# The Library and Information Science (LIS) Profession and the Cameroon Development Vision 2035: A Perception Study

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#### Abstract

The world faces immense challenges which range from people living in poverty and denied dignity, rising inequalities, unemployment, global health threats, natural disasters, spiraling conflicts, violent extremism, terrorism and related humanitarian crises leading to force displacement of people, the depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation and the resultant climate change problem, just to name these. Fortunately, there are recognized human rights in the context of the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Right in Article 19 and the Africa Chatter. These problems have thus challenged the world's organizations to think and reflect on the way forward and some of these ways are developmental plans which include the UN Post 2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, the African Union (AU) 2063 Development Agenda with 17 aspirations, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Strategy Plan and key initiative and the Cameroon Development Vision 2035 emergence programme. These agendas require a number of stakeholders to intervene if these challenges must be reduced for the benefit of humanity. One of such stakeholders is the Library and Information Science (LIS) Profession. The question that comes up with respect to the Cameroon context is, "Is the LIS profession in Cameroon able to meet its information role?" In line with this, three research questions were coined to guide data collection for this paper. The survey method was adopted with document analysis and interview schedule constituting the main data collecting instruments. The simple descriptive statistical method was used for data analysis. The information profession is critical in the development agenda, because it provides the platform for access to various information that enhance the progress of all human activities. The LIS profession drives the knowledge economy. Thus it is well placed to roll the information literacy programmes of any nation to help people have access to quality information, enhance community education, social, health and economic needs thereby improving lives and development. There is equally the shift from a print to a digital information environment as supported by the advent of new Internet technology such as mobile or broadband. This is changing the means and mechanisms of information delivery in libraries which have the potential to lead, improve and provide more relevant services and programmes for users. This profession has proven to be the most suitable with skills and mandate to pull together, organize and make available and accessible information in all forms and formats to all irrespective of their social, educational and physical status. From the study it is clear that the LIS profession in Cameroon is not able to play its role of collector and steward of human heritage, is not able to play its fundamental role in enhancing education through the different libraries and information services, is not able to enhance and ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning and is unable to increase access to information and knowledge assisted by ICTs to support sustainable development to help Cameroon in its development agenda. The recommendation is that it will be unfortunate for a nation like Cameroon not to afford to accord an appropriate attention to the LIS profession which is a suitable developmental tool. The government needs therefore to provide the needed status for this sector and put it on its agenda and this will usher in a new spirit of information professionalism in Cameroon that will go a long way to enhance literacy that is needed if Cameroon must develop.

**Keywords:** library and information profession, role of information, development agenda, perception study, Cameroon

#### 1. Introduction

The library and information science (LIS) profession drives the knowledge economy and is well placed to roll

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the information literacy programmes of any nation to help people have access to quality information, enhance community education, social, health and economic needs (Eissenberg, Lowe, Spitzer, 2004). The LIS profession is critical in the development agendas of organizations, communities or nations as the case may be (Martin, 1988). This profession provides a good platform for all domains of human activities to depend on for progress.

The LIS profession has proven to be the most suitable with skills and mandate to pull together, organize, and make available and accessible information in all forms and formats to all irrespective of their social, education and physical status. It will be difficult for any society to progress without the creative and informative utilization of accumulated information. Modern discoveries and invention, particularly those reflecting the advancement of science and technology, depend on rational use of recorded information (Etim, 2007).

Today, one of the criteria for categorizing a country as developed is the extent to which it develops its information systems at various levels to achieve socio-economic growth. This goes to emphasize the place of the LIS profession in development. Thus various developmental agendas of nations, international organizations and continents such as the United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union (AU) 2063 Development Agenda and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) have been so eminent in the world. Working to achieve the Cameroon Vision 2035 emergence agenda needs to use information services to support the efforts if this vision must be achieved. This explains why the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions is working with the UN to achieve its goals. IFLA is the global voice for libraries and has been instrumental in driving the LIS activities around the world for over eighty (80) years.

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (SDGs) with 17 goals and 169 targets, adopted in September 2015 by world leaders in an historic summit came into force on 1 January 2016. This agenda recognizes as its main thrust that, "...eradication of poverty in all forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and indispensable requirement for sustainable development" (2015). The 17 goals and targets are built on the millennium development goals which elapsed in 2015 and are expected to stimulate actions over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for people.

The eradication of extreme poverty is indeed the basis for laying the platform for any sustainable growth. If poverty must be eradicated, there must be some steps that must be taken to ensure this. Within the Cameroon context, some of the steps would include; ensuring the rule of law, equality for all, ensure human dignity, literacy and education in the informal, non-formal and formal forms, preservation of our environment and cultural heritage as we manage the natural resources for sustainability. The UN SDGs have handled these aspects and much more and rightly so.

The SDGs unlike the MDGs call on all irrespective of status to come on board and ensure sustainability of various sectors of human lives. In line with this call many countries including Cameroon and even continents like Africa have put forth developmental agendas to align with the UN SDGs. Cameroon has come up with Vision 2035 and Africa Union with development agenda 2063 with 17 aspirations aligning SDGs with their specific needs. If development must be attend in Cameroon like everywhere else, many sectors must bring in their contribution and the LIS sector is no exception.

#### 2. Objective and Research Questions

This paper highlights the crucial role of the information profession in the development agenda of nations with a focus on Cameroon. To achieve this objective, three research questions were articulated to guide the data collection process and these are:

- What is the place of information in the advancement of a society?
- What is the link between the library and information (LIS) profession and the society?
- Is the LIS profession in Cameroon able to meet its information role to enhance the country's development agenda of vision 2030?

### 3. Method of Study

The survey design was adopted for this paper with document analysis and questionnaire as the data collecting instruments. The population for the study was made up of workers in LIS services in Cameroon. From the population a purposive sample of two hundred and twenty respondents was selected for study in Buea, Bamenda, Douala and Yaounde, which are the major cities and towns in Cameroon. A total of 220 copies of questionnaire were given out. Data were collected using a questionnaire structured in a Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The analysis of data collected was done respecting the

three research questions that guided the study. The simple descriptive statistical method was used to calculate frequencies. The nature of the data collected from the sampled respondents can be put into three clusters: the value and role attached to information as a developmental tool, based on the experience of the LIS professionals; the status given to the Library and Information Science profession by the Cameroon society that can either motivate or demotivate the role of this profession in the process of development and finally the last cluster had to do with whether, the LIS profession in Cameroon in its current status can help in the attainment of the Cameroon development agenda of vision 2035?

#### 4. Literature

The educational development of any nation will determine the knowledge base of the nation which will, in effect, determine the growth of the industrial, political, economic, financial and many other sectors. Governments of different countries around the world conversant with the value of information have established libraries and information services for the development of various sectors of the community (Reding, 2005). This is why Itsekor (2000) observed that the growth of any organization is directly proportionate to the knowledge base of its operations.

Access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development (IFLA, 2012). The Library is the only place in many communities where people can access information that will help improve their education, develop new skills, find jobs, build businesses, make informed agricultural and health decisions, or gain insights in to environmental issues. Their unique role make libraries and information services important development partners, both by providing access to information in all formats and by delivering services and programmes that meet the needs for information in a changing and increasing complex society.

As the United Nations Organization (UNO) establishes a post – 2015 development framework to guide development worldwide, IFLA calls upon all stakeholders to recognize that libraries in every part of the world can be reliable mechanisms for underpinning the delivery of sustainable development programmes. Relating to this, IFLA affirms that:

- Libraries provide opportunities for all in the community. Libraries can be found in all locations; in the country side, cities, on campuses and in the workplace. Libraries serve all people regardless of their race, nationality, ethnic origin, gender or sexual preferences, age, disability, religion, economic circumstances or political beliefs. Libraries support vulnerable and marginalized populations and help ensure that no persons are denied basic economic opportunities and human rights.
- Libraries empower people for their own self-development. Libraries underpin a society where people from any background can learn, create and innovate. Libraries support a culture of literacy and foster critical thinking and inquiry (UNESCO, 2000). Through libraries, people can harness the power of technology and the internet to improve their lives and communities. Libraries protect the right of users to access to information in a safe environment. Libraries are socially and culturally inclusive. They can help all people engage with the public institutions they need to access services and can act as gateways to civic participation and new e-government services (IFLA, 2013).
- Libraries offer access to the world's knowledge. Libraries are an essential part of a critical infrastructure that supports education, jobs and community growth. They offer meaningful convenient access to information in all its forms, whether it is a manuscript, printed, audio-visual or digital. They can support the preservation of folk memories, traditional and indigenous knowledge and national cultural and scientific heritage. This is possible when national information policies aim to improve telecommunications and provide high-speed broadband for the provision of public access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and networked information resources (IFLA, 2014).
- Libraries provide expert guidance. Library staff are trained, trusted intermediaries dedicated to guiding people to the information they seek. Librarians provide training and support for the media and information literacies for people to better understand and participate in the information society.
- Libraries are part of a multi-stakeholder society. Libraries work effectively with many different stakeholder groups in varied situations. They deliver programmes and services alongside local and national governments, community groups, charity, and funding organizations (IFLA, 2015).

The World Bank report (2000) revealed that: "... a severe lack of capabilities-education, health, nutrition – among African poor, threatens to make poverty dynastic with the descendants of the poor also remaining poor". This is quite serious and tells a clear story. These persons lack capabilities or skills to either benefit fully from

the economic advantages of their communities or contribute to it. These capabilities can only be acquired through literacy education that can take two forms, namely, formal and non-formal forms.

Literacy education programmes are packaged using appropriate information; this goes to say that the information profession's role is primordial. The advantage with this profession is that it has several information services that can collect, organize and repackage information for different segments of the society. For example, the public / community libraries are well placed to carry out information literacy education in partnership with different stakeholders and organizations relating to different information needs and skills. These information services can conveniently take care of the needs of all. There are the school libraries to take care of the children and adolescents; they can catch the young at very tender ages and build a strong life long literacy foundation. The academic libraries are there to take care of the higher education sector, supporting the training of the workforce of the nation. The special libraries are there to cater for the special information needs of specialized services like banks, health services, ministries, parliaments to name just these. The national libraries are there to liaise with the government for proper development of the information system of their nations. The archives and museums are there to take care of the heritage of the nation. These highlight the role of the LIS profession as an overriding tool in the development process needed by the human society to improve on poverty, education, health and wellbeing which are instrumental for human existence and progress. Cameroon cannot therefore afford to be indifferent.

#### 5. Results and Discussions

The analysis is presented as follows (Figure 1):

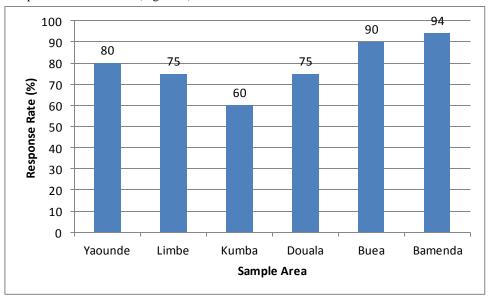


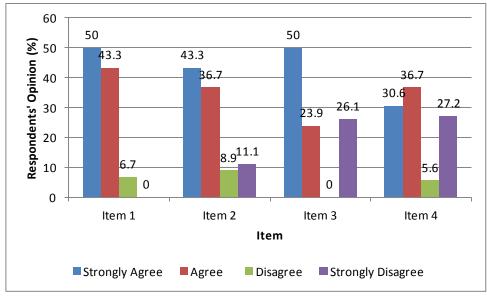
Figure 1. Distribution of questionnaires in the sample areas

Figure 1 shows that a total of 220 copies of questionnaires were distributed and a total of 180 collected, losing a total number of 40. 180 is considered to be quite representative of the population under study and it is useful for this paper as it represents 82% Of the sampled population

#### 5.1 The Place of Information in the Advancement of Society

Data analyzed in response to research question one on, the place of information in the advancement of society is presented in Figure 3. Four statements were used to collect data in response to this question. Statement 1 on information driving the knowledge economy from all perspectives as a developmental resource was confirmed by 67.23% respondents from the five towns and cities under study as against 32.74%. Statement 2 on, Development starting with transformation of the human minds using information was acknowledged by 73.89% as against 26.11% respondents. Statement 3 on Information being what is needed to build skills required for the transformation and development of society in every aspect was accepted by 80% as against 19.99% respondents. The last statement on Development being about information literacy which renders people literate in various domains of life needed for the advancement of society, was confirmed by 93.33% as against 6.67% of the respondents.

From the above results, the role of information in the human society cannot be over emphasized as respondents involved in this study fully agreed that information has an indispensable role in the advancement of the human society by a majority of 78.6%. This percentage confirms the notion that information drives the knowledge economy of the society, transforms the human minds for development, builds skill through literacy education which are all fundamental for development. This is supported by IFLA (2015) in the following statement, "...access to information must be recognized as critical to supporting governments to achieve development goals and enabling citizens to make informed decisions to improve their own lives".



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Item 1	Development is about information literacy which renders people literate in various domains of life needed for the advancement of society	
Item 2	Information is what is required to build skills needed for transformation in all domains of life and development of society	
Item 3	Development starts with transforming human minds using information	
Item 4	Information drives the knowledge economy from all perspectives as a developmental resource	

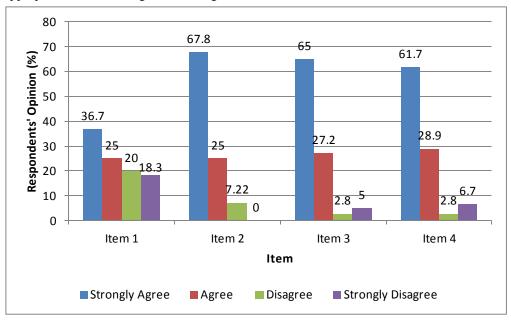
Figure 2. Place of information in the advancement of society

## 5.2 The Link Between Information (LIS) Profession and the Society

Figure 3 presents data analyzed in response to research question two on, the link between the Library and Information Science (LIS) profession and the society. Four statements were used in collecting responses to this question. Statement 1 on, society's needs for appropriate, current, complete and quality information resources which can be better handled by the LIS profession was acknowledged by 61.67% as against 68 38.33% of the respondents. Statement 2 on the possibility that information services under the LIS profession would be the most appropriate and reliable tool for collecting, organizing and disseminating required information to all segments of society if well-resourced, was confirmed by 92.78% as against 7.22% of the respondents. On statement 3 relating to the fact that Information services with the support of ICTs are better placed to handle the information business of society, was affirmed by 92.22% as against 7.78% respondents. Statement 4 on, the information profession is a development support tool at all times and constituting a pedagogic tool for training human resources in all domains, was accepted by 90.55% as against 9.45% respondents.

The results obtained in relation to the link between the LIS profession and the human society above, confirmed by a majority of 87% that the society needs appropriate, current, complete and quality information resources that can be better handled by the LIS profession. It also confirms that the LIS profession is the most appropriate and reliable to collect, organize and disseminate required information to all segments of the society and is able to handle the information business with the support of information and ICTs. This goes to say, therefore, that the

LIS profession through its information services constitutes a support development tool. In this light, IFLA (2015) urges that any post 2015 development framework recognizes the role of access to information as a fundamental element supporting development and acknowledges the role of libraries and librarians as agents for development. This therefore confirms the fundamental role of libraries as agents of development if they are well resourced and given an appropriate status on the government agenda.



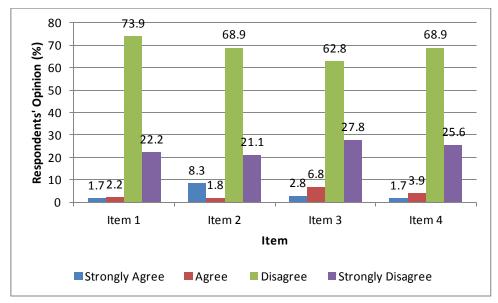
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Item 1	Society needs appropriate, current, complete and quality information resources and can be better handled by the LIS profession
Item 2	Information Services under the LIS profession if well-resourced are most current appropriate to collect, organize and disseminate required information to all segments of society
Item 3	Information services with the support of ICTs are better placed to handle the information business of society
Item 4	The information profession is a support tool for development at all times and constitutes a pedagogic tool for training human resources in all domains

Figure 3. Link between the library and information profession and the society

# 5.3 The Library and Information Profession in Cameroon and its Information Role with Respect to Enhancing the Country's Development Agenda

Data analyzed and presented on Figure 4 are in response to research question three relating to, the role of the Library and the information (LIS) profession in the Cameroon's Vision 2035 development agenda. Four statements used to collect these data had to do with; statement 1 on the LIS profession in Cameroon being able to play its requisite role of collector and steward of human heritage, assuring equality of access for all received only 3.89% as against 98.11% of the study population who agreed and disagreed respectively. Statement 2 on the Cameroon LIS profession being able to play its fundamental role of enhancing education via the different types of libraries and information services, was confirmed by 10% as against 90% of the respondents. Statement 3 relating to the Cameroon LIS profession capable of enhancing and ensuring inclusive, equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all was accepted only by 9.44% as against 90.56% of the respondents. Statement 4 on whether the LIS profession in Cameroon assisted by ICTs is able to increase access to information and knowledge and support sustainable development for emergence, received 5.56% who affirmed as against 94.44% of the respondents who did not.



Item 1	The LIS Profession in Cameroon can play the role of collectors and steward of	
	human heritage, assuming equality of access for all.	
Item 2	The LIS profession in Cameroon is able to play the fundamental role in enhancing	
	education via the different types of libraries and information services.	
Item 3	The LIS profession in Cameroon is able to enhance and ensure inclusive,	
	equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.	
Item 4	The LIS profession in Cameroon assisted by ICTs is able to increase access to	
	information and knowledge and support sustainable development for emergence.	

Figure 4. Role of the library and information profession in the Cameroon development agenda

The different respondents in the different towns and cities sampled confirmed by a very significant majority of 93.75% that, the LIS profession in Cameroon is not able to play its role of collector and steward of human heritage, not able to play its fundamental role in enhancing education through the different libraries, not able to enhance and ensure inclusive, equitable, quality education and promote lifelong learning and unable to increase access to information and knowledge assisted by ICTs to support sustainable development to help Cameroon in its development agenda. Access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development (IFLA, 2005). Thus the library is the only place in many communities where people can access information that will help improve their education, develop new skills, and find jobs (IFLA, 2005). Their unique role makes libraries important development partners, both by providing access to information in all formats and by delivering services and programmes that meet the needs for information in a changing and increasingly complex society. If libraries have been confirmed to be so important, then it will be unfortunate for a nation like Cameroon not to afford to accord an appropriate attention to the LIS profession. Some studies like that of Shafack (2013) have confirmed that the LIS profession in Cameroon is very poorly developed, has no status and is treated haphazardly and this has contributed to the great challenges facing this profession. The question that has to be answered therefore here is, "What can be done and quickly to change the state of affairs relating to the LIS profession in Cameroon?"

For the LIS profession sector to be able to make its own contribution towards the Cameroon development agenda, it is necessary to understand; the extent to which the country achieved the MDGs. What were the challenges? How can these be reduced to ensure a significant attainment of the country's development agenda in alignment with the UN's SDGs?

Providing answers to these questions is indeed vital because the country still has a long way to go to be able to meet the expectations of the SDGs 17 goals and targets.

As a way forward, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions working closely with the UN has proven beyond doubt that the information profession has a requisite role to play when it comes to development. This has been proven through the, Berlin Declaration (2002), Marrakesh Treaty (2012), the Trend Report (2013), the Lyon Declaration (2014) and the Cape Town Declaration (2015). All these go a long way to support the role of the LIS profession in supporting development. The major question here is how the Cameroon LIS profession aligns its self with the Cameroon development agenda.

The LIS profession in Cameroon needs to first of all build a very strong national association that can work with government institutions and other development stakeholders. The Cameroon LIS national association created in 1974 has gone through great challenges. However, the efforts made in the past three years if reinforced, can make it resilient enough to be a strong force to reckon with as far as its role in development is concern. A strong national association will ensure a strong profession that will ensure proper information legislation on which information services can thrive. Through this the status of the profession will be recognized and respected. If the country has a strong LIS profession, then the information services will be well resourced to play their role as information service providers in all sectors of life. The role of each type of information service will be well executed and if we consider the role of public and community libraries then it will be very clear that the LIS profession is an agent of change and development. The public libraries are suitable platforms for information literacy education and is very indispensable in changing the mind set of humanity. Together with entrepreneurial skills from other sectors, persons can be impacted with such skills by teaching them how to be self-sustaining and transforming their lives and thus extreme poverty. Health and environmental education and other literacy skills can be impacted on the community using the public library platform that can accommodate all and sundry. The LIS professionals are equipped with various skills to collect organize and even repackage information in suitable forms for different segments of society irrespective of age, economic, education levels, to name just these

### 6. Recommendations and Conclusion

IFLA (2014) supports the notion that, "Access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development". It is important to note that IFLA is the "Global Voice" for libraries and thus the LIS profession. It has proven beyond doubts, through its activities and partnership activities with funding bodies like the United Nations Organizations, that the LIS profession has an indispensable role to play in enhancing the development of the human society. It is based on these that the following recommendations have been proffered:

- The Cameroon government should place the LIS profession on its agenda and use it as a support tool for its development agenda, Vision 2035 because the library is the only place in many communities where people can access information that will help them improve their education, develop new skills, find jobs, build businesses, make informed decisions that will improve the lives of its citizens (IFLA).
- The unique role of libraries make them important developmental partner, both by providing access to information in all formats and by delivering services and programmes that meet the needs for information in a changing and increasingly complex world (IFLA, 2014). Thus, it is important for all in the society to invest in building viable and well-resourced information services (libraries) that can meet the varying needs of all community members.
- As the United Nations (UN) moves to establish a post-2015 framework to guide development worldwide and as Cameroon moves on with its Vision 2035 development agenda, IFLA calls upon all development stakeholders to recognize that libraries in every part of the world can be reliable mechanisms for underpinning the delivery of sustainable development programmes. This thus goes to affirm that:
- Libraries empower people for their own development by underpinning a society where people from any background can learn, create and innovate.
- Libraries support a culture of literacy and foster critical thinking and inquiry.
- Through the library, people can harness the power of technology and the internet to improve their lives and communities
- Libraries protect the right of users to access to information in a safe environment.
- Libraries are socially and culturally inclusive.
- Libraries can act as gateways to civic participation and new e-government services.
- Libraries offer access to the world's knowledge

- Libraries are an essential part of a critical infrastructure that supports education, jobs and community growth.
- Well-resourced libraries have information staff qualified to provide expert guidance. These people are trained trusted intermediaries dedicated to guiding people to the information they seek and provide training and support in using the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Confirming the above listed qualities of libraries, IFLA (2014) therefore urges policy makers and development practitioners to leverage these powerful existing resources and ensure that any 2015 development framework recognizes the role of access to information as a fundamental element supporting development and acknowledges the role of libraries and librarians as agents for development.

In conclusion, and in the least terms, libraries of different types constitute indispensable agents for development and there is need for Cameroon to give libraries a status and put them on the government's agenda (The Guardian, 2013).

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