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Sub-theme: Community needs – Mapping and Using Community Needs

Title of the paper: Library as agent of change: a model for public libraries
Supporting Sustainable development goals to meet Community needs.

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ABSTRACT

In Kenya, as elsewhere in the world, parents sometimes lack quality time for their children. In this case children find it easy to interact with librarians and consequently confide in them. Knls Kibera, situated in the giant slum on the outskirts of Nairobi, has attracted many children due to its unique services. Children spend most of their time in the library, thus librarians are able to identify children’s needs. The library discovers and maps services that need to be provided innovatively in order to meet the needs of the community. The challenges cut across the gender and include lack of ICT, role models, empowerment programs, drug abuse, radicalization of youths, girls lacking sanitary towels and fees. The library came up with a way of curbing these challenges by providing a platform to discuss and channel change to the community. Through creative and innovative ideas, the library is an agent of change and a torch to the entire community. The library organizes empowerment programs, workshops addressing drug abuse and crime, life skills, computer trainings, career guidance, fun reading events and provides sanitary towels to girls. The librarian has reported high levels of relish from the participants.

This paper considers the experience and impact of knls Kibera library’s distinctive services to meet community needs, which began when the library opened in 2012. The first Kibera library service to use ICT was a tablet computer education programme for slum children supported by the EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) Public Library Innovation Programme. The paper argues that the library’s unique services, appropriate technology and interactive workshops offer a platform to discuss challenges experienced by the community. The library uses ICT to disseminate information and equalize opportunities for children as well as community members’ exposure to technology. The paper also discusses how knls Kibera provides services to the community, how librarians overcome challenges and explain the advantages of mapping the
community needs. This has inspired a love for reading within the slum, increased the numbers of users in the library, contributed to improved school results, reduce the number of dropouts from schools, reduce crime and adults enrolling in colleges. It argues that the knls Kibera library’s experience offers a cost-effective, efficient and replicable community service model.

Keywords: Slum, Knowledge, Technology, Community, ICT, Services

Introduction
Education and training are charged with the responsibility of creating knowledge-based society that upholds justice, democracy, accountability and encourage issue based and result oriented political engagements. It also assist the country to address gender imbalances, youth related problems and obstacles facing other vulnerable groups by equipping them with skills that will enable them to live more productive and satisfying lives. In Kenya education is recognized as the basic tool for human resources development, improving the quality of live and cultivating nationalistic values. Owing to that the libraries came up to support education, assist in research, collect, organize and disseminate information. Public libraries are key focal points of information within communities and live up to the aspirations of the society. Kenyan public libraries are appreciated as one of the key resource centers that form the knowledge pillar in a community. It is also a resource that draws people together irrespective of their backgrounds.

The education system has a major role to play in providing the ICT knowledge and skills citizens’ need, which increasingly include technology studies, technology or ICT as formal, examinable school subjects. In Kenya, the basic and secondary curricula offer a variety of technology and computer studies options. However, technology roll-out has been slow, and schools and colleges do not have enough computers or Internet connectivity to keep up with demand therefore the libraries tries to bridge the gap.

Public libraries acts as agencies for social and personal development and can be a positive agency for change in the community. This is through providing a wide range of materials to support education, businesses, environment, heath and by making information accessible to all. The public libraries can bring economic and social benefits to individuals and to the community. They contribute to the creation and maintenance of a well-informed and democratic society and help to empower people in the enrichment and development of their lives and that of the community in
which they live. The public libraries try to be aware of the issues being discussed within the community in order to provide information that will enrich the debates.

Kenya is rapidly integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into its economy. This is captured in the national planning strategy document, Kenya Vision 2030, which emphasizes the role of schools, technical colleges and universities in providing ICT training to meet future skills needs. In line with the Kenya Vision 2030, education is expected to equip citizens with understanding and knowledge that enables them to make informed decisions about their lives. Through education and knowledge, a cohesive society imbued with a culture of hard work and efficiency and one that values transparency and accountability should be produced.

The libraries should be going to their patrons, rather than waiting for them to appear in the building. After all, the inherent strength of the library profession is found in its comprehension of the value of information. The ability to select the best and most useful information and organize it into categories for easy access indicates that libraries possess a detailed understanding of what their clients need. Unfortunately, the traditional role of libraries stopped at collecting, organizing, and assisting. It did not include, in any significant form: Informing the client about the material being collected presumably on their behalf; Discussing the issues for which the material was to provide background and enlightenment; Soliciting users through extensive demonstration programs of how to use best the information collected and for what purposes; Targeting key individuals in the organization for special services so that they could convey the value of the information to others; Teaming with management of the institution on addressing problems, projects, research initiatives, and instruction as a player (policy and decision-maker) who brings the significant perspective of the knowledge and information provider (librarian) to the table; or Stretching the job description of the librarian or the organizational role of the library to fit better the needs of the organization it serves. These six underutilized actions need to be implemented intelligently if libraries want to remain useful. To accomplish this transition, libraries cannot be passive organizations.

Libraries are community centers or hubs, a place for information and ideas, somewhere to meet, open to all, free information and welcoming. They are at the centre of community life alongside and in partnership with, many council and other local services. Libraries are open and offer free

communication centers with news, local history, Wi-Fi and or terminals to access the internet. A family place, community hub, business centre, a place with which the whole community identifies. Public libraries play a vital role in the lives of individuals and their communities. The community library acts as a vehicle for access to knowledge, ideas and information and as a democratic service open and available to all clients. The public library is a trusted and recognized feature of the local area to be visited by all community members.

Kibera library when it opened its doors to the community it realized that “Turning outward” was the only way to remain relevant whereby it emphasized a shift in orientation from internal (library-focused) to external (community-focused). This change is achieved through practical steps: taking measures to better understand communities; changing processes and thinking to make the library’s work more community-focused; being proactive to community issues; and putting community aspirations first.

**Access to Information**

Information is essential in today’s global society for providing services to the community, doing business, and dealing with personal and family needs. The Kibera library has a key position in the information world, collecting, organizing and exploiting information, operating as a guide to information for the individual and the community and as a trusted source of access to information of all categories. Kibera library staffs are able to provide the correct information, or access to the relevant information resource, for their community users. This is achieved through having skilled information staff, access to books, journals, newspapers and other published information, both online and in print and identifying and sourcing authoritative information resources. The library has a responsibility to collect and make available to local community as well cultural information to ensure that content rarely collated elsewhere can be accessed.

**ICT in the library**

The Kibera tablet computers project which was the first of its kind to be offered by Kenya National Library Service was aimed to support education in schools. The project was launched in 2012 with funding support from the [Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) Public Library Innovation](https://www.eifl.org/public-library-innovation)
Programme (EIFL-PLIP),\(^2\) and was implemented in partnership with the educational agency, eLimu.\(^3\) It also aimed to encourage disadvantaged children to use technology to advance their learning, and to see the value of technology to their future careers. The project opened a new life to the community since ICT skills are highly important in this modern computer world. The library has partnered with neighbouring schools to offer computer lessons in order to equip students with the necessary skills.

The library also has a computer section where youth and adults are trained on ICT. This is aimed to empower them with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes like responsibility, hard work, honesty accountability etc. The library also received (50) fifty e-readers from the Berkly family who are the sponsors of the facility in honour of their late son, David Alistar who died in a Pan AM Flight 103 crash that was involved in the 21st December 1988 terrorist Lockerbie bombing. However, the demand is higher than the resources available forcing the library to start looking for support. There is need for the library to get more desktops and tablets so that the devices to students’ ratio can be reasonable. Through these trainings the impact of the library is realized because children are improving in school performances since higher numbers are admitted in national and provincial secondary schools. The youth and the adults also visit the library to search for information from the internet. The youth are also trained on how to apply for jobs online and the community supports the library saying that its helping them to change their way of living.

**Role models and Empowerment programs**

Life in the slum is difficult such that those who succeed consider not going back. Students like seeing and talking to people who have been before them and have managed to succeed hence make a life. The children need a role model who feels good about themselves, if they too, are to grow with a positive self – image.

\(^2\)EIFL is EIFL is an international not-for-profit organisation dedicated to enabling access to knowledge through libraries in more than 60 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Learn more at [www.eifl.net](http://www.eifl.net).

\(^3\)eLimu is a non-governmental organization promoting ICT in education, based in Nairobi. See [http://e-limu.org/](http://e-limu.org/)
Due to this reason, the library has initiated motivational programs that help young people meet their role models. Together with the library volunteers, the library invites prominent individuals who have made it from the slums to come and share their stories with students and youth.

The library also organizes various empowerment programs which include money management, career guidance, equipping oneself for job, starting and running initiatives and many more. The youth come together and discuss the topics they need to be covered. This has made the community to make the library be there second home.

**Drug abuse & Radicalization of youths**

As stated earlier, most young people in this area find it easy to confide in librarians as parents either lack time or are too harsh to be approached. Through this, the library is able to know through the victims or their friends how drug abuse is slowly killing young people. The library has started slowly to initiate a counseling and rehabilitation program that will help deal with this menace which eliminating the youth very early in life. It starts by identifying the victims and connecting them to friendly counselors to take them through sessions with the aim of helping them to stop using the drugs. Away from dealing with the affected ones, the library organizes for sessions on drug abuse for students in order to curb the problem before it bursts. This is aimed to help reduce school dropout cases caused by drug abuse amongst the young people.

In Kibera slum children and youth are exposed to several challenges on daily bases. Underground and illegal groups using drugs are increasing everyday with their major targets being young boys and girls. The groups seduce their targets with money and other promises they know are basic needs to their targets. Many times, children fall prey to these groups because of lack of proper guidance on how to avoid associating with the groups. Through these groups, they engage in criminal and terror activities, drug and substance abuse and immoral acts like gang rape. This eventually leads to school dropout, arrests and imprisonments and early deaths. The library is committed on addressing this issue through special programs targeting radicalization of youth.
Girls’ club

The library has organized a girls club whereby programs are organized for them. They are trained on life skills, good citizenship, environmental conservation, civics and human rights. Professionals are invited to give lectures to them and later given a chance to discuss challenges facing them. One of the daunting challenges affecting them is lack of sanitary towels. The library through its girls programs has identified this as a gap that needs to be filled. With little pay and hand to mouth jobs, parents in informal sectors have to debate about getting food for their families and getting other basic staff for their girls. The result is that several parents can’t afford to purchase for their girls these monthly needs. For some time, the library has partnered with other well wishers to try and provide them with this basic need. Due to increase of the needy girls, the library is looking forward for more well wishers coming on board to assist in filling this noble gap.

Assisting to keep children in school

As much as library offers a favorable place for reading and studying, children need to be kept in school during school days and hours. However, at times librarians find themselves in tricky situations when students face them requesting for financial assistance to facilitate their school fees. Most of these students are bright and watching their dreams and ambitions going to waste pains. There are some cases where the library has assisted through looking for sponsors for the children to pay fees for them and more need to be done as the number is rising. The library has also tried to partner with institutions that offer education scholarships to students, but some situations might be curbed. The library is determined to play a major role in trying to bridge the gap within the community although it’s a difficult task.

Outreach Programs to schools

Outreach is offering of library services outside of the physical library space. The librarian carry library materials to go and meet serve the community. The library organises programme of activities targeting the intended population, offer advice to children in the community, publicity to community and taking information to external community. Kibera community library offer this service to the following groups; pre-school children, primary, secondary schools, ‘out of school’ children, children in hospital, young offenders in prison/remand homes and prisoners.
The library reaches them through regular visits to schools with collection of books, tablets and e-readers, bringing school groups into the library, operates School Book Box scheme, link to International Book/Literacy days whereby activities are organised in partnership with other organizations, reading tents, Inter-school competitions, visiting children homes and through Book Clubs.

Librarians organize for regular visits to schools and other times activities are organized in the library and schools are invited. This assists the librarian to create a good working relationship, help him/her to enjoy his/her work and have an impact to the community. The library also follows up usage of library materials by different schools.

**Organized talks in the library**

The library also organizes and invites prominent people who give talks on career guidance to students, debate sessions and other people who advice on how to be innovative and creative. Kibera library is a well positioned to help facilitate connections, provide gathering spaces, increase visibility, and advocate for underserved groups. Children are allowed to learn about each other’s differences and build friendships across those differences hence promote cohesiveness.

**Enterprise Programs**

Kibera library provide information to business people in the community. In the digital era information abounds and there are even more aspects of business life that the library support. Growth is now weighted to entrepreneurs, start-ups and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). For many, the need for space, reliable Wi-Fi access, information resources and a skilled information manager, make the library an ideal venue for work, meetings, and ideas. People who are self-employed, entrepreneurs, start-ups and SMEs, the library operates as their workplace. The library service offer incubation space for the community people, provide working and meeting space, free Wi-Fi access, information resources, a skilled information manager, learner support and access to information retrieval expertise. Kibera library helps to link people with jobs by providing the resources and support to develop employability and job seeking skills.
Health and well-being

The quality of life is determined by various factors. Well-being refers to positive and sustainable characteristics which enable individuals and organizations to thrive and flourish. Such characteristics are only defined in part by income and wealth; they are further determined by life skills, health, work, learning and by an overarching sense of being in control of one’s life. In health matters people want to know more, to feel in charge of their well-being, understanding conditions and being informed about treatments and medications. The library works as a resource and a source of support through partnering and collaborating with health organizations like Kenya Aids control Council, hospitals etc. The users are requested to forward their mobile numbers and health information is sent to them through their phones free of charge. The development of books on prescription and the value of targeted reading materials has become an increasingly valued aspect of library provision.

Challenges

Inadequate space:

The library has organized with schools and other community members through timetabling when to visit the in order to use computers and e-readers. Limiting the number of children to visit the library per session is done in order to offer a chance to many users as possible.

Threat and breakage

The library has a secure cabinet where the computer tablets and e-readers are kept. The community was trained in order for them to own the library. They also trained on spreading the word that all the resources in the library belong to the community whereby they should use them to improve their standards of living.

Communication barriers

There are communication barriers between the community members and the librarians due to interference from local language. The library has to make sure there is an interpreter in order for the user to be explained using the language he / she understands.
Distance from the library
Some community members who want to visit the library are very far from the library as well as some schools. The library organizes with the members when to visit the library or at times when the librarians would visit the schools.

Shortage of staff
More staff is needed to facilitate the many activities organized by the library i.e seminars, Workshops, computer trainings, children reading tents, visiting users in children homes, prisons etc.

Achievements
One of the outstanding cases of the library is that of Lincoln Amulega, a youth who sat for Investment and Securities Technicians (IST) examination which is usually examined by KASNEB body. He has been using resources from Kibera library since he could not afford to pay college fees. The young gentleman emerged to be the best overall in 1st level I examined in June 2014 (KASNEB news line, issue no.4: October – December 2014). Lincoln said that the learning and his good performance can only be attributed to Kibera Community Library. He encouraged other youth members to continue using the library in order to learn and change their lives for better. He said the library opened up his mind and made it possible for him to sat for the examination because he realized the library offers what he lacked most i.e. space, technology and content. He said that the Kibera library is touching and changing lives of many community members.

Also there has been remarkable improvement in the education standards of schools that use the library resources. This is based on testimonies from some head teachers and children who visit the library regularly. All the schools improved in 2015 KCPE compared to 214 examination for example Anajali primary which scored a mean 323.24 ; Hope Academy scored 244.08; Langata West scored 312.25; Ngei Primary scored 321.27; St. Stephens 224.7 to mention but a few.

4KASNEB news line, issue no.4: October – December 2014

5The KCPE examination takes place at the end of primary school and determines entry to secondary school.
Many children from the schools in the settlement managed to secure form one places in provincial and national schools hence changing the future of the children.

**Impact of the library to the community:**

- The school going children and youth are able to demonstrate effectiveness of information and communication technology (ICT) use in supporting classroom teaching.
- Three quarter of the school going children interviewed in a library survey, reported that the library support them to improve in English, mathematics and science. This is because the library provide computer tablets, e-readers, space, internet and information materials which assist classroom work.
- Provides space for learning, research, holding workshops, seminars, and meetings for the entire community.
- Prepare children and youth for work in the job markets where ICT’s, particularly computers, internet and related technologies are becoming more and more ubiquitous. Technological literacy or the ability to use ICT’S effectively and efficiently, is thus seen as representing a competitive edge in an increasingly globalizing employment.
- Kibera community being connected to the rest of the world because of provision of internet.
- Communication channels opened hence increased. This is because community is able to communicate freely through email, discussion groups etc. in the library.
- Library earns support from parents, teachers, and community at large in Kibera.
- Volunteers coming in to assist librarians to train the children, youth and adults in the library.
- The community members have learnt to share resources through the skills they gain during trainings.
- Community members and children gain ICT literacy skills, confidence and enthusiasm. They are able to use computer tablets, desktops and e-readers with confidence.
- Community members are able to access up to date information from the computers and e-readers on their own.
- Children and youth are learning about life skills, being good citizens and democracy hence change their characters for better. This was noted by the elders from the community.
• Gain understanding and analytical skills, including improvements in reading.
• Encouragement of independent and active learning and self-responsibility for learning.
• Better data handling skills and increased ability to understand on how the community members can improve their day to day life by integrating ICT into their businesses.
• Facilitate creativeness and innovativeness to all members of the community hence starting small businesses.

Conclusion

Kibera library has changed lives of many people in the community. This is because it’s able to equip the community with knowledge and trainings on how to utilize ICT skills and improve their standards of living. The community has learnt that the library is a store of knowledge, has ICT equipment hence an agent of change if used wisely. The impact of the library especially to the youth and children in the informal settlement is immeasurable, since it goes beyond learning especially when using computers and e-readers. Interviews conducted by the library to the youth and adults revealed gratitude of the chance given to them to learn and gain knowledge with their children, trainings offered, space, information resources provided, computers and e-readers. Kibera library has become a second home to many community members hence seen as a centre for expansion and growth because it also assists in building social cohesion in the settlement.