



# The Role of Librarians in African Higher Educational Institutions as Central Actors in Embedding NREN Digital Services

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# Outline

- Background
- The Bigger Picture
- Emerging Librarian role
- A Research Agenda
- Workshop Survey Review Approach



# **BACKGROUND**

# Previous Work

- TANDEM survey of end-user needs in the WACREN area – academics, researchers & technicians revealed:
  - End-community of librarians in higher education play a pivotal role in the identification, provision and dissemination of information resources through the services offered by RENs
  - Among the prioritized areas for their service users was “open access data repository services”
- Institutional weaknesses identified as an issue.

# Nigerian Study on Librarian Skills

- Identifies institutional weaknesses leading to lack of adequate “digital” skills acquisition:
  - Ignorance and apathy among librarians
  - Poor funding of libraries
  - Lack of funds to pay/sponsor for the training
  - Lack of facilities needed for such training in some of the skills programmers
  - Insufficient skilled personnel to train the librarians in the country
  - Limited training opportunities within the country
  - Lack of motivation by the library administration

# Nigerian Study on OA

## Awareness

- Issues faced by Nigerian academic libraries in playing a key role in developing OA resources:
  - Depleted budgets
  - Unavailability of IT facilities
  - Insufficient skills to access web resources
  - Lack of opportunity to access repositories, databases and OA resources
- Lack of affordability of computer resources is frequently mentioned.



# **THE BIGGER PICTURE**

# Digitalisation

The general trend towards transforming traditional content and media, into digital representations, which has implications for how these altered formats can be transmitted, shared and consumed, thus affecting and potentially disrupting business models in industry and the delivery of learning and teaching in education.

Some direct impacts for librarians:

- Traditional information resources ☾ digital assets
- Traditional library collections ☾ digital collections
- Traditional research support ☾ research data management/digital curation, etc.

# Digitalisation & Convergence

- Convergence of communication and information technologies and the development of cheaper, faster and more convenient hardware together with the platformization of IT services, e.g. cloud computing, create a situation where computers are a ubiquitous commodity and content is available on request.

# Digitalisation & Dematerialisation

- Digitalisation leads eventually to *dematerialisation*, i.e., the physical and tangible become the virtual and intangible.
- The result is that the skills learnt to deal with material properties of objects need to change due to dematerialisation.
- This leads to:
  - De-skilling: loss of traditional skill sets
  - Re-skilling: learning new digital skill sets
  - Up-skilling: trading up to higher level skills that are not easy to automate.

# The Contemporary University

- On demand courses
- Lifelong learning
- University as a partner to business
- Providing value to the “market”
- Emphasis on information
- Student as customer
- Anywhere/everywhere availability
- Multidisciplinarity
- Emphasis on technology
- Globalisation of higher education.

# ...New HE Challenges

- Publication and scholarly communication (e.g. open access)
- Delivery and use of digital resources (e.g. open data and open repositories)
- Students from different backgrounds, locations, abilities, ethnicities
- Increasing demand for traditional resources
- New channels for delivering learning (e.g. distance learning, MOOCs, open education)
- Doing more with less, reduction of resources, particularly in staffing.

# The Open Movement

*The open movement seeks to work towards solutions of many of the world's most pressing problems in a spirit of transparency, collaboration, re-use and free access. It encompasses open data, open government, open development, open science and much more. Participatory processes, sharing of knowledge and outputs and open source software are among its key tools. The specific definition of “open” as applied to data, knowledge and content, is set out by the Open Definition.*

*From:*

*<http://opendatahandbook.org/glossary/en/terms/open-movement/>*

# The Librarian as Information Specialist

- Key roles emerge:
  - Information retrieval
  - Information seeking
  - Information literacy
  - Information organisation
- These roles support the academic/researcher in making sense of data and interpreting it for their own specialism

# Other New “Digital” Roles

- Systems librarian
- Electronic resource librarian
- Digital librarian
- Institutional repository manager
- Clinical librarian and informationist
- Digital curator/research data manager
- Teaching librarian/information literacy educator
- **Information and knowledge manager.**



# **EMERGING LIBRARIAN ROLE**

# The Role of the Academic

## Library

*“Students and faculty alike fail to involve library resources and services in regular learning and instruction, turning to the library primarily as an undergraduate study hall or reserve book room 🗿 National initiatives 🗿 fail to mention, much less to plan, improvement of library resources 🗿 [There is] a disheartening decrease in academic library share of institutional funding 🗿 they remain, for the most part, on the periphery of decision-making and innovative processes 🗿 librarians are often not involved in information policy development. 🗿 In all, the ‘library is the heart of the university’ metaphor leads librarians and academics to erroneous conclusions about the real relationships between the library and the*

# Academic Libraries'

## Response

- Changing librarian's roles and responsibilities
- Developing a service-oriented model of collection development and dissemination
- Providing free and equal access to information
- Keeping up-to-date with ICT developments
- Leading in digitalisation movements
- Understanding new learning and teaching schemes, new economic business models and new

# A Central Role

*“Changes could catapult the library into a central role within the teaching/learning enterprise if appropriate adaptations are made; if not, they could further remove the library from the institutional centre” (CETUS, 1997).*

# Institutional Factors

## ○ Structure

- Role played by the library function vis-à-vis teaching and research
- How the library function is integrated with other support functions, e.g. the IT function

## ○ Rules, regimes, standards

- The rules of the game – how libraries actually function, their constraints and enablers

## ○ Norms

- Institutional logics driving the librarian function

## ○ Culture

- Organisational culture, professional culture, cross-over professions, boundary spanning roles

# Nolan's Stages Adapted to IM

- Initiation
  - IT-related solutions restricted to some super users
- Contagion
  - IT-related applications in widespread use throughout organisation
- Control
  - Planning for IT-related functions becomes a priority
- Integration
  - Wider integration of platforms/users across organisation
- Data administration
  - Information needs, value and utilisation of data prioritised
- Maturity
  - IT, policy, management, resources, allocations all aligned on an ongoing basis



# **A RESEARCH AGENDA**

# Research Agenda & Survey

RQ: *How to develop sustainable institutional support for HE librarians to play a central role in providing services linked to Open movements through NREN infrastructure ?*

Main Outcomes:

- *Identifying institutional factors that constrain or enable a more central role for librarians as information managers in West and Central African HE institutions.*
- *Developing and launching a wide-ranging survey to investigate the issues currently experienced by the HEI librarian communities of practice in establishing efficient and sustainable information resource management capabilities within HEIs in the West and Central African region.*

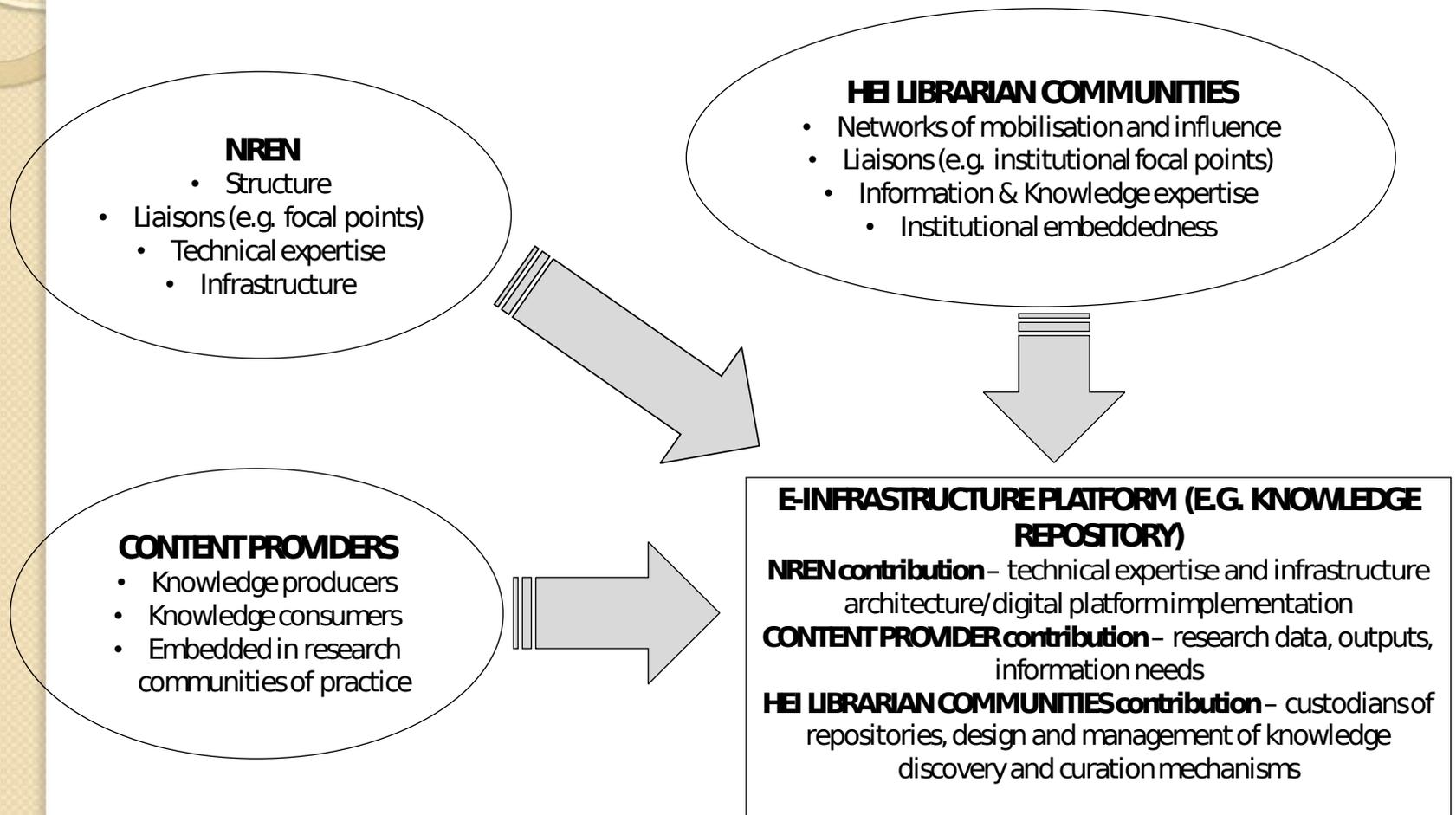
# Motivations

- A need to develop and implement a vision of ***African Open Scholarship*** led by African Librarian Communities of Practice
- A need to establish and understand ***the drivers for***, and ***the hindrances against, change*** that would deliver on this promise
- A need to determine ***“e-readiness”***, i.e., the extent to which higher education institutions were ***building the necessary resources and capabilities*** to deliver digital innovations
- A need to determine the ***evolving role of the African HEI library*** in light of digitalisation

# Key Questions for LIBSENSE workshops

- How can Open Access Repositories operate ***embedded in NREN e-infrastructure*** and provide a foundation for an innovative, open, distributed and networked resource for ***scholarly communication and Open Science in Africa*** ?
- What are librarians' inputs into a ***guiding framework for federated Open Access Repositories in Africa*** ?
- Using a typical information science tripartite of the key influences of ***information, people, and technology***, what part does the ***upskilling*** of librarians in digital skills play in providing guidelines and policy direction for this framework of action ?

# Key Stakeholders in OAR Creation



# Aims & Objectives

- The **aim** of the survey was to produce a rounded picture of how higher education sector librarians view the **enabling and constraining factors of their practice as information resource managers** especially regarding the development, implementation and maintenance of Open Access Repositories.
- The **objectives** of the survey were to:
  1. Understand the evolving role of the library function in contemporary African higher education institutions (HEIs)
  2. Understand how institutions affecting the higher education sector support or constrain the roles of librarians
  3. Determine how NRENs can work with librarians to support their roles
  4. Gather demographic information that would be useful in categorizing the librarian communities of practice



# **WORKSHOP SURVEY REVIEW APPROACH**

# Survey Approach

## ○ **Regions:**

- Ubuntunet Alliance – Region 1 (East & Southern) – 1<sup>st</sup> Survey & Discussion Workshop
- WACREN – Region 2 (West & Central) – 2<sup>nd</sup> Survey & Discussion Workshop
- ASREN – Region 3 (Northern) – 3<sup>rd</sup> Survey & Discussion Workshop

## ○ **Key Partners**

- WACREN, EIFL, COAR, UoS

## ○ **Distribution**

- Librarian consortia and associations in these key regions

## ○ **Questionnaire**

- Revised version of Pilot Survey distributed to WACREN librarian mailing list last summer
- Developed in consultation with HEI librarians in Libsense workshops and key partners
- 54 questions, 6 sections
- Sections A to D target specific library functions
- Section E deals with librarians' digital skills
- Section F deals with demographics

# Issues Identified from WACREN

## Pilot

- Future vision of library and *librarian roles still embedded in tradition and conventions of the past*
- Technology used mainly as *support to traditional roles, not as creator of innovative practices*
- Main *institutional weaknesses* revolve around funding, infrastructure, library influence at policy level, lack of investment in library's involvement in technology enhanced learning initiatives
- Training opportunities available for digital skills but *lack of external expertise/consultancy* which sometimes catalyses change
- More *librarian involvement in Open movement initiatives* would help to catalyse change
- *Advocacy, information management, service transformation leadership* are all aspects that need attention and development,

# Focus for Workshop

## Discussions

- ***Professional Issues*** – the composition of the librarian communities of practice in this region and how this affects the view of the profession and its ability to catalyse change
- ***Open Access Repositories*** – development of policy at the national and institutional level, what should these policies seek to do to assure a vision of African Open Scholarship
- ***Evolution of the Library*** – from support to innovation, what needs to be in place to drive innovation in libraries, what relationships need to be in place between actors from complementary areas to drive forward Open Science in Africa

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