DIGITAL INCLUSION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES

BY: COMFORT A.B. ASARE

Wisconsin International University College, Ghana

Outline

- Introduction/definition
- How to promote digital inclusion
- Areas of concern for digital inclusion
- Role of libraries in digital inclusion
- Institutional initiatives
- Government initiatives
- Conclusion/ Way forward for libraries

Definition

According to the United Nations, digital inclusion is defined as "equitable, meaningful, and safe access to use, lead, and design of digital technologies, services, and associated opportunities for everyone, everywhere".

How to promote digital inclusion

- ▶ Users should be our ultimate concern
- ▶ Create the right environment to enable access
- ▶ Be intentional about motivating people to use the system created
- ▶ Build users trust to use the available technology
- ▶ Need to collaborate to make the system function effectively
- ▶ Institute performance appraisal systems

Areas of concern

- Institutional and governmental policies on digital inclusion
- Infrastructure

  - Cost of infrastructure - hardware

  - Availability of requisite infrastructure

  - Security of infrastructure (hackers/viruses, institutional security to house devices)

  - Frequent updates to some technological platforms and the need for update

  - Online digital inclusion or in-house

  - Physical damage/theft to infrastructural cables etc

  - Changes in ownership of some digital platforms to newer ones with new pricing models

Areas of concern con't:

- Institutional bandwidth to support digital inclusion

- Institutional digital setups – eg. Most institutions not cooperating to have union catalogues etc

- High cost of data

Areas of concern con't:

- Exposure of most institutions with the coming in of covid-19. This was..

Challenging as most institutions without the requisite platforms

had to institute and implement measures

to make things work out virtually

Areas of concern con't:

- Technical Skills

    - Personnel (Library staff) – willingness to adapt

    to change

    - Users literacy level

    - Faculty's literacy level

- Frequent power outages

Libraries standpoint - Ghana's situation

Key areas	Who assisted / How it is realised
Capacity Building - Staff (library) - Users - Faculty	- Ghana Library Association - Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH) - African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) - Institutional initiatives
Resources sharing - Electronic resources	- Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Ghana (CARLIGH)
Online Public Access Catalogues	- Done at institutional levels
Wifi provision	- Carried out at institutional levels

Some Initiatives in Ghana

By Organizations	By Government
Some Telcos offered free packages to support fight against Covid-19	Rolling out of free Wi-fi project to13 public institutions (*Graphic Online*)
Some private institutions provided 10GB data to support online classes	Government through the public library system offered virtual training to several librarians in Ghana

Conclusion

- Going forward, there is the need for the following:

  - More collaboration

  - Policy on digital inclusion

  - Advocate more on the need for digital inclusion in Africa and beyond

References

- United Nations (nd.) Available at: https://www.un.org/techenvoy/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/general/Definition_Digital-Inclusion.pdf

- Graphic Online (n.d.) Available at: https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-govt-rolls-out-free-wifi-project-13-public-institutions-connected.html