

**PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE NATIONAL LIBRARIAN, PROFESSOR CHINWE
VERONICA ANUNOBI, AT THE BOARD ROOM OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY
OF NIGERIA ON TUESDAY, 20th SEPTEMBER 2022,
TO COMMEMORATE HER FIRST ANNIVERSARY IN OFFICE, AND SHARE
INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRESS MADE DURING THE PERIOD**

Theme: BUILDING BRIDGES

The Management and Staff of the National Library

Gentlemen of the Press

Good afternoon, everyone.

It is my pleasure to welcome each of you to this press conference. I most especially thank the members of the press for honouring our invitation and turning up to hear what I have to say and disseminate same to the public.

You will all recall that when I was appointed to this office in September 2021, I addressed a press conference on 10th November where I shared my vision and the thrust of my administration which revolves around 8 areas.

I deem it proper to share with the public our modest progress in the last one year, how we have fared towards meeting the target and vision we announced last year, with a view to rendering quality service, in a conducive environment to the public.

We are doing this not just for accountability and transparency purposes but to also let the public know what is new in our bouquet of services for them.

This also gives us an opportunity to receive feedback, which enables us to adjust and improve, in our service delivery.

My effort so far is considered as building bridges to connect the old and the new, leveraging on technology. Consequently, it is my desire to share our success story with you based on the agenda.

i. Digitization and Development of National Repository of Nigeria, (NRN):

The National Library is about 57 years old with a consequential sixty years old information resources. Hence, it is not out of place that some of the information resources are weak and deteriorated due to age and usage. To salvage and preserve them, we engaged in the digitization of this weak heritage aimed at preservation, increased availability and wider accessibility leveraging information and communication technology. While digitization activities are ongoing, the development and deployment of the National Repository of Nigeria (NRN) is about 70% completed. We hope to achieve completion and commissioning for public use by the end of November 2022. The NRN houses in electronic form, all

Nigerian heritage that has been deposited from inception to date by authors, printers or publishers, in compliance with the legal deposit law. The NRN will be accessible by every Nigerian and beyond, regardless of status, qualification, or location. Nevertheless, access to these materials will be in three categories; **FULL ACCESS**, **PARTIAL ACCESS** (metadata and content page) and **READ ONLY**. This is not only designed to increase visibility of Nigerian intellectual heritage but also to enable creators of this intellectual heritage have return on their investments.

We are also working with newspaper houses to collect their publications in e-copies. So far, *Leadership* and *Daily Trust* newspapers have complied to this request as we await other media publishing companies to key into this initiative.

ii. Virtual Library Services Deployment

Technology has enabled humans to perform certain tasks with less physical exertion, thereby saving time and other resources. In leveraging technology, we have designed and developed a virtual library that is fully ready for deployment. The Virtual Library will provide the reading public anywhere in the world, access to our operations and services. This effort will enhance visibility and use of the rich National Library heritage as well as globalize our operations.

We are also mindful of the growing and evolving/diversity of library information resources which we are yet to meet, with our limited resources, which has constrained us to limit acquisition to print monographs. Thus we are exploring a collaborative window with the TETFund for subscription to online databases that will help enrich our collections for teaching, learning and research.

iii. Automation of Library Operations and Services;

It is said that when you integrate automation into your workflow, you are not cutting out certain jobs but getting them completed more efficiently. In the last one year, we have commenced the enhancement of efficient service delivery through the automation of the following:

- a. The ISBN platform which makes it possible for authors and publishers to apply and receive with dispatch International Standard Book Number, International Serials Number and Catalogue in Publication (CIP): contrary to the age long phrase of ‘CIP available in National Library’);
- b. ISBN verification platform whereby, authors and publishers can verify the genuineness of the ISBN they are using. This helps eliminate the faking of Standard numbers.
- c. We have deployed KOHA library automation software for cataloguing and classification in National Library. On the 4th of April 2022, we launched our Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC), the window for all the resources housed by the National Library of Nigeria. This will enable users to virtually check for the materials we have, and their exact location, without physically rummaging our shelves.

- d. We have made it easier for researchers to access news stories and articles of their interest by indexing all Nigerian newspapers and making them available online. This way, anyone searching for information about a particular subject can just log on and enter the subject and explore.

iv. Enhancing the Branch Libraries Environment;

To attract users to any library, the library must be easily accessible, and conducive to the user. We are always concerned about the location and ambience of our branches. In the last one year, concerted efforts were made to ensure proper situation of our branches in the prototype buildings rather than their temporally locations. Hence, the Minister of Education Mallam Adamu Adamu graciously secured the approval of the Federal Executive Council for the Construction of prototype branch buildings in Illorin, Kwara state, and Abeokute Ogun state which construction has commenced

By next week, we shall commence the renovation of our branches in Sokoto, Cross River, Niger and Kwara states temporally buildings.

v. Providing Library Services to the “Hard to Reach”;

As it is public knowledge, we have intensified our readership promotion campaign in the last few years, going to motor parks, custodial centres and maternity homes etc. We are taking further steps to enhance the reading capacity of the ‘Hard to Reach’ groups in our society. When we say *Hard-to-Reach*, we are not only talking about geographical spaces, but language barriers. So we have taken the campaign to royal palaces, to meet the royal fathers who will galvanize support by identifying volunteers that will drive the project in those communities. The campaign is not expected to be flash in the pan, whereby once we turn our backs, the project will end. Arrangement is concluded to provide these communities with whiteboard, markers, writing and basic reading materials, in other to engender basic literacy skills. The Honourable Minister of Education had flagged off this project on 15th September, 2022 at the Conference Room of the Ministry

vi. Enhancing Literacy Sensitization and Encouraging Documentation of Family Heritage in Indigenous Languages;

It is not news to anyone here, that our indigenous languages are fast declining and disappearing. This is why we set out when I assumed office, to see how much we can do, in halting that decline and reverse the trend. As a starting point, we held a roundtable discussion on 21st of February 2022, in collaboration with the embassies of Bulgaria and Bangladesh, to draw attention to the importance of preserving indigenous languages. We have gone further to institute awareness campaign on the documentation of family heritage in indigenous languages. This was motivated by the realization that there is paucity of literature in indigenous languages. Furthermore, we have finalized arrangement to commence the

documentation of historical sites, in four languages (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Pigeon English) at the first instance.

We have also partnered with the National Orientation Agency to train our staff in four indigenous languages Efik, Gbagyi, Igbo and Hausa, to develop proficiency, especially in writing those languages. This is to equip them to be able to support our indigenous language sensitization project.

vii. Expansion and Strengthening of National Library Archive;

We have a section where rare and historical materials are kept, for posterity and current use. Such materials include edicts, biographies and pictures of colonial and past Nigerian administrators etc. We are expanding the scope of this collection to include speeches by former Governor-Generals, Premiers, Military Administrators, Executive Presidents, Governors, Traditional Rulers etc.

viii. Collaborating with Schools to ensure the Establishment and Management of Libraries for Promotion of Reading;

There is an aphorism that “if you walk alone, you go fast. If you walk together, you go far”. As an organisation mandated to enhance reading and literacy levels in Nigeria, we believe that working with others, we shall go farther in addressing the situation. It is in this regard that we, in collaboration with Senator Sam Egwu are renovating and equipping libraries in selected schools in Ebonyi state.

We have also commenced interaction with the Universal Basic Education Commission, Reading Association of Nigeria, Network of Book Clubs, Learn to Read Project of USAID and some state ministries of education towards the actualization of an enhanced reading by pupils and students through provision of reading materials, planting of book clubs and the enforcement of library hours on school timetables. In fact, we recently collaborated and marked the 2022 International Literacy Day at a school in Kuje;

All that anyone needs to do to access this services is to visit our website, www.nln.gov.ng and explore the relevant links.

.....Beyond the Eight-Points

Apart from pursuing the eight-points agenda I set for my administration, we have continued to carry out other activities that have aided and contributed to the realization of our set agenda and by extension the mandate of National Library as encapsulated in her (the National Library's) vision and mission, which is; “To connect and build an informed citizenry by collecting, preserving and providing easy access, leveraging on ICT.”

Repeal of the Enabling Act establishing the National Library of Nigeria

The National Library Act of 1970 had continued to encumber smooth and robust actualization of the Institution's mandate. The cheering news is that on 24th August 2022 the Honourable Minister of Education Mallam Adamu Adamu with Minister of State's

commitment to ensure that National Library takes her pride of place secured the approval of the Federal Executive Council for the repeal of the existing law, enactment of a new law as well as consequent transmission to the National Assembly.

Capacity Building and Manpower Development

No organization will thrive effectively without competent and well-motivated human resources. Consequently, a brainstorming session was held with all Directors of Public Libraries in Nigeria from 10th -12th May 2022. This provided an opportunity for us to share experiences, cross fertilize ideas and forge a common front towards rendering world class library services, promote literacy and reading amongst all strata of citizens needed for the actualization of the 17 Sustainable Development goals and the African Union inclusive growth and development .

We also organised a refresher capacity building session for our Management staff, as well as the Heads of our 33 state branches, on how to harness their experience and skills and in uniformity pursue the realization of the 8-point agenda. Presently, we have concluded arrangements for the training of 80 other staff of the organisation in their respective identified skill gaps in order to motivate and charge them to give their best towards the realization of our mandate.

Within the period, we are proud to say that even though the staff have been on strike since my assumption of duty (In solidarity with their parent/national body), we received 48,644 unique visitors across the branches, out of which 20,941 have registered as full time users. The total number of materials consulted within this period are 45,982 and we have collected 20,637 volumes in 3,660 titles as legal deposit.

Ladies and gentlemen, this have been our modest efforts in the last one year.

At this point I must appreciate the Honourable Minister of Education Mallam Adamu Adamu, the Minister of State, Rt Hon. Goodluck Opiah and the Permanent Secretary Mr. Andrew David Adejo for their unflinching support in ensuring that the National Library is properly situated towards the actualization of the Ministerial mandate in the Federal Government nine priority areas. I also thank the management and staff of the National Library, for their support to my administration, which has made us to attain the successes we have recorded so far.

My administration by the Grace of God and support of the stakeholders will continue to make strides towards the completion of the bridges of redefining National Library operations and services leveraging ICT while swimming through the tides of accommodation, human resources and financial constraints.

Thank You and God bless.

Abuja,
20th September, 2022.