Rural Library Services and Community Initiatives in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper seeks to highlight some of the great achievements, best practices and innovations in developing communities through creative initiatives fostered by the Rural Libraries Resources Development Programme (RLRDP). These initiatives also seek to integrate the rural communities to participate holistically in the knowledge economy. In trying to close the gap between urban and rural communities, RLRDP embarked on outreach programmes essential in building communities through knowledge sharing. The information addressed the socio-economic, cultural, educational, political, environmental and technological needs of the communities. These were responsive to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and closer to home, the 2016-2020 Zimbabwe UN Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF) as well as the 2013-2018 Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-economic Transformation (ZimAsset) programme, (UN in Zimbabwe, 2014). This paper also highlights the steps that are being taken by RLRDP in closing the information gap through the introduction of ICTs within some of its member libraries. Due to the dynamics of technology and influx of information, there is increased information available which has led to what has been coined "information tsunami" by librarians and information professionals. Today, according to IDC (2016) more than 2,5 exabytes (2,5 billion gigabytes) of data are generated every day, an already high number that is expected to continue growing at a significant rate. Statistics released by IDC (2016), the premier global provider of market intelligence, advisory services and events for the information technology, telecommunications and consumer technology markets experts now predict that 40 zettabytes of data will be in existence in 2020. The RLRDP products and services which are outlined serve as a prototype framework for setting up similar projects in any rural setting, to foster sustainable development in all dimensions. It is common knowledge that rural communities constitute a greater percentage of the total population of any African state, hence empowering these communities ensures that they participate actively in democracy and the knowledge economy. If adopted as a prototype countrywide and subsequently worldwide, within similar communities, the rural communities can be salvaged from poverty.

Goal 4 : 'Ensure inclusive and quality education for All and Promote Lifelong Learning'.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Social Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the UN in September 2015 underlines efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. Whilst addressing Goal 4, the paper also reveals how other SDGs have benefitted from addressing Inclusive and Quality Education for All, in particular:

Goal 1:   **End poverty in all its forms everywhere;**
Goal 2:   **End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;**
Goal 3:   **Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;**
Goal 5:   **Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls**
Goal 6:   **Ensure access to water and sanitation for all**.

Experiences mentioned in this presentation are those from the Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP) Zimbabwe, a community based organisation founded in January 1990. The aim of the organisation is to reach out to the remote rural communities, in the provision of free of charge, relevant and appropriate print and non-print material. To date, 300 rural school/community libraries have been assisted in establishing and developing library projects. Fifteen donkey drawn mobile carts and 200 book delivery bicycles provide an extension outreach service in areas where proper roads are not available. In recent years some libraries have acquired computers, some with Internet connection.

Rural libraries are developed through partnership with rural schools and their communities. A set of guidelines on the setting up of a Library Management Committee (LMC), drafting of a library constitution, rules and regulations of a library etc. are provided to all new applicants. Training courses in basic skills of librarianship are also provided, guided by **A Manual for Rural Libraries.** The LMC is the authority behind the library, and is responsible for the day to day operations of the library including the appointment of teacher and community librarian, fundraising etc. Almost all RLRDP member libraries operate from either primary or secondary school. As community based libraries, they are also open to out of school youths and communities at large. The size of each library and volume of books also differ from community to community. The major role played by RLRDP is to ensure that all such libraries operate professionally in meeting the needs of their membership. Each library project is a shared responsibility between RLRDP and the community. Various agencies concerned with school and community development at local level form part of community partnership support. RLRDP provides material and technical support, in the form of print and non-print material and the training of library staff and management committees. The RLRDP is generally active throughout Zimbabwe, with a higher concentration in Manicaland and Matabeleland North Provinces. Other libraries are also dotted throughout the country.

2. Background

In Zimbabwe and most developing countries, the information gap between rural and urban communities is a huge drawback to national development. About 70% of Zimbabwe's population reside in the rural areas and yet the flow of information to these communities compared to urban centres is about 20%. A Zimbabwe government sponsored preliminary report released in 1997 revealed that 72% of rural people are poor or very poor compared to 46% in urban areas. Statistics from the then Zimbabwe Ministry of Education also revealed that the country's education system rapidly expanded in 1980 to cater for thousands of children whose education had been disrupted by 15 years of the liberation struggle. The period leading to 1979, up to 1 082 primary and 46 secondary schools countrywide had closed due to the war, thus affecting 274 000 pupils. In 1979 there were 2 401 primary schools with a total enrolment of 819 596 pupils and 177 secondary schools with an enrolment of 66 215 students. As a result of government's education for all policy, these numbers rapidly rose to 4 161 primary schools with an enrolment of 2 132 304 pupils and 1 129 secondary schools with an enrolment of 416 413 students. Exponential annual increases in enrolment grew at a rate of 21.2% for subsequent five years. Three quarters of these developments were taking place in the rural areas where government felt politically indebted to close the gap between urban and rural areas. The education expansion was not without its shortcomings; shortage of teachers, books, classroom blocks, furniture and other necessary facilities. In the rural areas, the period up to 1985 over 50% of the teachers were untrained while the pupil-teacher ratio stood at 1 to 45 as opposed to the recommended 1 to 35. Though rural pupils did not pay school fees, they received government per capita grant to buy textbooks and stationery. However, the money was barely enough to cater for every child individually. As a result, up to five or ten pupils were forced to share at least one textbook. Pass rate at national examinations were very low, a situation still prevailing in some rural areas, to date.

The country's national literacy campaign, launched by the Zimbabwe Government in July 1993 also suffered. By then the illiteracy rate stood at 63% or 2,5 million of the four million adults. The Adult Literacy Organisation of Zimbabwe (ALOZ), a local NGO had transformed its mandate in line with the new education thrust. The concept was designed to ensure that every literate Zimbabwean teach at least one person and that 200 000 tutors be trained to teach illiterate people and eradicate illiteracy by the year 2 000. But the programme had its structural problems, one of which was under-funding and by 1994 only 69 000 of the 2,5 million people had benefited. The government's definition of literacy was based on one's ability to read and write in their own mother language and speaking English for basic communication purposes. The predecessor to ALOZ, the Adult Literacy Council, formed in 1963 developed and conducted courses in improved crop management, animal husbandry, soil erosion prevention, family planning and home economics.

After independence (1980) ALOZ emphasized functional literacy through reinforcing of reading and arithmetic skills. This was after an evaluation study had revealed that after four years of literacy lessons students achieved 65% in reading and only 35% in numeracy. ALOZ also enlisted the co-operation of local authorities, government ministries, churches, women's clubs, commerce and industry and NGOs in training professional adult tutors, developing appropriate

functional literacy materials and testing and certification of learners. ALOZ also devised three stages of literacy, as follows:

> Stage I which was equivalent to grade two;
> Stage II which was equivalent to grade four;
> Stage III which was equivalent to grade six.

Learners were encouraged to join study groups or night schools thereafter. However, due to dependence on local and international donors for sustenance – shortage of staff to monitor activities coupled with resistance, particularly from men (partriachal pride) and non payment of tutors, the campaign was derailed and learners relapsed.

This is the scenario the RLRDP immersed itself into when it was formed in 1990. Parents and teachers in respective communities who had over the years watched helplessly while their children's performance at schools deteriorated, had already previously explored opportunities to stem the tide of a bleak future. But they were not only concerned about the future of their children but also how they could best make use of their natural environment for their own individual and collective development. Central to their initiatives was the need to improve their standard of living and widen their horizon in politics, economics, civic and cultural issues. To achieve these somewhat distant objectives they realised that what they required first was appropriate information which they could use to transform their lives. Library and information centres became the vehicle for the realisation of their dreams and RLRDP the catalyst.

3. Reading Materials

The ideology of RLRDP is to develop viable and relevant libraries that respond to the reading needs of users. For this reason, RLRDP is against any book donations that are given without the consent of the recipient library. It is important that schools/libraries are given a leading role in the identification and selection of the books they want to see on their shelves. There are some institutions, especially in urban centres and developed countries who donate their discarded reading material to information starved rural communities. This practice is unfair as it puts the receiving school or library in a dilemma, they will accept the donation out of fear that if they reject, they may not be considered in the coming future even for relevant material. The library is left with no option, but to accept any material and then proceed to place it onto their shelves, just to please the donor. The best way to promote reading in the rural areas is to support the production of locally relevant books, including literature in local languages. When books are purchased locally, writers and book publishers flourish, thus ensuring a continuous supply of good-to-read books. People will easily relate and associate with libraries that recognise the importance of their language, cultures and traditions. Research that was carried out by RLRDP in 2000 revealed that libraries that had more locally published books compared to donated material had more users compared to those flooded with 'irrelevant' donated books. RLRDP insists that all its member libraries should have a clear policy on book donations. Such a policy should be in line with the aims and objectives of its constitution, whilst also being in tandem with the RLRDP policy.

Through the Training and Publications Unit (TAPU), RLRDP receives book purchase funds from donors and then engage its member libraries on the types of books to purchase. From time to time RLRDP also alerts its affiliates on any new locally produced books. Communities also mobilise funds to beef up their library stocks. The policy of RLRDP is to provide 75% library material and 25% academic material, in line with its thrust to avail rural communities a cross-section of reading material. The reading culture is also being nurtured during early stages through the provision of early learning centres being introduced as part of the library package. LMCs now include children's reading material. School leavers, most of who did not have the benefit of libraries during their days at school have been smoothly integrated into the system to further their academic qualifications. In the majority of cases they end up starting income generating projects or joining existing ones. Though the mandate of the libraries is to meet the reading needs of communities, educational imperatives and realities have undoubtedly shifted more focus on fulfilling and achieving academic excellence among the students because the future lies in the youth in line with the original objectives of the communities. The scope of books in stock reflects the need to broaden pupil development of general knowledge about their immediate environment – the country, the Southern Africa region, the continent and the world on issues ranging from politics, economics, cultures, sciences, social studies and general reading.

Some of the books in the libraries are of short-term use or beyond the level of users, but certainly not irrelevant. Some of them were donated as a public gesture of goodwill designed to nurture libraries and promote a reading culture with scant but innocent disregard for the users' needs. Teachers in primary schools also report that some books in their libraries are suitable for secondary levels but the experience has been that the pupils are eager to explore their contents and in the process gain knowledge no matter how hazy or scanty. Combined with the increasing number of appropriate readers, the schools have recorded improved pass rates all round. Stocks also reflects their donor origins as the bulk of them are English readers donated mainly by Book Aid International, UK, though more books in local languages are finding their way into the libraries judging by the high level of enthusiasm for Shona and Ndebele readers by all categories of users; the books are not always enough to go round. A sample of stocks show equal distribution of teachers resource books, the popular African and Pacesetter series, English literature, general readers, junior series, rural development, science, folk-tales and fiction novels and local and international magazines.

Apart from the standard administrative rules and regulations outlined, each of the schools has devised flexible time-tables for library sessions since there is no official provision under the education curriculum. The time-tables are conveniently designed to suit the teacher and community librarians' other responsibilities. Some of the books have been found to be useful, in particular lessons like English, history and science that teachers borrow in bulk on behalf of students. This relationship has helped teachers quantify the work rate of students and pass rates which are now comparatively attributed to the existence of libraries.

4. Library Impact

- Nyajezi primary school library in Nyanga district, Manicaland Province, started operating from a former teachers' bedroom with teachers extracting any relevant material from old books and publications and filing them. They joined RLRDP membership in 1991. In

1997 with an enrolment of 500 pupils, the community moulded bricks, provided building materials and built a proper library. Today they have a library block housing a library room with shelves and a separate reading room, with about 7 000 books. Next to the library is a culture hut constructed out of the enthusiasm of community members. The culture hut houses various community artefacts and cultural items, unfamiliar to young adult teachers and children. Knowledgeable community members take turns to educate pupils, teachers, and any other library visitor or user on the significance and use of such artefacts. The pass-rate at Nyajezi primary school has risen from around 35% to 75%, since the revival of their library project.

- Sedze, a neighbouring primary school to Nyajezi, a library run by teachers had a collection of a lot of discarded and irrelevant books until 1994 when it was admitted into the membership of RLRDP. Now the library representative Library Management Committee, with school and community members has been able to weed out most of the irrelevant stock. They currently operate from a one roomed library structure with about 3 000 books. Following the introduction of improved library services their pass rate also significantly improved by 15%.

- In 1996, Nyanhundu overall pass rate ranked for the first time, tenth out of 23 schools in its circuit.

- In the same year Nyafaru's overall primary school pass rate shot to 76% from 20% while there was a 100% pass rate in English literature.

- At Saunyama the pass rate rose from 5% to between 55% and 89% due to proper academic grounding, supported by the library.

- Tsatse primary school, also in Nyanga whose motto is "Read to Learn and Learn to Read" has, since its affiliation to RLRDP in 1993 developed its library collection to 3 500 books, pushing their pass rate from 10% to 45%. With an enrolment of about 450 pupils the library traces its history to 1991 when teachers and pupils wrote own stories and dipped them together for preservation in classrooms. Teachers also contributed money to purchase novels, while the school organised a 90km sponsored walk and raised $600,00. RLRDP assisted Tsatse with funding from SEKY (Finnish Ecumenical Association) to construct a purpose built library.

- Hlangabeza High School in Nkayi, Matabeleland North Province with an enrolment of about 600 students started in 1985 but the library died down in 1990 due to lack of resources. It was revived in 1992 after coming into contact with RLRDP. An Library Management Committee was established, with rules and regulations of the library supported by a constitution; appointed teacher and community librarians who received training from RLRPD. Today it is a fully fledged library with about 8 000 books. They now have an impressive pass rate of about 85% at Advanced Level and 60% at Ordinary level.

- Inyathi High School in Bubi district, Matabeleland North Province, with support from RLRDP saw their pass rate rise from 6% in 2008 to 75% in 2015 at Ordinary level national examinations.

- Mahole primary school in Tsholotsho, Matabeland North Province improved its pass rate within a few years of introducing a library, from 0% to 44%.

- Kwesengulube primary school in Nkayi, Matabeleland North Province has had a 30% improvement in its pass rate following its membership to RLRDP.
  The library admitted out of school youths, who started a successful bee-keeping project as a result of reading bee keeping books found in the library.

These are just few examples of the initiatives highlighted in this paper which reflect the sense of self responsibility that the RLRDP has instilled into the 300 member libraries so far operating under democratically elected LMCs. Though their constitutions are independent, they are tailored to the general guidelines set out by RLRDP, making them eligible for membership of RLRDP. The libraries have also over the years introduced library rules and regulations which suit their particular circumstances, but always in conformity with the general guidelines to ensure the smooth running and long term sustenance of the libraries.

While the responsibility of the day to day running of the library lies with either the teacher or community librarian it is pertinent to note the heavy involvement of pupils who are progressively acquiring the keen sense of responsibility and a culture of reading. The mandate of the LMCs is to create an atmosphere where library users can contribute ideas, work for the library – cleaning, repairing, covering and binding books. Such participation develops among users the spirit if ownership of the library. Apart from providing labour in the construction of some of the libraries, communities also bring in solutions to problems that may crop up in the administration. Damaged books are assessed and a penalty is charged based on the extent of the damage.

The issue of penalties has been carefully examined with more emphasis on proper handling and care of books to sustain their durability. As a result, the majority of libraries report average carefulness with fewer incidences of damaged books and rarely, losses due to carelessness. This is largely attributed to the independent and democratic nature of library administration which is represented by a broad based interest from the grassroots including local councillors, education, health, agriculture experts and traditional chiefs. All the work towards the library is voluntary and taken as community service.

5. Gender, Youth, HIV & AIDS Resource Centres

Twenty five (25) Resource Centres operating under the existing libraries have been introduced in Nkayi and Bubi districts, Matabeleland North Province. The centres operate within the existing RLRDP member libraries, in order to ensure support from a wider section of the community, including school administration, school development committees, library management committees etc.

Project Target

The project is directly targeting young people, 30 youth facilitators from each centre. Since the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is reported to be more among girls than boys, the project involves 60% girls and 40% boys. Though the centres operate within schools, 70% of the participants are out of school youths and 30% are in school. Rural communities of Nkayi and Bubi lack facilities where youths can access information necessary for making informed decisions. The project targets out of school and in school youths in mapping out strategies that can assist in achieving behaviour change. There is a high HIV & AIDS infection rate among out of school youth in Matabeleland North Province, including the two target districts. According to the National Aids Council (NAC), the youths are among the groups most vulnerable to STIs, HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe.

Targets Achieved

Project activities are held at centre, cluster and district level. At centre level 30 youth facilitators get together on regular basis to share their own experiences around : "What it means to be a boy or girl living in a rural setting". At this level the youth profile their lives and those of their communities pointing out areas that might expose them to contracting HIV & AIDS. They single out lack of income, scarcity of leisure activities, lack of parental guidance, lack of informal learning programmes, the sprouting of beer drinking night clubs, as some major concerns. Having identified their concerns, the young people are able to document some of their experience in SiNdebele (local language). They also came up with drama, songs & dance highlighting the need for communities to address these concerns. Each centre and cluster together with its facilitator receives leadership skills training from RLRDP.

Joint Production of Docu-Drama with Zimbabwe Broadcasting Coorporation / Zimbabwe Television

The production of docu-drama with ZBC/TV sharpened young people's skills in drama. Together with our Theatre for Development consultant, young people were taught how to express themselves in front of a camera. They were also assisted in overcoming shyness when performing in front of a big crowd. Young people indicated that their confidence as actors has been boosted with input from the consultant and ZBC/TV personnel. The docu-drama stories have been properly documented shared with young people's communities through open performances.

Linkage of centres with mentors and community role models

Resource centres have been enhanced by the involvement of mentors and role models from the communities where projects operate. Involvement of local leadership and role models ensures that young people get assistance from locally based facilitators. Young people who have worked with local mentors and role models are happy with this development as they get advice on their project activities closer home. The Gender, Youth, HIV and AIDS Resource Centres, as they operate within existing rural libraries provide current information on HIV and AIDS.

The resource centres provide a platform to share information and experiences on HIV and AIDS with the aim of preventing its spread. Discussions, theatre, print and non-print material are forms of disseminating HIV and AIDS related information, based on young people's experiences. The young people have peer education clubs at each centre, through which they conduct sport, drama, income generating activities in addition to peer HIV and AIDS education sessions. Before the introduction of these Resource Centres, levels of knowledge on HIV and AIDS were frighteningly low in some rural communities, exposing a lot of young people to the danger of contracting the virus. Statistics available are that in 2007, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health said HIV and AIDS prevalence had fallen to 15.6 percent from 18.1 percent in 2005 and 24.6 percent in 2003.

6. Income generating projects

In some cases the communities started income generating projects to facilitate payment of community librarians' allowances. So far the emphasis on income generating projects has been towards the sustenance of libraries to ensure that they are self supporting and not to solely rely on RLRDP and other donors. Common projects include uniform sewing, carpentry, soap making, poultry, animal husbandry, gardening etc. Though some of the projects belong to respective communities, a certain percentage of the proceeds go towards the libraries to acquire books and meet other expenses related to the library. Nyajezi school sells stationery and agricultural chemicals for a small profit. Tsatse sells stationery while Hlangabeza partitioned a garden for poultry and vegetables. Kwesengulube primary school library in Nkayi district incorporated out of school youths, who started a successful bee-keeping project as a result of reading bee keeping books found in the library.

Some schools levy each pupil a fee, usually every term which goes towards the library. Involvement of communities has also had its positive ripple effects in that while the majority of users are school teachers and pupils, school leavers and adults are increasingly benefiting from the library since the RLRDP started acquiring books relating to income generating projects. Though some adults read for leisure, particularly Shona and Ndebele novels, their speciality is materials on how to raise their level of literacy and how to start and successfully manage projects pertaining to their day to day survival and their immediate environment. Often information is shared through inter-personal communication or during community development meetings.

7. Role of Rural Women

Women constitute about 75% of RLRDP volunteer librarians and they provide the service with high commitment and unquestionable dedication. It is important to note that some of the women who volunteered as community librarians wished to advance their education and attain higher qualifications. Some of the women wanted to gain knowledge on how best to take care of their children and provide better nutrition for their families. Some of the women were involved in livelihood activities and needed knowledge on how best to benefit from such engagements. Donkwe Donkwe Wozani primary school/community library, in Matabeleland South Province came into existence after contact with RLRDP in 1990. The nerve behind the library is Jester Moyo, who, with four years of primary education volunteered to become a community librarian at its inception. Her idea was to start reading; at the age of 53 years she bought a school uniform,

went back to school, doubling up as a scholar and a community librarian at the same time. Within a few years, she sat for her grade seven examinations and passed all four subjects, attaining five units. She was the best student of her school in that year, thus earning respect from the community, teachers and pupils. Through her involvement in the library she continued reading for her Junior Certificate and Ordinary Level and later sat for examinations, again passing convincingly.

Today Mrs. Moyo does not only guide her LMC, but also guides the donkey drawn mobile library that makes errands within nearby primary and secondary schools. She received training in basic skills of librarianship from RLRDP including her participation in various other courses such as gender and development, income generating projects and training of trainers' courses. Under a Farneboskolan run Grassroots in International co-operation exchange programme she attended a three month course in Sweden, where she networked with other participants from Tanzania, South Africa, Ecuador and Nicaragua in Latin America. Mrs. Moyo later led a group of her community women for exchange programmes to Tanzania and South Africa. Jester Moyo is a shining example of the power of information in transforming lives.

Another sterling example of empowerment through rural libraries is Angella Chiweshe, community librarian of Benhura secondary school/community library in Mhondoro Ngezi, Mashonaland West Province. Benhura was affiliated to RLRDP in 1992 where Mrs. Chiweshe became its pioneer community librarian. The library was purpose built with a reading room accommodating scholars, teachers and community members. Angella Chiweshe went through basic librarianship training courses offered by RLRDP including the gender and development workshops, children's library services, income generating projects etc. Like Jester Moyo, she also led a group of women from her community on an exchange programme to South Africa and Tanzania, following her three month stay and study in Sweden under the Grassroots in International Co-operation Course under the auspices of Farneboskolan. During her time as community librarian at Benhura, Mrs. Chiweshe started studying for Ordinary Level since she had only completed primary education. She enrolled for examinations and passed five O levels with flying colours to realise her life-time dream of becoming a leader in her church. A few years later she left the library to take up full time work in the church where she became overseer of a circuit with a number churches and schools under.

Nyajezi library in Nyanga was, at its inception managed by Ms. Violet Bwanya, who co-ordinated between the community and the library. She participated in various courses including basic skills of librarianship facilitated by RLRDP. Ms. Bwanya attended a three month Grassroot in International Co-operation course in Sweden in 1994, under the auspices of Farneboskolan after which she led a group of eight women from her community on a study visit to South Africa and Tanzania.

At Skopo primary and secondary schools in Nkayi district, Mrs. Rebecca Masango was instrumental in the introduction of a school/community library in her community. Construction of the library was made possible with funding sourced by RLRDP from the Finnish Ecumenical Learning Association (SEKY). Like her other three predecessor colleagues mentioned above, she attended various courses in basic skills of librarianship offered by RLRDP. Masango also took part in the three month Grassroots in International Co-operation Course offered under

Farneboskolan in Sweden. On her return she engaged other women in her community and together they went on a study visit to South Africa and Tanzania. Various courses targeting rural women were facilitated by libraries with appropriate leadership from local women who are regular library users.

In partnership with the Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN), RLRDP initiated 'Information to Rural Women Project' where information targeted at rural women was provided. The initial project targeted 36 rural libraries, whose activities involved exchange of ideas, sharing of information and exchange visits. Leadership courses were held for rural women and as a result a number of rural women took up positions as School Development Committee Chairs, Rural District Authorities Councillors among other positions.

8. Donkey Drawn Mobile Libraries

History of project and areas of operation

The first donkey drawn mobile library was introduced by RLRDP in 1995 and started operating in Nkayi district – Matabeleland North Province. Since then more carts have been produced by various engineers under the guidance of RLRDP. Nkayi and other low-lying areas of Zimbabwe rely on donkey drawn scotch-carts as means of transport. Communities in these areas have a long history of association with donkeys and rely on them for draughts power. Donkey drawn mobile carts are made from light, but solid steel to allow for easy pulling by two or four donkeys. A children's mobile library service was introduced in 1996 as an outreach service. Children constitute the majority of rural library users, hence efforts to introduce mobile libraries that are accessible to all, including children. Children and other users with special needs – the visually impaired, audio impaired, physically handicapped and those with albinism are also catered for in the rural library service. There are currently fifteen donkey drawn mobile libraries and ten of them are designated to children. These operate in Nkayi, Bubi and Tsholotsho districts in Matabeleland North Province and Matobo District in Matabeleland South Province. In Nyanga and Mutasa Districts in Manicaland Province, there is a Bicycle Mobile Library service – since donkeys are not common in these areas. These are specialised bicycles fitted with book trunks at the back. Their operations are similar to the service provided by donkey drawn carts. Each mobile cart or bicycle service visits three to four primary schools and one or two secondary schools, reaching about 2 000 children. The carrying capacity of each mobile cart is about 1 500 books. Bicycles carry between 250 and 300 books. Two of the mobile carts are mounted with renewable solar energy to allow use of audio-visual equipment that includes a television set, computer and radio.

Concept & relevance of project

Static libraries are very expensive to construct and many rural communities cannot afford to have purpose built libraries. There are also limitations to static libraries as they cannot reach out to children in remote areas. Donkey drawn or bicycle mobile libraries do not need buildings and children can access books outside buildings or under trees. As cart librarians makes their errands they meet a lot of people on the way. In this way they can easily advertise their service. They also get ideas from out of school youths and other villagers regarding user needs. The mobile

cart is also user friendly compared to motorized mobile libraries. Donkey Drawn Mobile Cart Librarians do not need licences to drive these mobile carts. The carts are also environmentally friendly as they do not produce or emit any poisonous gases. Mobile carts are cost effective and they are a good strategy to promote a wider access to literature by children. The harsh economic condition being experienced in Zimbabwe has not affected the operations of the mobile cart service. Running costs of this service are minimal as fuel is not required to move it around.

Operations & routines of the mobile service

Each of the schools and centres that the cart or bicycle visits, has a Mobile Library Committee. The committee is responsible for the welfare of donkeys, care and maintenance of books, bicycles and the carts. There are also joint meetings by a cluster of schools that is visited by each cart or bicycle in order to discuss common challenges facing the service. A mobile library cart or bicycle time-table with visiting schedules is designed and agreed upon by the cluster committee. Each cluster committee has its rules and regulations on the operations of the mobile service. Community members through School Development Committees (SDCs) pay levies for the sustenance of the project. Some Mobile Cart Librarians receive allowances from community contributions. There are child librarian committees at each of the library centres. Child librarians monitor the use of library books by other children. They also collect information on the reading needs of children and communicate these to the main committees. RLRDP hold regular workshops for child librarians on basic library skills, drawing and painting. There has been a remarkable improvement in the pass rate among schools involved in the project. Children have improved in their reading & spoken language.

9. Knowledge Management in Rural Libraries: ICTs Package for Rural Teachers and Librarians

This package introduces trainees to basic concepts of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), starting with the role Knowledge Management plays in rural libraries through to the operation and maintenance of all hardware and software systems identified in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Syllabus (2015 – 2022). Additionally, this package provides the theory of integrating ICTs into the range of services provided by RLRDP through rural libraries. To be effective, the following is recommended:

a) The subject be studied over 5 days comprising of theory in the morning and practical laboratory sessions in the afternoon
b) This material is used in conjunction with the **Knowledge Management Manual for Rural Libraries**

Change Management during large ICT transformation is critical. This involves mobilising stakeholders, creating consensus around what has changed, addressing stakeholder resistance, creating structures for sustaining change. The topic of Change Management for those involved in implementing the Ministry's new ICT Syllabus (2015 – 2022) is given detailed treatment in the **Knowledge Management Manual for Rural Libraries**.

Rural communities are considered to be at the bottom of the pyramid with regards to information access and appropriation for developmental needs. A familiar term used to describe the disparity of uses of information technologies by different communities is the Digital Divide. Income disparity, availability of appropriate information for rural communities and availability of ICT literate personnel in rural communities fuels the Digital Divide.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education developed a comprehensive ICT Syllabus (2015 -2022) as a strategy of ensuring that all schools take part in equipping learners with ICT skills relevant for twenty-first century citizenry. The skills are critical in enabling citizens to uptake in opportunities envisaged by ICTs to improve livelihoods. However, the unavailability of ICT skills and resources in rural communities is likely to widen the Digital Divide between rural and urban communities.

RLRDP's overarching goal is to close the gap between rural and urban communities with regards to the access and utilisation of library and information services. The organisation has developed a range of resources and services which include, but are not limited to, training packages, library committees, teacher librarians and a Manual for Rural Libraries.

The introduction of the new ICT Syllabus in all schools and the digital transformation that has permeated the libraries services space has created urgency in the need to review and update RLRDP resources with the view introducing ICTs in rural communities. This training package is one such resource and it complements the Knowledge Management Manual for Rural Libraries.

Teachers and Librarians' Guide Highlights!

- Covers all the Topics in the new ICT Syllabus
- Discusses the structure of the new ICT syllabus
- Contains Section on how to implement Change Management during the implementation of the new syllabus
- Shows how to develop eLearning teaching aids as a strategy for applying ICTs in all subjects
- Discusses Business Information Systems cycle
- Shows how to provide Career Counselling about ICT Careers
- Discusses ICTs that are used for administering the schools

10. Conclusion

According the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Zimbabwe's literacy rate currently stands at 91%, one of the highest in Africa. It should be noted that a number of players including government, donor partners, NGOs, library and information services stakeholders and others – including RLRDP, have a stake in this achievement. Library and information services targeted at rural areas are essential in sustaining the attained literacy levels.

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