



## MOBILE LIBRARY SERVICES: A PANACEA FOR GRASSROOT LITERACY AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

**Abimbola Labake Agboke, Ph.D; CLN**

University of Uyo Library  
Technical Services Division

Email: [abimbolalagboke@uniuyo.edu.ng](mailto:abimbolalagboke@uniuyo.edu.ng)

**Oluwatosin J. Soyoye, CLN**

Acquisition Unit  
University of Uyo Library  
Uyo, Akwa-Ibom State.

and

**Boma Torukwein David-West**

Department of Library and Information Science  
University of Port Harcourt.

Email: [boma.davidwest@uniport.edu.ng](mailto:boma.davidwest@uniport.edu.ng)

### Abstract

*Libraries exist to disseminate information to the users not considering their geographical location. This paper describes the Mobile Library as any vehicle that convey information resources to the users at any place and anywhere. Mobile Library service is an offshoot of the Public Libraries, School Libraries and other private parastatals or NGOs. Furthermore, this paper discussed mobile library services in the conventional library when physical resources were the only means of information sources and users were needed to be physically present in the libraries building before, they could access the resources of the library, books were transported to the users at their various locations through donkeys, bicycles, buses, van, containers and any other physical movable items. Furthermore, the paper enumerates that mobile library services metamorphosized into digital library services; during the era of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the Internet and particularly the World Wide Web (WWW) have revolutionized library activities, hence, there have been changes in the normal functioning of Libraries in the digital world. In the present trend, mobile library services are now in electronic services (e – services) accessing information through e-books, e-resources, e – journals and other online services. Moreover, this paper highlights the contributions of mobile library services to the development of the grassroots and the vulnerable thus; Mobile library services aid the development of Agricultural products in the grassroot, Educational development of the grassroot and the vulnerable, Technological Development of citizens at the Grassroot and the Vulnerable amongst others were discussed in the paper and concluded that government at all levels should make a policy that would support mobile library servicers in Nigeria. It was recommended among others that public libraries should offer mobile library services in all local government areas.*

**Keywords: Mobile, Library, Services, Grassroots, Development, Vulnerable**

## Introduction

Mobile library services or 'Bookmobile' is taking books and other information resources to the door steps of the citizenry for enlightenment and education. In the past years and presently, libraries are not limited to only the physical ones but also move to mobile library which is mobilize and can reach people far from town such as in rural areas or grassroots. Mobile libraries are vehicles that can be used to take library resources from the main or central library to clients that live far away from the library. Mobile library service is a vehicle especially equipped and furnished to provide a professional library service direct to the people. Mobile Libraries are libraries that do not operate behind walls, nor do they wait for their users to come to them; they make their ways to them in the most unexpected ways: with buses, ships, trains, bicycles, elephants, camels, donkeys, etc. In fact, anything that can move and carry information sources to the users and satisfy their information needs at the comfort of their homes or any geographical location could be regarded to as mobile Library. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions [IFLA], (2010). Any library service that does not stay in one place is classified as a Mobile Library. Also, Biko and Papadimitriou,( 2018) stated that libraries in any form that move in any manner, that offer library services, are served by specialized staff and work in an organized manner within an institutional framework, can be formally classified as Mobile Libraries. This category includes mobile libraries which are created and supervised by the central government of a country or by local government authorities or by an institutional body or as a result of the collaboration of these authorities. The most common of these libraries are those that run as branches of public, school, academic and generally institutional libraries.

Mobile libraries support the information needs of people in the grassroots or rural areas for economic, social, educational, political development and other forms of development. Recently, mobile library services metamorphosized into digital library services, aimed at disseminating information to the grassroots. The development of countries globally cannot be achieved without the development of the4 rural communities or grassroots. This is because 75 – 80% of the people live in the rural areas and they need positive, relevant and prompt attention in their daily activities. Rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important catalyst in the development process. People in rural areas whether literate or not should have access to all kinds of information which would help them to become better – informed citizens. Mobile libraries made the information available at the grassroot. This paper highlights mobile library services to the grassroots and vulnerable development, Brief history of mobile library, mobile library outreach services, Mobile library services during the era of technologies and the contributions of mobile library services to the grassroots and vulnerable

development.

### **What is Grassroots Development?**

Grassroots development otherwise known as rural development, embraces a host of economic, social and political activities aimed at improving the standard and living conditions of the rural dwellers. It is a process in which the people are the key participants in their own development. The essential elements of grassroots development include poverty reduction; rising incomes; increase in health and nutrition status of the people; provision of quantitative and qualitative basic education; improved agricultural activities; provision of infrastructural facilities; amongst others. Grassroots development (rural development) is the process by which the standard of living at the grassroots level is raised politically, socially and economically. This definition views grassroots development as a multi-dimensional process involving important changes in social structures, conditions of life, as well as the involvement of the rural dwellers in decisions that affect their lives. Grassroots development, in this wise, is regarded as an effective strategy of addressing the basic needs of the rural population. Egwemi and Odo (2013) sees rural or grassroots development as the development of rural people in such a continuous manner as to enable them to effectively and efficiently utilize their intellect, technology and other resources for further development of themselves and others. Development can only be effective if rural dwellers have access to relevant, diverse information for their activities. As long as people do not have information and are not empowered, they will remain perpetually poor. [IFLA], (2017) posited that access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support grassroot development. Information is power and has the capability for social transformation and social engineering. Harande, (2009) viewed information as a raw material for the development of urban and rural arrears and that the well-being and development of any nation depend largely on information. Therefore, Mobile libraries are the means of disseminating information to the grassroots and for development of the grassroots and vulnerable.

### **What Constitutes Vulnerable Populations?**

The vulnerable population are the citizens that lack the basic social amenities of life, like good quality education, good food, adequate electricity, clean water facility etc. therefore, they are vulnerable to ill – health, they are tagged the poor. Kayinwaye (2014) conceptualized poverty as a dreaded condition of absence of capacity to maintain basic level of decent living and denial of right to exercise full potentials. It creates vulnerability, exposing people to various diseases, ill-health, malnutrition, starvation, indecent accommodation, lack of potable water, infrastructure deficiencies, inadequate

education, deprivations, inequalities, and decreased life expectancy. It dominates and incapacitates its victims. The poor do not have significant voice and influence in determining public policies and political priorities in their community. Saleh and Lasisi, (2011) remarked that Nigeria as a third world country has certain features of rural population which include illiteracy, poverty, hunger, disease and general absence of basic infrastructure such as roads, schools, electricity and so on All these people need information for development. Poverty eradication can only thrive on the wheels of adequate and appropriate information offer by the Mobile libraries. (Nkiko, 2005; Royal Commission on National Development, 2005) averred that the extent to which people of the twenty first century will be creative, informed, knowledgeable and instrumental to national development will be determined by the availability and the content of the library services in their immediate locality The primary objective of a library is to provide the right information at the right time in the right format to its users.

The development of countries globally cannot be achieved without the development of the rural community or grassroot. This is because 75-80% of the people in the developing countries live in the rural areas and they need positive, relevant and prompts attention in their daily activities. Rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in the development process. People in rural area whether literate or not should have access to all kinds of information which would help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligations, to become better informed citizens. Mobile libraries made the information available at the grassroot. Phillips (2006), the rural people contend with so many issues among which are housing, infrastructure, access to amenities, income, living standards and issues of physical and social environment.

### **Brief History of Mobile Library Services**

Library without wall existed even before the era of Information and communication technology (ICT). In the 1800s, the travelling libraries were the most popular method for books to reach the people who, for various reasons, did not have access to libraries. Books were taken on horses, Vans, books trolley to various destination call 'Bookmobile'. Bookmobile service was introduced into Nigeria by the regional governments in the 1960s and 1970s. The level of success varied. According to Okiy (2004), mobile library service was launched in order to extend library services to everyone in Bendel state, irrespective of location. By the end of 1977, this service had a fleet of five vans with a total book stock of 12,500 volumes. The vans operated 220 service points in 140 towns and villages. In 2003, Funmi Ilori, a former primary school teacher now an educational consultant based in Lagos, started the Bookmobile library services 'Library on the wheels' from visiting houses with baskets full of books,

“Books in a basket and was going door-to-door,” By 2013 it metamorphized from baskets to using Vans and minibuses to move books to some remote parts of Lagos State in Nigeria. In the same year, Ilori launched the first read Mobile Library. Ilori’s read Mobile Library had visited over 3,000 children so far in the remote part of Lagos. Reiterating the importance of the mobile library to grassroots development, Ilori advocated for community libraries everywhere. Just as churches are springing up. This is because of the need to catch new readers from a young age. She painted a picture of children in rural communities who have never held a book. (Arab News, 2018).

### **Mobile Library Outreach Services**

Mobile library has played a notable part in the development of library services. This is done by arranging library collections in a systematic order and moving them in specialized vehicles to the remote parts of the nation. According to Hisham and Abudallah, (2018) the collections of mobile libraries are books, journals, magazines, and comics. Some audio – visual materials may also be included such as maps, slides, projectors, TV Monitors, DVDs and computers. When they get to these locations which may be the village square or at times the village hall, children are made to line up to be served with these library resources. Mobile library services provide information to the vulnerable through outreach services. Library outreach builds relationships within the community and is a way to provide information services to populations with specific needs such as seniors, in-home patrons, veterans, and persons experiencing homelessness. The mobile library service is the most effective instrument in reaching out to provide library services to patrons reading in remote areas. Hisham and Abudallah, (2018) also stated that in libraries’ outreach is often described as services for those who are traditionally underserved. Library outreach strives to provide equitable delivery library services to all through the development of programs, services and policies which make the library available to everyone the ability to be in the community, to engage with community members, and offer specific targeted services. Therefore, Mobile library service is important for community development.

### **Mobile Library Services in the Era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

The era of ICT brought about the era of mobile technologies in the library. According to Ranganathan (1931) library is a growing organism as such it is dynamic and tends to adapt to technological changes. Technological changes are enhancing the creation, storage and dissemination of information tremendously. Balachander and Ramesh. (2019) explore that ICT changed the library concept of the storehouse to data scattering. These technological changes involve the use of electronic information resources, internet, social media tools and mobile technology. In the present dispensation, information

is packaged and communicated with the aid of Information communication technology like the internet and WWW changes the function and format of library and information Centre. The progress of web-based services changes the library from physical to virtual. It changes the format of Bookmobile to Electronic Book (E- Books). Computers and mobile telephones are gaining popularity among the population in the grassroots.

Mobile technologies have provided faster access to information and communication. Mobile technology devices changed the pattern in which information is been accessed and disseminated, information can be accessed and disseminated using mobile devices anywhere, anytime in a convenient and timely manner. During the era of (ICT) books are now made available to users electronically; they could be digitized or downloaded electronically. Users can access e- books regardless of proximity to a physical location. Those who are not able to visit the library, like the elderly and the homebound, will be able to access a much broader range of materials than those provided through traditional outreach methods. Hill and Bossaller (2012) averred that materials that patrons are conventionally prohibited from removing from the library, like rare maps, photos, and reference texts, can be borrowed in digitized format at the corners of their beds. During the era of electronic information sources mobility of books became easier and more accessible. The application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the Internet and particularly the World Wide Web have revolutionized library activities, hence, there has been changes in the normal functioning of libraries in the digital world. The present trend of library resources includes e-books, e-resources, digital library, e- services etc. The future prospects of smart libraries would involve utilization of skill and knowledge whereas the information is also recorded, stored, retrieved and disseminated in the e-format at a large scale.

### **The Contributions of Mobile Library Services in the Grassroot Development and the Vulnerable**

The contribution of mobile library services to the development of the grassroots and the vulnerable cannot be overemphasized. They are:

#### **Educational Development:**

Drotner (2015) opined that libraries foster learning and development in the society by rendering different quality information related services to the citizens to enable them make informed decisions and solve societal problems, as well as enable the citizenry to play active roles in the society. Therefore, the Mobile libraries support quality education and this has resulted to the development of grassroot. Agboke,

(2019) declared that Quality library Information has substantially increase the number of youths and adults who have skills, including technical and vocational skills for employment, decent job and entrepreneurship. It also supports lifelong education, hence teaching and learning are no longer limited to the four-walls of classrooms, adults and old people can now further their education at any time and acquire information resources through mobile library.

### **Political and Community Development:**

Every human society no matter its size is usually interested in knowing and participating in how they are being governed. In a democratic nation like Nigeria, it is the right of the citizens to vote the leaders of their choice into power and no community can actually develop without some measure of self-help projects. Mobile libraries enable the rural people to be informed about their community and take decision for the community. Mobile library brings information to the conveniences of the grassroots for political enlightenment and entitlement. Odo, (2014) stated that the grassroots development is also viewed as a self-generating process of socio-economic and political development in which the rural inhabitants themselves are actively involved and share in the cost and benefits of such development. The most critical reason for the creation of local governments in Nigeria is for grassroots development otherwise known as rural development, which embraces a host of economic, social and political activities aimed at improving the standard and living conditions of the rural dwellers. It is a process in which the people are the key participants or ought to be key participants in their own development. Citizens can read about the manifesto of the government of their choices in the information resources circulated to them by the mobile libraries.

### **Health:**

Most Nigeria citizens are living in rural areas, where they do not have access to good water, good health facilities and other basic amenities of life and these made them vulnerable to various health issues. Infectious diseases like cholera, chicken pox, measles amongst others can easily spread among the people. Mobile library services provide health information on how to manage and prevent the spread of these diseases. The citizens are informed about where to get drugs for their illness, they are informed about the well-being of their neighborhoods and how to get on good water supply,

electricity, environmental sanitation and waste management as well as access and road maintenance and drought related issues. During COVID 19 pandemic lockdown information were disseminated digitally even at the grassroots level. Ladan, Haruna and Madu (2020) reiterated that Nigerian Library Association (NLA) through its Facebook and blog page joined the World Health Organization (WHO), to create awareness on the precautions to avoid further spread of the pandemic.

### **Agriculture:**

Most of the people at the grass roots are mainly peasant farmers. They need information to be able to grow their product and how to get market for their product. They have need for information about how to get fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, improved varieties of seedlings and farming implements like tractors which could be gotten free or at subsidized rate and also new techniques and innovations in farming to boost their farmers yields. Information is one of the basic human needs after air, water, food and shelter. Ogar, Dika & Atanda, (2018) posited that man requires information to be able to manipulate the factors of production as land, labor and capital resources into meaningful and productive use. The primary objective of a library is to provide the right information at the right time in the right format to its users. The information given to the farmers through library outreach and advocacy services help the farmers to know how to grow their farms and the type of pest control to use.

### **Technological Development:**

Mobile libraries have contributed to the technological development of the grassroots and the vulnerable. People in the grassroots can now operate some technological devices. The most dramatic impacts have been in the expansion of the range of materials collected and made available, together with the ability to reach users regardless of the geographical location. The 'Library without Walls', (digital library) once a dream is now a trend in the nations and it has aided the development of the grassroots. With the advent of Online information resources available in the libraries, many people in the rural areas are now internet users, smartphones, high phone and laptops and computer users. Mobile libraries are providing virtual references via the web. Some old people and youths in the grassroots can now access online information.



## **Eradication of Poverty:**

In present world, people are in search of how to grow more than one stream of income to improve the living standard of their families. In rural communities, people particularly women engage in small business such as tailoring, petty trading, animal husbandry, weaving and soap making among others. They also sought an opportunity for interest free loan business and organizing themselves into Association where is contributed on a regular basis and shared at agreed time to solve personal financial needs. They sought for every opportunity to empower themselves financially there is an intrinsic relationship between poverty eradication and information. As long a people do not have information and are not empowered, they will remain perpetually poor. IFLA (2017) posited that access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development. Michael Onuoha, Nkiko & Okuonghae,( 2020) reported in their study on Poverty eradication. The role of Nigerian Libraries towards the Achievement of the Sustainable Development,reported that mobile library services played (90%) in poverty eradication in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

The contribution of Mobile library services for the development of the grassroots and the vulnerable cannot be overemphasized. It has contributed to the agricultural development of the grassroots, the people in the grassroots are now technologically savvy and well informed. It has contributed to the educational enlightenment of the grassroots and the level of illiteracy has reduced drastically. Mobile library made health information accessible to the people at the grassroots, with this they have learnt how to combat any contagious disease and know how to give themselves first aid treatment before going to hospital. Moreover, mobile library services aided poverty eradication at the grassroots and the condition of living has improved. People at the grassroots are now informed on how to do business, get loans and assist themselves financially through information sources disseminated to them by mobile library services. Considering the contributions of mobile library services, the following recommendations were made.

## The Way forward

1. The public libraries should offer mobile library services in all local government areas.
2. All the relevant agencies, ranging from the local government to any level of government should provide funds for mobile library services for the purchase of vans, bus etc. for transportation of physical books to the remote areas of the nation.
3. Computers, smartphones and other ICT systems should be made available to the people in the grassroots.
4. The government should make a policy that ensures that mobile libraries in grassroots areas have access to Internet connectivity.
5. Training and retraining of people in the grassroot on ICT and related areas should be a continuous exercise.
6. An outreach programme should be organized at the grassroots to create awareness for the people on the availability of mobile library in the libraries.

## References

- Agboke, A.L. (2019). The roles quality library information plays in education, technology and economic development in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review*, 6 (3), pp. 71-76. Available online at <https://www.journalissues.org/IJEPRR/>  
<https://doi.org/10.15739/IJEPRR.19.010>
- ArabNews, (2018). On the road with Nigeria's first mobile library.  
<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1237316/offbeat>
- Balachandar, P., & Ramesh, R. (2019). Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Library Operations Resources and Services in University Libraries. *International Journal of Recent Academic Research*, 1(8), 472-474.
- Biko, G., & Papadimitriou, P. (2018). Mobile Libraries: Defining the phenomenon, *International Journal of Library and Information Science*, 10(3), 35-40, March 2018 DOI: 10.5897/IJLIS2017.0816. <http://www.academicjournals.org/IJLIS>
- Drotner, K. (2015). IFLA. 2014. Lyon declaration on access to Information and development.  
<http://www.lyondeclaration.org>.

- Ebiwolate, P. B. (2010). "Nigeria public library service to rural areas: libraries in Niger Delta states." *Library Philosophy and Practice*, June 2010. Gale Academic OneFile, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/A233125061/AONE?u=anon~482a6ffe&sid=googleScholar&xid=7f0fdfa2](http://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A233125061/AONE?u=anon~482a6ffe&sid=googleScholar&xid=7f0fdfa2).
- Egwemi, V., & Odo, L. U. (2013), "Rural Development and Poverty Eradication in Nigeria". *Journal of Research in National Development*, 11(1).
- Harande, Y. I. (2009). Information Services for Rural Community Development in Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*.
- Hill, H., & Bossaller, J. (2012). Public library uses of free e-resources. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 45(2) 103–112. DOI: 10.1177/0961000611435253lis.sagepub.com
- Hisham, N. B., & Abdullah, C. Z. (2018). The goodness of mobile library and user satisfaction among rural community in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(12), 1355–136.
- IFLA. (2017). The Role of Public Libraries in the Attainment of Vision 2016. <http://library.ifla.org/258/1/201-radijeng-en.pdf>
- Kayinwaye, C. (2014). Assessment of national policy on education and its Implication for poverty Eradication in Nigeria, (7), 31–48.
- Ladan, A., Haruna, B., & Madu, A. (2020). COVID19 Pandemic and social media news in Nigeria: The role of Libraries and Library Associations in Information Dissemination. *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences*, 7(2) ISSN (Online): 2349 – 5219.
- Michael-Onuoha, H. C. Nkiko, C., & Okuonghae, O. (2020). "Poverty Eradication: The role of Nigerian Libraries towards the achievement of the sustainable development goals (SDGs)" (2020). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 4105. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/4105>
- Odo, L. U. (2014). Local Government and the Challenges of Grassroots development in Nigeria. *Review of Public Administration and management*, 3(6). [www.arabianjbmr.com/RPAM\\_index.php](http://www.arabianjbmr.com/RPAM_index.php)

Okiy, R. B. (2004). History of libraries. Benin City: Justice-Jeco Business Venture.

Philips, D. (2006). Quality of Life: Concept, Policy and Practice. Oxon: Routledge.

Saleh, A. G., & Lasisi, F. I. (2011). Information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural women in Borno State, Nigeria. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. <http://unlib.unl.edu.LPP/salh-lasisi2.pdf>.

Stringer, I (2010). Mobile Library Guidelines, Professional Report, No. 123. IFLA. <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/publications/professionalreport/123.pdf>