

Abstract

Purpose -- The aim of this paper is to review some of the critical information needs in Sub-Saharan Africa and the challenges that face libraries in the region in establishing digital libraries as a way of overcoming the great information shortfall in the region. **Design/methodology/approach** -- A selective survey of relevant literature is carried out in the study with focus on the role of libraries and information in social development, sectoral information needs and the issues involved in the establishment of digital libraries. **Findings** -- The paper argues that lack of social development in Africa is exacerbated by lack of adequate information. The paper concludes that, through better information gathering, processing and especially by taking advantage of today's digital transfer of knowledge, countries in the Sub-Saharan region can experience rapid economic, social and political development. **Originality/value** -- The paper concludes that digital libraries in the Sub-Saharan region can be strategic gateways to the global information and a boost to development in the region. The goal of establishing digital libraries in the region can be achieved through measures such as adoption of modern information communication technologies, amassing relevant digital content, investing in digital skills for library staff and users, strategic partnerships between local institutions, and funding agencies and above all government-backed strategy on digital libraries.