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PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE DELIVERY FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN SOUTH-EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study examined public library service delivery for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in South-East Nigeria. The study was guided by four research questions and covered public library boards in five states, involving professional and paraprofessional library staff and registered active community users. A sample of 300 respondents, comprising 150 library staff and 150 community users, was selected through multistage quota sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Public Libraries and Sustainable Development Goals Questionnaire (PLSDGQ). Out of the 300 copies questionnaire administered, 282 were returned in usable form, comprising 141 staff and 141 community users, representing a 94.0% response rate. The instrument was validated by specialists in Library and Information Science and Educational Measurement and Evaluation, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82. Data were analysed using frequency counts, mean and standard deviation. Findings showed that public library programmes and services supported selected SDGs, with the strongest support for SDG 4 (Quality Education). Government budgetary allocations were the major resource acquisition mechanism, while community donations and NGO partnerships provided supplementary support. Utilization of SDG-related services was generally high, but ICT-based and specialized services recorded lower utilization. Major challenges were inadequate funding, unstable electricity, insufficient ICT infrastructure, staff shortages and outdated service models. The study

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recommends sustainable funding, improved ICT and power infrastructure, continuous staff development, user-oriented services and stronger partnerships to enhance public library capacity for SDG-related service delivery in South-East Nigeria.

Keywords: Public libraries, Library Service Delivery, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Public Library Services

Introduction

Public libraries are community-based institutions that provide equitable access to information, knowledge and learning opportunities for diverse groups of users. Their community orientation makes them important platforms for education, information access and social development. Kosciejew (2020) notes that public libraries, through their commitment to information provision and access, have an important role in advancing the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

The role of public libraries is expressed largely through library service delivery, which involves providing information resources, facilities, programmes and assistance that respond to users' educational, informational and developmental needs. Effective service delivery enables libraries to transform their resources and expertise into meaningful benefits for individuals and communities. IFLA emphasizes that libraries contribute to development by providing access to information and delivering services and programmes that respond to changing community information needs

Through effective service delivery, public libraries can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 17 global goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. Library contributions are particularly evident in areas such as quality education, health, employment, gender equality, access to information and community development. Kosciejew (2020) identifies public libraries as important actors in realizing

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the 2030 Agenda, while Connaway, Doyle, Cyr, Gallagher and Cantrell (2023) found that libraries undertake activities that contribute to several SDGs, even where the goals are not formally incorporated into strategic planning.

The practical contribution of libraries to the SDGs is therefore realized through public library services, including literacy programmes, access to information resources, ICT services, educational programmes, community outreach and other services designed around local needs. Such services provide the mechanisms through which public libraries support learning, skills development, health information, economic opportunities and community participation. Devi, Gupta and Arahova (2024) further show that library initiatives and programmes can mobilize the library sector towards achieving the SDGs.

Statement of the Problem

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require concerted efforts to improve access to education, health information, employment opportunities, digital technologies and social inclusion. Public libraries can support these efforts through information resources, learning opportunities, ICT facilities and community-oriented services. However, their capacity to perform this developmental role depends on adequate funding, relevant resources, functional ICT infrastructure, reliable electricity, suitable facilities and qualified personnel. Public libraries in South-East Nigeria operate under these limitations, yet there is limited consolidated empirical evidence on the extent to which they support specific SDGs. It is also unclear how their resources and infrastructure are acquired and maintained, the extent to which communities utilize SDG-related services, and the operational challenges affecting service delivery across the five

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states. The problem, therefore, is the limited empirical understanding of public libraries' contribution, resource capacity, utilization and operational challenges in supporting SDG-related development in South-East Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions

1. What challenges confront public libraries in implementing sustainable development initiatives in South-East Nigeria?
2. To what extent do community members utilize SDG-related public library services in South-East Nigeria?
3. What methods are used by public libraries in South-East Nigeria to acquire and maintain resources and infrastructure for supporting sustainable development initiatives?
4. What Sustainable Development Goals are supported by public library programmes and services in South-East Nigeria?

Literature Review

Public Libraries and Sustainable Development

Public libraries have increasingly moved beyond their traditional role as repositories of books to become community-based information, learning, digital-access and social-development institutions. Their contribution to sustainable development is particularly associated with equitable access to information, lifelong learning, digital inclusion, community participation and access to knowledge resources. A systematic review by Mathiasson and Jochumsen (2021) shows that library research increasingly connects

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sustainability with social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of development. In developing countries, this role is particularly significant because inequalities in access to information and technology can restrict participation in development processes. Aregbesola, Owolabi, and Adebisi (2024) argue that public libraries can function as information convergence points through which communities are informed and mobilized around sustainable development. Their Nigerian study emphasizes the strategic role of public libraries in disseminating relevant information and supporting public participation in the SDGs. Similarly, Oyeniran (2023) in a study of the relevance of public libraries to the SDGs, identifies public libraries as important institutions for supporting education, information access, ICT development and other dimensions of sustainable development in Nigeria. Salihu (2024) further argues that libraries and information centres can support SDG implementation through accessible information resources, community awareness and development-oriented programmes.

Public Library Programmes and the Sustainable Development Goals

Public libraries can contribute to several SDGs through their educational, informational, technological and community-oriented functions. Their contribution to SDG 4 (Quality Education) is particularly direct through reading programmes, access to educational resources, information literacy and lifelong learning. Their provision of employment, entrepreneurship and skills-related information can support SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), while health-information services may contribute to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). ICT provision and digital-literacy programmes are relevant to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and can also contribute to

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SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through improved access to information and technology. Salubuyi, Udensi, Akor, and Bitagi (2022), examining public libraries in Niger State, found that public libraries could be deliberately positioned as instruments for implementing the SDGs through awareness activities, ICT services, programmes and collaboration with relevant development institutions. Aregbesola et al. (2024) similarly demonstrate that public libraries can support sustainable development through information dissemination, education and community mobilization. Their study is particularly relevant to the present research because it situates public libraries within the Nigerian development environment. Ajani et al. (2025) found that Nigerian public libraries are using digital literacy, emerging technologies and open-access platforms to promote knowledge accessibility and social inclusion, although inadequate infrastructure, unreliable electricity, limited funding and skills gaps continue to constrain these efforts.

Resource Acquisition and Infrastructure Maintenance

The capacity of public libraries to contribute to sustainable development depends heavily on the availability and maintenance of information resources, ICT facilities, buildings, electricity, internet connectivity and qualified personnel. Recent research indicates that inadequate financing remains one of the principal constraints on library development in Nigeria. Okeuhie, Ijeoma, Uzoma, Okwuchi, and Nwakaego (2022) identified inadequate funding as a major problem affecting public libraries and emphasized the need for alternative funding mechanisms alongside government support. Abdussalam-Bayero et al. (2021) similarly identified funding as a major obstacle to the

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development of digital libraries in Nigeria, particularly because digital services require continuous investment in technology and infrastructure.

Resource acquisition can therefore involve government allocations, donations, grants, partnerships and other forms of external support. Recent Nigerian evidence supports the relevance of partnerships. Isewele-Ishola, Aborishade, and Ishola (2025) found that public libraries in South-West Nigeria were engaging societal groups in partnerships aimed at supporting SDG-related activities, although collaboration was not yet widespread across all state library systems. Similarly, Oladokun et al. (2025) examined corporate social responsibility support for public libraries across Nigerian geopolitical zones and recommended stronger CSR collaboration and alternative funding arrangements to sustain library development initiatives. These findings suggest that While government funding remains important, complementary mechanisms are also needed to support resource sustainability.

Utilization of Public Library Services

The developmental contribution of public libraries majorly depends on whether community members actually use the resources and services provided. The existence of educational materials, ICT facilities or development-oriented programmes does not necessarily translate into community benefit if users are unaware of them or cannot access them. Yahaya and Abdullahi (2021) examined ICT integration in a proposed public library in Gwagwalada, Abuja, and demonstrated the relevance of ICT-enabled spaces to contemporary public library services. Ogunbodede and Bobmanuel (2022), studying public library operations in Rivers State, found that ICT utilization was affected by

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limitations including inadequate facilities, funding constraints, connectivity and electricity problems. More recent evidence from Anambra State indicates that ICT integration can improve the speed and quality of reference services, while infrastructural deficits, inadequate funding, staff skills gaps and low user digital literacy remain important constraints.

Challenges Affecting Public Libraries' Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals

The literature identifies several interconnected challenges affecting public libraries in developing contexts. These include inadequate funding, poor ICT infrastructure, unreliable electricity, insufficient information resources, limited staff competencies, inadequate facilities and weak partnerships. A systematic review by sustainable-library researchers emphasizes that sustainability challenges in libraries are multidimensional and include institutional, technological, social and resource-related barriers. In Nigeria, Abdussalam-Bayero et al. (2021) identify funding as a major obstacle to digital library development, while Ogunbodede and Bobmanuel (2022) identify ICT, connectivity and electricity constraints in public library operations. The most recent Nigerian evidence reinforces these concerns. Ajani et al. (2025) found that poor digital infrastructure, unreliable power supply, limited funding and skills gaps continue to constrain the sustainability and accessibility of Nigerian public libraries. These challenges are particularly important because contemporary SDG-oriented library services increasingly depend upon digital technologies and reliable infrastructure.

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Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Institutional Theory developed by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and advanced by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). The theory explains how organisations are shaped by external pressures such as government policies, regulations, professional standards and societal expectations. The theory is relevant to this study because public libraries operate under government mandates to provide information resources, programmes and services that support community development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the effective implementation of these responsibilities depends on adequate funding, resources, ICT infrastructure and staff capacity. Institutional Theory therefore provides a basis for examining the relationship between institutional expectations and the actual capacity of public libraries to implement SDG-related programmes and services in South-East Nigeria.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The study covered the public library boards in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States, with professional and paraprofessional library staff and registered adult active community users as respondents. A sample of 300 respondents was selected through multistage quota sampling, comprising 150 library staff and 150 community users. The staff sample was proportionately allocated across the five states - Enugu (47), Anambra (36), Imo (31), Abia (23) and Ebonyi (13); while 30 community users were selected from each state. A four-point scale of Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1), with a criterion mean of

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2.50. Three specialists in Library and Information Science and Educational Measurement and Evaluation validated the instrument. A pretest involving 20 respondents at Delta State Library Board, Asaba, yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82. Of the 150 questionnaires administered to staff, 141 were returned and usable (94.0%). Similarly, 141 of the 150 questionnaires administered to community users were returned and usable (94.0%). Thus, 282 questionnaires were usable. Research Questions 1, 2 and 4 were analyzed using the 141 staff responses, while Research Question 3 was analyzed using the 141 community-user responses, reflecting the institutional and user perspectives addressed by the respective questions. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. A mean of 2.50 or above indicated Supported/Agreed, while a mean below 2.50 indicated Not Supported/Disagreed, as applicable. The findings represent respondents' assessments and not independent verification of actual SDG achievement or service outcomes.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Library Staff Ratings of SDG Areas Supported by Public Library Programmes and Services in South-East Nigeria (N = 141)

S/N	SDG Area	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	SDG 4: Quality Education (literacy drives, adult education and study spaces)	69	60	9	3	3.38	0.70	Supported
2	SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth (vocational skills and job-search support)	26	67	39	9	2.78	0.82	Supported
3	SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being (health awareness and public health information)	21	57	50	13	2.61	0.85	Supported
4	SDG 5: Gender Equality (empowerment of women and girls)	12	44	68	17	2.36	0.80	Not Supported
5	SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (public ICT access and internet hub services)	8	34	71	28	2.16	0.80	Not Supported

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S/N	SDG Area	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
	Grand Mean					**2.66**	**0.80**	**Supported**

Criterion mean = 2.50.

The results in Table 1 show the mean scores of library staff rate of the overall contribution of public library programmes and services to selected SDGs. The grand mean of 2.66 (SD = 0.80) indicated SDGs areas supported by public library programmes and services. Based on the criterion mean, SDG item 4 scored 3.38 (0.70), 8 = 2.78 (0.82) and 3 scored 2.61 (0.85) where above the criterion mean indicating supported by library programmes and services. The strong rating for SDG 4 is consistent with Aregbesola, Owolabi, and Adebisi (2024), who highlighted the role of public libraries in supporting education and sustainable development through community-oriented services. Overall, the findings indicated that public library contributions were perceived to be strongest in education.

Table 2: Library Staff Ratings of Resource Acquisition and Maintenance Methods Used by Public Libraries in South-East Nigeria (N = 141)

S/N	Resource Acquisition/Maintenance Method	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Direct annual state government budgetary allocations	80	55	5	1	3.52	0.60	Agreed
2	Partnerships with NGOs and civic bodies	25	76	35	5	2.86	0.74	Agreed
3	Soliciting book donations and equipment gifts from community donors	39	73	27	2	3.06	0.72	Agreed
4	Consortium-based resource sharing/inter-library loan models	6	31	75	29	2.10	0.77	Disagreed
5	Public-private partnerships for infrastructure/technology funding	5	26	78	32	2.03	0.75	Disagreed
	Grand Mean					**2.71**	**0.73**	**Agreed**

Criterion mean = 2.50.

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The results in Table 2 show the mean ratings of library staff on resource acquisition and maintenance methods. The grand mean of 2.71 (SD = 0.73) indicated agreement with the identified methods. Based on the criterion mean, government budgetary allocations recorded the highest mean of 3.52 (SD = 0.60), followed by community donations 3.06 (SD = 0.72) and NGO/civic partnerships 2.86 (SD = 0.74). The predominance of government funding is consistent with Abdussalam-Bayero et al. (2021), who identified funding as a major issue affecting library development in Nigeria. Overall, resource acquisition depended mainly on government funding, supplemented by community and NGO support.

Table 3: Library users Rating of the Extent of utilization of public library services in South-East Nigeria (N = 141).

S/N	Service Utilization Indicators	VHE (4)	HE (3)	LE (2)	VLE (1)	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Utilization of literacy materials and physical reading spaces for education	67	63	10	1	3.39	0.65	High Extent
2	Utilization of vocational and skill acquisition resource collections	24	66	44	7	2.76	0.79	High Extent
3	Participation in library-organized community health and literacy drives	18	54	56	13	2.55	0.83	High Extent
4	Accessing public ICT facilities, computer workstations and internet services	6	30	77	28	2.10	0.76	Low Extent
5	Engagement with dedicated gender development and women's empowerment programmes	7	34	73	27	2.15	0.78	Low Extent
Grand Mean						2.59	0.78	High Extent

Criterion mean = 2.50.

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The results in Table 3 show the mean ratings of library users on the extent of utilization of public library services. The grand mean of 2.59 (SD = 0.78) indicated a high extent of utilization. Utilization was highest for literacy materials and physical reading spaces (3.39, SD = 0.65), followed by vocational and skill acquisition resources (2.76, SD = 0.79). In contrast, ICT facilities and internet services recorded a low mean of 2.10 (SD = 0.76). The low ICT utilization is consistent with Ogunbodede and Bobmanuel (2022), who identified inadequate facilities, connectivity and electricity as constraints to ICT use in public libraries. Overall, users utilized conventional educational services more than ICT-based services.

Table 4: Operational challenges/constraints affecting SDG-related service delivery among library staff (N = 141)

S/N	Operational Challenges / Constraints	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	x̄	SD	Decision
1	Chronic budgetary underfunding and delayed release of state allocations	89	48	3	1	3.60	0.57	Agreed
2	Unstable national grid power supply and lack of alternative energy sources	88	49	3	1	3.59	0.57	Agreed
3	Inadequate ICT infrastructure, low internet bandwidth and decaying workstations	66	66	8	1	3.40	0.63	Agreed
4	Shortage of professional staff trained in digital systems and community advocacy	41	74	24	2	3.09	0.71	Agreed
5	Outdated organizational service models and rigid cataloguing structures	32	72	34	3	2.94	0.74	Agreed
Grand Mean						**3.33**	**0.64**	**Agreed**

Criterion mean = 2.50.

The results in Table 4 show the mean ratings of library staff on the operational challenges affecting SDG-related service delivery. The grand mean of 3.33 (SD = 0.64)

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indicated agreement with the identified challenges. The major challenges were budgetary underfunding and delayed allocations (3.60, SD = 0.57), unstable electricity supply (3.59, SD = 0.57), and inadequate ICT infrastructure (3.40, SD = 0.63). These findings are consistent with Abdussalam-Bayero et al. (2021) and Ogunbodede and Bobmanuel (2022), who identified inadequate funding, ICT infrastructure and electricity as major constraints to library development and operations in Nigeria. Overall, inadequate funding, electricity and ICT infrastructure were the most prominent constraints to SDG-related service delivery.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Sustainable Funding and Resource Acquisition**:** Public library boards and state governments should provide adequate and regular funding for public library programmes, resources and infrastructure. Libraries should also strengthen community donations and partnerships with NGOs and civic organisations to supplement government funding.
2. Strengthening SDG-Oriented Library Services: Public libraries should strengthen programmes that support quality education, decent work, health and well-being, while giving greater attention to gender equality and ICT-related services that recorded lower levels of support and utilization.
3. Improved ICT and Power Infrastructure: Public libraries should provide functional ICT facilities, reliable internet connectivity and alternative sources of

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electricity, including renewable energy, to improve access to digital services and enhance SDG-related service delivery.

4. Staff Development and User-Oriented Services: Library boards should provide continuous professional development for staff in digital literacy, ICT, community advocacy and SDG-related services, while redesigning services to respond more effectively to users' educational, vocational, health and developmental needs.

Conclusion

Public libraries in South East Nigeria serve as vital social institutions for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly regarding quality education (SDG 4), economic empowerment (SDG 8), and public health awareness (SDG 3). However, their contribution remains constrained by chronic state underfunding, unstable electricity supply, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and gaps in staff technical training. Addressing these challenges requires moving away from traditional, static operational models toward dynamic, technology-enabled community centers. By adopting public-private partnerships, investing in renewable solar energy, modernizing cataloguing standards, and training library staff in SDG advocacy, public libraries in South East Nigeria can serve as efficient drivers of sustainable community development

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