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ASSESSING THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) IN NIGERIAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a universal call to action, aimed at addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation and access to quality education. Libraries, as knowledge-driven institutions, play a strategic role in facilitating access to information, fostering literacy and supporting community development. This study critically assesses the role of libraries in promoting SDGs within Nigerian communities, with emphasis on their contributions to education, information dissemination, digital inclusion and socio-economic empowerment. Using a conceptual and analytical approach, the paper explores how libraries align their services with SDGs such as quality education (SDG 4), reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and partnerships for development (SDG 17). The analysis reveals that libraries in Nigeria serve as catalysts for sustainable development by providing inclusive access to information resources, supporting lifelong learning and bridging digital divides. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure and low policy recognition hinder their effectiveness. The study further proposes strategic frameworks and models for enhancing

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library contributions to SDGs through policy integration, technological advancement and community engagement. Ultimately, libraries are positioned as indispensable agents in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria, provided that systemic barriers are addressed.

Keywords: Libraries, Sustainable Development Goals, Nigeria, Information Access, Community Development

Introduction

Sustainable development has increasingly become a dominant paradigm in global policy discourse, particularly following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of 17 interrelated goals designed to address pressing global challenges, including poverty eradication, quality education, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. Central to achieving these goals is the recognition that access to information is a fundamental driver of development outcomes. Information empowers individuals, enhances decision-making processes and promotes inclusive participation in socio-economic activities (United Nations, 2015). This underlines the centrality of information as a strategic resource for sustainable development rather than merely an instrument for knowledge acquisition. This recognition places libraries at the centre of development discourse because their primary mandate revolves around organizing, preserving and disseminating information for societal advancement.

Within this framework, libraries play a strategic and indispensable role. As knowledge repositories and information dissemination centers, libraries facilitate equitable access to information resources that are essential for individual and community development. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], (2021) opines that libraries function not only as physical spaces housing books but also as

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dynamic institutions that provide digital access, promote literacy and support lifelong learning. Globally, libraries have been recognized as key partners in the implementation of the SDGs, particularly in areas related to education, innovation and reduced inequalities.

In Nigeria, libraries exist in multiple categories, including public, academic, school and special libraries. These institutions cater to a diverse population encompassing students, educators, researchers, professionals, rural inhabitants and marginalized groups. According to Aina (2017), Public libraries serve as community hubs for information access, while academic libraries support research and higher education. School libraries contribute to foundational literacy and special libraries provide specialized information tailored to specific sectors such as health, law and agriculture. Despite their immense potential, libraries in Nigeria remain underutilized in national development frameworks. Their contributions to achieving SDGs are often overlooked in policy formulation and implementation processes. This under-recognition limits their ability to participate in national and community-level development initiatives fully. Furthermore, structural challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure and limited technological integration constrain their effectiveness (Okiy, 2018). This observation implies that the limitations confronting libraries are largely systemic rather than professional. Therefore, the inability of libraries to maximize their developmental roles should not be interpreted as institutional failure but rather as evidence of inadequate investment in the country's information infrastructure.

This paper therefore critically examines the role of libraries in promoting Sustainable Development Goals within Nigerian communities by analysing their contributions to education, digital inclusion, socio-economic development and community empowerment. Beyond describing existing contributions, the paper evaluates the opportunities and challenges influencing library participation in sustainable development and advances practical strategies capable of strengthening their relevance within Nigeria's

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development agenda. Through this analysis, the paper argues that libraries represent indispensable institutions for sustainable national development whose full potential can only be realized through deliberate policy integration, sustained investment and stronger collaboration among governments, educational institutions and development partners.

Libraries and Sustainable Development

The relationship between libraries and sustainable development can be conceptualized through the **Information Access Model (IAM)**, which posits that access to relevant, timely and accurate information enhances decision-making and socio-economic outcomes.

Model Equation: Information Access Impact Model

SDI = f (IA + DL + CE + TI)

Where:

- **SDI** = Sustainable Development Impact
- **IA** = Information Access
- **DL** = Digital Literacy
- **CE** = Community Engagement
- **TI** = Technological Infrastructure

This model illustrates that sustainable development impact is a function of multiple library-driven variables.

Libraries as Agents of Sustainable Development

Libraries function within the broader knowledge economy as institutions that facilitate the creation organization, dissemination and preservation of information. In the context of sustainable development, their role extends beyond traditional book-lending

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services to encompass digital inclusion, capacity building and community engagement. The theoretical linkage between libraries and sustainable development can be explained through the Information Access and Development Model (IADM).

$$SDG_{impact} = \alpha IA + \beta DL + \gamma CE + \delta TI$$

Where:

- IA= Information Access
- DL= Digital Literacy
- CE= Community Engagement
- TI= Technological Infrastructure
- $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$= Weights of contribution

This model suggests that sustainable development outcomes are directly influenced by the degree to which libraries provide access to information, enhance digital literacy, engage communities and deploy technological infrastructure.

Table 1: Core Components of Library Contribution to SDGs

Dimension	Description	Relevant SDGs
Information Access	Provision of books, journals and digital resources	SDG 4, SDG 16
Digital Literacy	ICT training and digital skills development	SDG 4, SDG 9
Community Engagement	Outreach programs and awareness campaigns	SDG 1, SDG 3
Innovation Support	Access to research and development tools	SDG 8, SDG 9

Libraries and Quality Education (SDG 4)

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One of the most significant contributions of libraries to sustainable development in Nigeria is in the area of quality education. Libraries provide access to a wide range of educational resources that support teaching, learning and research. Academic libraries in particular serve as the backbone of higher education institutions by providing scholarly materials, research databases and academic support services (Yusuf & Iwu, 2020). Libraries provide organized and reliable information resources that enable individuals and communities to acquire knowledge necessary for improving their quality of life. Evidence from Nigerian and international scholarship continues to affirm that information accessibility significantly influences educational attainment, innovation, health awareness, agricultural productivity, entrepreneurship and democratic participation.

School libraries contribute to early literacy development by encouraging reading habits among students. Studies have shown that access to well-resourced libraries significantly improves students' academic performance and critical thinking skills (Echezona & Ugwuanyi, 2019). Public libraries further extend educational opportunities to out-of-school youths and adults through literacy programs and continuing education initiatives. However, disparities exist in the distribution of library resources across Nigeria. Rural areas often lack functional libraries, limiting access to educational materials and widening the knowledge gap between urban and rural populations (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Addressing these disparities should become a national priority because sustainable development cannot be achieved where significant segments of the population remain excluded from access to information and digital knowledge resources.

Table 2: Educational Services Provided by Libraries in Nigeria

Library Type	Key Function	Educational Impact
School Libraries	Support curriculum delivery	Improved literacy
Academic Libraries	Research and scholarship	Knowledge advancement
Public Libraries	Lifelong learning	Adult education

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Digital Libraries	Online access to resources	Global knowledge exposure

Libraries and Digital Inclusion (SDG 9 and SDG 10)

Digital inclusion is a critical aspect of sustainable development, particularly in developing countries. Libraries in Nigeria serve as access points for ICT resources, especially in underserved communities. By providing internet access and digital training, libraries help bridge the digital divide. Digital inclusion is essential for achieving equitable development in the modern world. Libraries in Nigeria serve as critical access points for digital technologies, particularly for individuals who cannot afford personal internet access. Ifijeh and Yusuf (2020) observed that the growing dependence on digital platforms for teaching, learning and information access has increased the need for libraries to expand electronic services and strengthen ICT infrastructure. The implication is that libraries must continuously adopt innovative digital services to remain relevant and to support equitable access to information. By providing digital literacy training, virtual reference services, electronic databases and online learning platforms, libraries help bridge the digital divide, reduce information inequality and contribute directly to the realization of SDGs 9 and 10.

Modern libraries increasingly provide digital literacy training, internet access, electronic information resources, research data management, entrepreneurship information and community development programmes. By providing computers, internet connectivity and digital training, libraries help bridge the digital divide (IFLA, 2021). Digital literacy programs offered by libraries equip users with the skills needed to navigate online information, participate in the digital economy and access e-government services. This is particularly important in rural communities where digital skills are limited. Despite these contributions, challenges such as inconsistent power supply, limited bandwidth and lack of skilled personnel hinder effective digital service delivery.

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Libraries and Socio-Economic Development (SDG 1 and SDG 8)

Libraries contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth by providing access to information on entrepreneurship, agriculture, health and vocational skills. Community libraries often organize workshops and training sessions that empower individuals economically. For instance, access to agricultural information can improve farming practices, while business information supports small-scale enterprises. Michael-Onuoha et al. (2020) argued that access to timely and reliable information through libraries empowers citizens with the knowledge and skills needed to improve productivity, create employment opportunities and reduce poverty. This is possible because libraries function as catalysts for socio-economic transformation by equipping individuals with information resources that foster self-reliance, innovation and sustainable livelihoods rather than merely serving as centres for reading and academic study.

Libraries contribute to socio-economic development by providing access to information that supports income-generating activities. Farmers, for instance, can access agricultural information that improves productivity, while entrepreneurs benefit from business and market information (Aina, 2017). Among other contributions, libraries also organize training programs on entrepreneurship, financial literacy and vocational skills. These initiatives empower individuals to create employment opportunities and improve their livelihoods.

Table 3: Socio-Economic Services Offered by Libraries

Service Area	Target Group	Development Outcome
Agricultural Information	Farmers	Increased yields
Business Support	Entrepreneurs	Business growth
Health Information	Communities	Improved health
Skill Acquisition	Youths	Employment creation

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Challenges Facing Libraries in Promoting SDGs in Nigeria

Despite their contributions, libraries in Nigeria face significant challenges that limit their effectiveness in promoting SDGs. One of the primary challenges is inadequate funding. Many libraries lack the financial resources needed to acquire up-to-date materials and maintain infrastructure (Okiy, 2018). Funding has always been an issue of serious concern in library collection development. Libraries are not usually business ventures, so raising internally generated revenue is not a reliable means to meeting its financial needs.

Another challenge is poor policy integration. Libraries are often excluded from national development strategies, which reduces their visibility and limits their capacity to contribute to SDGs. Additionally, technological constraints such as unreliable power supply and limited internet connectivity while lack of modern ICT tools limits service delivery. Also, Human Resource Constraints such as Shortage of trained librarians impacts efficiency.

Table 4: Key Challenges and Their Implications

Challenge	Description	Impact
Funding Deficit	Insufficient budget allocation	Poor services
Policy Exclusion	Lack of recognition	Limited impact
Infrastructure Deficiency	Poor facilities	Reduced access
Technological Barriers	Limited ICT tools	Digital divide

Support of or against the role of Libraries in SDGs

Several scholars strongly affirm that libraries are indispensable instruments for achieving sustainable development goals, particularly through information dissemination, literacy promotion and community engagement.

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Adepoju and Akobe (2023) argue in support of the transformative role of public libraries in rural development. Their study posits that libraries facilitate access to essential information that enhances research productivity, reduces knowledge gaps and empowers underserved populations. They emphasize that libraries are not passive institutions but active agents of development capable of reaching marginalized communities and supporting SDGs through inclusive information services. This position clearly aligns with the pro-library argument that access to information is central to development outcomes. Similarly, Salihu (2024) supports the argument that libraries are critical drivers of SDGs through their ability to provide relevant, timely and accessible information. Salihu maintains that libraries contribute significantly to national development by organizing educational programs, seminars and awareness campaigns that directly align with SDG targets. He further emphasizes that integrating libraries into national development strategies would significantly enhance their impact. This position reinforces the argument that libraries are underutilized yet powerful development tools.

In addition, Okuonghae and Igbinovia (2019) strongly advocate for the role of academic libraries in achieving SDGs. Their research highlights that academic libraries support sustainable development by providing conducive learning environments, facilitating research and promoting knowledge sharing across institutions. The authors further argue that collaboration among libraries and stakeholders enhances information dissemination and supports national development goals. This work situates academic libraries as central to knowledge production and innovation, which are essential for SDG attainment. Michael-Onuoha, Nkiko and Okuonghae (2020) adopt a supportive stance by linking libraries directly to poverty eradication (SDG 1). As Nigerian LIS scholars, they argue that access to accurate and relevant information enables individuals to acquire skills, improve livelihoods and reduce poverty levels. Their position is grounded in the belief that information accessibility leads to empowerment and socio-economic transformation.

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Another strong proponent is Dada (2025), who advances the concept of "green libraries" as instruments for environmental sustainability. Dada argues that libraries contribute to SDGs not only through education but also through environmentally sustainable practices that support climate action (SDG 13) and sustainable communities (SDG 11). This argument expands the scope of library contributions beyond traditional roles to include environmental stewardship.

Finally, Ominyi (2025) emphasizes the role of libraries in promoting peace and national security, which are critical for sustainable development. He argues that access to information fosters informed decision-making and social stability, thereby contributing to economic and social development. This perspective highlights the indirect but crucial role of libraries in achieving SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

While many scholars support the role of libraries in SDGs, others present critical perspectives, highlighting structural weaknesses and questioning their effectiveness. Okiy (2018) adopts a critical stance by arguing that libraries in Nigeria are significantly constrained by systemic challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure and lack of policy support. According to Okiy, these limitations prevent libraries from functioning optimally as development agents. This calls for substantial government investment and policy integration, without which the potential of libraries to contribute meaningfully to SDGs remains largely theoretical. Similarly, Akor (2023) argues that the roles of libraries in preserving knowledge and promoting culture and by extension development are not adequately appreciated by policymakers and the general public. This lack of recognition leads to underfunding and neglect, thereby weakening their capacity to contribute to SDGs.

In another critical perspective, Friday and Chinwe (2023) reveal that although Nigerian library leaders attempt to position libraries as development agents, they are

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hindered by poor political will, insufficient funding and weak institutional support. These challenges significantly reduce the effectiveness of libraries in promoting SDGs despite the efforts of professionals in the field. Abata-Ebire, Adebowale and Ojokuku (2018) acknowledge the potential of libraries but argue that their impact is limited by operational inefficiencies and lack of modernization. The emphasis is that without technological advancement and improved service delivery models, libraries may struggle to remain relevant in the digital age

The divergent scholarly positions reveal a nuanced understanding of the role of libraries in promoting SDGs in Nigeria. On one hand, proponents argue that libraries are powerful tools for education, information access and socio-economic development. On the other hand, critics highlight structural and systemic barriers that limit their effectiveness.

This duality can be expressed analytically as:

$$L_{SDG} = (P_{capacity}) - (C_{constraints})$$

Where:

- L_{SDG}= Library contribution to SDGs
- $P_{capacity}$= Potential capacity (information access, literacy, outreach)
- $C_{constraints}$= Structural constraints (funding, policy, infrastructure)

The implication of this model is that the effectiveness of libraries in promoting SDGs depends on the extent to which their inherent capacities outweigh existing constraints.

Strategies for Enhancing Library Contributions to SDGs

To maximize the role of libraries in promoting SDGs in Nigeria, several strategies must be implemented.

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i. First, there is a need for increased funding from government and private sector stakeholders. Investment in library infrastructure and resources is essential for improving service delivery.
ii. Second, libraries should be integrated into national development policies. This will enhance their visibility and ensure that they are recognized as key partners in achieving SDGs. Third, the adoption of digital technologies should be prioritized to improve access to information.
iii. Capacity building for library staff is also critical. Training programs should be implemented to enhance their skills in digital information management and community engagement.
iv. Policy Integration: Inclusion of libraries in national SDG frameworks.
v. Increased Funding: Government and private sector investment.
vi. Technological Advancement: Adoption of digital library systems.
vii. Capacity Building: Training and development of library personnel.
viii. Community Partnerships: Collaboration with NGOs and development agencies.

Recommendations

Based on the critical analysis of the role of libraries in promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigerian communities, the following five strategic recommendations are proposed:

i. **Adequate and Sustainable Funding of Libraries:** There is a pressing need for increased and sustained funding from government, private sector organizations and international development partners. Adequate funding will enable libraries to acquire up-to-date information resources, modernize infrastructure and expand service delivery. Sustainable funding mechanisms such as public-private partnerships and endowment funds should also be explored to ensure long-term viability.

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ii. **Integration of Libraries into National Development Policies:** Libraries should be formally recognized and integrated into Nigeria's national development frameworks and SDG implementation strategies. This policy inclusion will enhance their visibility, legitimacy and operational effectiveness. Policymakers must therefore acknowledge libraries as critical stakeholders in education, digital inclusion and community development.

iii. **Technological Advancement and Digital Transformation:** Investment in modern Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure is essential for enhancing library services. Libraries should adopt digital systems such as e-libraries, online databases and virtual learning platforms to improve access to information. Improved technological capacity will also strengthen digital inclusion efforts and bridge the digital divide in rural communities.

iv. **Capacity Building and Professional Development of Librarians:** Continuous training and professional development programs should be implemented to equip librarians with the skills required for digital information management, community engagement and SDG advocacy. Skilled personnel are essential for effective service delivery and innovation in library operations.

v. **Strengthening Community Engagement and Partnerships:** Libraries should actively collaborate with community organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), educational institutions and international agencies to expand their outreach and impact. Community-based programs such as literacy campaigns, health awareness initiatives and entrepreneurial training should be intensified.

Conclusion

Without adequate financial support, libraries in Nigeria will continue to operate below their potential, thereby limiting their contributions to sustainable development.

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Increased funding is therefore not optional but fundamental to enhancing library effectiveness in achieving SDGs.

The exclusion of libraries from national development policies significantly undermines their strategic importance. Integrating libraries into SDG frameworks will reposition them as central actors in Nigeria's development agenda and improve their overall impact.

The future relevance of libraries in Nigeria is closely tied to their ability to embrace digital transformation. Technological advancement is essential for improving access to information, promoting digital literacy and ensuring that libraries remain competitive in the information age.

The effectiveness of libraries is largely dependent on the competence of their personnel. Investing in the continuous development of librarians will enhance service delivery, innovation and the overall contribution of libraries to sustainable development.

Libraries that actively engage with their communities and build strategic partnerships are more likely to achieve meaningful development outcomes. Strengthening community engagement will ensure that library services are relevant, inclusive and aligned with the needs of the population.

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