INFS 324
INDEXING AND ABSTRACTING

Session 12 – NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICY

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College of Education
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Session Overview

The session introduces students to the need to have some ideas on how information can be used for national development.

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Session Objectives

By the end of this session, the student should be able to:

- explain how information can be used for national development

- discuss the role of information in agriculture development

- explain the impact of information in national development

- state the legal aspects of information for national development

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Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Topic 1: Introduction
- Topic Two: The Right to Information
- Topic Three: Information as a National Resource
- Topic Four:The Need for a National Information Policy
- Topic Five: Stakeholders in the Development of Information Policy
- Topic Six:The African Information Society Initiative

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Reading List

- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (2003) *AISI: An Action Framework to build Africa's Information.*

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- Alemna, A. A. (2000). *Libraries, Information and Society*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press. 39p.

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Topic One:

INTRODUCTION

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What is a policy?

Generally:

– A public statement of intention that is usually (but not always) formalized and clearly expressed by a government, institution or other organizational entity, a social group or club, or even an individual practicing a profession.

Information policies:

– As a class or subset of policies in general; in other words, information policies deal with some component of the production, organization, retrieval and communication of data/information within an enterprise or a country.

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What is Policy Cont'd

National information policy:

- A blueprint that is expected to guide a society (e.g., a nation) in its progress towards the 'knowledge' economy or information society.

- A set of decisions taken by government, through appropriate laws and regulations, to orient the harmonious development of information transfer activities, in order to satisfy the information needs of a country (Kisiedu,1988)

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Topic Two:

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION

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Introduction

- The Right to Information is recognized internationally as one of the Universal Human Rights.
  - Reflected in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana;
    - Article 21 Section 1 Clause f of the 1992 Constitution.

      - It enjoins government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

      - Makes it the responsibility of governments to provide access to such information through the mandatory provision of a Right to Information Law.

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The Right to Information Versus Availability of Information

- Critical shortage of information in most Sub-Saharan African countries.

  – literature on national information policy indicates that a great deal of information is available but it is difficult to identify and access it for use because of;

    - insufficient and inefficient levels of cooperation among libraries in Ghana

    - Inadequate information structures on the ground

    - inefficient information management practices

    - ignorance of the public of its right to information

    - some government and institutional laws and regulations that tend to block access to information

    - Lack of legislation on the right to information: The Right to Information Bill

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Topic Three:

INFORMATION AS A NATIONAL RESOURCE

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Access to Information as a Human Right

- Information is the basis of knowledge and has been declared as a human right by the United Nations.
  - Human beings need information for the many daily decisions and for leading a meaningful life.
  - Every modern enterprise needs to acquire not just any information but sound information, and use it intelligently in order to gain a competitive edge over its rivals.

- Information has also been declared as a public good.
  - Published information should be made available in the public domain for anybody who needs to use it, without let or hindrance.

- Information is also required for professional services and for socio-cultural development.

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Information is Indispensable and has Value

- Information is indispensable in national development.
  - it is required in the rational use of :
    - National resources

    - The development of human resources

    - Scientific and technological advancement

    - Progress in agriculture, industry and commerce

    - The blooming of culture and enhancement of social wellbeing (Horton, 1997)

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Managing Information as a Resource

- Every enterprise or resource has four objectives in mind when it acquires, processes, stores, utilizes or distributes and disposes of unwanted resources (Horton, 1997).

  - These objectives are to:
    - Obtain the resource as cheaply as possible.

    - Maximize the value obtained from using the resource.

    - Ensure a constant, uninterrupted supply of the resource.

    - Make somebody accountable or responsible for the achievement of the foregoing objectives.

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African Initiatives

- African organizations

  - African Union (AU)
    - Development projects should have an information component.

  - Pan African Development Information System (PADIS)
    - Centralized bibliographic database of development information.

  - The African Information Society Initiative (AISI)
    - Provision of an ICT-based framework for accelerating Africa's entry into the information society.

  - UNESCO

  - ECA

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The Way Forward

- African countries should;
  - Revive the information policy debate that has been ongoing since the 1980s.

  - Take into consideration the increasingly dominant role of the ICTs in information management.

  - Pursue The AISI's ICT-led agenda to its logical conclusion.

- Librarians should;
  - Widen the scope of stakeholders to include not just information personnel but also scientists, researchers, policy makers, planners and even ordinary information users.

  - Establish systems and services that make this vital commodity (information accessible to the user when he/she needs it, and with little or no wastage of his/her time.

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Topic Four:

THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICY

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Rationale for Information Policy Development

- In the African context the need for policies on information is urgent because;

  - Africa needs to overcome fundamental information problems of;

    - Weak or non-existent physical infrastructures.

    - Shortage of qualified personnel.

    - Insufficient awareness by African bureaucrats and policy makers of the true relevance of information in decision-making, problem-solving and national development.

    - Chronic lack of funds for and indifferent funding of information programmes.

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Fundamental Information Problems: Obstacles in the Way of NIP Development

- Government officials and decision makers
  - Lack of knowledge on the usefulness of information.

- The library profession
  - Low image, and the lack of success to prepare project plans.

  - The national information services and systems are usually based on a single, under- resourced, under-staffed, underdeveloped final point (such as the Ghana Library Board).

- Lack of national information policy

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Impact of the New Technologies, its Positives and Negatives

- The positives
  - Enable new knowledge to be produced, organized, packaged, retrieved, transmitted and applied, together with old knowledge, speedily and with ease. (Horton, 1997).

  - Cyberspace

  - Web (www)

  - Virtual learning (e-based Distance Education: learning from the home or office).

- The negatives
  - Criminal fraud activities on the Internet

Topic Five:

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION POLICY

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Everybody is a Player in the Policy Formulation Process

- Government, (lead player)

- The information industry (information professionals and institutions)

- Information users (current and potential)

- Professional associations and societies

- Industry groups

- Educational institutions (including schools, colleges, universities etc)

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Everybody is a Player in the Policy Formulation Process

- Health institutions

- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's)

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

- Private citizens

- Consumer protection groups

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Scope of Policies

- **Broad Policy Scope;**
  - Involves all sectors pooled together in a comprehensive whole.

  - Offers government the advantages of setting broad policy objectives that will cover the different national information institutions and activities.

  - May be difficult to achieve in the short term.

- **Narrow Policy Scope;**
  - Involves the development of partial policies for sub-sectors e.g.
    - agriculture
    - education
    - environment
    - Health
    - ICT

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Linkages of NIP with Other Policy Areas

- National information policy interfaces with many sectors of a nation's economy and policies. E.g.
  - Education policy:

  - Science and technology policy

  - Public and state security policy
  - General legal System

  - Overall Economic Policy

  - Taxation Policy

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Stages of the NIP Process and its Major Players

- Informatics Policies in Africa, 1988) identified the following stages:
  – Goal setting
  – Problem identification
  – Policy development
  – Policy implementation and
  – Policy review.

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Stages of the NIP Process and its Major Players

- NESCO's guidelines edited by Horton (1997), has also identified the following four:
    - Policy assessment, decision and approval
    - Policy planning and strategizing
    - Policy implementation and
    - Policy housekeeping- additions, deletions and changes.

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Topic Six:

THE AFRICAN INFORMATION SOCIETY INITIATIVE (AISI)

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Rationale or Need for AISI

The External Factors

- 400 years of slavery

- Over 100 years of colonialism

- A huge debt burden

- Unequal terms of trade

The Internal Factors

- Senseless Coups d'Etat, civil wars and conflicts

- Dictatorship, tyranny and oppression

- Corruption and maladministration

- Gross abuse of human rights including murder and torture etc. (APRM, 2005).

Some Benefits to be Derived from AISI

- Agriculture and food security

- Education and research

- Health

- Gender and development

- Trade and commerce

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Implementation of AISI: Challenges and Achievements

- Stakeholders

- Implementation Plan

- Challenges

- Achievements

- Impact of the AISI Programme

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