



**PROCEEDINGS OF THE 62ND NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
ON PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS THROUGH
INNOVATIVE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE
DELIVERY IN NIGERIA, PORT HARCOURT 7TH-12TH JULY, 2024.**

Garden City 2024



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**BUILDING SUSTAINABLE LIBRARIES BY ENHANCING DIVERSITY
AND INCLUSION IN THE DIGITAL ERA**

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Abstract

In the digital era, the role of libraries has evolved beyond traditional repositories of information to dynamic hubs of knowledge, fostering inclusivity and sustainability. Sustainable libraries embody a commitment to environmental, social, and economic responsibility. In the digital age, this extends beyond eco-friendly practices to encompass the democratization of information access and representation. Recognizing the transformative potential of technology, libraries are strategically positioned to bridge the digital divide by ensuring easy access to resources and services for all community members. Central to the sustainability of libraries is the enhancement of diversity and inclusion. Libraries are not only gatekeepers of information but also cultural facilitators that reflect the rich tapestry of communities they serve. By embracing diversity in their collections, programming, and staffing, libraries can become vibrant centers where individuals from diverse backgrounds find themselves appropriately represented and engaged. The digital era amplifies the impact of inclusivity efforts, as online platforms offer unprecedented opportunities to connect with a global audience. Sustainable libraries leverage technology to create inclusive digital spaces, breaking down geographical barriers and fostering collaboration among communities with varied perspectives. Additionally, digital resources enable libraries to curate content that reflects the diversity of voices, experiences, and knowledge, promoting a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the world. Building sustainable libraries in the digital era requires a multifaceted approach. It involves investing in technological infrastructure for widespread digital access, fostering a diverse and inclusive organizational culture, and actively engaging with communities to understand and address their unique needs. Moreover, it necessitates partnerships with stakeholders across sectors to ensure the long-term viability of library initiatives. In conclusion, the path to building sustainable libraries in the digital era lies in the promotion of diversity and inclusion. By embracing these principles, libraries can evolve into resilient, dynamic institutions that empower communities, contribute to a sustainable future, and serve as catalysts for positive social change.

Keywords: Digital Era, Diversity, Inclusion and Sustainable Libraries

Introduction

Libraries have become indispensable institutions for improving the quality of research, information literacy, skills and learning for its users and communities across the globe, which facilitate diversity and inclusion in digital era. Nowadays, Libraries provides access to several information resources, services, providing educational opportunities, health and medical information, community services and resources, and meaningful participation in civic and political discourse. Libraries are essential in the growth and development of any nation. No society grow without encompassing investment in research and information centers, the outcome which also birth significant proliferation in information and communication technologies; providing residents, businesses, and community institutions countless opportunities to leverage technology to improve their day-to-day lives and operations. In the digital era, the role of libraries has evolved beyond traditional repositories of information to dynamic hubs of knowledge, fostering

inclusivity and sustainability. All these can only be possible through digital inclusion and diversification. Libraries being an institution that play crucial role in fostering digital inclusion, promoting democratic values, and ensuring equitable access to information in today's digital age can better promote digital inclusion and sustainable development, by strengthening policy coordination, expand local initiatives for digital literacy, enhance digital services, and provide digital literacy education because digital adoption is more than just the adoption of broadband; it is the use and participation in digital readiness, digital literacy, and skills training that goes beyond just the connectivity but comprises a range of engagements with digital technologies, content, platforms, and services (Rudy Briocche et'al, 2021).

Libraries over the years have evolved significantly from traditional repositories of physical collections to dynamic spaces that incorporated modern and advanced technologies, digital collections, social media, and multimedia resources to serve their communities. In the digital era, libraries transformations cannot be overemphasized, this trait redefining their roles and functions to adapt to the changing landscape of information access and technology despite historical challenges and threats they faced.

Findings such as the report of Rudy Briocche et'al (2021) on Digital Empowerment and Inclusion highlighted that the role of libraries in fostering digital inclusion in communities is an area that does not always receive adequate attention it's deserved. The report showed that libraries role and purposes today are now more aligned to spurring digital adoption efforts within opportunity society with need for more exploration and analyzes. Studies also showed that libraries with diverse collections, including digital resources, attract a broader range of users from diverse backgrounds. Access to materials that reflect their identities and experiences promotes inclusivity and engagement with the library Magus and Afebuameh (2023). It's not doubt libraries digital inclusion and sustainable development is inevitable and necessary for libraries though there are enormous challenges usually accustomed to it such as navigating the contemporary digital landscape, addressing differences in digital literacy, and defining their democratic responsibilities within the evolving digital trends.

The United Nations' 2030 agenda declaration for sustainable development noted that Information Communication Technologies and global interconnectedness is capable of engineering progress of humans and bridging existing digital divide (United Nations, 2015). This explains the prominence of ICTs in the agenda in an inclusive manner. This was affirmed by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2021) that by 2030, every individual must have affordable access to the Internet in order to eliminate the digital divide. Government at all levels and various stakeholders must support encompassing access to ICT infrastructures, build digital literacy and skills, and increase the relevance and understanding of the advantages of using the internet. This according to Magus and Afebuameh (2023) relate that, libraries as a major stakeholder in the development agenda must therefore, strengthen their roles in digital inclusion and diversity as a stride towards promoting the attainment of sustainable development.

It is therefore proficient while building a sustainable library to put into consideration diversity and inclusiveness. According to Harris (2023) sustainability is usually defined so that it includes economy, environment and equality. Sustainable development should therefore take account of economic considerations, but the development should also be environmentally conscious. In addition, development should include a social aspect: it is not sustainable if it increases human inequality. The author further reinstated that the sustainable library takes seriously and responds to the various economic, environmental and social challenges our societies confront. Sustainable libraries should act responsively and promote responsibility in their community in every possible way, not just by sharing reliable information.

Foregoing, this study shall examine and address the building of sustainable libraries by enhancing diversity and inclusion in digital era.

Conceptual Review of Sustainable Libraries

Libraries serve as vital hubs for intellectual interchange and community participation in addition to serving as knowledge warehouses in a world growing more interconnected by the day. However, libraries must change to reflect the many needs and viewpoints of their patrons if they are to be relevant and sustainable in the digital age. This calls for improving diversity and inclusion in library systems in a proactive manner. Similarly, libraries are not merely repositories of knowledge but serve as exemplars of sustainable practices, demonstrating how institutions can minimize their ecological footprint while maximizing their societal impact. With this in mind, the paper focuses on sustainability of libraries in the digital age while emphasizing inclusion and diversity within the context of libraries.

The Concept of Sustainability

Sustainability is meeting current needs without compromising the opportunities of future generations (Hopper, 2013). It is a concept that emphasizes the need to have or build enduring practices that have the capacity to stand the test of time, in a manner that serves benefit to the people and community. Mollenkamp (2023) is of the opinion that sustainability, in its widest meaning, is the capacity to sustain or continue a process over an extended period of time. Sustainability in commercial and policy contexts aims to keep natural or physical resources from running out so they can be used for a long time to come. Sustainable policies place a strong emphasis on how a particular policy or corporate practice will affect people,

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ecosystems, and the overall economy in the future. The idea frequently reflects the conviction that the earth would sustain irreversible harm if significant changes are not made to the way it is managed.

Pillars of Sustainability

Sustainability is said to have certain pillars that uphold it. These pillars help to strengthen the workability of the concept and practice. The idea of sustainability is often broken down into three pillars: economic, environmental, and social—also known informally as profits, planet, and people (Mollenkamp, 2023). According to that dissection, the idea of these pillars are classified as follows:

Economic sustainability is centered on protecting the natural resources—both renewable and exhaustible—that serve as the physical inputs for economic activity. The idea of **environmental sustainability** places more focus on the soil and atmosphere, two life support systems that are essential to economic activity and human existence.

On the other hand, **social sustainability** addresses how economic systems affect people personally and include initiatives to end hunger and poverty as well as fight inequality. The third pillar aligns directly with the approach of sustainability in the foregoing discussion, perhaps not to end hunger per se but to eradicate inequality and encourage inclusivity and diversity within the information system in the digital age where technologies dominates all human activities.

Sustainable Libraries in the Digital Age

Libraries have existed for many centuries providing information and documentation services to individuals, corporate bodies, governments, and even the society at large. The goal of all libraries has been to sustain relevance and maintain their pride of place as information access providers. In the digital age, sustainable libraries promote diversity and inclusion by making sure that everyone has equal access to digital resources, by providing all-encompassing programs for digital literacy, by offering multilingual services, by hosting programming that is rich in cultural contexts, by curating collections that are diverse, by emphasizing accessibility, by participating in community outreach, and by implementing inclusive policies and practices. By means of these endeavors, libraries function as hospitable and easily navigable venues where people from all backgrounds can interact with information, establish connections with their communities, and commemorate their many identities and viewpoints.

In the digital age, libraries are essential for creating good social change, lifelong learning, and social fairness because they embrace sustainability principles and cultivate an inclusive culture. Sustainable libraries in this context emphasize the intentional roles and approaches that libraries in the modern age which seeks or aspires to make impact on its community must implement in order to bridge the digital divide existing among information seekers. In this light, Khamaru and Harikrishnan (2024), suggests that selecting the technological innovations that are inescapable for practical use is essential in this age of disruptive innovation. In order to select the right digital tool for long-term growth and improvement, one must make evidence-based decisions.

Understanding Diversity in the Digital Age

Establishing an inclusive organizational culture is essential to establishing a supportive and appreciated work environment for all employees. In addition to increasing employee engagement and job happiness, an inclusive culture fosters diversity, equity, and a sense of belonging, all of which improve business outcomes. Top talent is drawn to and retained by inclusive workplaces, which also promote a respectful and cooperative atmosphere. By embracing diversity and creating a safe and supportive environment for all employees, organizations can improve productivity, build stronger relationships with customers and stakeholders, and contribute to a more equitable and just society (Gao, 2023).

In the context of the library profession, some well-known library and information stakeholders are beginning to take steps towards institutionalizing diversity and inclusion programmes from the perspective of library users. The American Library Association (2021) in a publication acknowledges the vital need for everyone to have access to library and information resources, services, and technologies, particularly those who may be facing obstacles to equal access to education, employment, and housing as well as those who may be facing barriers related to language or literacy, economic hardship, social or cultural isolation, physical or mental barriers, racism, or discrimination based on appearance, ethnicity, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. In furtherance to the foregoing, ALA suggests the following as ways to overcome access barriers:

- Providing collections and programs which accurately and authentically reflect the cultural perspectives of diverse communities.
- Promoting library services through communication channels and community events organized by people of color and intersectionalities.
- Developing and providing services which address the unique needs specific communities.
- Investing in recruitment strategies that build a diverse staff so that all people see themselves represented in the administration, management, and delivery of library services.

Ultimately, recognizing and addressing the complex ways in which digital technologies interact with different facets of human diversity is essential to understanding diversity in the digital age. This entails recognizing cultural variances, guaranteeing fair access to materials on digital literacy, encouraging diversity in language and representation, supporting linguistic ambiguity, planning for accessibility, protecting identity and privacy, closing the digital divide, and opposing harassment and discrimination online. Through proactive engagement with these challenges, people and organizations can strive to create a more equitable and inclusive digital environment that enables people from a variety of backgrounds to fully and effectively participate in the digital era.

Achieving Sustainability through Inclusion and Diversity in Libraries of the Digital Age

Leveraging on technological advancements as well as opportunities presented by technology, achieving diversity and inclusion in modern libraries may seem not so difficult. The following strategies can actually help these libraries to achieve its inclusion goals:

- ***Promoting inclusive digital access***

A multimodal strategy that includes user-centered design, accessible and cheap access, education, community participation, legislative advocacy, and collaboration is needed to promote inclusive digital access. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to design digital goods and services with accessibility features, offer reasonably priced internet access and gadgets, provide digital literacy programs catered to a variety of communities, interact with local stakeholders to learn about their needs, promote laws that support digital inclusion, work with different organizations, and involve users in the design process. We can close the digital divide and make sure that everyone, regardless of background or ability, may fully engage in and benefit from the digital world by giving inclusion first priority in digital efforts. Through peer coaching and learning opportunities, this program will help library employees from a variety of areas build the skill sets and knowledge bases necessary to advance in their careers as librarians. Additionally, non-minority library staff members will get knowledge on how to create and preserve inclusive, culturally varied work environments in the library industry through this program.

- ***Diversifying Library Collections and Services***

Library collections and services offered by modern libraries aiming for sustainability must ensure to diversify their collection in a manner that reflects the diverse information needs of their users, devoid of race, religion, or political affiliation. Equitable information access must remain the goal. In order to properly reflect those who are marginalized by societal perspectives—such as those based on color, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, physical ability, or socio-economic class—the library is working to diversify. Ways to diversify library collections.

- ***Creating Inclusive Spaces and Programs***

Developing Inclusive Spaces and Programs entails planning library areas that are hospitable and accessible to people with disabilities as well as people from all backgrounds. It also entails presenting events and programming that celebrates a variety of cultures, identities, and viewpoints and giving library staff members the tools and training they need to promote an inclusive environment and deal with cases of bias or discrimination. Establishing an inclusive organizational culture is essential to establishing a supportive and appreciated work environment for all employees. In addition to increasing employee engagement and job happiness, an inclusive culture fosters diversity, equity, and a sense of belonging, all of which improve business outcomes. Top talent is drawn to and retained by inclusive workplaces, which also promote a respectful and cooperative atmosphere. By embracing diversity and creating a safe and supportive environment for all employees, organizations can improve productivity, build stronger relationships with customers and stakeholders, and contribute to a more equitable and just society (Gao, 2023).

- ***Leveraging Technology for Inclusive Outreach***

Using mobile optimization, multilingual content, and accessible platforms are all part of leveraging technology for inclusive outreach to make information easily accessible to a wide range of audiences. Social media, online events, and collaborations with neighborhood organizations are effective ways to interact with communities, reach underrepresented groups, and get insightful input for ongoing development. Through giving priority to user feedback, offering training in digital literacy, and encouraging cooperative content creation, companies can cultivate a feeling of empowerment and inclusivity within their audience. Furthermore, maintaining data security and privacy fosters trust among disadvantaged populations, which increases the efficacy of digital outreach initiatives in fostering an atmosphere that is more inviting and inclusive for all.

Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in a 21st Century Library

Libraries, once considered repositories of dusty tomes, have transformed into vibrant community hubs. In the 21st century, these institutions face a crucial challenge: ensuring their collections and services reflect the richness of the communities they serve. This essay argues that fostering diversity and inclusion in libraries

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is not just a moral imperative but a strategic necessity for their continued relevance. Diversity encompasses a wide range of identities, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and socioeconomic background. Inclusion goes beyond mere representation; it requires creating a welcoming environment where everyone feels valued and empowered to access information and engage with the library's resources. Diversity encompasses differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and more. Inclusion goes beyond mere representation and involves creating an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and have equal access to library resources and services. Libraries have long served as cornerstones of communities, offering access to information and fostering a love of learning. However, in the 21st century, the need to be truly diverse and inclusive is paramount. The 21st-century library is no longer a static repository of books, but a dynamic hub for learning, engagement, and community. To fulfill this evolving role, libraries must strive to be diverse and inclusive spaces that welcome and empower users from all walks of life. This study explores strategies libraries can implement to enhance their ability to serve a wider range of users and ensure everyone feels welcome and empowered:

1. Collection Development and Representation

A cornerstone of promoting diversity and inclusion in libraries is reflected in the materials available to users. Libraries must prioritize acquiring and curating a diverse collection of books, journals, multimedia, and other resources that represent the varied perspectives of their user base. This includes works by authors from different backgrounds, addressing a wide range of topics and experiences. Library professionals should engage with the community to understand its needs and preferences, ensuring that the collection is reflective of the local demographic.

2. Multilingual Services

To cater to the linguistic diversity within the community, libraries should provide multilingual services. This includes offering materials in various languages, hiring staff proficient in multiple languages, and organizing language learning programs. A multilingual approach fosters inclusivity by breaking down language barriers and ensuring that individuals with limited proficiency in the dominant language can still access library resources and services (National Research Council, 2013).

3. Technology and Accessibility

In the digital age, technology plays a pivotal role in library services. To enhance diversity and inclusion, libraries must ensure that their digital platforms and online resources are accessible to individuals with disabilities. This involves adopting inclusive design principles, providing assistive technologies, and offering training programs to both staff and users. Additionally, libraries can leverage technology to reach underserved populations, such as remote or rural communities, through virtual programs and digital outreach initiatives (Dube and Wigmore, 2017).

4. Cultural Competence Training for Staff

Library professionals are at the forefront of facilitating diverse and inclusive environments. Carmona (2018) posited that cultural competence training is essential to equip staff with the knowledge and skills needed to interact sensitively with individuals from different backgrounds. Training programs should cover topics such as cultural awareness, unconscious bias, and effective communication. By fostering a culturally competent workforce, libraries can enhance user experiences and build trust within the community.

5. Community Engagement and Partnerships

Libraries should actively engage with the community to understand its unique needs and preferences. Building partnerships with local organizations, schools, and community groups can help libraries tailor their services to the diverse interests of their users. This collaborative approach not only enhances the library's relevance but also ensures that the community feels a sense of ownership and inclusion in library initiatives (Brown and Berube, 2019).

6. Inclusive Programming

Programming is an effective way for libraries to create inclusive spaces and cater for the diverse interests of their users. Ploskonka and Johnson (2019) asserted that libraries can organize events, workshops, and lectures that address a wide range of topics, celebrating different cultures, perspectives, and identities. Inclusive programming helps break down stereotypes, promote understanding, and foster a sense of belonging among diverse user groups.

7. User Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Libraries should actively seek feedback from users to assess the impact of their diversity and inclusion initiatives. This feedback loop is crucial for understanding what works well and where improvements are needed. Continuous improvement based on user input ensures that libraries remain responsive to the evolving needs of their diverse user base, fostering a culture of adaptability and inclusivity.

Strategies for Building Sustainable Libraries in Digital Era

Sustainable libraries embody a commitment to environmental, social, and economic responsibility. In the digital age, this extends beyond eco-friendly practices to encompass the democratization of information access and representation. Recognizing the transformative potential of technology, libraries are strategically positioned to bridge the digital divide by ensuring equitable access to resources and services

for all community members. Central to the sustainability of libraries is the enhancement of diversity and inclusion. Libraries are not only gatekeepers of information but also cultural facilitators that reflect the rich tapestry of communities they serve. By embracing diversity in their collections, programming, and staffing, libraries can become vibrant centers where individuals from diverse backgrounds find themselves authentically represented and engaged. According to the International Federation of Library Association Institutions (2023) as inspired in her suggestions of a green and sustainable library consider the following strategies to build sustainable libraries in the digital era through encompassing aspects like digitalization, recycling, promoting green practices, providing shared resources, and committing to environmental goals:

Go Digital-First: Transition from print to digital content like e-books to reduce paper and ink usage, contributing to conservation efforts. The digital era amplifies the impact of inclusivity efforts, as online platforms offer unprecedented opportunities to connect with a global audience. Sustainable libraries leverage technology to create inclusive digital spaces, breaking down geographical barriers and fostering collaboration among communities with varied perspectives. Additionally, digital resources enable libraries to curate content that reflects the diversity of voices, experiences, and knowledge, promoting a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the world.

Commit to General Environmental Goals: Incorporate sustainability criteria in procurement processes, use sustainable materials, and develop eco-friendly building designs. According to Hickerson et'al (2022) designing libraries for the 21st century encompasses many aspects, ranging from conceptualizing a compelling, aesthetically pleasing, and sustainable structure. A technology infrastructure that will allow the building to change with a rapidly evolving technical environment and programming spaces to enhance the research and learning mission of the university are also key elements of the 21st-century library. In building sustainable library in digital era, Hickerson (2022) highlighted what they called catalyst for connection, creativity, and innovation which include:

Permeability: Libraries architectural design should seek to provide easily discernible understanding of the nature and purpose of a facility and welcome those entering with enabled by cutting-edge technologies, cafés and other areas that catalyze informal socializing, transparent spaces enabling diverse use and putting digital or electronic interaction on display, co-working space, multifaceted labs that support research partnerships, collaborative and community-building.

Also Joan Lippincott (2022) on building sustainable library in digital era emphasized that a sustainable library space in the 21st century should facilitates environments that enhances a sense of belonging for users such as a:

Spiritual and emotional well-being and wellness: Libraries should put into consideration the provision of facilities and programs that address users' spiritual, emotional, and health needs, including a space for prayer where they can meditate, practice yoga, or rest.

Family Spaces: Also for academic libraries for instance, provides an enclosed space for students especially the married ones where they can bring their children and complete their academic work with adequate Wi-Fi signal or other resources that they need.

Glowing and safe presence an oculus enabling light to pour into the library during daytime hours the library is important in this regard because students need to feel comfortable, secure, and encouraged as they pursue their academic work.

Conclusion

Building sustainable libraries in the digital era requires a concerted effort to prioritize diversity and inclusion in all aspects of library operations. This can be easily achieved through fostering easy access, diversifying collections, creating inclusive spaces, and leveraging technology for outreach, libraries can ensure that they remain vital hubs of knowledge and community for generations to come. This study has documented the strategies needed to build sustainable libraries through enhancing diversity and inclusion in the digital era, regardless of the type, structure, resources among others of the libraries.

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