

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE OF SOME SELECTED SECTORS INFORMATION POLICY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper discusses the information policy of Nigeria and its emergence and how it can be accessed globally by Nigerian citizens. Information policy on the other hand is a set of interrelated principles, laws, guidelines, rules, regulations, and procedures guiding the oversight and management of the information life-cycle; the production, collection, distribution/dissemination, retrieval, and retirement of information. With the continued globalization of knowledge, the changes in knowledge creation, the generation of non-print formats (e.g., multimedia and digital), the rapid expansion of wireless technology, and the need to increase the level of sharing of information/resources, it is now time to begin the development of a global information policy. Emphasis was made on the global information policies of some selected sectors in Nigerian. The information policies discussed in this paper were the health information policy, educational information policy, telecommunication information policy, freedom of information legislation policy, intellectual property rights, citizen charter of information rights and regulation of telephones and cable system policies. The state of the information policy and challenges were highlighted. Conclusions and recommendations were given based on the four cornerstones of information activities in the country.

Keywords: Information, Information Policy, global information policy, Nigerian information policy and Information cornerstones.

Introduction

Information is news or knowledge received or given (Webster Dictionary, 2014). It is equally intelligence, word, knowledge acquired in any manner. A policy is a deliberate system of principles which guide choices and bring home rational outcomes. A policy may be a statement of intent enforced as a procedure or protocol. Policies are a square measure usually adopted by a governance body in a corporation. Styles of policies includes; public, defense and environmental (Syndey, 2018).

According to Hermon and Relyea (2003) Information policy as encompasses 'the set of all public laws, rules, and policies that reassure or regulate the formation, use, packing, and communication of information. Information policy may be a set of reticulate principles, guidelines, rules, laws, and procedures guiding the oversight and management of the knowledge life-cycle, the assembly, collection, distribution/dissemination, retrieval, and retirement of data. This paper discusses the information policies of some notable sectors in Nigeria using the global information policy perspective as indices.

Rationale for a Global Information Policy

It would be unscientific to imply that there are no national information policies already in place in many countries. Various governments have accepted information policies that have formed the overarching architecture of the communications and information industries. With the continued globalization of knowledge, the variations in knowledge creation, the generation of non-print formats (e.g., multimedia and digital), the rapid growth of wireless technology, and the need to increase the level of distribution of information resources is on the increase in forming the growth of a global information policy. (Sandra, 2011)

Some of the purposes of the global information policy would include; Encourage uniform handling of similar information exchange activities, Introduce steadiness of action and decisions among the participants, act as an automatic decision maker by formalizing worldwide answers to previously made choices about how particular questions and problems should be resolved, offer a predetermined answer to monotonous issues, afford a device for insulating information leaders from hasty and ill-considered needs for a policy change and Serve as a major communication link to the various global constituents. (UNESCO, 2010).

The initial sight of information policy was present around the mid1900s. The stages to begin developing from an industrial society to an information society sparked several other transformations. The common industrial technologies were setting out to get substituted by informational meta-technologies. Organizations began a dynamic type of much new architecture of data developed, and most meaningfully, the data economy substituted industrial and agricultural Economies, by the 1970. The idea of national information policy was created to guard the data and information that was used in creating public policies. University of (Milwaukee, 2018)

The first adopters of information policy included the United States, Australia and numerous European countries that all recognized the need for a more standardized governance of Information. The primary concern in information policy at the end of the 18th century as voiced in the Bill of rights to prevent possible abuses of government power. The development of information policy since 1789 has been adhoc response to events. One example has been the development of administrative agencies' power to obtain information through inquiries, required reports and assessments and prevent possible abuses of government power (Milwaukee 2018)

Information Policy in Nigeria

Since the 1990s, efforts are being strengthened for the creation of information policy instruments by different bodies. Some of these efforts can be traced to: (i) Mass media practitioners (ii) Librarians/information scientists (iii) Computer Association of Nigeria (iv)

Ministry of Science and Technology; and several other government ministries and parastatals. The Ministry of Information, Youth and Culture, for example, has numerous parastatals and departments which are answerable for administering and executing information policies. For example, the Department of Culture is responsible for the creation 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 artefacts that are of value to the historical inheritance of our nation. 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 formed at an NLA conferences held at ASCON, Topo, badagry from February 18-20 1991. According to Mbah (2016) the 'draft' recommended are as follows:

- (1) All information must be obtainable to all people, in all formats purveyed through all communication channels and delivered at all levels of comprehension.
 - (2) All types of information resources and services produced in Nigeria constitute a vital investment in the national development efforts. Such information should be systematically collected, preserved and effectively managed as basic inputs to national development efforts at all levels.
 - (3) 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.
 - (4) Nigeria's information resources and services must be organized in space and time so that waste is avoided or minimized.
 - (5) 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.
 - (6) Information resources in all forms oral, book, serial, 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.
- (Mbah, P.O. 2016)

Telecommunication Policy

Telecommunications policy determines the operating rules for telephone, cable, satellite, and wireless transmission and computer networks. These are the pipelines through which information is transmitted electronically. Telecommunications policy includes the following areas; regulation of the telephone, satellite and cable systems and development and creation of high-speed telecommunication networks. Information is essential to your participation in deciding how to vote, where to live, how to find a job, organizing lifelong learning, and planning your retirement all depend on timely access to information. If an individual is suddenly required to pay for information which was previously received for free or if the telephone system begins to charge for each call they make their quality of life which is profoundly affected by decisions they take no part in.

Over the next decade, hundreds of billions of dollars will be invested in telecommunication networks (telephone, cable, and satellite) and the production of information and entertainment products. Billions will be made in profits. (Armstrong, 2010) Government and industry are currently involved in many studies, hearings, task forces, and committees. The outcome will determine who benefits and who pays in the coming information economy. (Edwardson, 2008)

The public is not represented at these hearings and discussions. The Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has recently allowed monthly telephone rate increases and repackaging and increased charges by cable companies. Public protest against the cable changes show that the corporations and CRTC are not representing the public interest. (Braga, 2017). Only a few community organizations with limited resources are attempting to represent the public interest on these issues. Among these are: libraries, Public Interest Advocacy Groups, Free Nets, and groups working for freedom of information and protection of privacy. (Jane, 2013)

Freedom of Information (FOI)

FOI legislation allows individuals to request a wide range of government information that may not normally be available. The Federal Government and all the provinces except Prince Albert Peninsula is located on northwest Victoria Island in the Northwest Territories, Canada and Prince Edward Island (PEI) is one of the thirteen provinces and territories of Canada. It is the smallest province in terms of land area and population, but the most densely populated both provinces have some version of this legislation although the degree of access varies widely even though they are rarely not available. FOI legislation is important because it can open the operations of government to public scrutiny. All versions of this legislation require improvements to increase access and limit the exemptions to releasing information.

Intellectual Property Rights Policy

Copyright, patents, and trademarks protect the investment of creators in their creation. On the other side, intellectual property rights create barriers to access, particularly in libraries where many users want to photocopy part of a book for research or personal information. Current copyright legislation is not clear about the rights of users. This many-sided debate requires a balance between the rights of creators and the access rights of the public. (Mahapatra, Shibuya K Lopez et al., 2007)

Citizen's Charter of Information Rights Policy

A Citizen's Charter of Information Rights will provide protection to the public and ensure that a basic level of information will be freely available to all. It will take a major political effort on the part of a wide spectrum of the community to achieve such a Charter. For instance the Canadian Library Association has adopted a draft set of Information and Telecommunication Access Principles for continued discussion by its membership and the general community. These principles are available through your local library and include the following rights.

All citizens have the right to; Literacy, Universal, equitable, and affordable access to information, communicate with others in all formats, access a public area for non-commercial

information, a broad diversity of sources of information, an equitable workplace, Privacy of personal information, participate in democratic policy-making, access and secure telecommunications networks. (Hickson, 2017)

Regulation of the Telephone and Cable Systems Policy

The Canadian Radio-Television & Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has recently ended the telephone company monopoly on long-distance service and allowed telephone companies to increase local rates (CRTC 94-19). Following the pattern established in the United States, long-distance rates are dropping for those who use them and all telephone users will see their local telephone rates increase. CRTC 94-19, which is now on hold for now, would increase local telephone costs by up to 30%. (Kenneth, 2008)

Other suggestions for increasing local telephone service costs have included Local Metered Service (LMS) where users would be charged by the length and number of local calls. Increased local telephone charges, LMS or some other formula, would decrease the number of people who could afford to use telephones. Access to friends, to essential social services, and to institutions such as libraries, information center and freenets would be reduced. Many of the CRTC hearings focus on debates between the cable and telephone industries to determine who will get the advantage on the new electronic highway. Once again, the public interest is not represented. (Norton, 2017)

Health Information Policy in Nigeria

Health Information Systems (HIS) constitute a crucial building block of any country's health system. Underperforming HIS render national development and other management decision making purposes in the health system incompetent and increase missed openings in the use of accessible resources to save more lives. As one of the six building blocks of the World Health Organization (WHO) Health Systems Strengthening framework which form the basis for the production, analysis, dissemination and use of quality data, has in the last decade received renewed attention in several low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). (Oyediran & Mullen, 2016)

Nigeria is a Federation of 36 semiautonomous states and a Federal Capital Territory with a projected populace of over 180 million people and a Gross National Income per Capita of \$ 2300.00 by the end of 2021. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) develops health policies and rules which may be adopted for implementation by the states at their discretion as health is not on the exclusive list of issues adjudicated by the Federal Government. States also oversee Local Government Areas which are smaller administrative units within them. (Onyemelukwe, 2016).

The Ministries, Sections and agencies in Nigeria that have accountability for the health system include the FMOH, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning (formerly National Planning Commission), National Health Insurance Scheme, National Primary Healthcare Development Agency, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control, National Agency for the Control of AIDS, National Population Commission (NPC), Nigerian Institute for Medical Research, the National Bureau of Statistics and a few others. Each entity acts self-reliantly with different responsibilities that affect the national HIS. Nigeria's large disease and disability burden is associated with a weak health system. (World Bank, 2016).

Governance of the health system in general has been a main problem, especially in a decentralized system as practiced in Nigeria. The current drive to ensure Universal Health Coverage needs to be backed by proof to show areas of progress or gaps in order to redirect investments. A viable Routine Health Information Systems (RHIS) should guide investments in the health system in a country.

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Countries need to develop complete national plans for health information that address the full range of data needs and data sources and that include provision for building national capacities for data generation, analysis and distribution. These national plans should serve as the platform for external funding so that eventually countries will be able to draw on a broad base of dependable, standardized and timely data to support decision-making in health. (Eboreime, 2017).

Little countries have civil registration systems that permit adequate and regular tracking of mortality and causes of death. Demographic surveillance sites function in several countries, but the data generated are not integrated into the national health information system because of concerns about representativeness. Health management information systems produce considerable data, but the information is rarely used because of concerns about bias, quality and timeliness. To date, 43 countries in the Region have initiated Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response. (Uneke, et al 2015).

Educational Information Policy in Nigeria

The requirement for a national policy on education came about as a result of the 1996 National Curriculum Conference which was attended by a cross-section of Nigerians. These inventions and changes include; The lifting of the suspension order on Open and Distance Learning Programs by Government, revitalization and growth of the National Mathematical Centre (NMC), creation of Teachers Registration Council (TRC), introduction of information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the school curriculum as a second official language, education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the most significant instrument of change; any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be headed by education. (Animasahun & Chapman 2017).

Life-long education shall be the basis of the nation's educational process, education and training facilities shall remain to be extended in response to social needs and made increasingly accessible to afford the individual a far more expanded and flexible choice, educational activities shall be attentive on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment, Universal Basic education in a variety of forms; depending on the needs and possibilities, shall be provided for all residents. (Bureau, 2012).

To this end, Government set up a National Educational Policy Implementation Committee to understand the Policy into workable blue prints that would guide the bodies

whose responsibility it would be to implement the policy. The Committee was also to develop monitoring system for educational plan as it evolved accordingly;

- (a) Education shall continue to be tremendously rated in the national development plans because education is the most vital tool of change; any essential change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be controlled by education;
- (b) Life-long education shall be the basis of the nation's educational policy;
- (c) Education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to social needs and made progressively accessible to afford the individual a far more expanded and flexible choice;
- (d) Educational activities shall be centred on the learner for maximum self-development and self-fulfilment;
- (e) Universal Basic education in a variety of forms; depending on needs and possibilities, shall be provided for all citizens, Efforts shall be made to relate education to overall community needs;
- (g) Educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual;
- (h) Modern education techniques shall be progressively used and improved upon at all levels of the education system;
- (i) The education system shall be planned to develop the practice of self-learning. Government shall in this regard continue to inspire the establishment of Young Readers Clubs in schools
- (j) At any stage of the education process after junior secondary education, an individual shall be able to choose between continuing full-time studies, combining work with study, or embarking on full-time employment work with study, or embarking on full-time employment without excluding prospect of resuming studies later on;
- (k) Opportunity shall continue to be made for religious training; no child should be made compulsory to accept any religious instruction which is different to the wishes of his or her parents;
- (l) Physical and health education shall be stressed at all levels of the education system. (Atchison, 2009)

Government should review and regulate school and district financial record keeping. More comprehensive training of head teachers and administrators in economical administration., regular government review of schools., encourage parents to complain or fight against schools fees and proactively help parents to know their rights, empower and mobilize local overseer organizations such as parent-teacher organizations and school-management committees, improve teacher compensation, government investment in child and youth development through suitable education and health policies and programs, increase access to early childhood development programs, Increase access to schools, improve transportation

infrastructure in rural areas, varying systems of education and broadening skills taught to make education more relevant to the demands of the economy. (Tille & Adewole 2016).

There is also a push in many African countries to improve colonial education standards to stress the importance of indigenous languages and cultures instead of European languages and cultures. Critics of these reforms maintain that European languages should continue to be the focus of education to ensure that African students can be competitive in a European-dominated global economy. (Aitchison & Hassana 2009)

Implications for Global Information Policy

Some recent US Information policy laws such as the bank secrecy act reaffirms the federal reserve's longstanding commitment to combating money laundering and safeguarding agreement with the bank secrecy act and related requirements regarding the reporting of doubtful activity by domestic and foreign banking organizations supervised by the federal reserve. There is opposition to this as an assault of privacy. Cable TV privacy Act of 1984 places limits on what type of information a cable firm can obtain from its consumer, family educational right to privacy act hampers access to students records and freedom of information act, gives citizens' rights to acquire public records at cost.

In Nigeria 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 to make information accessible to the citizenry at no cost.

Challenges of Information Policy in Nigeria

In the face of rapid demographic change, the major challenge facing Nigeria is developing policies and appointing qualified personnel capable of understanding and responding to the current social priorities and complex needs of an increasingly population. Other challenges includes; financial resources, limited experiences such as limited knowledge about other cultures, language competencies, standards i.e. there is no standards to accommodate new digital formats.

Conclusion

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 does 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 four basic cornerstones of information activities. These are; Free access to information, Information Security, Information storage and retrieval and Information dissemination especially to rural areas and the less privileged.

Recommendations

- Free access to information should be provided globally. There should be equity in the share of information
- Information security should be provided to both the have and the have nots.
- Information should be provided to the rural areas to bridge the gap between the upper and the lower-class citizens to achieve global information policy,

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