**WALKING TOGETHER, WORKING TOGETHER: THE JOURNEY BETWEEN THE NALIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA AND THE NIGERIA LIBERARY ASSOCIATION**

BY

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*We breathe, so that the trees thrive and the trees breathe so that we are able to live. Perfect symbiosis. – Sanchida Pandey*

Telling the story of the relationship between the National Library of Nigeria, (hereafter called, the Library) and the Nigeria Library Association, hereafter called, the Association), is like telling the story or the relationship between one’s left hand and the right hand.

While in my university days for my first degree, in the field of biology, symbiosis was one phenomena that was present almost in all the topics that we studied. Just to refresh our minds, sysmbiosis is the mutual relationship between two organisms. This is the kind of relationship that exists between the Library and the Association

Before the emergence of the Association as an autonomous professional body, all professional librarians were fraternising under the umbrella of the West African Library Association, WALA. And until 1962, the Association was the Nigerian branch of WALA which was formed in 1954 with headquarters in Accra, Ghana. While using the umbrella of WALA, the first qualified librarian of Nigerian descent, Mr. K.C. Okori, made a call for the establishment of a National Library of Nigeria. This call was what germinated, took roots and sprouted the clamour that eventually led to the establishment of the Library in 1964.

Prior to the call by Mr. Okori, the first documented call for a National Library of Nigeria appeared on the pages of the West African Pilot Newspaper, in 1947. The piece was authored by the Rt. Honorable Nnamdi Azikiwe, then a young Nigerian journalist who had retired Home to his fatherland after a brief political sojourn in Ghana {then known as Gold Coast}. The foresight of Dr. Azikiwe was underscored by the fact that Libraries were hardly known in Nigeria. The YABA Institute {now YABA Collage of Technology} then the only tertiary Institution in Nigeria, its Library was the nation’s showpiece alongside those of Kings Collage, Lagos, Hope Institute, Calabar and Barewa Collage, Zaria.

Following the pioneer call made by Mr. Okori in 1954, on the platform of WALA, the desire for a National Library of Nigeria continued to smoulder and on its attainment of autonomous status in 1962, the Association, took up the gauntlet, and two years later, in 1964, the National Library of Nigeria came into being on the instrumentality of the Act of Parliament.

It could therefore be rightly said that the Library is a child of the Association.

While the mother is sixty years old today, the child is 58 years. For about six scores now, each has been fending for the other and nurturing its growth. This progressive collaboration between the Association and the Library has seen to the deepening of the roots of librarianship in the country.

It is worth repeating that library development is dependent upon professional planning, foresightedness, understanding and involvement. For the sake of efficiency, these issues are better managed by library associations, rather than by individual library institutions. The solidarity and oneness is a key prerequisite for effectively and successfully pursuing and attaining the best common results by any group of persons with a shared interest. In fact, the strength and effectiveness of professional associations reflect this solidarity. The stronger the solidarity, the stronger and more successful the association is, and vice versa.

Library associations are considered as learned fraternities and when given adequate support by both her individual and corporate members, they are capable of spreading the public library movement, ensuring better library service delivery and building a good image for the profession. They continuously strive for the provision of library and information services to all and sundry by developing strategies that ensure easy access to the services offered by its professionals and when necessary, send appropriate proposals to the right quarters for consideration implementation.

This has been the role that the Association has been playing in, and for the development of librarianship for the past sixty years.

On the other hand, National Libraries are established and funded by national governments to collect, collate, and preserve the intellectual out of the citizenry, for public use, both for today and in the future. They are usually considered to be the library of libraries, and as (Ugwokwe, 1992) has rightly stated, “a national library is the leader in the hierarchy of libraries in a country”, and a coordinator of the main activities of all other libraries – public, academic, special, schools – in such a nation. Considered to be the giant memory of their nations, they are a focal point for overall library and information services. This is that the Library has being, for the past fifty-eight years.

**The Bond Between the Library and the Association**

Over the past half-century, the Library and the Association have maintained a strong symbiotic relationship which has been rewarding, commendable and exemplary. Such manifest areas of the relationship are as stated below.

**Membership of the Governing Board of the Library:**

When the government is composing the governing board of the National Library, the Association is mandatorily represented, usually by the incumbent NLA President, on the Governing Board of the Library. This goes to say, that the Association, since the establishment of the Library, has being involved in the formulation of policies for the administration of the Library and accountable for the execution of its mandate. It is worth mentioning that, being a professional and representing the body of librarians, the NLA President more easily than the other Board members, understands the issues that are usually presented before the Board, by the National Librarian so is able to support the National Librarian in convincing the Board and getting approvals.

**Membership of the Council of the Association.**

Conversely, the Library is represented on the Council of the Association by the National Librarian/Chief Executive Officer of the Library. The council of the Association is the body that takes decisions on the management of the affairs of the NLA. It is concerned with the general attainment of the organisational goals, and objectives in an effective and efficient manner. To the best of its abilities, having being at the planning table, the Library, through the National Librarian/Chief Executive Officer, has on a continuous basis, for the past fifty years, supported the Association in pursuit and attainment of its plans. This fact has been underscored by Alhaji Mua’zu Wali, a former Chief Executive Officer of the National Library of Nigeria, in his anniversary lecture delivered at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Association held in Abuja, in 2012. According to Wali, without the continue support from the Library, especially in 1998, when the Association was on the edge, it would never have been what it is, today.

**Collaboration on Common Goals**

Since both the Library and Association work towards the uplifting of the standards of the practice of librarianship, both parties have being working hand in glove to achieve targets that will be of benefit to the profession. Key among such collaborations is the one that saw the two parties working towards the standardisation of practicing librarians which culminated into the establishment of the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria, a body set up for the regulation of the practice of librarianship in Nigeria. Both parties have joined hand in lobbying the government, to set up a body with the mandate of registering and maintaining a register of professional librarians as well as setting standards for the practice of librarianship.

It is also worth mentioning that the organisations have at one point or the other, collaborated in giving recognition to persons who, though do not belong to the profession, have given outstanding support to the progress of librarianship in Nigeria, as way of appreciation and encouragement to do more and invitation to others too. Notable among such individuals are Architect Sonny Echono, and Chief Seiyefa Koroye. Architect Echono, as the Permanent Secretary the Ministry of Education, exerted the influence of his office and his experience in, and of the real estate industry to see to the downward review of the cost for the completion of the National Library Headquarters building. Apart from the government’s desire for the completion of the project, his contributions helped to get the solution that will lead to the completion of the project within the next two years. Chief Koroye on the other hand, was the Chairman of the Bayelsa State Library Board. During his time, though not a librarian himself, he supported all the causes were crucial to the progress of the Bayelsa State Library Board, by using his influence and access to the state government, to get whatever was needed for such progress. In addition, he ensured that the state’s Library board was sponsored to be attend NLA conferences and activities and he himself was usually present, whenever he had time. The two were jointly nominated by the Association and the Library to the Council of the NLA, which found merit in the nomination and were conferred with the Eminent Service Award in 2021.

Beyond this, both parties have worked and brought forth, the *Harmonised Classification Scheme for Nigerian Government Documents and International Organisation Publications.*

**Capacity Building:**

Similarly, for the past half-century, the relationship between the Library and the Association has seen them collaborate on organising professional development seminars and workshops. This periodic sessions does provide a fertile ground where library professionals meet to exchange information, share ideas, experiences and expertise. Apart from the periodic sessions, the Association also helps in providing opportunities to establish network for librarians to meet as colleagues to develop policy and share, which the Library leverages upon.

Examples of such include the NLA AGM/Conference, Cataloguing and Classification workshop, Information and Technology Section Workshop etc.

This has in no small measure impacted positively on staff performance in their offices.

**Publicity and Advocacy**

The Association plays a vital role in giving activities of the Library visibility and publicity to its members, such as readership promotion campaigns, ISBN/ISSN sensitization, sensitization on legal deposit compliance. The Association additionally do send representatives and even resource persons to such activities. In addiction, the Association through its state chapters helped to scale up the introduction of the online application solutions the Library recently introduced for the issuance of ISBN.

**Publications**

The Association and the library are each, involved in the publication of professional journals – Nigerian Libraries and Nigerbiblios respectively. These journals which are extensively used by librarians, has being providing avenue for professional development and research. They serve as an effective means of establishing a legitimate and effective voice for the profession in Nigeria.

**Office Accommodation and Staff Support/Involvement**

The Library has unconditionally provided office accommodation for the association for her use as permanent secretariat, at its headquarters in Abuja. In addition to this the Library does second staff on its payroll to the Association. Very recently the Library has started providing fully furnished accommodation in its prototype branches for the use of the state chapters, for office accommodation. In terms of membership drive, The Library has made it mandatory that her librarians must be active members of the Association and as of date, they are not only just active, but also in the Executive Councils of some state Chapters. In fact, Adamawa, FCT, Kwara, Oyo have staff of the Library, as their Chairman.

**Conclusion**

Based on the foregoing, it is safe to conclude that the Library and the Association are faces of the same coin. They complement each other in driving the development and progress of our profession. I can confidently conclude that the if these two organisations have related fared together for over fifty years, without bickering, nor crisis, it possible for them to continue to live and work harmoniously for the next five hundred years. This is not only my wish, it is also my prayer.

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