

An Overview of National Policy on Information in Nigeria

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The paper discusses the National Policy on Information in Nigeria. Thus, an Information Policy for Nigeria is most desirable in the face of the emergence of an information society. The paper describes the concepts of Policy, Information Policy, Information Society, the National Policy on Information, the objectives and features of national policy on information, traceable information policies in Nigeria and information policy instrument in Nigeria. The paper also believes that information policy is a plan for the development and optimal utilization of information technology (IT), data resources and services. Information policy provides guidance for the design of a strategic programme for the development and use of information resources services and systems. The purpose of this paper is to present an overview of National Policy on Information in Nigeria. The paper also believes that national policy on information can be traced amongst the various bodies involved with information production and distribution. The paper concludes that a National information policy will complement globalization with guidelines that allow the benefits of globalization without jeopardizing internal security and survival of the economy as well as ensuring proper packaging of information by determining the nature and format of information resources to meet local needs. The paper suggested that national information policy must address the need to ensure that there is sufficient supply of appropriately skilled information specialists to maximize the value of information for individual users and organizations through processes of collection, organization, storage and dissemination.

Keywords: Policy, Information, National Information policy

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INTRODUCTION

Information refers to some meaningful message transmitted from source to users. In this process information may be stored in information products and services organised for the purpose of providing a memory in numerical, textual, sound and image forms. Information is invaluable at all times and in all circumstances, especially to national development. Information can be communicated through interpersonal channels. Relatedly, information service has a social connotation in that it is responsible for the organizing, storing and dissemination of ideas. It is impossible, that without the transmission of thought or information for the human civilization to have

survived and achieved what it has today in terms of culture, language, speech, science and technology and social organisation (Adomi, 2008).

Historically, the use of language which followed logically predated the written word. Graphics were some of the mechanical facet of communication. Today we are very much familiar with 'recording' and the impact of information communication technology (ICT) on information activities. Thus, it could be said that the development of civilization as we know it today is largely due to man's ability to exchange information and ideas.

Concept of Policy

A policy is a conscious scheme or plan of action that is intended to guide decision making in order to attain set objectives as well as expected outcomes. A policy is a set of principles which guide decision making (Htwe, 2007). A policy is deliberate plan of action intended to guide decision and to achieve rational outcome (s). The term may apply to government, private sector organizations, groups and individuals (Wikipedia, 2019). Policy provides a framework against which proposals r activities can be tested and progress measured (Spasoff, 1999; cited by Htwe, 2007). A policy which is a set of principles and strategies which guide a course of action for the achievement of a given goal may be developed at the organizational or institutional level (Micro policies) or at the national, regional or international level (micro policies). Polices are embedded in the so called policy instrument. These can be the following kinds of legal instruments (constitution, parliamentary acts. Laws, regulations, international treaties etc.), professional instrument (code of conduct, professional ethics, service guidelines, etc.) and cultural instruments (customs, beliefs, traditions, social values, etc.).

Policy statement usually, but not always, formalized set forth the goal, a vision, a direction, organizational values and norms or other kind of guiding principles which a group, enterprise or nation intends to follow or adhere to in the pursuit of its everyday endeavours (Olatokun, 2005). The goals of any policy may vary widely according to the organisation and in the context in which they are made. Broadly, policies are instituted in order to avoid some negative effect that has been noticed in the organisation, or to seek some positive benefit. Given the above scenario, the concept of policy is defined differently by different people. However a typical policy has the following attributes—a scope, a mechanism; an action. Each rule defines a scope initiating the policies; a framework or structure which embodies the mechanism of the policy implementation and the action which is the effects of the policy on national programmes and events. The policy which comprised set of rules, principles and regulations that guides the development, acquisition, utilization or transfer of information is however regarded as Information Policy.

Information Policy

Information policy as any written or unwritten law, regulation, rule or practice that affects the creation, acquisition, organization, dissemination or evaluation of information. According to Montviloff, (1990) cited in Adomi (2008) information policy provide guidance for the design of a strategy and programme for the development and use of information resources, services and systems and that a policy on information or information policy is a

set of such policies. An information policy can be formulated at the institutional, national, international or regional level. Information policy, in its broadest sense, is the set of rules, formal or informal, that directly restricts, encourage or otherwise shape flow of information.

Information is the basic coin of librarianship, so information policy which is roughly defined as the wide array of miles and policies that govern the handling of information is central to librarian's work. Laws regarding copyright, access to government information, personal privacy, freedom of speech and the like set the information "rules of the road" for our society and thus influence the operating policies, services, and even the fundamental mission of libraries. Librarians must obey, and in some cases, even enforce information policies (Weingarten, 1996 in cited in Adomi, 2008). Sometimes, information policy is associated with government regulations which focus on such areas as telecommunications, copyright, intellectual property and information technologies for public, educational and industrial uses (Burger, 1993, Cited by Kargbo, 2006). Some information policies can be enforced in the library. Libraries are instruments of information policy in that they serve various public purposes regarding information. They provide access to the information, archiving, organization, education and literacy and so on (Weingarton 1996). Libraries are critical information providers and part of their function is to make policies. The policies that they adopt on selection, organization and dissemination of the information they possess, determine to a great extent, their effectiveness. Thus, the concept of information society cannot be played especially in its efforts in which a society can access, share and utilize available information will greatly determine their economic well-being

The Information Society

In the era of information society, it is information that is the most essential factor of production and wealth creation. How well an individual, an organization, an entire society can harness, access, share, and make use of available information will ultimately decide their ability to generate economic growth and to enhance the quality of life for all. The information society has a great impact on issues bordered on information policies. One way to capture the information environment is to consider how information activities takes place amongst individuals and institutions who are involved in the day-to-day processes of information creation, dissemination and use in the society. Information broadly represented can therefore be said to be any message to be conveyed from one source to another source or destination. Information created is embodied in different forms, which are represented as formats or channels of communication (Uhegbo, 2004). The forces that are shaping the information society

are the information components. These are: information creating activities; information products; information distributors; information dissemination; and, information users. All these components can be referred to as stakeholders in information policy (Yusufu, 2009).

The importance of information in our society can hardly be overestimated. As we increasingly recognize the critical nature of information, policies that affect information organisation, use, and dissemination become equally critical. There are a variety of stakeholders in the information policy process, stakeholders who are deeply concerned about information from a legal or political perspective. Such stakeholders include:

- Business and industry—these are very active in influencing policies that will affect the dissemination of information and also are interested in both the discovery of new knowledge and the organisation of current knowledge.
- Government ministries and parastatals which are responsible for information activities of government. These include: Federal Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture; Federal Ministry of Education; Federal Ministry of Science and Technology; Federal Ministry of Tourism; Federal Ministry of Transport and Aviation; Federal Ministry of National Planning; National Communication Commission; National Census Commission; Independent Electoral Commission and others (Yusufu, 2007).

The information society generates and consumes great amount of information and at the same time information technological process has made it easier to process, share, and communicate information and knowledge in new ways. Alone, the ever accelerating internets generate innumerable quantities of information supported by a decrease in telecommunication cost as well as in hardware prices. However, the huge amount of information available also creates a number of different problems because it is difficult to access exactly what information are available and how specific groups or citizens may get it (Niegaard, 2009). From the foregoing, the concept of information society is however significant in creating a National Policy on information. This is because National Policy on Information is a plan for the development and optimal utilization of information resources and services either at the institutional, national, regional or local level.

National policy on information

The need to have a 'national policy' that will stimulate a cohesive information generation and dissemination environment has been discussed severally. According to

Uhegbo, (2004) information policy is one of many different types of public policies that governments make. Nigeria is a very large country, socially and culturally diversified. It is the most populous country in Africa potentially a leading force in the international arena. Nigeria is endowed with an abundance of human and natural resources; it is in a continuum of socio-economic restructuring and adjustment. Civil rule and participatory politics; economic reforms; social reforms; educational reforms; science and technology drives; these are all areas of paramount importance for the future of the nation. In the face of all these social and political uncertainties lies the dynamics of social cohesion. The role of information in the survival of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized.

National information policy, including considerations of informatics and telematics are a key to coping with the prevalent challenges of the information society. There has to be a total re-examination of traditional policies in the virtual, interactive, highly volatile reality of cyberspace, particularly in a framework of legal and ethical issues (UNESCO, 2014). An information policy is a plan for the development and optimal utilization of information technology (IT), data resources and services. Information policy provides guidance for the design of a strategic programme for the development and use of information resources services and systems. An information policy can be formulated at various levels – institutional, national, regional or international level.

The formulation of a national policy on information according to Montviloff (1990) cited in Adomi (2008) sets up therefore a strategy for the following series of action:

- Design of a plan of action for the development and operation of information services and systems fully integrated in the country's national development plan
- Launching of information programmes coordinated and integrated the plan of action
- Implementation of information projects at the most appropriate place and date
- Optimum operation of information services and systems.

Objectives of National Policy on Information in Nigeria

A national information policy will help ensure proper packaging of information by determining the nature and format of information resources to meet local needs. The objectives of a national information policy according to Montviloff (1990) cited in Adomi (2008) are as follows:

- Provision of relevant, reliable and timely information/data at a reasonable cost to all those contributing in various ways to the achievement

of the national development goal, e.g. researchers, engineers and technicians, development planners, policy makers, administrators, extension workers, paraprofessional farmers, and entrepreneurs.

- Preparation and implementation of the plan of action for the establishment and operation of a national information system based on the existing infrastructures, the co-ordination of the various systems and services, the identification and correction of deficiencies, the filling of gaps and the productive interaction with regional and international information systems and programmes.
- Ensuring support for the components of the national information systems including information manpower, facilities and technologies through public and other forms of financing and collaborative arrangements.
- Ensuring cohesiveness and sustained growth of the national information systems by formulating and prescribing policies and guidelines for assigning areas of responsibilities, choice of means and method priorities, financial arrangements and coordinating mechanisms in consonance with the country's development objectives and plans and its political, social and cultural specialties and government structures as these evolve with time.
- Ensuring support for research on information related theories, practices, education, training for information generation, transfer and use.

National information policy will therefore specify how libraries in Nigeria will go into cooperative resource-sharing either among themselves or with those overseas. Resource sharing is a delicate enterprise and therefore requires carefulness and caution. For instance, what kind of audio-visual accessories, equipment and personnel that should be shared between local libraries and those overseas will be streamlined? A national information policy will help to streamline both the nature and format of information resources that will be made available to Nigerians (Adomi, 2008).

Features of a National Policy on Information

A National Information Policy will help to strengthen information infrastructure by specifying how resources will be organized and managed. In the view of Montviloff (1999) cited in Adomi (2008), information policy closely interacts with not only policies in libraries and archive but also with policies in such rapid converging fields as informatics and telecommunication; information policies often respond to specific stimuli at specific period of time and must therefore be flexible. However, the growth of

the national information resources and services can take place in various situations:

- i. Countries which have poor information infrastructures and no policy, which is often the case of the least-developed countries;
- ii. Countries which have information infrastructures but have no policy; this could be either advanced-developing countries or developed countries which have established already some information services but have not clearly identified a national agency or legislation on the matter;
- iii. Countries which have an information policy but little or no information infrastructure; these can be developed or developing nations which have already worked on the formulation of a legislative framework;
- iv. Countries which have elaborate information infrastructures or policies, these are advanced countries which do not lack policies; but lack harmonization in their proliferation.

Scope of National Information Policy

The scope of most information policies can extend beyond the walls of the library; for instance, telecommunication policies, copyright laws, national information and communication technology policy (ICT), information technology policies (TC), etc. Notwithstanding, the concepts of connectivity, content and competencies are three main areas of concern that can be identified for: national information policy (Ornager, n.d. cited in Adomi 2008):

Connectivity: Ideally it incorporates three areas which are information networks, access and interoperability. For creating the information networks, a policy should set out a strategic approach to the development of the country's information networks. It should provide framework within which public and private investments can be planned. It should specify the preferred approach to regulation ensure that the networks operate efficiently and for the public good. The provision of global access requires that networks are available as widely as possible in institutions and homes. The policy should specify a strategy to ensure access for key organizations and individuals such as schools, libraries and those in isolated rural areas. Pricing strategies should not exclude people from network access.

In order to ensure interoperability, one has to focus on the different devices making up the ICT. Giving the rapidly changing technological environment, there will be a variety of technological networks and platforms that can be used to deliver information including computers, telephones and digital television. The policy should include provision to ensure that there are no barriers to

the citizens from absence of interconnectivity between the networks.

Content: includes the creation of core content, ensuring delivery of the same, protection of the citizen and provision of free access to core information. In creating core content for the public good, a great amount of public information will be needed in an information society. Much of this needed to be provided by public sector institution working when necessary in collaboration with the private sector. The policy should therefore set out a strategy that will ensure that public support is available for the development of needed information content (Adomi, 2008).

In order to ensure effective delivery of content, the creation of digital content alone will not be sufficient. Effective delivery over the network requires the development of appropriate information retrieval aids and navigation tools. Government department and agencies must seek innovative ways of presenting information to the citizens cutting across institutional boundaries to ensure target markets are reached efficiently; training and awareness programmes will be required. The Policy should indicate how these issues are to be addressed.

Ethical issues like protecting the citizens require regulatory Mechanisms. The information policy should address a range of legal and regulatory issues including privacy and data protection, Intellectual property rights, censorship and fraudulent use of the networks and to legal deposit of intellectual property. The rapid development of e-commerce will generate further requirements for regulation in the consumer interest. To ensure the rapid take-up that the government seeks, the e-envoy will need to make issues of consumer confidence a priority. To have free access to core information, a policy will need to cover rights of access to information. Already individuals have rights in some countries to access personal information about themselves and there are some rights of access to local government information (Ornager, n.d).

Competencies include the development of universal information literacy, the supply of information specialists and the creation of information strategies for organizations. To develop universal information literacy, effort is needed to develop a base level of information literacy for everyone. The policy should set out a strategy for the achievement of this. It should encompass a wide range of skills including numeracy, literacy, computer and information retrieval skills. It must be delivered at a variety of levels throughout the formal and informal education process, and it should take advantage of the full range of delivery methods now available, including digital networks (Adomi, 2008).

Information Policy Instrument in Nigeria

Since the 1990s, efforts are being intensified for the formulation of information policy instruments by different bodies or stakeholders. Some of these efforts can be traced to: Mass media practitioners; Librarians/information scientists; Computer Association of Nigeria; Ministry of Science and Technology; and several other government ministries and parastatals (Yusufu, 2007).

The Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture, for example, has several parastatals and departments which are responsible for administering and implementing information policies. For examples, the Department of Culture is responsible for the formulation and execution of the national cultural policies for the promotion of all national cultural activities through the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the Council for Arts and Culture. This body is responsible for the policies guiding national museums. The national museums contain artifacts that are of value to the historical heritage of our nation (Alabi, 2003).

The National Library of Nigeria is a parastatal under the Ministry of Education. In its crusade for an information policy in Nigeria, the Nigerian Library association has organized several seminars, workshops, conferences with a view to coming out with a blue-print to enable the government formulate an information policy. For example, "Draft of the National Policy on Information Resources and Services" was produced at an NLA conferences held at ASCON, Topo, Badagry. Amongst others, the 'draft' recommended as follows:

- i. All information must be available to all people, in all formats purveyed through all communication channels and delivered at all levels of comprehension.
- ii. All types of information resources and services produced in Nigeria constitute a vital investment in the national development efforts.
- iii. Such information should be systematically collected, preserved and effectively managed as basic inputs to national development efforts at all levels.
- iv. Endogenous information and indigenous knowledge must be regularly integrated with externally generated information on Nigeria's development, as well as with relevant information on the development of other countries.
- v. Nigeria's information resources and services must be organized in space and time so that waste is avoided or minimized. In particular, the acquisition, storage and sharing of information resources and services must be rationalized to ensure the optimal utilization of human, material and fiscal resources in national development.
- vi. Information resources in all forms – oral, book,

serials, print, electronic media, etc. must be harnessed and repackaged, using the most cost effective processing, communication and transport technologies available to deliver appropriately targeted information to all categories of Nigerians, and especially the illiterate and rural population who constitute more than 80% of the population (Ayo, 2000 in Yusufu, 2007).

Under the National Library, a National Information and Documentation Centre (NIDOC) was established as a bibliographic and numerical databank of information for the social and economic development of the country. And, as a focal point for the exchange of information, NIDOC intends to coordinate a network of participating centres in Nigeria. Alabi, (2003), NIDOC is envisaged as a pivot information centre for the dissemination of intellectual information resources in formats such as database, indexing and abstracting services.

Traceable Information Policies in Nigeria

Information policies are roughly seen as array of rules and regulations that govern the handling of information. Information policies can be identified in the various bodies responsible for information services both in the private and public sector. Thus, information policies are associated with regulations which focus on such areas as telecommunication, copyright, intellectual property and information technologies for public, industrial and educational uses (Burger, 1993 in Kargbo, 2006). Even though in Nigeria, a single paper on National Information policy does not exist, there are still traceable documented information policies on copyright, collection development, information technology among others.

Copyright policy

Copy right could be classified in terms of items, rights and term. The items cover the areas of original literary, musical, dramatic and artistic work; cinematographic films, sound records and protection of the form but not the ideas. The rights cover the classes of right of reproduction, right of distribution, right of public performance, right of broadcasting, right of adaptation, right of sale, rental and hire and right of translation. The term covers; life plus 50 years to the author of the work and fifty years in case of other works (Rao, 2003)

Various bodies/organizations/institutions issue statements intended to provide guidance on copy-right matters. Some of them are:

1. **International organizations:** Example of this is

WIPO- World Intellectual Property Organization. WIPO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that is dedicated to developing a balanced and accessible intellectual property (IP) system, which rewards creativity, stimulates innovation and contributes to economic development while safeguarding the interest of the public. WIPO was established by the WIPO Convention in 1967 with a mandate from its member states to promote the protection of IP throughout the world through cooperation among states and collaboration with other international organizations. Its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland. WIPO currently administers 24 treaties (three of those jointly with other international organizations). These are categorized into three (WIPO, 2007): IP Protection; Global protection system and Classification.

2. **National Governments:** The second body that can issue/make copyright statements/laws/policies is national government while international copyright laws are adopted /applied by member by member states; national copyright laws are applicable to individual countries that make them. A national copyright law is normally enacted, promulgated or made by the government of the country to regulate intellectual property in the country. An example of a national copyright law is the Nigerian Copyright Act 1990 amended copyright (Amendment) Decree NO 42 of 1999 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

3. **Professional associations:** An example is the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which has issued "IFLA position on copyright in the digital environment" (IFLA, n.d.). Another is the American Association of Law Libraries (2001).

4. **Publishers:** An example is the Emeralds Copyright Policy meant to promote and protect the interests of authors and the organizations interest in creativity (Emerald, n.d).

5. **Libraries:** Another body which makes copyright statement/policy is the library. A library's copyright policy is normally derivable from the existing applicable international professional and in particular the country's copyright laws.

Collection Development Policy

A collection development policy is a written statement of

libraries' intentions for building its collection. It describes the collection's strengths and weaknesses and provides guidelines for the staff (Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, 2003). The American Library Association (1987) describes collection development policies as documents which define the scope of library's existing collections, plan for the continuing development of resources, identify collection strength, and outline the relationship between selection philosophy and the institution's goals, general selection criteria and intellectual freedom.

Collection development policies guide a library on issues and processes of selecting information materials to satisfy users' need. It spells out issues related to contents of the collections, format of the collection, the responsibility of selecting and acquiring information resources. It provides criteria for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of a developed collection in meeting the needs of the library patrons (Kiondo, 2004). The use of collection development statements has, in all types of libraries, been a standard practice (White and Crawford, 1997). A collection development policy statement serves many functions beyond being merely a tool for selection of resources. In addition to describing current collections, it compels the staff involved to (re) consider the aims and objectives of the organization, both long and short term, and the priorities to be attached to different activities. It assists with budgeting, serves as communication channel within a library and between the library and outside constituents, supports cooperative collection development, prevents censorship, and assists in overall collection management activities including the handling of gifts, selection of materials and serial cancellations (IFLA, 2001).

Collection development policy is very important to the library as it assists staff build a balanced and healthy collection which can meet user's information needs. Johnson (1994) asserts that "libraries without collection development policies are like business without plans" producing one is commitment as it takes time and careful consideration to develop a useful and relevant document. Once the document is completed and the library board/committee has approved it, it is a good idea to put the collection development policy on the World Wide Web (the library's website) as an example for other librarians so that it is available beyond the library's local community (Arizona State Library, Archives and Public Records, 2003). According to IFLA (2001), the purpose of documenting a collection development policy in a library is subjected to selection, planning, public relations and wider context.

Information and Communication Technology Policies

Information and communication technology policy is an official statement which spells out the objectives, goals,

principles, strategies etc. intended to guide and regulate the development, operation and application of ICT. ICT policy generally covers three main areas (APC, n.d in Adomi, 2008) telecommunications (especially telephone communications) broadcasting (radio and television) and the internet. It may be national, regional (and or sub-regional) or international; each level may have its own decision-making bodies, sometimes making different and even contradictory policies.

ICT policies must take into account other policies such as education policies, information policies, trade and investment policies and cultural and linguistic policies, even when promulgated as distinct policy statements. The mere establishment of written national ICT policy, however, has value in itself. At a minimum, it conveys the message that the government is forward looking and intends to pursue the utilization of ICT in the society. Government should aspire, of course, to do more by putting the policy content into actual practice and becoming a role model in applying ICT in their administration and services (UNESCAP, 2007). An ICT policy framework is recognized as an important step in order to create an enabling environment for the deployment of ICTs and their uses in social outcomes (Njugana, 2006)

CONCLUSION

The importance of National Information Policy cannot be downplayed. National information policy will complement globalization with guidelines that allow the benefits of globalization without jeopardizing internal security and survival of the economy. With a national policy, pirated and adulterated materials, the dumping of useless and toxic publishing materials such as ink, paper, and equipment and facilities will be checked. Thus, a national information policy will help ensure proper packaging of information by determining the nature and format of information resources to meet local needs. Book and non-book material that violates local content specifications will no longer be allowed into the country. Internet service providers could no longer expose young Nigerians to inappropriate content. Conclusively, information policies can be identified in the various bodies responsible for information services both in the private and public sector. It should also be appreciated that though a single white paper on 'national information policy' do not yet exist; it is however business as usual for most information industries and stakeholders. In the main, a single information policy for the country should be able to address five basic cornerstones of information activities. These are: Free access to information; Information Security; Information storage and retrieval; Information dissemination especially to rural areas and the less privileged. One way of ensuring maximum use of information is by packaging it in a form that the target

audience will appreciate. This involves understanding the literacy level of the country, its ethics, norms, and values, gender and age composition, and numbers and kinds of physically-challenged persons (Nwokocha, 1998).

Recommendations

The paper suggested the following recommendations:

- The national information policy must address the need to ensure that there is sufficient supply of appropriately skilled information specialists to maximize the value of information for individual users and organizations through processes of collection, organization and dissemination.
- The National Information Policy should, in addition, establish a framework to promote information strategies for organizations.
- Government departments should develop a comprehensive set of information policies to maximize the impact that information can have on consumers and service managers. Similar approaches are needed by other publicly funded bodies.
- Information skills handling should be explicitly identified in any national initiative designed to improve management and human resource skills.
- In this regard, publishers and other dealers in the information industry will be able to know and understand how to package their products to meet local conditions and sensibilities.

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