

**THE USE OF THE COURT LIBRARIES:
WHAT USERS NEED TO KNOW**

BY

ENVULUANZA, MAGAJI AGU

ASSIST. INSTITUTE LIBRARIAN

NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, ABUJA.

**BEING A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE
NATIONAL WORKSHOP FOR JUDICIAL
LIBRARIANS,**

8TH -12TH MAY, 2017 AT ANDREWS OTUTU

OBASEKI AUDITORIUM,

NATIONAL JUDICIAL INSTITUTE, ABUJA.

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a court library as a library attached to a court and established within the court premises to serve the judicial arm of government. The paper mentioned Judges, Lawyers, Prosecutors and Solicitors as users of the Court Library. It further discussed the functions of Court Libraries in selecting, acquiring, organizing and dissemination of information to satisfy the users information needs. The Paper also highlighted the kinds of information resources available for use in the court library as follows: Law books, Internet/Computers, Online Resources i.e .E-Journals, Newspapers etc. The paper also discussed some Court Library Services render to users, e.g. Reference Service, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), User Education Service, Internet Service, Inter-Library Loan Service and Hours of Service. The Paper identified and discussed some few problems bedevilling the court library e.g. funding, inadequate ICT training of the court librarians and epileptic power supply. The Paper concluded by proffering solutions as to how libraries can adequately be funded to meet the needs of court libraries and the justices.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of a library as a source of information and for the dissemination of knowledge is recognised and acknowledged the world over. Gotau (2014) stressed that “all libraries are depositories of knowledge which take the form of books, journals, publications, newspapers, pamphlets, bibliographies, encyclopaedias and other media information which are basic to the continuous survival, development and progress of mankind”. According to him, libraries are known to be service oriented institutions. The services they provide are centred on basic assistance to library users who need some measures of help in locating information in the catalogue or on shelves. The main aim of providing quality services in court libraries is to stimulate and sustain users satisfaction in the utilization of legal and other related information resources. This can help researchers of the law materials to prosecute cases diligently. However, the function of library as the centre of information generation, preservation and dissemination has partially but significantly altered in recent times as a result of ICT. For instance, in the past three (3) decades, due to phenomenal growth in information generated from extremely large volumes of literature, the nature of library services has been improved to accommodate the volumes of knowledge in the society. This implies that the court library has shifted positively towards knowledge dissemination which requires expert management for creating, storing, sharing and re- using organizational knowledge for the benefit of maximising their goals and objectives. Lawal (2010) stressed that “the manual use of court Libraries has therefore shifted to ICT (Information and Communication Technology), especially in research terms but consultation of materials in physical format for recreation, leisure and academic purpose still persist and would continue to be so in the Court libraries”.

DEFINITION OF TERMS:

Court Library: -Uloko (2001) stated that “court library is a specialized library because of its unique place as a tool i.e. the teaching of law, research in law and its valuable contribution to the maintenance of peace and stability in the country”. He said court libraries function as a reservoir that keeps up to date records of the numerous law Decrees, Edicts, Constitutions, Court proceedings, and amendments as they are passed. Therefore, a well-stocked court library is indispensable to the legal practitioners as well as to the Judges in the administration of justice. The quality of lawyers submission in the court is largely depending on the accessibility of legal authorities both statutory and case law, available to him.

Users of Court Library:- Kotso (2015) opined that “court is a legal environment for the business of litigation often carried out by lawyers who are either judges, prosecutors or attorneys”. According to him litigation is a serious business that requires well stocked library to facilitate sound and well-grounded adjudication where justice is seen to be dispensed, and also Judges, Prosecutors and Attorneys depend highly on it to defend clients adequately and interpret the law intelligently to come up with informed judgement. Other court library users are registrars, accountants and clerks who are supporting staff of the court who need to improve and update their knowledge for more efficient service towards administration in their various areas of specializations. Some users for example are students and scholars who seek for permission to use the court library for research purposes. Therefore the objectives of the court library in Nigeria is to make information resources accessible to its users.

FUNCTIONS OF COURT LIBRARIES

The Court Libraries are hardly self-existence. There are different functions performed by Court library to meet the purpose and needs of their parent organizations. Such common functions are selecting and acquiring law information resources for the parents organization; carefully organizing and processing of the information resources so that the user can locate and use them; making the resources accessible to the users and loaning out the materials for convenient home use.

Omokaro (2007) opined that “the main purpose of every library is “to render services to its users”. According to him, the functions of cataloguing, classification and the purpose of processing the court library materials are geared toward letting the users know what is in the library, where it can be found and how it may be borrowed from the library. Similarly, Anaeme (2011) stressed that the specific functions of the court library is “to provide the information resources required by the academic programmes of the law faculties; to provide information resources relevant to the needs of the users; to provide the information resources for the recreation and personal self-development of the users; to provide conducive accommodation for study and research; to provide and ensure security of information resources and staff; and to maintain inter library service delivery”.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

The Court Library is a service and information centre where the sum total or even most human civilization and development in print and non-print formats are stocked and organized systematically for the users in their quest for information, knowledge, learning, teaching, research, recreation and entertainment. These information resources stocked in the court libraries are law

textbooks, law journals; encyclopaedia, citations, law digest; biographies, bibliographies, gazettes, treaties, practices and precedent books, newspapers and magazines, indexes, yearbooks, online resources, (electronic books, e-journals).

Gotau (2014) said that “librarians make these information resources available and accessible for the dispensation of justice”. According to him, such information resources should emphasize those that would be most often used for judicial authorities. These are;

- Legal resources in all forms (print, microforms, and audio-visuals) are used to support the function of the court. These should be made up of primary and secondary sources, such as legislature’s reports, digest, practice books, periodicals, textbooks, treaties and bibliographical tools among others. These information resources should be retrospective and current editions of local and international contents. For instance, law report, common law series, international treaties, conventions depending on the jurisdiction of the court.
- There should be reasonable proportion of non-legal materials (reference materials) for users consultations. They are encyclopaedias, dictionaries, these, dissertations, indexes, abstracts, yearbooks, bibliographies and newspapers, magazines, periodicals (serial materials) which are essential for the entertainment and intellectual development of the users.
- There should also be local materials/publications of court proceedings, seminars, workshops and conference papers, and be properly preserved for easy accessibility for use when need arises by users.

COURT LIBRARY SERVICES

The followings are some of the few services rendered to the users by the librarians in the court libraries: reference service, selective dissemination of information (SDI) user education; internet service; inter-library loan service and opening hours.

Reference Service

Nkanu (2007) sees it as “the personal assistance given to the users by the librarians in search of information for whatever purpose”. It is an inter personal relationship between the user and librarian .The librarian assists the users to locate the materials for their information needs, answers the users queries as well as assisting the users to borrow unavailable books and materials from other friendly libraries.

In electronic reference service, its role is even more demanding. The proliferation of the information resources such as databases, numerical databanks, electronic journals and the general internet services coupled with the sophistication of the technological operations, very few library users can access them optimally without professional help from computer-base librarians. Kotso (2015) opined that “they help in formulating enquiries and developing searches to surf the internet and provision of passwords for users are essential roles to provide access to information resources”.

Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) Service

Selective dissemination of information is the distribution of new information to individuals or groups according to their expressed interests. Court libraries perform this Current Awareness Services (CAS) which is the provision of unsolicited information which would be of interest to the library users. This is done through the provision of table of contents to judges.

The use of personalized alerting services with the help of ICT such as mobile telephones and e-mails also help to keep Judges informed and abreast of all legal trends. Only few court libraries in the country undertake the task of

provision of current awareness service to reach their users either by way of drawing the attention of users (Judges) to pages of publication of interest or case at hand. The Supreme Court library performs the task of drawing the attention of Judges to the amended laws as soon as they are received by the library. This is to enable the Judges to give sound judgement.

User Education Service

The librarian's role is to educate the user on how to structure their information needs and how to locate them on the shelves with minimal assistance from the librarians.

The users are educated on how to trace the books of their choice through the use of catalogue cards or through surfing the software available in the library. The interpersonal relationship of the librarian and the users should be very cordial to attract the users' interest in the library.

The librarian needs to be assertive and friendly to his users who will in turn assist in the development of the library through their personal relationship with the chief executive or the government for more fund.

Internet Service

Internet is one of the most relevant ICT facilities that plays an important role in the court library. Internet offers a wide range of services which can enhance library operations. These operations include electronic mail, e-commerce, file transfer, remote logging, teleconferencing and bibliographic services. The advent of internet services has brought awareness of global communication. Many organizations and businesses are connected to each other than ever before. Large information can now be stored in digital format requiring minimal storage accommodation, rapid online access to bibliographical information is now possible and networking and sharing of the resources are made easier. Kotso (2015) stressed that "it is high time every court should embrace this technology as it is the most realistic solution to the dearth of information resources for learning and research". It helps in quick resource sharing through

the interlibrary cooperation, formation of consortia, interlibrary loans and delivering systems to facilitate and provide convenient access to information.

Inter-Library Loan Service

Inter-library loans is one of the important functions of a library services to its users . Hardly can any library meet all the information needs of its clientele. Most world libraries at present engage in resource sharing, as a way of satisfying users information needs because no library is self-sufficient in meeting users' needs.

Union catalogues in libraries indicate the resources of different libraries which are in cooperation. Library users consult the union catalogue and make their request for materials located in other libraries. The librarian arranges to borrow the books and lends them to his patron who has requested for them.

With the advent of ICT, libraries that have agreed to come together for resource sharing make their resources available and accessible on-line. The librarian on the other hand educate the users how to source for information on-line and same from other libraries. This is done through the use of networks. The libraries have a link to each other through a properly, organized network. Information and Communication Technology makes it easier and faster for users to get the information they need at a shortest possible time.

Hours of Service

The opening and closing hours of service in a court library is usually determined by the category of users it serves. Court library opens from Mondays to Fridays, and at times extended depending on its users, and can only close during public holidays.

CHALLENGES FACED BY COURT LIBRARIES

Lack of Adequate Funding: Funding plays a vital role in the provision of adequate holdings for any library. The court libraries lack financial autonomy and is poorly funded. Whatever fund allocated to the library is not enough to get require materials for the library.

Inadequate Training and Retraining of Librarians: This is one of the main ways of ensuring that users get the maximum benefit from library by providing training and retraining of librarians and other staff of the library especially on ICT. An information literate person with ICT knowledge possesses the ability on how to source for information and serve his users effectively.

Epileptic Power Supply: This constitute serious problems because most of the ICT in the libraries cannot function or work effectively for lack of adequate power supply.

WAY FORWARD

- Government at both federal and state levels in Nigeria must develop a more proactive and progressive attitude to ensure that grants meant for the judiciary are speedily released and autonomy is given to administer such grants. Such grant must be adequate to cater for Court libraries.
- Court library must be involved in the training and retraining of librarians in the knowledge of ICT and competences required for effective management of the resources.
- The use of information technology (IT) as a strategic management and cognitive tool is very important if court libraries wish to be run effectively, accessing information through worldwide network. The court libraries would need to be efficiently involved in inter-connectivity to facilitate resource sharing.
- There should be adequate power supply. Electricity should be provided and made available at all time, especially with the recent trend in ICT. Therefore,

there is need for the provision of a standby generator or solar power in case there is power failure.

CONCLUSION

Library is nerve centre of an organization and allocation of adequate fund to meet up the information requirement is a task that must be done to meet up the objectives and mission statement of the parent organisation. However, the high cost of books and other library resources, inadequate training of librarians and lack of collection development policy in the court libraries are making the court libraries difficult to provide required services that will satisfy the users' information needs. Therefore, adequate fund should be provided to procure current and relevant information resources that will reflect the current changes in the society, maintain ICT facilities, for the training and retraining of librarians and other staff of court libraries especially on ICT to help improve their performance in the discharge of their duties. With the present economic predicament or inflation in the country, government needs to take into cognisance and increase the budget of judiciary.

REFERENCES

- Anaeme, F.O.** (2015). Strengthening the Nigerian judicial Libraries: A call for Standard. A paper delivered at the National Workshop for Judicial librarians, 21st – 31st July, 2015 organised by National Judicial institution Abuja.
- Anaeme, F.O.** (2011). Standards for Nigerian Law Libraries, Enugu. Immaculate publication Ltd.
- Gotau, J.T** (2014). Accessibility and Utilization of Information Resources and Services in National Library of Nigeria. Unpublished Thesis Of Masters of Library and Information Science (MLS), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Kotso J.E.** (2015) The Role of Court Library Services in Administration of Justice in Nigeria. A paper presented at the National workshops for the Judicial Librarians. Organized by the National Judicial Institute, Abuja held at the Andrews Otutu Obaseki Auditorium from 27th – 31st July, 2015.
- Lawal, O.O.** (2012). The library as an integral Part of Corporate Organisation with special Reference to the Use of Library. In Lawal, O.O Library Information Practice and Education in Nigeria; Current trend and issues. Callabar; De-Masta press Callabar, Rivers State.
- Lawal, S.A** (2015). Challenges Facing Court Librarians in the Age ICT. A Paper Presented at the National Workshop for Judicial Librarians Organised by National Judicial Institute, Abuja from 27th-31st July, 2015.
- Madu, E.C.** (2010). Reference Service in Libraries and Information Centres in the 21st Century, In Modern

Information Science Library and for Professionals
Workshop for the Judicial Librarians Organised
by the National Judicial Institute, Abuja, held at the
Andrews Otutu Obasehi Auditorium from 27th -31st July,
2015.

Mamman, P. I. (2015). The Nigerian Judicial Libraries. What we
have and the way forward.

Nwalo, K.I. N.(2003). Fundamental of Library Practice. A Manual on
Library Routines.

Omokaro, D, and Ode, E.O. (2007) Basic Principles in Practice of
Librarianship, Enugu. RSG Franc publications.

Uloko, G.I. (2001) Sustainable Collection Development in Nigeria Law
Libraries. Problems and Prospects in the 21st century in legal
Information and Development in the 21st century, Lagos. By
Malomo J.O. and Sholaja E.O. Nigeria Association of Law
Libraries.

