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Introduction

Information is power. All people need and have a right to information, but some groups are disadvantaged in getting information. Such groups are people who have various conditions that render them unable to work or function in society in a conventional way. Among the disadvantaged groups are those who have internal conditions (the physically and mentally handicapped), like the blind, the deaf, the learning disabled; and those disadvantaged by external socio-cultural factors, like prisoners, the rural dwellers, the elderly, immigrants and the people in the barracks community. This paper concerns the blind and the prisoners - two groups that are disadvantaged in different ways which hinder their access to library and information resources. They have
The objectives of the study here to:

1) identify the non-governmental organizations that are involved in providing library and information services to the blind and prisoners;

2) find out the information needs of the blind and prisoners as perceived by the NGOs;

3) identify activities and programmes that non-governmental organizations employ in providing library and information services to these groups;

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), have stepped in to supplement the efforts of public libraries in this direction. The NGOs may be non-profit agencies, community-based organizations, charities, advocacy groups, religious institutions (and) unions, that are outside government bureaucracy (Vasquez, 1994). They are institutions or any group that is independent of government, which has humanitarian rather than commercial objectives. Their main purpose is to fill the lacuna in government's programmes, such as rendering library and information services to disadvantaged groups. NGOs are usually grassroots organizations that seek to meet the needs of their clientele (Vendever, 1995). This study set out to investigate the role being played by NGOs in providing library and information services to two disadvantaged groups in Nigeria.
4) Identify the problems non-governmental organizations encounter while providing library and information services to these persons; and
5) Suggest strategies for improving on their services.

Methodology

The research design for this study was survey design. The population of study comprised the nine NGOs identified as providing library and information services to the two groups. Five of these offer library and information services to the blind, while four do the same for prisoners. Those serving the blind include the Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association, Gindiri Materials Centre, Niger-Wives Braille Production Centers, Pacelli School for the Blind and Partially sighted, and Vocational Training Center for the Blind. The four NGOs serving prisoners include Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA), Society for the Welfare of Women Prisoners (SWEP), Center of Excellence for Literacy and Literacy Education, Ha-Fic, and the University Women’s Association Children’s Centre, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The respondents consisted of the coordinators and staff of the NGOs involved, who were administered a questionnaire and interviewed.

Data was analysed using frequency distribution and mean scores.

Overview of Library and Information Services to Blind Persons and Prisoners

The blind are the visually impaired whose poor eye sight makes them unable to do work for which sight is necessary. These users have characteristics that make them different from other classes. The blind seem to be isolated from all other groups in the sense that they are cut off from the world of things, including books. There are categories of blindness: some people are born blind; others get blind at middle age because of one accident or the other while others get blind as a result of old age. In Nigeria, old age is usually regarded as the major cause of blindness. In the past, education for this group of people was looked upon as an unrealistic venture, but with the National Policy on Education, special teachers are trained to teach them in special schools with materials such as Braille, talking books, audio tapes etc.
Cernea (1988) observed that the very identification of something as a resource depends not only on that thing itself, but also on the attributes of the potential users, including their knowledge, skills, status, and access to other complementary resources. This applies to the blind in their search for information. If the blind are exposed to the right resources for sourcing information, their potential will be fully developed. A person’s loss of sight can put a severe limit on his/her access to information and intellectual stimulation, because the person cannot read print materials and cannot move freely. Therefore, print materials are represented in a form that could be used. For example, books should be printed in Braille, and there are talking books, talking newspapers, in the form of sound recordings. There are some European countries which render library and information services to the disadvantaged. Countries like Germany and Denmark have a central institution or library that produces and distributes reading materials for the blind by post. These include Braille volumes, talking books including textbooks, journals, magazines, professional literature and other recreational reading materials. Atimmo (1983) observed that associations like the Danish Organization for the Blind loan books to the blind at the state library and printing house and provide for the social and welfare needs of the blind as well. Also in America, the National Library Services for the Blind and the Physically Handicapped (NLS) of the Library of Congress is charged by law with providing Braille, talking books and the machines for reproducing the Braille and talking books free of charge to the blind and the physically handicapped who are unable to read ordinary print (Vellene, 1979). Russell (2002) also reported that in Ireland, audio books, both on cassette and CD format, are lent free of charge to the blind users.

However, in Nigeria, the disadvantaged have inadequate library services. Libraries have often failed to have specific, special provisions that encourage the blind students to use the library. For instance, in Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the Braille resources are located on the top floor and this makes it difficult for the blind to access the materials. Also the Nigerian Advisory Council for the Blind has for two decades failed to establish a Braille press for the production of Braille material, which if established would make it easier for the blind in Nigeria. Today books embedded in Nigerian culture are not produced in Braille, and this prevents the blind from getting informed.
**Information Needs of Prisoners**

Prisoners are persons who are confined because of one crime or the other. They include persons awaiting trial (ATPs) and detainees (Civil Liberty Organisation, 1991). Some people are in prison because they could not pay a fine due for their offence. The highest calibre of prisoners is the ones who are awaiting execution unless there is a presidential pardon. The typical prisoner in Nigeria is a physical, mental and emotional wreck (CLO 1991). The prisons are marked by congestion and inhuman treatment. Most of the inmates are packed in rooms without ventilation, are not well fed or healthy, and all this contributes to the psychological trauma they go through. It is this condition that calls for library services that will disseminate information to prisoners.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Article 1 declares that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (CLO, 1991). Therefore, prisoners like every other person have dignity and rights. One of those rights as cited in section 37-47 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution is freedom of expression, which includes the right to communicate. The prison service itself put its role in very succinct terms in its 1984 Annual Report, which says: “As one of the security arms of government, the Nigerian prisons service is charged with the responsibility of ensuring the safe custody of offenders, their reformation and rehabilitation.”

One of the most effective ways to prevent crime is not by firing squad but by training the confined criminals. One of the most effective ways of training a criminal is to make his new environment similar to his natural habitat (Womboh, 1991). What can do that? It is books through library services in the prison yards. The prisoners need information for their legal needs, information for religious and vocational needs and to improve their education. This is because most of the prisoners are dropouts and they need to continue their education. The prisoners’ state of mind makes them need information even more than other groups. It is worthy to note that in as much as the prisoners do not have freedom of movement, they have freedom of thought and expression, and the library is the center for such freedom. Dike (2001) pointed out that libraries are spaces of freedom and light, where individuals exercise their basic human rights to information, education, freedom of thought and expression. 

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The library can be a reformatory center for prisoners in the sense that recreational books like novels and plays help ease their mind. Libraries help prisoners change the negative beliefs they have about themselves and the society through the kind of books that are administered. As Davis (2000) said, "better libraries mean better inmates". Prison libraries also help in making the offender whole. Rendering library services to prisoners helps turn them into better citizens when released. It also helps satisfy the legal needs of the prisoners by providing them with legal materials and other information that will help them seek freedom through having an attorney to represent them. Reading is the "bread of the intellect" (Medina, 2000). By reading several materials in the library, attending seminars and participating in different workshops, the prisoners get educated. The relevance of library and information services to prisoners cannot be overemphasized as it helps very much in the overall reformation of prisoners.

The kinds of library service vary from country to country. IFLA guidelines for library services to prisoners says that every institution shall have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and that the prisoners shall be allowed to make use of it (Lehman, 2000). But this is not always the case. In Nigeria, Bikie (2001) observed that the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs Annual Reports of 1994 and 1996 failed to even mention library services as one of the programmes of the prison social welfare. Here again NGOs have come in to help fill the gap.

### Information Needs Identified by the NGOs

A comparison of the information needs of the blind and prisoners is made on Table 1 which shows the response of the NGOs and their rating of the information needs of their target beneficiaries.
Table 1: Information Needs of the Blind and the Prisoners

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Information needs</th>
<th>Prisoners (N=11)</th>
<th>Blind (N=8)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Educational needs</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational needs</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational needs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious needs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial needs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal needs</td>
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As shown in table 1, the information needs that ranked highest for the blind were educational needs, followed by vocational and recreational needs. This indicates the effort the blind make to get education, due to their inability to read print materials. On the other hand, the prisoners' most pressing information needs include health, legal, religious, educational and vocational needs. Health, legal and religious needs ranked highest; this can be linked to the conditions to which the prisoners are subjected. They are incarcerated behind walls, and as a result they are psychologically downcast. Books are liberators and medicine of the mind. If books that can heal such minds are delivered to them they will not only survive the condition but become better citizens when released from prison.
Among the NGOs serving the blind, more are involved in the production and donation of library materials. This activity is being carried out as a way of solving the blind’s educational needs, which scored highest among their information needs. They also engage in vocational training workshops, literacy education programmes, acquisition of library materials through foreign aid, seminars, and counseling. The Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind, Gindiri Materials Centre, and Vocational Center for the Blind are all involved in the production of Braille and other materials like mathematics diagram board, simple calculating boards, Braille writing frame for satisfying the library and information needs of the blind.

The NGOs serving the prisoners such as PRAWA, UWA, and SWEP, donate books to the prison as a way of satisfying their educational needs.

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needs. Since the prisoners' most pressing information needs are health, legal and religious information, followed by educational needs, NGOs serving them engage mostly in financial assistance, legal aid programmes, literacy education and recreation activities in a bid to satisfy their need.

Problems Encountered in Rendering Services

The NGOs encounter many problems while rendering library and information services to these two groups. From the list of problems, it was found out that inadequate fund is the major problem and this problem hampers some of their activities. Examples of problems that are peculiar to NGOs serving the blind include high cost in the production of library materials and lack of trained staff. For the NGOs that serve the prisoners, illiteracy among prisoners, poor reading culture and high censorship of library materials pose problems. In a bid to solve these problems, the NGOs employ various strategies which range from soliciting for funds locally and internationally, negotiation at the top for attraction of government's attention towards helping them in providing funds and reducing regulations that lead to censorship of materials in prisons.

Recommendations and Conclusion

In line with what has been discussed so far, the researcher recommends that libraries, especially school and academic libraries, should collaborate with these NGOs so as to help them serve their disadvantaged clientele. The recommendation is made because it has been noticed that most of the academic textbooks are not in Braille. The academic libraries collaborating with these NGOs will help them serve the visually impaired better as NGOs could help in producing their books in Braille. In addition, the government, corporate bodies and individuals should help the NGOs through their various offices to provide fund for effective service. Thirdly, there should be inter-library loan and conferences between these NGOs and the different institutions that serve the blind and prisoners alike. Fourthly, teachers and prison officials should be trained thoroughly to equip them in extending library and information services to their clientele (the blind and prisoners). Finally, censorship of library materials should be reduced in prisons.

Disadvantaged persons are special library users; they need to access information together with their peers so as to be useful to themselves and the society. But because of certain conditions,
information has to be repackaged in such a way that it could be used by them. For instance, books have to be transcribed in Braille or audiotapes for the blind. The prisoners need books with legal and religious bias and simple educational books which can help educate them while in prison. All these are the reasons these two groups could be served. Because the government has not adequately provided for them, the NGOs as grassroots organizations stepped in to salvage the situation.

The NGOs in the process of rendering library and information services engage in several activities such as production of library materials, acquisition of library materials, and literacy education. They also encounter some difficulties, which range from lack of fund, high cost of production of materials, and censorship of library materials to lack of government support. In order for them to overcome these problems, the NGOs solicit for funds, hold workshops and train trainers, etc. The effort of these NGOs cannot be overlooked. Libraries and other institutions are advised to follow their footsteps and collaborate with them so as to render more effective library and information services to their disadvantaged users.

References
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