

LIBRARY COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT IN WOMEN DEVELOPMENT
CENTRES IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

by

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In the pre-colonial era, African women had their roles in the traditional set up which made them to be involved in governance. Some even served on the King's council, like the Iyalodes of Yorubaland in Nigeria (Hassan,1992).The colonialists set up policies which sent the African woman backwards politically and economically and also their rights culturally.

It has been an arduous task for the African woman to come up since then because the African man enjoys this new subservient position of the woman as it makes him feel more masculine. However, since the launching of the United Nations Decade for women in 1975, and the international body's directive to countries to put into place measures for the advancement of women in their countries, there have been some appreciable efforts to develop women in Africa.

Women, for example in Ghana and Nigeria, in recent times make great contributions in the economic, political, social, educational, agricultural, scientific, technological and other sectors of the nation including policy and decision making. These are in addition to their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Most of these contributions are made directly towards national development. However, on the political scene, women are still backbenchers when it comes to wielding direct political power. It may however interest you to know that, most times women are the powers behind the thrones. They wield such power through their sons, brothers, fathers, or their husbands. This is not a fact most males will readily accept, but it is true. If Africa had many of such strong willed women behind the thrones, the tables would have long been turned to favour women, but all is not yet lost. The complete integration of women in national development means we must have a greater participation in social, economic, educational and more importantly, political sectors. The current situation where women are in the majority in the agricultural sector and according to IFAD constitute 85% of the labour force but only constitute a negligible percentage, for example, 6% in Ghana (Oppong, 1977) in decision and policy making at all levels of government- community, local, regional, national, international is unacceptable and therefore there is the urgent need for a remarkable change for the better.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN

During the United Nations Decade for women, from 1975-1985, most African governments in response to the United Nations call, set up bodies charged with the responsibility of ensuring that women get to the mainstream of national development.

In Ghana, the Ghana National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) was set up by the Ghana Government in 1975 to advice it on the integration of Ghanaian women into national development. It also among other functions, was established to research into various aspects of the life of the Ghanaian

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ABSTRACT

Women Development Centres (WDCs) in recent times have been set up to carry out functions towards the improvement of the woman in all facets of life. These WDCs work under the supervision of a governmental or a quasi-governmental body. In Africa, these centres exist in many countries under various names. In Ghana, it is the National Council for Women and Development while in Nigeria there is the government's National Commission for Women (NCW) and the quasi-governmental Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development (MBNCWD). These set ups have Library and Documentation Centres (LDCs) to collect, process, store, and disseminate information on women. The methods used by the MBNCWD, Nigeria which is a pacesetter among WDCs in West AFRICA to collect information, problems encountered in sourcing these information and the types of information available in its LDC are discussed. Suggestions for effective library collection development for WDCs in Africa are proffered.

KEYWORDS : Information retrieval and dissemination, Data and information base, Collection development, Interlibrary cooperation, Women studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus worldwide has in recent times been placed on the development of women. This has come about because the world has come to realise that women's contributions to national development which had been hitherto erroneously termed "no contribution" really counts in computing the Gross National Product, if accuracy of such a computation is the ultimate. At the home level without the housewife keeping the house spick and span, cooking for the man, laundering and mending his clothes as well as minding the children, the husband will not be able to perform well at his desk, be it in a private or public sector outfit. Going further to include women who operate small shops in the neighbourhood, market women, intellectuals, academicians, and queens in industry, one realises that the woman, as a matter of fact, cannot be ignored in national development.

In Africa, most women have always been at the receiving end of all the negatives of development - poverty, illiteracy, beasts of burden, social maltreatment- all the negatives ad infinitum, but unfortunately are very fertile and so are capable of bearing many children which weakens them long before menopause. This makes them to depend on men for their livelihood because they never have the means to provide for their future. This situation was non-existent before the advent of the colonialists.

woman to ensure that it is fully armed with correct and up to date information to feed the government. Invariably this means it must have an LDC to assist researchers and also receive results of such research for processing and dissemination. The NCWD has an LDC, how useful and well stocked information wise is another issue entirely. So far, the NCWD has been tackling factors inhibiting women from being fully integrated in all aspects of national development; getting involved in adult education classes to ensure that there is full participation of women in national development and also ensuring that activities of all organisations, involved in the development of women are integrated. It is a welcome change that most of the officials of NCWD today are females, because in 1977 all members of the Regional Advisory Committees were men (Mazorodze, 1977). In addition to the NCWD, there is the 31st December Women's Movement which also aims at improving the life of the woman. It helps by giving assistance to women to be economically viable, among other functions.

In Nigeria, the National Commission for Women (NCW) was established in 1990, 15 years after the United Nations call. This body was actually set up after the prompting of the wife of the then Head of State, Mrs. Maryam Babangida. This is evident in the fact that the NCW came after she had set up the Better Life Programme for the Rural Woman (BLP) in 1987 and had achieved some success in improving the lot of the rural woman. The NCW was set up, among other things, to ensure the full utilisation of women in national development and also the welfare of women. It also has an LDC. Here too how useful and well stocked information wise is another pot of tea. There is also a Womens' Commission in each of the 30 States and in the Federal Capital, Abuja. The NCW is the supervising body of these State Commissions though they draw their budgets from the State Governments. Policy and decisions are passed to them from the NCW. However, the BLP activities overshadowed those of the NCW for quite sometime until the BLP was officially brought under the NCW in 1992. In Nigeria too, the delegation to the United Nations International Conference for Women in 1985 was led by a man (Hassan, 1992).

3. MARYAM BABANGIDA NATIONAL CENTRE FOR WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

The MBNCWD, Abuja, was commissioned on 17th October 1992. It is the baby of the BLP initiated by Mrs. Maryam Babangida. After the BLP had made appreciable impact in addressing issues concerning women, it was found out that there was the need for a resource centre for Training, Research and the Mobilisation of women for the attainment of their individual self- fulfilment and also to prepare women for leadership roles. The MBNCWD was therefore established to fill this need. In effect the MBNCWD has a Research, Training and Library & Documentation departments as its academic wing.

The MBNCWD was set up to, among other functions," collate and package information relevant to the activities and achievements of women for use by researchers and policy makers ----- and to serve as a data bank for essential information which will be used for educating and creating awareness-----". In essence therefore, it is the desire to promote research into the activities and achievements of women and to serve as a data bank, among other functions which brought about the establishment of MBNCWD.

4. INFORMATION ON AFRICAN WOMEN

Information is a valuable resource in the development of any aspect of life.

The searchlight which the United Nations Decade for Women beamed on women brought about an ever increasing interest in women and their development which in turn has heightened the quest for information and data on them.

Information on women is even very valuable today, because the world has come to realise that women occupy a very vital position in world development and so the imbalance in what is available as information about them needs to be corrected. This imbalance is clearly evident when it comes to information about African women.

There has been very little written about African women. Sometimes one could be lucky to have some primary information given orally, which of course could be coloured, depending on the mood of the orator or her perception of the use the information was going to be put into. Researchers had and still have problems on how to get information about African women especially as the little available are mostly found in unpublished monographs or documents as just few lines or to be generous, a few pages, of a subject treated in a wider or general perspective. Information on African women have been mostly appendages or mentioned only in passing in publications on African people.

The existing information on African women which is quite large and written mostly in the colonial era, portrays the African woman in her traditional and reproductive roles. This needs to be rectified through new research which will unveil the African woman in the various aspects of the national life of a nation where she is actively involved.

Research on African women and their activities is of paramount interest today. I need not over emphasise the reasons because they are obvious from the foregoing. The results of such research can be fed into data banks for retrieval and dissemination when necessary. Encouragingly in recent times in Ghana and Nigeria, a lot of research have been and are being embarked upon on women in all aspects of their lives. It is cheering news, because very soon there will be an avalanche of information to quench the information

thirst of people, and also fill the yawning gap between books on women, in the developed and African groups, on shelves of bookshops and libraries.

5. LIBRARY AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF MBNCWD, ABUJA, NIGERIA

The Library and Documentation Centre of MBNCWD was opened 'in theory' on 17th October 1992. However, it opened practically on 15th January 1993 when I assumed duty as the pioneer Librarian. I met a handful of books and some furniture in the public area.

The immediate thing done was to find out the specific functions of the library which will be in addition to the normal functions of a library, which in a nutshell is to collect, process and store information for retrieval and dissemination.

The specific functions of the MBNCWD Library can be summed up as follows:

- to develop a data and information base on women specifically for Africa and Nigeria and then for the rest of the world.
- to provide adequate literature on women which will assist in identifying areas or subjects about African women which have not yet been researched on so that the Research Department can work on them.
- to assist the NCW and the Government, through the MBNCWD in policy decisions concerning women, through the materials assembled from developed countries who are advanced in matters concerning women.
- to provide materials about Nigerian women for foreign clientele and also materials about women in countries other than Nigeria for the use of Nigerians.

5.1 Physical Facilities

The LDC occupies the top floor of a 3- storey building, the Administrative Block. It is fully sealed from noise from the other floors with glass shutters on the verandar, from the concrete wall to the roof. The Library is fully airconditioned and superb for serious academic work. The offices of the library staff, processing and computer rooms are also on the same floor which is very convenient for supervision of staff and also for assistance to users. Most of the furniture were placed in there before I arrived and obviously without the advice of a professional Librarian so some adjustments had to be made to get them to fit into library standards. The concrete floor of the library had to be carpeted to exclude noise from passers-by feet; the issue desk had to be reduced to a portable size, hitherto it covered a large area, too large for a library which is basically for research. Some Journal and Newspaper racks; Atlas stands; Catalogue cabinets; Periodical catalogue cabinet ; Pamphlet boxes and Stationery for routine library

work had to be acquired. Computerisation of the library's resources is the ultimate goal, but we had to start with catalogue cabinets.

A photocopier is available in the Library while Telex and Facsimile machines are available on the first and ground floors respectively of the same block. The MBNCWD is fed by over 20 direct telephone lines all with international dialing status, and has a standing contract agreement with a reputable Courier Service. This means that as far as modern methods of communication are concerned, where information can be sent to users or received from various establishments and institutions for use, the MBNCWD is well equipped. In addition the offices of the Chief Executive, Heads of Research and Administration the Librarian and the Accountant have PCs which up to October 1993 had not yet been commissioned.

5.2. Types of Information acquired

The LDC of MBNCWD has a policy to acquire all known information in all available forms as far as the main subject is women or related to women. It will also provide basic reference materials like Subject and General Encyclopaedias, Subject and General Dictionaries, Almanacs, Yearbooks, Atlases etc. To this end types of materials like Books, Manuscripts, Journals, Magazines, Conference papers, Research publications, Theses and Dissertations, Reports, Case studies, Newspapers, Government documents, Photographs, Drawings, Audio and Video tapes are to be acquired. Some of these types are available in the library. Efforts to get the rest are already in top gear.

6. LIBRARY COLLECTION BUILDING OF THE MBNCWD, ABUJA NIGERIA

A peculiar problem has to be given a peculiar solution. Sometimes one has to devise means other than the standard means of doing things, to achieve success based on the environment one finds herself. In spite of this, the standard methods of collection development-- purchase, exchange, gifts (books or cash), legal deposit, institutional membership--are the main methods adhered to by the LDC. Interlibrary cooperation is also being pursued. The Librarian makes selections for Acquisitions and sends them to the Chief Executive for approval for purchase.

6.1 Immediate methodology

In the haste to get the library well stocked with all types of materials we had to resort to spending much on postage. Letters were sent to the following people and places:

- 6.1.1. International Organisations with offices in Nigeria and also their headquarters outside Nigeria asking for copies of all their documents, reports, pamphlets and any other material produced by them on women.

- 6.1.2. All foreign missions asking for all available information about their women in their various countries.
- 6.1.3. Women's Organisations- professional, philanthropic and social- within and outside Nigeria asking for copies of their aims, objectives and their publications. Here letters were sent to the organisations outside Nigeria whose addresses were supplied to us by the foreign missions, upon request. Organisations in Nigeria whose addresses were received from the NCW as well as from individuals were also written to.
- 6.1.4. Individual women of note in Nigeria were also written to for their resume- since it is also intended to use such information for the compilation of a Nigerian women Who's who - and also for their publications.
- 6.1.5. Universities in Nigeria which had Departments or Institutes involved in projects on women were asked for copies of their publications and reports.
- 6.1.6. Federal and State government Ministries were contacted for copies of their publications, documents and / or policy statements on women.
- 6.1.7. The National Commission for Women (NCW) and her State counterparts were also written to for copies of all publications, speeches, audio and video tapes of all held activities for and about women.
- 6.1.8. Letters were sent to various Booksellers and Publishers in and outside Nigeria for copies of their Books and Journals catalogues as well as Computer print outs, on women, where a list will be compiled for subsequent purchase.

6.2. Books, Documents and Papers

With the above listed people and places communicated to, one would have expected that the shelves of the LDC of MBNCWD would have been filled, or the number of pamphlet boxes containing documents become uncountable. This is in the contrary, because not all of them responded to our requests. In this kind of method of collection building one has to spread one's net as wide as possible to ensure some catch. In all, about 30% responded favourably by sending publications and documents. About 20% wrote back to inform us that they really do not have anything to offer or they had sent our request to their countries (for the foreign missions) and we did not hear anything from the remaining 50%. Out of the 30% who responded about 20% indicated that they have put the Library on their mailing list in order to continue sending more materials as and when available. Meanwhile publishers, booksellers and authors kept sending complimentary copies of their books on women and in fields relevant to women. Up till October 1993, the MBNCWD had purchased only one book--Webster's International Dictionary-- All books available were donations or gifts.

6.3 Journals

Requests were also made to about 15 Journal houses overseas for sample copies of their journals for assessment to determine their suitability for eventual subscription. Up till October 1993 only 3 had responded. 2 sent sample copies, 1 of which gave a year's supply free of charge. The other one sent an invoice for subscription which means there is no sample copy. This situation delayed our plans for journal subscription since we had to write to individuals well versed in women studies to recommend journals to us for subscription after our earlier approach did not yield enough results.

6.4 Newspapers and magazines

The Library subscribes to 2 copies each of 20 daily Nigerian newspapers and a copy each of 19 weekly magazines. 4 of these weekly magazines are foreign. A copy of each of the 20 daily newspapers is kept after the day for eventual binding while the other copy is used for cuttings. These are acquired directly from vendors and paid for fortnightly. Newspaper cuttings are made with the following subject areas in mind --All aspects relating to Women, for example, Women and Health, Women and Education, Women and Associations, Women and Motherhood, Women and Crime, Women and Societal Issues, Babies; Children; Food; Health; Education; Family and Marriage; Agriculture; Environment and Rural development. These are arranged alphabetically by subject and within each subject alphabetically by title. They are compiled on monthly basis. Wonedex, an index for the newspaper articles is compiled monthly too for it. Titles, volume and numbers of magazines are recorded in the periodical catalogue. Such information are also indexed based on the above-mentioned subject areas and arrangement. It is called Wodex.

7 PROBLEMS FACED IN BUILDING THE COLLECTION

- 7.1 The Library of the Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development is still in its infancy, which means she will still have some teething problems. The major problems faced in taking off however are the following:
- 7.2 Women studies is a comparatively new field in the world and especially in Africa so there are very few publications available. One can only lay hands on documents and research reports, which are now gradually increasing in number.

- 7.4 Lack of response to our requests for information from organisations written to, also deprived us of valuable information. Some were apathetic and others antagonistic because of the feeling that women were getting undue attention in recent times.
- 7.5 Most of the women organisations, especially the non-governmental local ones, did not have well organised systems of documentation of their activities. Infact most of them had no written information of their activities. This is because they were set up by illiterate and semi-literate women, who did not feel that there was any need for documenting their activities as long as their activities went on well. This in effect deprived us of valuable primary source materials.
- 7.6 There was also no available comprehensive list of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) so it was difficult to communicate to them. Occasionally some of their members came to the library and then informed us of the existence of others of their ilk, whom we later contacted.
- 7.7 Availability of audio-visual materials in women studies which will be of relevance to the African woman is rare. Also most of the women organisations have not accepted audio-visual materials as effective means of storage and dissemination of information because of lack of exposure to their handling techniques and usefulness.
- 7.8 The staffing situation in the library was inadequate. One professional, assisted by two library assistants who have only 'O' Level Certificate with no prior library experience constituted a problem. The professional staff was overworked since she had to do professional as well as administrative duties in the library and also train the assistants at the same time.
- 7.9 The Library also had no clearcut budget. Whatever amount needed to be spent was taken out of the central fund. This made it difficult for large purchases of equipment and materials to be made which was seen as a huge expenditure compared to that of the other departments.

These listed problems, major as they stand, can be surmounted with a little determination, goodwill and education.

8. STEPS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

The MBNCWD Library, just like other Women Development Centre Libraries in Africa needs to develop in order to meet the current demands on them for information on women.

- 8.1 Women Development Centres worldwide should work together and not in isolation. Especially in Africa, there should be a regular exchange of information and data. This means there should be networking to involve existing libraries and include new ones as they are set up. Proper standards should also be set up to ensure the success of such a programme.
- 8.2 The transfer of information technology into Africa must be stepped up. This will be used in collecting, processing storing and disseminating information and data on Women. As at now very little attention is given to such a transfer as it is mostly seen as not being one of the 'Technologies' which needs urgent transfer to Africa. Here the use of computers and modern communication systems is a must and not a may in the handling of information on women.
- 8.3 Sources of primary information acquisition on women are not yet streamlined. They are adhoc, put together as at when needed. This does not ensure that information collected is complete or there is a continuous flow of information, resulting in a situation where most times useful information is left out. There is need to set-up a proper information collection system which works round the clock in order to trap all available information.
- 8.4 Each country and/or agency responsible for women affairs must have a clearly defined policy on the collection of information on women, and methods of storing and disseminating them, in order to make the whole exercise worthwhile. Collecting information to fill a library, without proper storage, processing and sound disseminating methods, which will ensure that the materials are maximally used, is a wasted effort, in terms of time energy and funds.
- 8.5 Information about women is of paramount interest these days. This therefore calls for enough funds to be specifically committed to the acquisition of all types of information on women. The MBNCWD, and likewise all WDCs in Africa should as a matter of urgency give the LDC a budget code where funds can be set aside periodically, specifically for the development of the library's collection.
- 8.6 The drive for information from agencies and organisations should be stepped up. Most of them written to earlier on, but who did not respond should be written reminder letters and if possible personal calls made to them to ensure that the materials they stock which are of relevance to women are collected and stored at the MBNCWD Library for proper use.

- 8.7 African WDCs should organise workshops or seminars for leaders of NGO's to educate them on the usefulness of documenting their activities and actually go ahead to teach them how to do it, because they need such information for their libraries. A comprehensive list of such NGO's must also be kept by the LDC.
- 8.8 Researchers should be encouraged, for example, through research grants, to carry out studies on women. This could be general or topical. The findings will be very useful primary source information for users of the library.
- 8.9 Strong links or liaison with libraries of related organisations worldwide should be of primary concern to the WDC Libraries. This will ensure that current information in the field of women are easily made accessible for dissemination. In effect, library cooperation should be vigorously pursued. Such organisations in the more advanced countries even organise study tours for staff from developing countries to pick up new ways of providing effective information services, so such links will have additional benefits.

9. CONCLUSION

The Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development Abuja, Nigeria has an aim to be a centre of excellence as far as information about women is concerned. It wants to be able to provide information about women in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular to foreign and local researchers, as well as providing information about women in other countries outside Africa for African and Nigerian women to use to improve their lives. In a way MBNCWD is a pacesetter in West Africa. This is because she has come out in a big way to give a frontal attack to issues relating to women. Other countries in Africa who have similar set ups, have not gone this far, at least, in the provision of such elaborate facilities to house the activities intended. She has also gone ahead to provide some modern equipment for communication and processing information. In spite of this impressive start the Centre still needs to give more attention to its Library and Documentation Centre to make it perform its functions creditably especially in the aspect of collection development.

As a final word, I wish to reiterate that, Women Development Centres in Africa are indispensable vehicles for the improvement of the status and lives of our women. These Centres must have effective Library and documentation centres which will provide adequate information to support the activities to be carried out towards this improvement of status and life envisaged. The keyword here is EFFECTIVE, so existing African Women Development Centre Libraries should strive towards this while those about to set up should have this keyword in mind.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

- BLP - Better Life Programme for the Rural Woman
- LDC - Library and Documentation Centre
- MBNCWD- Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development
- NCW - National Commission for Women
- NCWD - National Council for Women Development
- WDCs - Women Development Centre(s)
- WODEX - Women Index
- WONEWDEX - Women Newspaper Index

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