Public and Community Library and Information Services in Rural South Africa: A Concept Paper*

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ABSTRACT The community library's environment is not a complex one. Both semi-literate and illiterate should be able to use this type of a library. A community library should not be a frightening place, and the provision of services to all the community members should be user-friendly. The educational and economic status of the community should also be taken into account as far as membership of a community library and information services are concerned. This paper focuses on public and community libraries, community centers, school library services in the rural communities, school libraries or media centers as well as library cooperation, types of cooperation and cooperative agreements.

INTRODUCTION

People originating from an African culture are not necessarily illiterate, as they possess a certain level of education in their own different information environment. Public libraries emerged in modern societies to meet the needs of literate users. According to Mostert (1993), the typical Western public library is suitable for those community members who are "well-educated, literate, and middle-class, whereas the newly literate and illiterate members of the community are not taken into account." Community libraries and information services play an important role in the rural areas by empowering the rural community members in as far as their basic needs are concerned (Mayer 2002). Therefore, they should aim to serve the whole community, including the illiterate.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Public and Community Libraries

People originating from an African culture are not necessarily illiterate, as they possess a certain level of education in their own different information environment (Ogundipe 1994). Public libraries emerged in modern societies to meet the needs of literate users. According to Mostert (1998: 71), the typical Western public library is suitable for those community members who

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are *"well-educated, literate, and middle-class, whereas the newly literate and illiterate members of the community are not taken into account"*.

Moreover, Mostert and Vermeulen (1998) are of the opinion that public libraries are meant to serve an educational role in the community. However, problems concerning the daily lives of the community and many other roles in the community may be neglected. This implies that in some instances only the educated group may benefit from public library services. The type of accommodation, collection and services could be geared mainly towards the literate members of the community. This implies that public libraries do not meet the real needs of the community as a whole. To address this disparity means that library and information services have to adjust to comply with the information requirements of users other than literates.

Community library and information services play an important role in the rural areas by empowering the rural community members in as far as their basic needs are concerned (Mayer 2002). Therefore, they should aim to serve the whole community, including the illiterate. The community library's environment is not a complex one. Both semi-literate and illiterate should be able to use this type of library. A community library should not be a frightening place, and the provision of services to all the community members should be user-friendly. The educational and economic status of the community should also be taken into account as far as membership of a community library and information services are concerned.

Community libraries can also be regarded as community information centers. The communi-

ty library and information services aim to uplift the living standard of the community with *"timely educational, informational, recreational and cultural information, documents or resources"* (Mokgaboki 2002: 78).

Mokgaboki (2002) states that the cluster library is ideal for rural communities because there is still an imbalance in community library and information services.

Communities within reach could be clustered together to be served by one common community library and information service in order to eliminate financial problems.

Books, which are sources of information, are worthless to people when people are unable to read. They need services that will meet most basic needs or food and safety by providing relevant information about social security programs that provide food and shelter to those in need (Mayer 2002; Mokgaboki 2002).

Public and community libraries have to cater not only for the literate group, but should attempt to include everybody within that community, whether literate or not (Mostert and Vermeulen 1998). The services should be adapted to the needs of a particular community. Also, for the community libraries to be successful, they need to be established with the assistance of the community. Mostert and Vermeulen (1998), and de Vries and van der Merwe (2004) are of the opinion that the community leaders, as well as users and staff, should be involved in deciding the type of the service to be established as well as the type of collection that should be developed.

Library planning and community analysis are of great importance and should be conducted thoroughly in order to establish the exact needs of the community, so that the relevant services to meet the needs of the community as a whole will be established and developed. As far as the accommodation for the community library is concerned, any ordinary type of accommodation can be used as a community library.

Zaaiman et al. (1988) are also of the opinion that the information provided by a service should be relevant to the information needs of that particular community, because the information needs of one community are not always the same as the information needs of another community. Both Zaaiman et al. (1988) and Kernicky (2006) agree that an information audit or a community analysis is very important in order to best know the information needs of that particular community so that relevant services are established and provided effectively. They agree that an information audit is required to investigate the type of information needs of a particular community before establishing any type of library or information service.

Apart from library buildings that are found in developed areas, there are also other types of library services that could be more suitable in the rural areas. Taking into consideration that there is poverty in the rural areas, establishing a conventional library may be expensive compared to other types of library facilities that could be used. These types of library services (discussed below) could be provided in rural areas because they provide facilities that are affordable. They should try to focus on the needs of the rural community members who do not have a reading culture.

In the past, according to Mostert (1998:72), community libraries were regarded as a solution to the problems experienced with some public libraries, which were not community orientated. "*Community libraries were regarded as being community oriented because they were based on the information needs of the community as a whole."* Public libraries have increasingly become more community-orientated and many have changed their names to include the words 'community library'. As a result the services to be provided for community A should differ from the services to be provided for community B because the services should be provided according to the type of information needs of that particular community.

Mostert (1998), Mostert and Vermeulen (1998) and Bekker and Lategan (1988) are of the opinion that the type of services to be provided by public and community libraries that will be suitable for rural communities are those discussed below.

- the first is the referral service, where information concerning the community is provided upon request and the librarian will be able to refer the user to the correct service if the community library is not of help.
- The direct service is where the user contacts the librarian to be helped with the problems the user experiences.
- Service awareness is the process by which the library staff makes users aware of the sources and services that they can use to their own advantage.
- Another service is the do-it-yourself service, where the community identifies the

type of skills to be taught to the users so that they can be self-reliant, for example, banking, adult literacy and other important programs.

According to Mostert (1998) and Kernicky (2006), a library can also provide practical assistance services where users will be assisted with basic things such as filling in forms correctly, making a phone call, filling in an application form, compiling curriculum vitae (CV), using typing and photocopying machines, and accessing information on the Internet.

Kernicky (2006) is also of the opinion that a library can also serve as a public access center in which services such as computer access, fax machines, newspapers, and printing services can be made available for the community's use. The rural communities need the services that will be able to provide them with survival information such as healthcare and sanitation, as well as information that will enable them to solve their daily problems, for example, *"social, political and legal rights information"* (Mostert 1998: 72).

Community Centers: Snyman and Snyman (2003) found that the type of services that should suit the needs of the rural communities of South Africa are the Multipurpose Community Centers (MPCCs), the universal service agency telecenters (USA tele-centers), and the Citizens' Post Offices (CPOS). Although MPCCs provide digital access, illiterate users need the assistance of a literate person to use all the facilities offered by MPCCs. The parents of rural children are the target group for these services and not the children themselves.

Snyman and Snyman (2003: 95-107) suggest that these services *"can be regarded as the most important vehicles of the center approach chosen by the government to offer a range of developmental services including information services."*

- Multipurpose community centers: MPCCS enable the rural communities to access various information facilities. Examples of services provided by MPCCS are computer training, Internet access, public phones, printing, scanning, copying and word processing services, and fax machines.
- Universal agency tele-centers (USA tele-centers): According to Snyman and Snyman (2003), the USA tele-centers are situated in previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa where many people are poor and unemployed. Examples of

services provided by the USA tele-centers are copying, computer training, Internet, public phones, printer, scanner, copier, word processing and fax.
- Citizens' post offices (CPOS): According to Snyman and Snyman (2003), the citizens' post offices are mainly meant for disadvantaged rural communities. The examples of services offered by the CPOS include copying facilities, word processing, faxing, binding, scanning, laminating, and Internet access.
- Rural information centers: Kernicky (2006) recommends that rural libraries should be adapted to become rural information centers that are also community orientated, active and are able to provide the community with the services that are relevant to meet their needs, since most of the rural population is not educated. The services, resources and the collections should suit the needs of the rural community who cannot read and write.

Kernicky (2006: 31) believes that *"the rural information centers provide the community with relevant, timely and current information"*.

Mostert (1998) is of the opinion that the type of services and community information to be provided should enable the community members to solve their daily life problems and also enable them to function well within their community.

Community information includes the various kinds of information listed below:
- Survival information, for example, health, childcare, housing, finance, legal and political rights information
- Citizen action information such as that required for social, political, legal and economic development.

The information that should be provided to the community should consist of self-help information or services, back-up programs, advice services and life skills programs. For example, information that will assist people to cope with their personal problems in daily life challenges, and work skills programs, which will train or prepare some people to do certain types of jobs, such as childcare skills (Bekker and Lategan 1988).

School Library Services in Rural Communities

The school library is different from other kinds of libraries in giving its first priority to its

educational aim. It is often situated in a single room or rooms designated for storage and use of information resources, or used in conjunction with other resources within a school. There are different types of school library models, such as the media center or resource center, or information center, school and community library, integrated library, school-housed public library, classroom library, book box and mobile book service (Naidoo et al. 1997).

Dube (1998) agrees with de Vries and van der Merwe (2004) that the different types of libraries can be combined to result in more suitable services. The combination of school libraries and a public library resulting in school-community resource centers is another option for library services that could be suitable for rural communities. These could be designed to cater for people from all walks of life, that is, learners, illiterate groups, semi-literate groups as well as literate groups. The combination of these libraries is of great importance and advantage in as far as funding is concerned, because all the stakeholders concerned will have to contribute a certain amount. Moreover, the LIS agencies would be able to prevent any form of discrimination among the community members (users).

According to de Vries and van der Merwe (2004: 26), library models, such as the school community library, should be established in the rural areas where there are limited resources. As far as this type of library model is concerned, it will be the responsibility of *"the provincial department of education, the provincial library service and the local government or municipality."* As a result this joint venture could facilitate the funding of the library.

School Libraries or Media Centers in Rural Areas: According to Bristow (1990), the media center should be very important in rural areas since children make up a large percentage of the country's population. The media center is important in that it contains books that are needed for the child to develop into a responsible adult. The child needs the information in books in order to do his/her homework, to make decisions, for problem solving and exploring the world. It is the library with its books that enables the child to master the reading habit and information skills. Furthermore, libraries are also important in that they:

- Instill a love of reading and books in children
- Stimulate the children, teachers and the community to read

- Can be used effectively with various education systems
- Can distribute the materials free of charge to all school children.

Collection Development in School Libraries or Media Centers: The school library or media center may be housed in a building or a converted classroom in a school that stores different resources ranging from print to electronic media, and makes those resources available to learners for use. The collection of the media center should be sufficient in order to meet the reading and information needs of the learners. Bristow (1990) believes that the collection should contain materials that are relevant and should be in the user's own language. They should also be available for use when learners need them. Moreover, the collection should contain materials relevant to the needs of the children.

Since this is an information society, successful companies and institutions are those that have information at their disposal. There needs to be sufficient relevant information, which is provided to learners in time. The learners should have the opportunity to gather sufficient information from their school library or media center. With a wide range of materials children would be in a position to discover new things by themselves.

A media center, which is well equipped, is of importance to those learners in rural areas where it is expensive to have Internet access at their homes. Thus, they will have the opportunity to search for the most recent information they need and they will learn while playing.

Library Cooperation

Types of Cooperation and Cooperative Agreements: Grossland et al. (1993) believe that cooperation could include developing the library collection jointly, and all should work towards its success. Library cooperation can be regarded as a relationship in which each library contributes equally whatever it has in its stock, for example, materials, personnel, programs, grant writing and networking ideas, into a partnership. It is a joint effort, which is also referred to as joint-use, collaboration, consortium and networking or partnership. Its purpose is to provide wider access of available material to users (Rush 1992).

Generally, for the cooperation or partnership to be successful, there should be careful plan-

ning, communication and cooperation. Before library cooperation can be established, a survey is important and should be conducted in order to find out about the feelings and attitudes of the people towards the library and whether they understand how library cooperation should work. It must be decided where to locate facilities such as the Internet, and interlibrary loan services. If it is located in the elementary school, pre-school materials and junior high school items should be provided. The school should be responsible for an elementary level collection. As far as access to information is concerned, the public library and the school library differ. As a result this should be discussed at the beginning of the agreement. There are language differences, ethnic customs and cultural expectations, which may also be a problem if not discussed beforehand (Sager 2000).

Necessity for Cooperation: Keeping in mind the lack of school libraries in rural areas as well as the sparse population of libraries in rural areas in general, library cooperation seems to be an option to be considered by the education authorities as a solution to the lack of library resources (Woolls 2001; Jesudason 1993; Kinsey and Honig-Bear 1994; Sager 2000).

Rush (1992) suggests that resource sharing is the result of the process of interlibrary loans, which is the primary resource sharing function. Library cooperation between school, public and community libraries, as well as college and/or university libraries could be the solution to the problem of a lack of resources, especially in rural areas where there is lack of school libraries. Although this cooperation will be on different levels, one type of library still has much to benefit from the other type of library. According to Meizel (1992), teachers and students will use network resources to support individual or small group cooperative work in a classroom setting.

Cooperation Between School and Public Libraries: Odini (1990:5) states that the public library is a library that readily gives access to each and everybody free of charge, irrespective of their race, gender, language and status. The public library also has an educational role to play by *"fostering and providing a means for self-development of the individual or group at whatever stage of education closing the gap between the individual and recorded knowledge."*

As far as cooperation between the school library and the public library is concerned, the public library complements and does not duplicate the school collection. Cooperation also enables the learners to use their public library facilities for their homework assignments because they will go to the library and show the librarian the topic and request assistance in finding the relevant information. They will also ask the librarian to help them with their assignment topics. The librarian will also arrange and prepare block loans with teacher-librarians for children to use.

Accordingly it is necessary for the public library's staff to know what type of information the learners need in order to complete their assignments (Odini 1990).

Cooperation between the school library and public library could be a solution to the lack of libraries. The teacher-librarian has the opportunity to invite the public librarian to visit the school in order to motivate the students to participate in activities, such as competitions, workshops and exhibitions. The public librarian could also invite the school librarian to accompany the students to the public library and to encourage them to visit the public library. Where there is cooperation between the public library and the school library without a professional librarian, the public librarian may take responsibility for the school library. Learners are also able to access more titles in the collections of the public library and make use of up to date computer technology (Woolls 2001; Kinsey and Honig-Bear 1994).

Cooperation Between School, Academic or College Libraries: Where cooperation takes place between school, public, college and university libraries, children have resources at their disposal. Cooperation also serves as a means to cut costs.

Marson (1995) states that resource sharing by means of library networks is quicker because one can download information from a distant university. It is also a means or strategy for the university to market its library services in order to attract or recruit students. Moreover, colleges and universities are regarded as institutions for the elite, and cooperation and outreach programs help reduce such perceptions.

Advantages of Library Cooperation in Rural Areas

Library cooperation in rural areas (where LIS are problematic) benefits the community in several ways. These include as follows:

Enhancement: Since no one type of library can meet all the children's information and reading needs, cooperation between public libraries and schools is a possible solution. If there is no school library cooperation, then an arrangement will have to be made between the teacher responsible for library resources and the public library. The advantage of cooperation is that it results in increased and improved communication and cooperation among all the library staff in all participating libraries. It also results in the exchange of photos, flyers, ideas and information about the participating libraries and the services they provide. Moreover, the teachers and learners enjoy enhanced services. For example, learners and teachers teaching in a school where they have online databases have access to both the information concerning books in the collections and also community information like public meetings and directories of services (Meizel 1992). However, there is no advantage for the public in sharing resources with school libraries that do not have comprehensive collections and which are aimed at school learners.

Reduces Expenses of Transport: Learners no longer need to make a special trip to find information elsewhere as a result of the extensive resources in their school due to cooperation. For example, teachers can arrange with the public library for a block loan of materials to be brought from the public library to the school by the school vehicle. It also enables libraries to reach users in areas that could not be reached before in a cost-effective way, by making use of mobile book services.

Encourages Sharing of Responsibilities: Grossland et al. (1993) state that some schools allow non-learners to make use of their school libraries, while some communities allow all learners within the district to use the community libraries. Some schools transport their learners to and from public libraries. Responsibilities are shared amongst the participating librarians.

During school hours, the school librarian and other support staff of the library take responsibility for serving the learner. During public library hours the public librarian should also take responsibility for serving the children after school hours.

During school holidays special arrangements are made, which are in accordance with the contracts concerning all policies and responsibilities of the participating libraries.

Where cooperation is running smoothly, a joint proposal can be undertaken for funding. There should be a teacher-librarian who also acts as a liaison to facilitate this partnership between the school, college, university and public libraries (Jesudason 1993; Woolls 2001; Kensey and Honig-Bear 1994; Sager 2000).

CONCLUSION

Considering the fact that children in rural areas have reading and information needs, alternative library services that can meet their information needs are important. Although children in rural areas have a background of an oral-based culture, they have reading and information needs that cannot be met by means of this oral culture. There are conventional libraries that meet both the reading and information needs of children.

In the rural areas, where there is a lack of such conventional libraries as a result of poverty, lack of professional staff, funds, resources and infrastructure, alternative library services can be suitable to meet the reading and information needs of rural children.

Library cooperation, which has much to do with resource sharing, can also play an important role in meeting the reading and information needs of rural children who do not have library facilities and resources at their disposal. As a result library cooperation is found to be one of the solutions to the lack of library resources especially in rural areas. In rural areas there is still a need to provide library and information services to children to support them in their studies. The literature review shed light on the different types of services that can be of importance in the rural areas where no library services exist.

NOTE

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