Information Policy and Its Relevance to National Development

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ABSTRACT

The value of information to any society at all times is hardly in doubt especially its importance in national development. No country can compete favorably and sustain its human resources development without full control of the information that flows into its economy. So information has becomes so valuable that it is more safe to expose a country's territory and well-being to any type of information without checks. The paper traces briefly the concept of information. The concept of policy, what information policy is all about.

Keywords: Information, Information Policy, Development, Society, Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Information is no doubt, an integral part of man's daily activities and existence, the advent of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has helped to usher the application of computer to every field of human endeavor. According to Aina (2004) information is a group of processed data and when well utilized can help an individual deduced an inference on value judgment in making decisions. Popoola (2009) posited that information is a critical economic resources which is capable of improving the knowledge state of the individual to take rational decisions. Information therefore, services as communicating ideas, opinions, beliefs, value judgment perception, and knowledge to people in the society business organization, social gathering, religions associations and so on, which enviable them to solve private and corporate problems. Hence, information is a powerful tool that educates the mind and develops the three domain of learning: cognitive effective and psychomotor.

In popular usage, the term "information" refers to facts and opinion provided and received during the course of daily life. One obtains information directly from other living beings, mass media, electronic data banks and observable phenomena in the surrounding environment. Utor (1999).Quoting several authors, defined information as data of value in planning decision-making and evaluation of any programme. It is also defined as "data" that have being subjected to some processing functions capable of answering a user's query, be it recorded, summarized, or simply collected that would help decision making.

Oyegade (2002) defined information as knowledge communicated or received in relation to a particular subject. It is well understood in terms of books, journal, magazines, public and private sector documents of all kinds, whether published for mass circulation or unpublished and rusticated or confidential in nature, results of research efforts which are made available to colleagues in form of reports, books and non-printed variables which differentiates and determines whether a country is in the first, second, third or fourth world. Uwem (1990) defined information as data that have been suspected to some processing functions capable of ensuring a user's query, be it recorded, summarized or simply collected that would help in decision-making.

2. POLICY

Policy can be defined as a plan of action, statement of aims and ideals especially one made by a government. Marian Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, (2002) sees policy from the prison of official enactments or prescription. Policy can also be a personal prescription in this case, it becomes a wise; sensible conduct; act of government, behaviour or relationship.

Policy can also be made by private organization or multinational companies which aim at regulating their operations and conduct. Policy can be a written statement of contract of insurance. For example accident insurance policy, fire insurance policy all these are aspect of policy. The term policy has attracted to it different interpretation and meaning; many at times such definition or interpretation seems to satisfy the peculiar need of such a person, body or agency. The meaning of policy therefore revolves around what the person defining or using it want it to be for instance, Akpan (1982) defines policy as a form of law made by the governing bodies of organization to govern, direct, control and regulate members of the organization. It may take legal form of laws passed by the legislature decisions of a government cabinet or boards of directors of public corporations or private companies.

2.1 The Concept Of Information Policy

Information policy is the set of all public laws, regulations and policies that encourage, discourage, or regulate the creation, use, storage, access and communication and dissemination of information. These are several fundamental issues that comprise information policy. Most prominent are public policy issues concerned with the use of information for democratization and commercialization of social life.

Information policy refers to the laws and policies that deal with the stages information goes through beginning with its creation, through its collection, organization, dissemination and finally to its destruction. In the context of public administration, information policy is the means by which government employees, institutions and information system adapts themselves to an environment in rapid fluctuation and use information for decision-making. Information policy is in fact, a combination of several varying disciplines including information science, economics, law and public policy.

Lungu (1981) defines information policy within the context of other polices which any country makes, he opines that nations promulgate many public polices. These are polices relating national security; foreign affairs policies, policies to do with the political, social, economic, cultural, scientific and technological development of a country both at sectional and national levels.
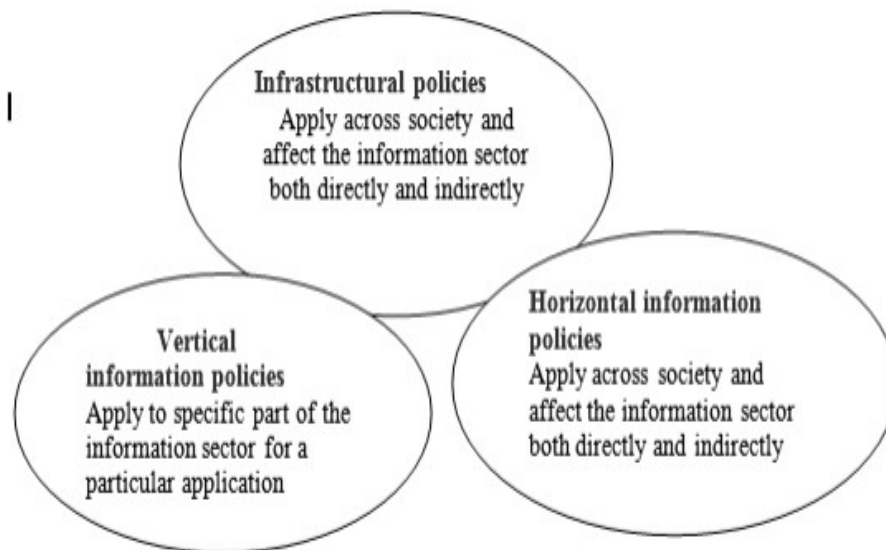

Fig 1: Levels of Information Policy
Source: Rowlands 1996

3. THE REASONS OF INFORMATION POLICY

The obvious reason for the need of information policy deals with the legal issues that can be associated with the advancement of technology. The digitization of the cultural content made the cost of the copy depressing to nearly zero and increased the illegal exchange of files, online, via sharing website or P2P technologies or offline (copy of hard disks). As a result, there are many grey areas between what users can and cannot do, as this create the need for some sort of regulation. Information policy will mark the boundary needed to evaluate certain issues dealing with creation, processing, exchange, access and use of information. It also helps for avoiding risk (financial issues from incomplete and uncoordinated exploitation of information, wasted time, failures of innovation and reputation loss). There is tendency for positive benefits including negotiation and openness among those responsible for different aspects of information management, enables the productive use of IT in supporting staff in their use of information and the ability to initiate change to take advantage of changing environment.

3.1 Information Policy Andits Effect on National Development

The value of information to any society at all times is hardly in doubt especially its importance in national development. No country can complete favourably and sustain its human resources development without full control of the information that flows into its economy. Information has become so valuable that it is no more safe to expose a country's territory and well-being to any type of information without check. The present lack of information policy is comparable to a situation where there are no know control measure over the drilling and marketing of Nigeria's petroleum resources. There are guideline for obtaining operation license guideline on the drilling, refining, marketing and distribution of petroleum products in Nigeria (Nwokocha, 1997).

National development of any nation in the contemporary new information order will be difficult to achieve if such a nation treats flow of information into her territory with Laissez-Faire. Political independent can scarcely be maintained and economic self determination is unthinkable without firm control of the information system (Adeyemi, 1991). National information policy in Nigeria is a road map to sustainable and balanced flow of information in all sectors of the economy, proper development of our information infrastructure, appropriate and reliable information packaging, determination of information and resources specification and their availability. Nigeria's quest for economic growth and moral the engineering of her youth cannot be sustained in an environment where there is no well articulated national information policy. The degree of information flow is a determining factor in development, nations without defined information policies has little hope of speedy development. If any country failure to adopt any national policy on information, rapid development in whatever sector of the economy will be seriously impaired. (Amadi, 1981).

The truth is that the nations with adequate control over information are also the ones referred to as developed countries, because they have taken advantage of information technology to control the flow of information into their territory as well as promote their industrial bases. Iweh (2005) had argued that developed countries had long realized information as constituting an important part of the wealth of nations and of course, have taken measures to jealously guard it. The disparity between the have and have-not nations is most evident in the area of information flow. A national information policy should be a grantee that appropriate information is provided to the right person at the right time and in the right format.

It should ensure that appropriate information is provided to our industrialist, policy makers, businessmen, bankers, and other professionals, at least by properly equipped libraries and information centre, these calls for the articulation of a responsible information policy for Nigeria by librarians and other information professionals. If the operation of our libraries, information centre's and other information agencies are to be at a better footing for the challenges of the 21st century, a national information policy is a most for the country.

4. THE CHALLENGES OF INFORMATION POLICY

1. **The unstable nature of economic and political environment:** A lot of countries have witnessed many changes of government with its attendant political and economic instability. Every new regime comes in with completely new policies. For examples government in a particular country changes most of the policies to suit current national and international focus of government at that time because they are not sure of their tenure most of them becomes pre-occupied with how to maintain their hold on power. Most of them have not shown any genuine commitment towards information policy.

2. **Government Apathy on Information Resources and Services:** Majority of the under-developed countries like Nigeria governments do not regard information as anything tangible except those favorable to the leaders. Development oriented information vital for national growths are treated with levity. A country where the government being the highest spender of public funds does not regard information as a resource for national development will obviously find it very hard to pursue any sound information policy.

3. **Weak and uncoordinated information professional bodies:** Indeed most of the information professional bodies have adopted the wait-for-something-to-happen stances on this issue. Most of the information workers leave their information work to other engagements, while there, they completely lose touch with reality in their professional responsibility. The few that remain in the profession commit less time in participating in any national discourse on information.

4. **Medium Communication and High Illiteracy Rate:** The cultural cosmology of some countries has a lot to do with national information policy issue. In most countries, an oral society and information is usually taken for granted. Due to her oral tradition, information is neither seen as essential for individual development nor as a national resource. Rich and vital news within the countries are people-based, and are subsequently lost whenever they die. Thus the reading habit of the citizens cannot therefore be adequately developed as a result, information cannot be deemed a national treasure without an enlightened population.

5. **Frequent interference in the function of our information institutions:** Most of the institutions that are association with information generation, selling, collection, processing, storage and dissemination in the country are established and owned by government. As a result they owe little or no obligation to any other external legislation and direction.

5. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

Information is capable of turning something good to bad and vice versa. This is also a vital tool for national development, if properly acquired and appropriately utilized. The current awareness of the need for information as a resource for national development is quite encouraging. However, for an accelerated information policy to be achieved in the country, the following recommendations are proffered.

1.   A committee of information experts comprising librarians, information scientist, publishers etc. Be set up. The committee shall produce a working paper on how to pursue a comprehensive policy on information for the country.
2.   The government should re-evaluate their economic policies generally, particularly those affect my information and publishing industry.
3.   The information processional associations should become more active, they should help to keep up the pressure through aggressive campaigns and enlightenment.

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