

Tanzania's Milestone Achievement: Introducing the First National Library and Information Services Policy

Unlocking the Power of Knowledge for All

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We are excited to share with you a significant milestone in the education sector in Tanzania, whereby the nation has taken a giant leap toward enhancing its intellectual capital. Introducing the first National Library and Information Services Policy since independence (1961), which marks a pivotal moment in Tanzania's journey towards a more literate and knowledgeable society.

Information is vital in libraries and society in general and serves as a foundation upon which knowledge, education, and progress are built. Yet again, Libraries support the provision of access to information irrespective of socioeconomic background, as it enables individuals to explore diverse perspectives, fostering critical thinking and informed decision-making. Moreover, access to information in society is essential for democracy as it informs the public to be better equipped and participate in civic life, and also information acts as a catalyst for innovation and society advancement. Furthermore, information in libraries is crucial as it prepares individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to participate in the modern workforce.

Currently, in this knowledge-based economy, libraries and information services together support education systems, intellectual advancement of individuals, and sustainable development and also provide information that enables manipulation of other factors of production such as labor, land, and capital. This fourth industrial revolution which strongly impacts all spheres of human life including library and information services, consists of digital technologies that have greatly improved conventional library processes, activities, and services such as the introduction of online collections. Librarians apart from their traditional duties, nowadays are trained to promote reading habits, participate in curricula development, and teach information literacy programs.

Therefore, libraries can take advantage of the many opportunities brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution by embracing the use of relevant digital technologies. Some of the opportunities include offering both on and off-campus access to information resources and the introduction of new products and services that increase the efficiency of library services. These

include the use of social media to communicate with patrons, online reference services, online renewal of print materials, and others.



The picture of a representative of the board elected for creating National Library and Information Services in 2023 held at Mwanza

Prof. Sife the vice chancellor of MoCU, presented at the third Tanzania Library Service Board Symposium which was held in Mwanza, and said, “In the future, it is expected that libraries will be trustworthy information brokers and will do more with new technology; provide universal access to information and scholarly works; and preserving and providing access to information in all formats. So it is important for a nation like Tanzania, to have a national library and information services policy, as it is an overall framework for planning, coordinating, and guiding the country’s library and information infrastructure, systems, content generation, and service provision. It is also a pioneer of legislation(s) that defines the establishment, organization, funding, the services to be provided, and the people to be served by libraries in the country.

However, the lack of a national policy negatively affects library development in terms of numbers, collections, staffing, and future directions. The goal of any National Library and Information Services Policy is to ensure that there is a common framework upon which sustainable library and information systems are developed throughout the country. The specific objectives of such a policy include bringing all libraries and information centers of the country under a common platform for their systematic operation and management; stipulating the roles and contributions of libraries and information centers to the country's socio-economic development; creating an environment where people of all walks of life in the country will get equal opportunity to learn; and protecting the rights of library users and staff as well as to strengthen professional dignity.

Furthermore, during the third Tanzania Library Service Board Symposium, Prof. Sife, as a keynote speaker added that Tanzania does not have a national-wide policy that guides and coordinates the development, management, and provision of library and information services. But, various frameworks have been in existence since independence including the Parliamentary Act (Act No. 39 of 1963) that established the Tanganyika 6 Library Services Board. This Act was replaced by the Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB) Act No 6 of 1975 which aimed at broadening the functions of the Board and providing for the management and control of the Board. Currently, library services in Tanzania are regulated by TLSB.

At the level of institutions, particularly in higher learning institutions, there are library policies, rules, and regulations that govern the development, management, and provision of library services. Many university libraries have their library policies, collection development policies, institutional repository policies, library operational procedures as well and library rules and regulations. However, one thing is not clear - whether and how TLSB regulates library services in Tanzania apart from running the National Central Library, regional and district libraries, and the School of Library Archives and Documentation Studies in Bagamoyo (Pwani) and Dar es Salaam. In sum, there is no comprehensive policy framework to oversee the management, development, and provision of the country's library and information services.

Therefore, the solution to all of these problems will be the coming National Library and Information Services Policy. Besides being an overall framework for planning, coordinating, and guiding the country's library and information services, a national policy is also a precursor to the formulation of relevant legislation. The main goal of a national library and information services

policy is to ensure that there is a common framework upon which sustainable library and information systems are developed and managed throughout the country. In addition, the current education and training policy does not emphasize the necessity of having functional libraries in schools and educational institutions. The formulation of a national library and information services policy must be guided by principles that will promote a shared vision among various actors. Formulated policy issues must enable the country to align well and reap the benefits of the 4th Industrial Revolution as far as the provision of library and information services is concerned. Such issues include generation, collection, and documentation of local content; development of library and information services infrastructure; embracing new technologies; planning for personnel; defining the organizational structure; hybrid library collections; management of Big Data; open scholarly communication; and bibliometric.

Upcoming event: Don't miss the 50th Large Conference and Annual General Meeting under the Tanzania Library and Information Association (TLA) to be held on 19th -23rd February 2024, Followed by a special large book fair to be held in October 2024 in Dar es salaam Tanzania.