Sustaining the Open-Access Regime through the Legal Information Institutes: A Success Story

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Abstract

In the past decade, the provision of open access to legal information has experienced unprecedented improvement. One of the recent additions to the open-access regime is the introduction of Legal Information Institutes (LIIs) that provide access to important information contained in government gazettes, reports, judicial decisions, and statutory instruments. As important as LIIs are for enhancing legal research, a perusal of the relevant literature reveals that there is generally a dearth about LIIs.

Against this background, this article examines the LIIs' contribution to legal information to determine how to strengthen LIIs in terms of their content and viability.

Keywords: Sustainability, Legal Information, Legal Information Institutes, LIIs, Legal Research

1. Introduction

Traditionally, the research community has revolved around a structured arrangement where a high premium is placed on the protection of human capacity and intellectual output. To ensure the protection and sanctity of human ingenuity, the dissemination, use, reproduction, propagation, and distribution of research output are often restricted exclusively for the sole use of the copyright holder—particularly where the holder enjoys commercial gains.[1]

Libraries play a crucial role in democratizing the process of accessing knowledge.[2] Hamel corroborates this view,[3] averring that researchers and libraries play dominant roles as consumers of research output. While libraries pay subscription fees to authors and publishers, researchers are actually the end users of such information.[4]

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[1] Oleh Hubanov et al., "International Legal Regulation of Copyright and Related Rights Protection in the Digital Environment," *Studies and Applied Economics* 39, no. 7 (2021): 3–20, 3.

[2] Bala Ahmed and Aminu Ahmed Buba, "Influence of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) in Libraries for Information Service Delivery: Issues and Practices," *Jewel Journal of Librarianship* 19, no. 1 (Mar. 2024): 12–22, 16.

[3] Leslie A. Harmel, "The Business and Legal Obstacles to the Open Access Publishing Movement for Science, Technical, and Medical Journals," *Loyola Consumer Law Review* 17, no. 4 (2005): 555–70, 556.

[4] Ibid.

As important as access to scholarly materials is, researchers and scholars are sometimes constrained in how they navigate through restrictions that sometimes hinder their access to relevant resources. As Gijs Van Dijck has noted, in some climes, researchers are "completely blocked or suffer serious restrictions regarding access to recent books and subscription-based journals."[5] Given this, open access can be important, as it enhances increased access to research materials.[6]

The concept of open access has been widely researched by scholars across various disciplines. In one of its earliest definitions, open access was defined as information freely provided via the internet for use by different users who may choose to read, download, copy, print, search, distribute, or access that information without any financial or legal restrictions.[7] Succinctly, open access describes a publishing platform that makes its content freely available to users.[8]

Bhardwaja and Madhusudhan[9] have posited that open access provides the opportunity to gain access to content through the World Wide Web (WWW) and create judicial websites and portals resulting in the development of a vendor-neutral citation format that serves as an alternative to the traditional citation to printed material. One of the perceived benefits of open access is that works published through this type of platform enjoy high "cited by" numbers, which may arguably facilitate increased usage of the research.[10] Open-access platforms are equally regarded as powerful research tools that can "democratize access to scholarly content, making research more accessible, transparent, and collaborative."[11]

Legal scholars, particularly postgraduate legal researchers, depend on legal information resources as critical tools for effective research.[12] As a result, law faculty and other legal researchers depend on these tools to "teach, learn, develop and practice law."[13] Just like other disciplines, in the field of legal information management, the regime of open access to legal information has continued to enhance scholarship in the field of law. More importantly, it has had far-reaching impacts on local communities. Specifically, Laws.Africa has stated the following concerning the relevance of open access: "Open access to digital African legal information helps communities to thrive, businesses to succeed, and judicial officers and civil servants to deliver services efficiently and effectively."[14] Open access to legal information further helps to ensure

> free availability on the public internet, permitting any user to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of these articles, crawl them for indexing, pass them as data to software, or use them for any other lawful purpose, without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. The only constraint on reproduction and distribution, and the only role

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[5] Gijs Van Dijck, "Legal Research when Relying on Open Access: A Primer" (Apr. 1, 2016), Law and Method (2016), Tilburg Law School Research Paper no. 17/2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2654144.

[6] Chun-Kai Huang et al., "Open Access Research Outputs Receive more Diverse Citations," *Scientometrics* 129, no. 2 (2024): 825–45, 825, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-023-04894-0; Uzma Shahzadi and Bashir Hussain, "Awareness and Access of Open Access Resources by Teacher Educators and Student Teachers: Potential for Reflection," *Pakistan Journal of Distance & Online Learning*, 5, no. (2019): 17–30, 18; Scholastica Ukwoma and Colette O. Onyebinama, "Access and Use of Open Access Resources by Undergraduate Students in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria," *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)* 4124 (2020): 1–12, 12, https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/4124.

[7] "Definition of Budapest compliant open access," Open Access Working Group, accessed July 30, 2024, https://access.okfn.org/definition/index.html.

[8] Suzanne Day et al., "Open to the public: paywalls and the public rationale for open access medical research publishing," *Research Involvement and Engagement* 6, no. 8 (2020): 1–7, 1, https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-020-0182-y.

[9] Raj Kumar Bhardwaja and Margam Madhusudhan, "Open access legal information sources and their use by students of National Law University," *Annals of Library and Information Studies* 60, no. 1 (2013): 314–19.

[10] Chun-Kai Huang et al., "Open access" (n 6).

[11] Maja Daruwala and Venkatesh Nayak, eds., *Our Rights: Our Information,* CHARI (2007), https://www.humanrightsinitiative.org/publications/rti/our_rights_our_information.pdf.

[12] Hadiza Umar and Victoria Sokari, "Challenges Associated with Utilization of Legal Information Resources by Postgraduate Law Students in Federal Universities of Northern Nigeria. Information Impact," *Journal of Information and Knowledge Management* 1, no. 1 (2020): 40–47, 47, https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/iijikm.v11i1.4.

[13] Oyintola Isiaka Amusa and Morayo Atinmo, "Availability, Level of use and Constraints to use of Electronic Resources by Law Lecturers in Public Universities in Nigeria," *JLIS.it* 7, no. 3 (Sep. 2016): 139–72, 142–43.

[14] "Open Access to African Legal Information," LAWS.AFRICA, accessed July 15, 2024, https://laws.africa/open-african-law.

for copyright in this domain, should be to give authors control over the integrity of their work and the right to be properly acknowledged and cited.[15]

A perusal of the pertinent literature reveals that there is a dearth of scholarly research on the use of the Legal Information Institutes (LIIs) during the legal research process. This modest effort seeks to contribute to the body of literature in this regard and to achieve the following objectives:

- articulate the historical background of the use of LIIs;
- evaluate the benefits of LIIs; and
- enumerate the ways to sustain the operations of LIIs.

It is hoped that this research can help enhance and strengthen access to legal information through the use of LIIs.

2. ORIGIN OF THE OPEN-ACCESS MOVEMENT

Although there is no consensus on the origin of the open-access regime, Mering and Hoeve explain that open access was originally referred to as the Free Online Scholarship Movement, which originated over fifty years ago.[16] The movement expanded in the United States through the establishment of the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) in 1966 by the US Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement and the National Library of Education.[17] This movement has, over time, expanded to other countries.

2.1 Open Access for Legal Information

The open-access regime in the field of legal information is gradually gaining momentum with different formats, initiatives, and collaborations constantly being forged. A few of these efforts are outlined below.

2.1.1 Research Guides

Research guides are subject-related information pathways curated by specialist librarians[18] that usually provide links to essential resources, including, but not limited to, texts, videos, databases, reports, and other types of useful information.[19] As noted by the US Law Library of Congress, "research guides provide a starting point for researching legal topics and recommend relevant materials in the Law Library's collections and online."[20] Resources contained in a typical research guide are usually a wide-ranging variety of resources that could be useful for legal research. These may include "references to treaties, Web sources, major case law, legislation, and other relevant sources that can aid in one's research."[21]

It is now common practice for law libraries to create guides on their institutional platforms for use by their students and faculty members.[22] More often than not, the research guides are crafted to cover the areas of special interest to the parent institution. One unique feature of this type of platform is that the librarian creating the

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Margaret Mering and Casey D. Hoeve, "A Brief History to the Future of Open Access," Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries 409 (2020), https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/409.

[17] Madhukar Bapu Togam, and Prakash Babanrao Jadhav, "Google Originality Test: An Instrument for Research Integrity in Higher Educational Institutes," *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)* (2022) 6852, https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6852.

[18] University of Toronto Libraries, Oise Library, Research Guides, accessed June 5, 2024, https://oise.library.utoronto.ca/research-guides.

[19] University of Minnesota, Library Research Guides, accessed June 6, 2024, https://libguides.umn.edu/; University of Queensland, Legal Research Guides, accessed June 6, 2024, https://guides.library.uq.edu.au/legal-research-guide.

[20] Law Library of Congress, Research Guides, accessed June 4, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/research-centers/law-library-of-congress/researcher-resources/research-guides/.

[21] UCLA, Hugh & Hazel Darling Law Library, Free Online Legal Research, accessed June 4, 2024, https://libguides.law.ucla.edu/c.php?g=183338&p=1208668.

[22] Springshare's LibGuide platform, a hosted, Web-based content management system, has become a popular tool in libraries worldwide for creating online research guides. See "LibGuides & LibGuides CMS," accessed June 1, 2024, https://springshare.com/libguides/.

guide will often focus on resources available within their domain. Equally, it is also possible for law librarians to prepare a research guide that focuses on other jurisdictions, thus providing useful guidance for researchers to look at a legal issue from a broader perspective without being confined to a single jurisdiction. In addition, unlike some other types of legal information, a research guide can be regularly updated. It is therefore not uncommon to observe that a particular guide has undergone one or more reviews and updates since it was originally developed.[23]

2.1.2 Proactive Disclosure of Legal Information

One of the major achievements of the movement towards the open-access regime is the creation of proactive disclosure initiatives across organizations and government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). Proactive disclosure of information implies a deliberate effort on the part of MDA leadership to publish (or make public) information or records pertinent to government activities prior to receiving any citizen requests.

Proactive disclosure contemplates the information needs of citizens and attempts to release such information to the public so that citizens will not need to request the information again from the concerned MDA. For example, it is now common for government departments to post information on their websites, including, but not limited to, the organogram of the entity, institutional activities, and enabling laws and regulatory schemes specific to the organization that may be of public interest.

2.1.3 Legal Information Consortium: GOALI

The Global Online Access to Legal Information (GOALI) is a relatively new initiative established under Research4Life,[24] which was launched to the public on March 6, 2018.[25] GOALI was conceptualized as a public-private initiative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in partnership with the International Training Centre of the ILO, Brill Nijhoff, and the academic partnership of the Cornell Law Library and the Lillian Goldman Law Library at Yale—both libraries at Ivy League institutions.[26] One of GOALI's features is providing free access to legal information for nations categorized as less economically developed.

Although the current beneficiaries of GOALI's free registration are mainly countries from Third World nations,[27] in terms of the operational framework for GOALI's activities, the current leadership and management structures have fewer personnel from institutions/organizations of Third World countries. This current structure implies that the technical skills, knowledge, and competencies required for managing a research platform like GOALI may not be transferred to developing countries. Meanwhile, the impact of GOALI could be better felt if members of the developing nations were included in the governance structure, thereby enabling these members to replicate their experiences across their own nations. As noted by Snellenberg and Horváth, the mission of GOALI is to

> reduce the knowledge gap in academic research between industrialized countries and the developing world. The new programme will empower people in governments, universities and not-for-profit institutions in participating countries by giving them access to critical legal research content provided by the world's leading academic publishers. It will contribute to the better education and training of new legal professionals.[28]

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[23] The opportunity for a quick update is a plus, considering that law itself is dynamic and may change rapidly over a period of time. Such updates are quickly and easily reflected in the particular guides.

[24] Research4Life is a partnership of research-intensive organizations that provides free or low-cost access to libraries, particularly in developing nations, on a plethora of resources covering a variety of disciplines such as health, agriculture, sciences, environment, law, and other fields of human endeavours. See 'Access to Research in the Developing World' Research4Life, accessed Aug. 4, 2024, https://www.research4life.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/R4L_factsheet_2015.pdf.

[25] "Learn what is and how you can access the new Research4Life programme – GOALI," Research4Life, accessed June 4, 2024, https://www.research4life.org/blog/learn-can-access-new-research4life-programme-goali/.

[26] International Labour Organisation, "About us," accessed July 31, 2024, https://www.ilo.org/about-us.

[27] Countries are generally categorized into three main bands for the purpose of determining what is to be paid as a subscription fee. While those within Group A can access GOALI without any subscription cost required, those within Group B pay a lower subscription fee. Incidentally, countries within Groups A and B are mainly from the Third World nations. See generally "Eligibility for Access to Reseach4Life," accessed July 31, 2024, https://www.research4life.org/access/eligibility/.

[28] Richelle Van Snellenberg and Edit Horváth, "Global Online Access to Legal Information (GOALI) – A New Legal Training Resource for Developing Countries," accessed June 6, 2024, http://library.ifla.org/id/eprint/1680.

GOALI is perhaps the only global legal database with robust resources and content made freely available to the least-developed economies in the world. Indeed, profit-making is not GOALI's aim.

2.1.4 Legal Information Institutes (LIIs)

The LII is another tool that seeks to provide users with access to free legal information resources across nations. The history of LIIs dates back to the 1980s with the beginnings of the Cornell LII, AustLII, and LexUM.[29] The earliest LII was Cornell's, founded under the leadership of its two co-directors, Thomas R. Bruce and Peter W. Martin (now Director Emeritus) of the Cornell Law School. Cornell LII's content was first unveiled in 1992 and comprised the opinions of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS).

It is noteworthy that the Cornell LII had been consistently publishing SCOTUS opinions for ten years before SCOTUS provided them on its own website. The Cornell LII (and its Oyez Project site) now serve over forty million unique visitors annually.[30] As Paliwala has noted, LIIs publish legal information from a variety of sources for free through the internet and also collaborate with one another in extending their offerings and services.[31]

By 1995, the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) had jointly established the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AustLII).

The LIIs' operation and management are often conducted at the national and subnational levels. In other words, it is possible to have an LII regime that focuses on developing resources for the country as a whole. Some of the LIIs devoted to procuring resources at the national level are the Cornell LII, CanLII, NigeriaLII, etc. The focus of these LIIs is to ensure there is an LII that is robust and rich enough to meet the diverse information needs of its users. Organizations that support these kinds of LIIs are usually well-plenished in terms of human and material resources, which help achieve the goal of establishing a national database.

On the other hand, in some countries, especially in a federal system with a minimum of two levels of government, it is possible to have a subnational LII that coexists with a national LII, whether the subnational government is a state, region, or province. Within Canada, for example, CanLII has information on some of the provinces. However, the resources of these provinces are understandably fewer in terms of content.

3. BENEFITS OF LIIS

3.1 Access to primary data

The LII is very useful for providing access to primary resources required for legal research. Primary sources in the field of law include judge-made laws, constitutions, statutes, ordinances, and administrative regulations.[32] Other primary legal sources are reports, treaties, white papers, and other relevant rules, regulations, statutory orders, and case reports of judicial pronouncements of different courts.[33]

3.2 Room for comparative research

The LII also provides free resources for comparative legal scholarship. In recent times, the need for collaborative research has become more evident. Comparative legal research may arise in the following circumstances:
- A researcher is interested in studying two or more areas of law concurrently—for example, civil and criminal law or the dual concept of technology and copyright.

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[29] See Abdul Paliwala, ed., *A History of Legal Informatics,* LEFIS series (9) (Zaragoza: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2014).

[30] "About the LII," Cornell Law School, accessed June 5, 2024, https://www.law.cornell.edu/lii/about/about_lii.

[31] Paliwala, ed. (n 29).

[32] "Introduction to Law," HC Library, Highline College, accessed Jan. 10, 2024, https://library.highline.edu/c.php?g=344547&p=2320319.

[33] Khushal Vibhute and Filipos Aynalem, *Legal Research Methods: Teaching Material*, prepared under the sponsorship of the Justice and Legal System Research Institute (2009), https://chilot.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/legal-research-methods.pdf.

- It has become necessary to examine a legal phenomenon using laws from different jurisdictions. For example, a researcher may want to comparatively examine the laws regulating the offense of rape in the United States and Nigeria.
- It is desirable to compare a legal phenomenon longitudinally.

There are institutions where the enrollments of foreign students have continued to soar. For example, over 50% of postgraduate students at the University of Cambridge are foreign.[34] Also, in the United Kingdom (UK), statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reveal that during the 2021/2022 academic session, 679,970 international students pursued their degrees in the UK, representing an increase of 12.3%.[35] At Harvard University, LL.M. students come from some 70 nations.[36] Within the context of the UK, the figure may perhaps be attributed to the relaxation of cross-border policies to attract a highly skilled workforce to the UK,[37] while for Harvard University, its international reputation as a leading institution for study is a strong factor in attracting international students.

Suffice it to say that while these figures may vary across nations and institutions, the COVID-19 experience (and the ensuing popularity of virtual education) favors collaborative research since the global research community can now effectively collaborate with the aid of technology.

3.3 Citizenry engagement with the government

Information provision has been described as oxygen for democracy. Citizens often require access to government information if they must engage with their respective nations on key governmental issues. According to the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative,[38]

> in order for democracy to work effectively, safeguards must be put in place to protect against systems and laws that serve to keep the public isolated from official decision-making, and in particular those that keep them in the dark about government policies and activities. Democracy is founded on the principle of representative government and it is therefore essential that politicians and government authorities communicate openly with citizens so that they are fully aware of the public issues they are supposed to be representing. All too often, governments are wary of the consequences of divulging "confidential" information to citizens and prefer to operate in secrecy.[39]

With access to information resources provided by LIIs, including, but not limited to, government budgets, citizens can access information resources that reveal the status of State affairs and thus allow citizens to make informed decisions on how to engage with government officials. This is corroborated by Bangani, who, while speaking about South Africa, averred that transparency in leadership entails accessibility to the information used to arrive at "decisions and the results of the final outcome thereof."[40]

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[34] "A global community," International Students, University of Cambridge, accessed Aug. 4, 2024, https://www.internationalstudents.cam.ac.uk/applying/global-community.

[35] International Recruitment Data, Universities UK, accessed May 31, 2024, https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/international-student-recruitment-data.

[36] "The LL.M. (Master of Laws) program is a one-year degree program that typically includes 180 students from some 70 countries," Harvard Law School, LL.M. Admissions, accessed Aug. 1, 2024, https://hls.harvard.edu/graduate-program/graduate-program-admissions-and-financial-aid/ll-m-admissions/#:~:text=(Master%20of%20Laws)%20program%20is.

[37] The policy of the United Kingdom (UK) that allowed foreign students to enter the UK with their dependents has been repealed with effort from Jan. 1, 2024. It is therefore most likely that the enrollment of international students in UK institutions will decline, beginning Jan. 1, 2024. See generally "Tough Government Action on Student Visas Comes into Effect," Gov.UK (Jan. 2, 2024), https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tough-government-action-on-student-visas-comes-into-effect#:~:text=From%201%20January%202024%2C%20tough,family%20members%20to%20the%20UK.&text=Restrictions%20to%20student%20visa%20routes,abuse%20of%20the%20immigration%20system.

[38] Daruwala and Nayak, eds. (n 11).

[39] Ibid., 15.

[40] Siviwe Bangani, "Open access to legal resources in South Africa: the benefits and challenges," *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)* (2018) 1892, http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1892.

3.4 Most helpful for nations with bureaucracies in accessing government information

Research guides can be most helpful in nations with bureaucracies that hinder access to information. These bureaucracies range from exorbitant government fees required to access legal information materials (like in many African countries), to deliberate efforts to frustrate requests for access to government information. Some LIIs go further, using their wherewithal to acquire such information and publish it proactively, thereby eliminating the usual hurdles that citizens would have to surmount to gain access to the documents/information.

4. SUSTAINABLITY OF LIIs

The sustainability of the LII program is an essential element to provide ongoing, cutting-edge legal information. Many of the early LII projects came by way of grants and support from donor agencies. For example, regarding the NigeriaLII, where this author currently works as the program manager, the seed funding was provided through a University of South Africa grant.

The following are suggestions for ensuring that LII programs are sustainable:

4.1 Crafting sustainability plans for the LIIs

It is essential that an LII develop a sustainability plan. This is particularly important because LIIs are non-profit organizations as reflected in the Cornell LII's mission as a "not-for-profit organization that believes everyone should be able to read and understand the laws that govern them."[41] In Nigeria, for example, the funding required for the establishment of the NigeriaLII was provided by a foreign partner. The challenge is that, as soon as the seed fund has been exhausted, there needs to be a strategy to keep the organization running.

In view of the need to survive the post-grant phase of any funded project, during the grant application process, the applicant should concretely establish in measurable terms how the fund-seeking organization can further its activities after the exhaustion of the seed fund. According to the US Agency for International Development (USAID), a sustainability plan "helps to identify the required resources to sustain the project; encourages the development of partnerships; supports and facilitates collaboration; and helps to define progress and the necessary action steps needed to ensure long-term success after the project ends."[42]

The sustainability plan can exhibit the anticipated support that might be provided by the implementing partner (such as an institution) in terms of human resources that will continue to support the project. This support could also be financial or infrastructural. Suffice it to say that donors are always wary of supporting projects without a clear-cut sustainability policy.

4.2 Country-led and nationally owned

As noted by the OECD in a 2011 policy brief, countries must take the lead and initiative to develop their own strategies.[43] Sustainable development strategies cannot emerge from outside pressures. This is especially applicable to developing nations where reliance is mainly placed on foreign aid. If the LIIs must continue to be active and progressive in their operations, then efforts must be made to curry support from local institutions and establishments that may be able to provide the needed support. A major feature of this approach is that contemplated support for the LII may come from sources outside the host institution.

4.3 Regular benchmarking

In view of the regular changes in the use of information and telecommunication technologies and users' attendant information-seeking, LII administrators need to be attuned to this rapidly changing climate.

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[41] "Welcome to LII," Cornell Law School, accessed Aug. 1, 2024, https://www.law.cornell.edu/.

[42] "Sustainability and Scale Up Plan," USAID, accessed Feb. 12, 2024, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00MX88.pdf.

[43] *Better Policies for Development: Recommendations for Policy Coherence*, OECD (2011), https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2011/09/better-policies-for-development_g1g13de8/9789264115958-en.pdf.

Therefore, embarking on regular benchmarking of LIIs will improve service delivery so the LIIs remain relevant and useful.

4.4 Incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI)

In the years to come, there will be a need to determine how to deploy the use of AI in the operations of the LIIs. As it were, most resources in use are still manually checked and examined by the users in their original formats. To enhance a seamless research experience, it will be necessary for AI to streamline research using specific indexes that will make access and searches easier. These are the strategies often adopted by existing mainstream publishers, such as LexisNexis, LLMC, Hein, Sage, etc.

4.5 Networking with other purpose-driven organizations

For the LIIs to remain relevant, it is incumbent for LII administrators to strategically identify organizations with objectives that are similar. Such strategic moves may help to create sustainable partnerships that will, over time, help strengthen the LIIs. For example, organizations hosting LIIs may partner with professional bodies with competencies that could help ensure the optimal delivery of services. One such body could be a group of professionals with skills in computing and the use of AI. This partnership could provide enormous support that could be highly instrumental in improving user experiences on the platform. Equally, the LII could partner with an organization for resource mobilization, thereby helping to ensure access to regular funding.

It is likewise essential for LIIs to have strong partnerships with information gatekeepers across MDAs. The gatekeepers, usually public servants saddled with the task of retaining public/government records, are sometimes unaware that ensuring that government information reaches the doorsteps of citizens could actually publicize government activities. With stronger collaborations between LIIs and these MDAs, the MDAs can become better informed as to why relevant government information/records should be proactively made available to citizens.

5. Conclusion

The open-access regime remains a crucial platform for ensuring that citizens have access to legal information, thereby fostering legal research and providing ample information necessary to engage with the government. As LIIs continue to serve as a veritable platform where citizens can have unfettered access to a wide variety of information, it is essential that there is synergy amongst the relevant stakeholders. These stakeholders, which include the political class, public servants, non-State actors (such as academics), and those within the not-for-profit sector, must ensure that LIIs in their respective jurisdictions are sustainable going forward.