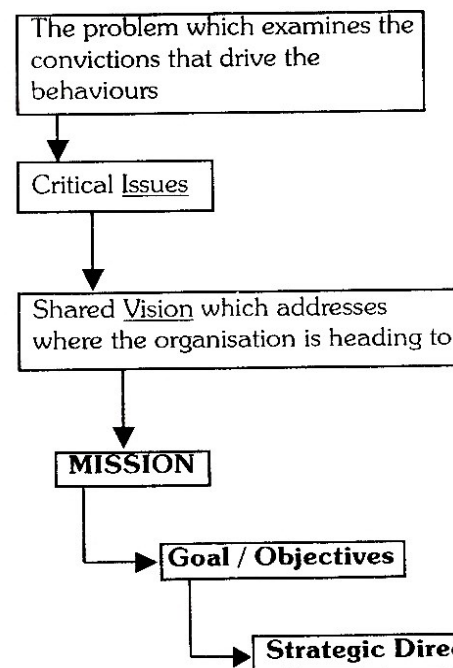
The ultimate goal of the planning process is to chart a course for the movement from where Akwa Ibom State libraries is today (by assessing the resources, user support and environmental realities), to where it should be in the near future (vision). The tangible outcome is the development of a vision statement that clearly outlines the unique and ideal image of the future. Essentially, the basic steps that are being followed to come out with a strategic plan are the vision, mission, goal / objectives. There has to be an environmental scan, internal assessment, policy issues, action plan, resource plan and evaluation.

Below is a flowchart that establishes the linkages of some of the salient activities as well as pertinent questions that are being addressed in the quest for Akwa Ibom State Libraries of the 21st century. Perhaps what needs to be pointed out in going through these activities is the need for the use of analytical methods of comparable standards to set the time frames within which these activities are to be achieved. (Figure 1.) This calls for an assessment of the internal environment (ie its strengths and weaknesses) as well as the external environment (its opportunities and threats) Undertaking a SWOT analysis would help reveal the unique qualities of hidden vulnerabilities which, when addressed, would help modify existing strategies. Strategic direction plans for the development of Akwa Ibom State libraries demands the addressing of the questions posed by the

strategic directions in the flowchart below (Figure 1). The following steps are therefore being taken to address these issues.

Figure 1 –Flow Chart of Concepts in Strategic Planning

Strategic Directions



Questions To Be Answered

- (1) What is the situation to be changed?
- (2) What are the most critical issues?
- (3) Where do we think we are going?
- (4) Why are we in business?
- (5) What do we plan to achieve?
- (6) How do we proceed and what are we doing to achieve the objectives?

The problem: What do we care about?

There have been several studies and surveys of the status, use and problems affecting the development of library and information services in Akwa Ibom State.(Etim, 2003;Udo, 2001; James 2001 Udoudo1998, Ndeh, 1998.)Akwa Ibom State has:- Six academic libraries (University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, Collage of Education, Afaha Nsit, College of Agriculture ObioAkpa, Maritime Academy, Oron, School of Remedial Studies, Ikono); five special libraries (Mobil Eket, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, International Management and Finance Institute. Some schools have libraries or reading rooms and five public libraries at Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Etinan, Eket and Abak.

A 2003 case study (Etim 2003) of the State Library at Udo Otung Ubo, Uyo showed the following: facilities and services.

Table 2 - Facilities, Information sources and services in the State Public Library, Uyo

Facilities	Number/Availability
Reading tables	30
Study Chairs	90
Study Carrels	None
Text books	164,845 volumes
Journals	30 titles latest issue 1990
Magazines	20 titles latest issue 1993
Newspaper	5 titles latest issue 2000
Government documents	None
Computer	None
Photocopier	None
E-mail services	None
Internet services	None
Television	None
Games	None
Counselling services	None
Story telling services	None

For a literate and school children population of over one million in the State, this is far from adequate services. Consciousness of the meaning and use of sources of information, as an indispensable tool for learning, success and survival at school, work and society includes knowledge of why, how and where to look for information in every situation of life, Udoudo (1998) surveyed pupils from sixteen local government areas of Akwa Ibom State. Findings revealed that only 10.2% out of 640 pupils surveyed had an idea of the meaning of information as a concept. 89.8% indicated they have never gone to the library, only 21% indicated their ability to use the dictionary and enclopaedia. 87.8% simply did not see the need to read newspapers or any other information materials outside their textbooks. There is an obvious lack of awareness of the

value of library and information resources in Akwa Ibom State - an identification of very low information literacy. In a related study, Ndeh (1991) tried to determine whether the reading culture exists among primary school children in Akwa Ibom State. She randomly selected 420 pupils who live near the divisional libraries at Uyo, Eket and Ikot Ekpene. Results showed that only 6.2 % of the pupils visited the public libraries at least once a week to read. 87.5% agreed they do not read any other materials outside their school recommended text. Ndeh further revealed a significant relationship between the cultivation of the reading culture in pupils and the availability of services offered by the public libraries. The problem therefore persists of poor reading habits and lack of the reading culture among school children.

Similarly, Udo (2001) examined Akwa Ibom State students reading habits and their academic performance in Home Economics. She administered a Reading Habit Test (RHT) on 470 secondary school students from 17 co-educational secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area. Indices tested were knowledge of the purpose of reading, awareness of the negative reading habits, knowledge of the importance of reading, knowledge of materials to read and Proficiency in Reading. Udo grouped the scores under good/superior, average and poor reading habits. Her findings revealed that all students tested had varied levels of reading habits, 120 students had good/superior reading habits, 190 students had average reading habits while 160 students had poor reading habits. She further confirmed that students with the superior reading habits had a record of good academic performance in Home Economics.

Again, James (2001) conducted a survey of 1,000 Secondary school students across the ten educational zones in Akwa Ibom State to assess their Information Handling Skills (IHS). Results showed that 17.3% only had an idea of the concept of information; 13.4% could name or identify information sources relevant to their needs; 10.3% exhibited some knowledge of search strategies relevant to their information requirements; 6.5%, showed ability to evaluate any item of information, 16.3% were capable of making useful notes from an information source; 13.4% were capable of presenting the acquired information in required formats. 22.8% had no idea of the information handling skills. On the whole the survey exposed the lack of information handling skills by secondary school/students.

In an increasingly competitive environment, the concern of managers of library and information services is not only the survival of the profession, but also the development of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). Etim (2003) conducted a survey of ICT provisions in Libraries in Akwa Ibom State.

Of all the libraries in Akwa Ibom State, only the five academic libraries have computers only for secretarial purposes, only the Mobil Library in Eket is computerised and has Internet Services. There are no Fax CD- ROM, E-mail or Photocopying services in other libraries in the State. There is obviously very serious dearth of library facilities and services in Akwa Ibom State. It raises very critical concerns and questions the commitment to the development of education, science and technology. The above has revealed the weaknesses of the Akwa Ibom State information society.

Critical Issues Concerned

The emerging issues critical to this library revolution are pertinently the - poor facilities and lack of information resource materials, - lack of development of an information society/information literacy, - lack of widespread diffusion of ICT in libraries, - poor information handling skills, - poor reading habits in Children, - poor collection development and resource sharing activities. In consideration of the critical issues aforementioned, the state NLA (Nigerian Library Association) in collaboration with the State Library Board has put forward the vision of library development in Akwa Ibom State as below:-

The Vision: (Where we think we are going to?)

“The evolution of an Akwa Ibom Information society through setting of standards, readership promotion and the provision of modern library and information infrastructure for optimal training and services to citizens of Akwa Ibom State” (Etim 2003).

It is envisaged that in the next five - ten years the true Akwa Ibom information society will emerge.

The Mission (Why are we in business?)

“In pursuance of the vision, librarians in Akwa Ibom State are set on a mission to promote the value of library and information services in Akwa Ibom State for development through advocacy, professional training, infrastructural and resources development, internet accessibility and preservation”.

The mission is obviously to address the identified problems earlier analysed.

The Overall Goal: What Do we plan to achieve?

Generally the Library Board plans to initiate and implement projects/ and activities that will lead to the promotion of library and information service development in Akwa Ibom State. - The Specific objectives are:-

1. To advocate for the advancement of an Akwa Ibom information society,
2. To reassess and evaluate standards for libraries, in Akwa Ibom State in facilities, human resources training and services in the light of current science and technology emphasis in the state;
3. To ensure the continuous establishment and equipment of libraries for schools in Akwa Ibom State;
4. To ensure the renovation and equipment of existing divisional libraries, while planning for more public libraries;
5. To ensure the building of a befitting state library and co-ordination of a state bibliography and resource sharing;
6. To gradually build a strong team of qualified and experienced library and information personnel for effective service in the unfolding ICT environment.
7. To introduce the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Akwa Ibom State libraries for optimal resources accessibility and internet-working.

Strategic Directions:- How do we proceed and what are we doing to achieve the objectives.

ADVOCACY

- (a) Promotional talks and jingles in radio, television and newspaper articles to sensitise the Akwa Ibom Society on library and information literacy.
- (b) Seminars and workshops for stakeholders, students, pupils, parents, community leaders on the need to invest in library development.
- (c) Institution of reading/information literacy competition in schools and institutions to popularise the reading culture.
- (d) Institution of a Reader development and Reading Promotion Project for mothers and young children.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- (a) Incentives and sponsorship for library and information personnel.
- (b) Retraining of serving library personnel to upgrade their competencies and skills.
- (c) Regular seminars and workshops in collaboration with cybercafes and web site designers for ICT competencies.

LIBRARY LEGISLATION

- (a) Review of existing library laws and edicts to create an enabling environment for library development.
- (b) Establishment and maintenance of standards in education, certification, facilities and service for both students and serving library professionals.

INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

- (a) Renovation of existing structures and facilities of divisional libraries
- (b) Building of a befitting state central library
- (c) Maintenance and servicing of facilities and equipment.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE SHARING

- (a) Evaluation of existing collection viz-a-viz user needs and acquisition according to funds available.
- (b) Put ICT facilities and equipments in place to facilitate networking within the state and internetworking globally.

COMPUTERIZATION/RESOURCE SHARING / INTERNET WORKING

Akwa Ibom State Libraries are in the process of the development and design of an Akwa Ibom State Information System that will lead to the building of the digital library (Etim 2003). In the proposed digital library, a significant proportion of the resources available to users will exist in digital form, connected to the World Wide Web. It is envisaged that the library will be a collection of full text bibliographic information sources rather than buildings. The introduction of digital libraries in Akwa Ibom State has implications for improving educational standards, enhancing the application of science and technology and the creation of an informed society.

FUNDING

- (a) Akwa Ibom State Government in collaboration with
 - (i) UNESCO
 - (ii) The British Council
 - (iii) The Ford Foundation
 - (iv) The United States Embassy
 - (v) Carnegie Cooperation
 - (vi) Stakeholders in the Community
 will raise funds to implement the aforementioned projects.

CONCLUSION

The greatest challenge facing library and information professionals in Akwa Ibom State is the change occurring continually in the environment and the global village. The impact of ICT on library and information services has necessitated the need for the advancement of an Akwa Ibom Information society characterised by widespread diffusion of IT in libraries and widespread information consciousness. Information must be seen as a key economic factor leading to a political process characterised by increased participation and consensus. Library development is being re-evaluated with strategic plans to meet the exigencies of these trends. In the final analysis, strategic planning for library development in Akwa Ibom State should find solutions to issues such that Akwa Ibom State can best meet the needs of the literate society, nurture and encourage responsiveness and creativity in the much invested science and technology society. In the final analysis development of a computerised library system will encourage effective resource sharing and internetworking.

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