ABSTRACT

Strong national research and knowledge systems are important in national development. If libraries are well integrated into national research and knowledge systems vibrant spaces of intellectual interrogation, research synthesis and translation can be created. Such an institutional landscape is key in linking research and policy, and this is critical for national development. Research and knowledge systems connect and facilitate sharing of lessons learned, what works, where, when, and how among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers thereby strengthening strategic collaborations to drive vital national development initiatives. Research and knowledge systems where libraries are an integral component create robust communities of practice where there is effective use of research and knowledge in policy and practice. This chapter focuses on how libraries can be part of a national research and knowledge system through institutional collaborations and partnerships and how such a system contributes to sustainable development through promotion of evidence informed policy and practice.
INTRODUCTION

There is significant evidence on the important role and value of libraries in community and national development particularly in light of their mandate in supporting production and dissemination of research and knowledge. Increased use of research and knowledge in policy and practice can improve or even save lives, reduce poverty, contribute to empowerment and minimizing inequalities and contribute to sustainable development. Libraries, if they are stocked with relevant material, are innovative and play a greater role in research, research synthesis and active dissemination, can provide new and evidence-based knowledge which can foster new practices and influence change in a policy or service (Straus, Tetroe, & Graham, 2009). For example, the Government of Tanzania has implemented a policy on health service reforms informed by the results of household disease surveys – this contributed to over 40% reductions in infant mortality between 2000 and 2003 in two pilot districts. On the other hand, the HIV/AIDS crisis has deepened in some countries because governments have ignored the evidence of what causes the disease and how to prevent it spreading (Sutcliffe and Court, 2005).

The function of libraries in development has tended to focus on their role within their respective institutions and immediate communities or spheres of influence, for example universities or other organisations that they are directly affiliated. This is mainly because most libraries are not stand-alone institutions but are departments within larger institutions like universities, research organisations or government departments. Only a few ones like national libraries are stand-alone but with a wider remit. However, in order for libraries to effectively function as catalysts for positive change and sustainable development, they have to be well integrated into broader national research and knowledge systems that support the use of research and knowledge in policy and other decision-making processes. This can only be possible if libraries function in close collaboration or partnership with other institutions with a remit to support interfacing research, policy and practice.

Most of the developed world and to some limited extent developing countries now use evidence-informed approaches to developing policies with support from their national library institutions. Examples of these institutions include the Library of Congress and the British Parliament Office for Science and Technology (POST) Library.

However, there still exists a profound gap in literature on national research and knowledge systems, how libraries can become integral components of such
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