

Community Information Services In Public Libraries: A Case Study Of KNLS Nairobi County

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Abstract: Kenya National Library Services (KNLS) has been providing community information services based at the Community Area for a quite a long time. The services have benefitted all categories of the public. Despite this effort, no study has been carried out to establish the kind of information services and details about the people who use these services. In this regard, this study endeavored to investigate the provision of community information services by Kenya National Library Services (KNLS) in Nairobi County with a view of proposing strategies to improve its services. The objectives of the study were to: explore what information resources and services were available; establish the information needs of the users; identify the forms of community information services available; establish the users of community information services; examine the challenges faced in accessing and using need information; and to propose ways to improve the provision of community information services. The study used qualitative research method. The interview schedules were the main data collection instrument. The interviews were administered on 100 respondents Data was qualitatively analyzed by means of pie charts and tables. The study found that majority of the respondents use community information services, mobile services, children reading tents that provides relevant information that meets the needs of the community, libraries and other information centers where the users access the information which is relevant to the users were some of the Constitutes of community information services. Further, the study found that community information services improved the living standards of the rural people, it takes the information resources to those who do not have access to the libraries due to long distances, it saves the users time and enhance the reading culture among the communities, it educates the users on their way of living and improves the economic resources and it also promotes good governance. The study concludes that resources are available to support community information services at KNLS and at Nairobi County also Kenya National Library Service has laid down procedures of conducting community information services. The study recommends that library staffs who are not computer literate should take positive steps to remedy their deficiencies since Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have come to stay. Short computer training and retraining programs should be organized from time-to-time to assist Librarians who do not have knowledge and computer skills.

Keywords: Community libraries, Information Services & Resources, Mobile libraries, Children's Reading Tent, Computer literacy.

I. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES

Community Information (CI) is the combination of two terms i.e. Community and Information. The term "Information" is used to identify many concepts; hence it is

extremely difficult to define it precisely. Normally, information is a message, communicated by a communicator to a receiver. It is the product of human action in mind, which may be abstract or concrete. Therefore, it is the raw material that is used in knowing, making decisions, taking actions, thinking and learning. Reid defines information as "a process

rather than as material. Data only becomes information by the act of imparting it". Information can be regarded as data, which can be transmitted between individuals, and each individual can make use of it in whatever form he/she wants. When information becomes publicly recorded, it becomes objective knowledge available to all.

Community is a body of people in the same locality or a body of people leading a common life or a group of people having common rights or a group of people having a common possession or enjoyment. Giggey (1988) defines community as "a group of people who have something common. This can be their age, education, religion, interest, political affiliation, activities, work, possession or a combination of two or more of these". Similarly, Usherwood (1999) defines community in a comprehensive way that "any geographical community or neighborhood will be made up of a number of communities definable by race, social class, or income group, employment, leisure interest, religion and so on, each with its own informal information network that has grown up without the help of librarians or any other information advice workers". Thus, community in general indicates towards a group of people having common interests. However, neither they can be assumed nor they can be created to legitimate a political programme or to support a plan for action. In the context of librarianship, it is a group of people with shared meaning and shared communication.

Community Information (CI) is the information for the survival and growth of the community or it is that information which is required by the member of the community to make effective use of the available resources around them. In this context Kempson (1986) has rightly defined CI as "information of self-reliance and self-determination". Thus, CI is that information which helps to solve their day to day problems related to survival such as health, education, housing, legal protection, sound economic development, political rights etc and also to participate in social, political, cultural, legal and economic progress of the society either individually or collectively.

The information service through which community information (CI) is provided to communities is called Community Information Service (CIS).

Community information services can be traced back to the outbreak of the Second World War. In the United Kingdom, citizens' advice bureaus were set up by the government to help individuals cope with such problems as emergency regulations, missing relatives, evacuation and the separation of families. In the United States of America, veterans, information centers were set up after the war to "assist in the resettlement and retraining of men returning from war" (Bunch 1987:4). The veterans' information centers had outlived their usefulness by 1949 but the citizens' advice bureaus continued to deal with personal and family problems experienced by individuals.

The sixties and seventies saw a stimulus to the growth of community information services in the United Kingdom and United States because many poor, foreign immigrants moved into inner city areas in search of jobs and (in the United Kingdom) the inhabitants of large housing estates were either confused by "a vast increase in legislation affecting [sic]

peoples everyday lives" (Bunch, 1987:5) or they were ignorant of their rights as citizens.

At first this government (the United Kingdom)-promoted community information services functioned outside libraries. Buddy & Jackaman (1977) were two writers on librarianship who held that public libraries had to abandon their passive role of collecting published information sources for the use of middle classes and take their responsibility to information to the deprived and disadvantaged groups in society seriously. Buddy & Jackaman (1977) felt that, at the very least, libraries should support other agencies concerned with providing information by acting as a "gathering and collating service" for them (Bunch, 1987). According to a study of urban information needs in Baltimore in 1971 to 1973, libraries *Inevitably favor those groups in the urban population best able to respond to that which is already offered-the young, the well-educated, the more affluent, the print-oriented-and fail to address fairly the just and real needs of those whose response is less easy to elicit. In some ways the "system" sustains itself* (Garrison, 1978)

Provision of information for development through the national and public library network enables people to fight poverty deprivation and illiteracy and thus supports reading and recovery programs by the government, rural and urban poor communities are better able to tackle their problems and introduce social change if they have access to relevant information that meets their needs and interests. In addition, access to information about the country enables citizens to participate effectively in the art of governance.

Through various reading campaigns, KNLS provides opportunities for communities to enhance their reading and information seeking habits, and therefore sustain literacy. The 2006 Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey estimated the national literacy rate at 61.5% indicating that only 38.5% Kenyan adults were illiterate. The survey also revealed that only 29.6% of the adult population had acquired the desired mastery level of literacy. This meant that the majority of those termed as literate (61.5%) were at risk of losing their literacy skills or could not effectively perform within the context of knowledge economies.

However, a country with effective library and information services will achieve continuity in learning and reading beyond the formal school program. Such systems cannot be explained any better than ensuring that library services are accessible to as many Kenyans as possible throughout the country. Public libraries go beyond formal education and they are at the heart of personal and community development. KNLS promotes reading by providing access to relevant reading materials to all communities. Libraries play a major role in stimulating public interest in books and in promoting reading for knowledge, information and enjoyment - thus KNLS is indeed a "people's university."

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Information is so essential that it has become part of every human being. All human beings have information need, either individual or collective. And it is information transfer and information revolution through which cultural change; socio-

economic development of a nation is possible. Information is that basic need of life, which helps in the proper fulfillment of other needs such as food, shelter, etc. Hence it can be rightly said that without information, survival and development of any community is not possible. Therefore, it is the basic responsibility of any welfare government to provide information services to communities. This important task of providing Community Information Service (CIS) is performed by many governmental, non-governmental voluntary organizations in their own way. There is no single agency that collects, reorganizes and disseminates community information in a suitable form as per the requirement of different communities. In this context, public libraries, being the library of communities can play important role in providing effective Community Information Services. These are the only institutions entrusted with the duties of providing right information to right users at right time, thereby helping people to deal with daily problem solving or in improving the quality of their lives. Public libraries are entrusted with the basic duty of preserving the recorded knowledge of past and present for future use are also responsible for providing information to the surrounding communities. Public libraries face two major challenges. On one hand, there is tremendous pressure due to information explosion, development of new information technologies for acquiring latest information in all fields of knowledge; on the other hand, there is an increasing demand for pinpointed exhaustive and accurate information in quickest possible time. Thus, in the changing library environment, public libraries have no way other than to shift towards information-based community-oriented libraries rather than repository centers of books and other documents. Failure to which, the existence of these libraries will be reduced to the status of a store house of books and other printed documents.

Public libraries in Kenya face many problems among them being inadequate funding. These libraries are charged with the responsibility of satisfying their users' needs through provision of relevant information. This being the case, they should be well funded. In addition to this is lack of adequate space, increasing cost of information resources, high proliferation of information literature, and challenges in acquisition of modern equipment increased pressure from users and poor remuneration. All these are pegged on inadequate budgetary allocations. The basic functions of the budget are: collection and allocation of scarce resources to priority sectors, provision of public goods and services by the government; and re-distribution of incomes.

The ability to avail relevant resources to users is extremely important in today's society and normally requires adequate funding. This is because we are living in the era of information explosion. There's so much information today and people need to keep themselves updated on what is going on around the world.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study investigated the provision of community information services by KNLS at its headquarters in the Community Area with a view to proposing strategies to improve information service delivery.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study were:

- ✓ To explore the information resources available to support the service
- ✓ To establish the users of community information services.
- ✓ To establish the information needs of the users of the services offered.
- ✓ To identify the forms of Community information services.
- ✓ To establish the effectiveness of the programme in meeting the needs of the users.
- ✓ To establish challenges faced in accessing and using needed information.
- ✓ To propose ways in which the provision of community information services can be improved.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

In common with developments in mainstream library services, there was a shift towards more dynamic centres that were concerned with the collection and provision of information, rather than simply with the management of collections of books.

These community information centres began to emerge in the early 1970s and a number are still providing valuable services today. Their focus was on acquiring, processing, storing and disseminating the information that was needed by the community that they served. They were, therefore, less passive than the community libraries: the emphasis was on taking the information to the people who needed it most. There was a corresponding need to identify and satisfy information needs within the community. This rather more dynamic role implied the need for trained information staff. This was particularly true in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, when many of the available information systems were difficult to use. The analysis and interpretation of information was an important function of services of this kind, and also required a high level of skill.

Some of the services emphasized the importance of collecting, analyzing, recording and storing oral information. This reflected recognition of the importance of oral information and an oral culture in rural communities. Initially the focus of these centres was firmly on the needs of local businesses, particularly agriculture. The aim was to provide individuals and communities with access to national and international information sources. The services were often, therefore, developed in partnership between an international organization, such as the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, or the International Rice Research Institute and a country's Ministry of Agriculture.

In the 1980s and 1990s, attention began to shift towards the need to meet the daily information requirements of individuals. This was especially true in areas like health, and organizations such as Health link (formerly the Appropriate Health Resources and Technologies Action Group, better known as AHRTAG) supported the development of a number of community-based health information services.

There are now few examples of the kind of community information centres that were envisaged in the late 1970s and early 1980s – most have developed into telecentres (which are discussed below). One good example, however, is the network of Lllubabor community library and information centres in rural Ethiopia. They seek to enhance development and reduce poverty in the region through providing much needed information, particularly in the areas of agriculture and health (Tadesse & Genesse, 2002). The network was supported by Oxfam Canada and revitalized rather dilapidated government reading rooms. An important product of the network is the publication of materials in Oromifa, the local language.

Community information has been defined as “survival information, the kind of information necessary for participation as a full and equal member of society”. A report published by the United Kingdom Library Association in 1980, defined community information services as:

Services which assist individuals and groups with daily problem-solving and with participation in the democratic process, the service concentrates on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance and on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs, and their rights.

Childers as cited by Shen (2013) while describing community information provision in the United States, has used the term “information poverty” to describe the lack of basic survival information experienced by large numbers of people.

Although community information services have worked with some success in Britain and the USA, they are still in their infancy in other countries. It would therefore seem presumptuous to propose such an information system to African countries which are already overburdened with problems in the provision of conventional library services.

Allowing for variations in levels of development and available resources, there could be considerable potential for community information services in African countries. Information on such topics as health, education, welfare and the family, is interest to people everywhere and possibly so in countries where administrative and communication structures may still be in the process of evolution. The rationale for community libraries lies in their essentially different sense of social purpose. They differ from traditional libraries in that they are proactive in their sense of social purpose. The primary stimulus is humanitarian and its outcome is social intervention in support of a positive prejudice.

Kempson (1986) suggested that community information services should be firmly rooted in and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. This means that they cannot be imposed on a community and that ideally, they should have advisory committees made up of potential and actual users. Similarly, information workers should work closely with and through the established channels for communication in the community and also with other professionals whose work involves the provision of information.

VI. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used the qualitative method of research to conduct this study. Qualitative research provided a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes which the researcher intends to explore. The use of qualitative research enabled the researcher to construct knowledge voices of many who had not had a channel to voice their concerns. The researcher used interviews with a view of searching substantial solutions to the problem. Qualitative method of research in this study focused on emerging issues in different aspects of life with a view of searching substantial solutions to the problems.

The study used interview schedule in collecting data. Interview schedules were preferred because it was expected that some respondents may not be literate and it would help to gather verbal and non-verbal communication regarding community information services in public libraries. This offered an opportunity to ascertain the validity of the data collected. It therefore gave the study a better insight on the information resources available to support the service, establish the users of community information services, to establish the information needs of the users of the services offered, to identify the forms of Community information services, to establish the effectiveness of the programme in meeting the needs of the users, to establish challenges faced in accessing and using needed information and to propose ways in which the provision of community information services can be improved.

It offered the researcher the opportunity to create rapport, explain the purpose of the study and meanings used which may not have been clear to the key informant (Mutai, 2000). The interview schedule enhanced the reliability of data collected and allowed a richer feedback that provided explanation to what happens and respondent’s opinion, attitudes, feelings and perspective. The questionnaire method was applied alongside the interviews.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that:

A. INFORMATION RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE SERVICE

Community information services improves the living standards of the rural people, it takes the information resources to those who do not have access to the libraries due to long distances, it saves the users time and enhance the reading culture among the communities, it educates the users on their way of living and improves the economic resources and it also promotes good governance. The study also concludes that resources are available to support community information services at KNLS at Nairobi County and that that Kenya National Library service at community area have laid down procedures of conducting community information services.

B. INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE USERS OF THE SERVICES OFFERED

The study further concludes that lending books, public lectures, video shows, radios and TV talks, participation in public forums, reading tents, current awareness services, registration of individual members and organizations, charging and discharging of books, referral services and provision of relevant books for HIV/AIDS were the activities involved in conducting community information services. The study further concludes that library users were satisfied with the community Information services being offered at the Kenya National Library Services at Nairobi County and the programme provided by the KNLS were very effective in providing community information Services.

C. USERS OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES

The study also concludes that the community information service was able to reach a wider community. The study also concludes that majority of library users used the Kenya National Library Services at Nairobi County services twice per month to better their education and avoid being idle, borrowing books, grammar perfection, to be better informed, to get assistant for their academic work, to satisfy the hobbies, to get teaching materials and to get reference materials. However, most of the information resources provided in community information services were not very useful to the users. The study also concludes that the facilities at the KNLS were in good shape and suitable for the users and that the community information service at Kenya National Library Services at Nairobi County provides information resources to its users regularly.

D. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE USERS

The study concludes that the information provided by community information services was not relevant since the information was too old and could not serve most of the user's purpose. The study also concludes that that the information collection used by the KNLS meet the needs of the users to a very great extent and that the library users were involved in the selection process annually and after three months respectively. Further, very old books, the space not big enough to accommodate everybody, books not sufficient for the large number of students who would like to be members, the community information service being far hinder the interested people from assessing it, the opening hours not sufficient, and limited number of books which one can be supplied with were some of the obstacles faced when using the community information service at the community Area.

E. CHALLENGES FACED IN ACCESSING AND USING NEEDED INFORMATION

The study further concludes that inadequate resource, communication barriers, too many schools in need of the service, insufficient materials, insufficient time, lack of adequate manpower, inadequate equipment, lack of current

information materials, lack of mobile vehicles and inadequate reading rooms were some of the challenges faced by the staff of the library when providing community information services.

F. IMPROVING THE PROVISION OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES

The study further concludes that library is very important for any educational institute and it should make better facilities and it should be made attractive for any educational Institution. It can be said that majority of the users are happy about the resources and facilities available in the library and also services rendered by the library is satisfactory. The library is still to improve the present system particularly the library should fully automate and they have to enter the networking so that all the libraries users share the available resources.

The library has to provide a variety of services to quench the thirst of users such as current awareness service, there should be a well-balanced and need based collection. It can be ended that with whatever drawbacks in the study "Availability of resources, facilities and services in Kenya National Library has revealed all possible efforts are taken both by the management and the Librarian to provide a good library service. Hope this study will help the management to take appropriate decision in improving the services and facility of library.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above study findings and conclusions, the study came up with a number of recommendations in an effort to improve service delivery. Incorporated in these recommendations are some of the suggestions made by the library users and members of staff. The recommendations are as follows:

A. INFORMATION RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE SERVICE

The study recommends that the government establishes community libraries throughout the country. The purpose being to improve the living standards of the rural people; to take the information services to those who do not have access to the libraries due to long distances; to save the users time and enhance the reading culture among the communities; to educate the users on their way of living and improve the economic resources and promote good governance.

The study further recommends that the management of Kenya National Library Service at the community area should improve on lending books, public lectures, video shows, radios and TV talks, participation in public forums, children reading tents, current awareness services, registration of individual members and organizations, charging and discharging of books, referral services and provision of relevant books for HIV/AIDS so as to improve the community information services. The study recommends that the management should also introduce competitive games that

would enable them to capture young writers who would help them publish some articles they had written, introduce more current books, more motivational and inspirational materials, the library to install internet, visual aids inform of CDs, competition on writing essays, more time to be allocated for library sessions, more story books for children and current affairs magazines. KNLS should also motivate its patrons to use the library more often. The study shows many users were using the service twice per month.

B. ANALYSIS OF USERS' NEEDS

In an attempt to provide C.I.S, this study *mutatis-mutandis* suggests the identification of community information needs through careful research, collection of community information from all sources and in all forms. The acquisition of these materials should be on the basis of local and trans- local community need and should be accurate, extensive and up-to-date. This should be a regular housekeeping process and should be available on the shelves and in various machine-readable forms for its easy and quick retrieval.

The pictures and posters should be pasted in a prominent place. There should be provisions for display of pamphlets. Moreover, the community information must be organized and repackaged in a manner that will be best suited to the needs of community members. All public libraries in a state should be connected through a networking system to share their resources. Further, the state network should have connectivity to different regional, national, and international library networking system. The public library should keep close link between other governmental and non-governmental agencies, experts of different fields to collect and share resources.

C. IMPROVEMENT OF FACILITIES FOR USERS

The study recommends that the management should improve the facilities available for users since the current facilities are not in good shape and suitable for the users. The government should also provide the library with enough vehicles to enable them take the services to many schools and other institutions. The management should also partner with many institutions to enable them meet the high demand for their services. The study further recommends that the management should lower the fees charged to the users so that many people are encouraged to join the facility and extend the opening hours to cater for those who are working and can only be available after work and students who are in school during the day.

The study recommends that the government should also equip the library with new and modern books since the ones available are too old and could not serve the purpose. This is because there are many sources of information in the library. The library provides extra services which helps in reading and it would not be easy to get the information that one requires from normal and obvious books. The study also recommends that the management of the library should train their staff in ICT and customer service care for them to interact better with the students and offer quality services.

D. MARKET COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES

The study also recommends that the management of the library should use the marketing strategies like participating in the National Trade fair, participating in organized children activities, and mobile library to schools, displaying of posters, conducting user education and public talks. Further, KNLS management should advise people on the importance of books and encourage registration of new members, provide quality services, provide user education, conduct exhibitions and book fairs, partner with institutions and individuals and allow members to be part of the library activities in an effort to involve the community in marketing the facility.

E. THE LIBRARY STAFF SHOULD BE IT COMPLIANT

The study further recommends that library staffs who are not computer literate should take positive steps to remedy their deficiencies to be compliant. This will go a long way to improve community information services. Short computer training and retraining programs should be organized from time-to-time to assist Librarians who do not have knowledge and computer skills. This will also aid awareness of computer potentials and capabilities.

The study further recommends that public librarians should be trained in rendering information services that will help promote inclusion in the society. Adequate funds should be provided for public libraries to render services to all segments of the society, with priority on the socially excluded. Libraries should carry out information needs assessment of their communities to acquire adequate knowledge to be able to detect various gaps in information services provided.

The study further recommends that public libraries should seek partnership with government and private organizations in the areas of capacity building, employment information and generation, investment opportunities, etc. Further, public librarians should be well-educated and informed about government policies and programmes to enhance their knowledge and ability to guide the members of their respective communities. Libraries should be, more than ever before, ready to play a more educational role than the provision of books.

F. CHALLENGES FACED IN ACCESSING AND USING INFORMATION

Relevant government agencies and NGOs should consider the public library when planning and implementing community-based development programmes. The government and private organizations should share relevant demographic and development information with public libraries to enhance the planning and implementing of information services programmes to their community.

The study further recommends that there should be many agencies alternative to public libraries to provide CIS such as Community Resource Centers, Community Information Centers, and Community Libraries etc. These alternative centers should not seem to be serving a particular community information need or a particular interest group.

G. IMPROVING THE PROVISION OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION SERVICES

Therefore, to keep pace with social change, library professionals have to consider the libraries social commitment. They should take its social responsibility seriously. Besides providing reading materials, they have to provide CISs, which should assist individual groups with daily problem solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services should concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance and on the most important problems that people usually face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights.

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