Public Library Changing Scenario with A National Overview Of Tanzania

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Abstract. Public libraries are inclusive institutions created for everyone to equally and freely access information for educational, social and cultural development; indeed that is the essence of inclusion. An informed society exercises democratic rights and plays a vigorous role in the society through democratic participation and understanding, improved decision making and reduce the danger of human rights violations. However, productive contribution and the development of democracy depend on acceptable education and unlimited access to thought, culture and information. Freedom of access to information (to use, share and distribute) is a right praised by society, but the majority of the population in Tanzania do not have access to information. The aspects of information exclusion in Tanzania include literacy levels and language of publications, physical access to libraries, challenged persons, ICT skills, connectivity and funding problems. Information exclusion and inclusion debates have emerged as strong issues at national level by different scholars. Social information exclusion offends human dignity, denies information seekers their fundamental human rights which threatens the democracy of any nation. Librarians in Tanzania therefore have a greater opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the realization of comprehensive information including.

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1. Introduction

Discussion of the concept of public libraries would bear less meaning, if global emphasis on freedom of access to information and the right to information are not mentioned here. The right of access to information is considered as a crucial human right and useful tool for individual, societal prosperity, freedom and development. An informed society exercises it democratic rights and plays a vigorous role in the society. However, productive contribution and the development of democracy depend on acceptable education and unlimited access to thought, culture and information (Kinya, 2011). Freedom of access to information (to use, share and distribute) is a right praised by some as the very core of the information society, and accused by others of being a merely formal standard with little practical reality in a world where the majority of the population does not have access to information (Pateman, 2010). With access to information, people should freely express themselves, since freedom of expression is one of the basic conditions for society's progress and for the development of every man. The effective implementation of freedom of expression requires citizens' access to express opinions and to seek information in the public sphere; hence one of the current biggest challenges is to ensure that the exclusive charter of the information society is replaced by inclusiveness. This is something that any popular government in the world should pursue as echoed by some researchers who pointed out that "*a popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy*", or perhaps both (Pateman, 2010; Lor, 2003).

Information plays a significant role in planning the execution of plans and overall decision making in all sectors of any national development plans. Explaining the coming of Libraries and Information Services to Africa and Tanzania, Kaungamno and Ilomo say "*the first stage of the transfer of the library tradition of Africa was via the colonial powers and it took place in the nineteenth century although it was sporadic*". The year dates back to 1945 (Kaungamno & Ilomo 1989) From there on the influence of International Conferences on the development of Library, Documentation and Information Services has been continuous in the East Africa region and in particular

Tanzania with varying degrees and levels. Since library and information is a crosscutting sector touching all other sectors of development in society.

In Tanzania, just three years after independence the country witnessed the opening of the then Tanganyika Library Services Board, a network of public library service after the enactment of the Tanganyika Library Services Board by the Parliament in 1963. Support agents including the British Council, UNESCO, UNDP and many others have contributed to the development of Library and Information service in the country. As such it can be justifiable to say that the library sector recognition has been there since the colonial period. The issue at stake is how it has fared since independence up to the present age especially with the emerging Information and Communication Technologies. With the new developments it is no longer feasible to talk about the library sector on its own, without showing how the new technologies have affected or dwarfed it. There are some pundits who have even dared to predict the "*demise of the book*" Without placing too much argument about such schools of thought, it is important to note how the new technologies effectively or enhance the dissemination of information. All in all it can be safely stated that the library and the Librarian for that matter will not sit down and watch while technology attempts to wipe the book. Rather it is for all stakeholders of the library sector to swim with the boat never allow to be swept by the new technologies but become part and parcel of the same.

2. Status of Librarianship Training

Fifty one years of independence in Tanzania has witnessed exponential growth of library and information services in various spheres of development. A number of governmental, non-governmental, research, academic, schools, community, religious and private libraries and information centres have been established. A number of these libraries are already automated or in the process of automation. Some of the libraries are manned by well trained staff in that direction. Notable among them include the widespread network of public libraries which are under the Tanzania Library Services Board which is now covered in all the regions of Tanzania. Likewise we have witnessed an increasing number of training institutions for library and information workers at various levels including: School of Library Archives and Documentation Studies (SLADS) offers certificate and diploma, Tumaini University offers bachelors degree and University of Dar es Salaam offer Masters and PhD degree studies. What is conspicuously lacking is the program related to postgraduate diploma in the field. This in a way is a limitation because students graduating from Tanzanian Universities and wishing to pursue librarianship and information service for a career do not have a direct local institution for the same. As such they have to look for the programmes outside Tanzania which are very expensive. Likewise assistance in the form of scholarships has been dwindling year after year. In this case stakeholders need to come together to find a solution for this anomaly.

3. Supportive Policies for the Library and Information Sector

3.1 Government Policies

There are a number of governmental and non governmental policies which support establishments of library and information centres. For instance; it is the government policies that all schools particularly secondary schools establish a library in their premises. This is regardless of whether the schools are public or private. Taking into account the number of schools existing in the country it is obvious that the opportunities for the library sector in this case are enormous. Likewise, other sectors of development have policies requiring establishment of library and information centres. The construction industry for example advocates creation of a central reservoir of information to serve all the stakeholders of the industry. That is the reason why the National Construction Council being the institution vested with the responsibility of co-ordinating the development of the construction sector in the country has been given the mandate to collect and organize all the information related any aspect of the sector's development. The Act establishing the National Construction Council compels "*anybody doing or intending to carry out research, producing any publication related to the development of the construction sector to deliver, at his own expenses the information to the Construction Council*" There is actually a fine related to noncompliance with this requirement. As a result the NCC information center is there to act as a clearing house for information in the construction sector. Other sectors of development have similar policies which create opportunities for mushrooming sectoral library and information centres.

3.2 Development Agenda

There are other development agenda in the country including Vision 2025, Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), MKUKUTA aimed at poverty reduction, Public Private Partnerships and many others which are related to the development of specific sectors including health, transportation, mining, industry and commerce and many others. These recognize the importance of library and information sector to support planning and decision making within the sectors and there are already libraries established for this purpose.

4. The Role of Public Libraries in Achieving MDGs

In Tanzania, information professionals are in line with Iya that "*Libraries are regarded as agencies through which sources of information of accumulated knowledge and experience are selected, organised, preserved and disseminated to those need them*" (Iya, 2009:97). Libraries are pre-occupied by three major tasks: the need to make information more easily available and easily accessible for use: need to increase availability of current as well as archives information in multidisciplinary fields including local content; and the need to minimize duplication of efforts in developing/generating information and learning resources. As agencies for social change, political, economical and educational institutions, libraries in Tanzania considered as among the information vehicles are considered to have a potential role in enhancing the achievement of the MDGs. The following are some of initiatives roles that libraries in Tanzania as information agencies towards attainment of such goals.

4.1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Public libraries particularly central library has made efforts of disseminating of technological packages to the farming communities for facilitating the efforts for eradication of poverty and hunger. Public libraries also facilitate poverty reduction and employment through dissemination of information related to opportunities for employment, places of studies, organizations that provide training on various skills.

4.2 Promote gender equality

One of the main agenda of the government of Tanzania is to eliminate gender disparity in all sectors. Through the provision of information advocating for gender equality public libraries have given a role to re-orient and influence public opinion in this respect. Libraries design specific information literacy programmes aiming at building capacity for lifelong learning school girls to excel in higher education levels. This has been done particularly in those regions and district women are regarded as appendages that have no voice in their community or tribes.

4.3 Improve maternal and other diseases health

Tanzania mission 2025 is to have access to reproductive health to all communities; public libraries have given a role to play in improving maternal health through the production of reproductive health education through provision of reproductive health information to the community using appropriate packaging. During its annual meetings Tanzania Library Association (TLA), one of the sub themes is about health information management of which expert from this field presents their papers.

4.4 Achieve Education in various levels

Public libraries carry different types of information resources that can be used to equip pupils, students and other learners with lifelong skills for the betterment of their living conditions. The Government of Tanzania has injected some fund to empower public libraries to provide effective library services to pupils and students without discrimination to build a good foundation for a literary and democratic society. A literary society is crucial for the attainment of the MDGs as no matter how much is provided financially, if the expected beneficiaries are not enlightened, it will be wastage of resources.

5. Public Libraries and Information Inclusion

In the context of provision of information to all, social information inclusion refers to "*giving all people access to the information, services and facilities that they have a right to, and making sure that they are fully aware of and*

know how to take up their entitlement to these services" (MLA, 2007, p.9). Social inclusion has various benefits that include:

5.1 Democratic participation and understanding
Provision of information to all members of a society is essential for public participation in all activities pertaining to the society. The public is truly able to participate in the democratic process only when they have information about the activities and policies of the government. When the public knows the reasons behind some of the government decisions, its support is guaranteed and misunderstandings and dissatisfaction are reduced. The main role of public in Tanzania is to provide information to the community so as they will be informed, as a result they can be in position to participate in different social, economical and political move of the nation (Tweve 2012).

5.2 Improved decision making process
Past researches indicate that decisions that are made public due to right to information laws are more likely to be based on objective and justifiable reasons. The society of Tanzania cannot make relevant decision making if they have no alternatives, the alternatives always are there when the decision make is information enough. Public libraries therefore should observe that since the enforcement of the right to information to all, decision makers focused on the need to base decisions on relevant information.

5.3 Reduce danger of human rights violations
Right to information to improve the enforcement of many economic and political rights is greatly enhanced. In addition, access to individual records ensures such records are accurate and decisions are not based on out-of-date or irrelevant information. The right to information has other advantages that include exposing corruption, making government and the economy more efficient; uncover mismanagement of food supplies; making economic shortages less likely; and expose environmental hazards that threaten health and livelihoods.

6. Challenges Facing Public Libraries in Tanzania

So far we have seen that Library sector is recognized in almost all the sectors of development and is a crosscutting issue. However there are various challenges facing the sector as enumerated hereunder:

6.1 Literacy levels and language of publications
Levels of literacy and the predominance of principal world languages such as English as the language of printed and online information are elements of exclusion. Many oral communities are not able to make meaning through interaction with printed resources, and hence are unable to participate in the envisaged information society. Those oral communities consider interaction with information resources as a one way communication system, quite discontinuous with indigenous forms of communication. To tackle this challenge of literacy, TLS, which is the major public library in Tanzania, through various reading campaigns, provides opportunities for communities to enhance their reading and information seeking habits, and therefore sustain literacy. It is clearly known that, an informed individual has more advantages on proper decision towards development issue compared to an illiterate.

6.2 Physical Access to libraries
According to Kiondo (1998) distance from the library is a crucial factor in its use. The nearer the library, the more people will use it; and the further it is away; the less people will use it. Their research on Camel libraries affirmed this when the findings indicated that more users were within a distance of 1km from where public library services were being offered. Many libraries in Tanzania are concentrated in cities and major towns in Tanzania. This leaves the remote parts of the country excluded from access to information that is crucial for the communities to make informed decisions (Jemo, 2008) as an example from Kenya. Over the years, the Government of Tanzania through the Tanzania Library Services (TLS) has tried to eliminate this kind of exclusion by opening community and mobile libraries. Currently, TLS has over 50 branches spread countrywide. However, much more needs to be done because there are still large populations in exclusion that need to be included. Thus, among the 26 regions in Tanzania, there are still many districts where such libraries have not yet been established. It should be noted that Tanzania economy is backed on agriculture, of which are found in rural areas (districts).

6.3 Challenged Persons

The available public libraries in Tanzania were not designed keeping in mind the needs of the physically and visually challenged information users. This disadvantaged group form part of the society that needs information to enable them participates in all areas of national development. They also need to be more sensitized about their rights; something that can happen only if they have access to relevant information.

6.4 ICT skills

Many public libraries today have developed into what we call hybrid type; providing both print and electronic resources, while putting more emphasis on electronic resources due to their ability to be accessed by multiple users concurrently.

Inadequate ICT skills and support to use electronic resources is however a significant factor in preventing certain persons from accessing information in Tanzania. Potential information users in many of the disadvantaged groups are often prevented from making use of ICTs because of low levels of computing and technology skills. This challenge is made more complex by attitudinal barriers with some excluded citizens pointing out that computers are for "*brainy*" people, for males, for the young and are difficult to use (Muddiman et al, 2001). Others feel that computers are unsafe because of the amount of unsuitable material on the internet (Botha et al, 2002,p. 22). Further research has indicated some disparities between male and female use in ICTs with access to the internet by male counterparts being greater in developing countries than female (United Nations , 2000). This has had serious implications, especially for women in the participation of national and global economic growth.

6.5 Connectivity

Though internet facilities are fairly spread in Tanzania like any other country in East Africa, there is a remarkable concentration in urban centres with institutions far remote from cities experiencing difficulties in getting connection (Mutula,2002**)**, an evidence of low level of exclusion with regard to ICT network. Hence appropriate technology for rural and disadvantaged communities is lacking. Even in the areas where communities are connected and have the skill to access online information they face another challenge of low speed internet and limited bandwidth. For example, to open a document to read takes quite a while because of the snail speed of the internet.

6.6 Funding

The planning, executing and implementation of any programme requires considerable financial support. However, the extent of financial support whether at local government or provincial government level in developing countries and particularly in Tanzania, has not always been consistent (Raju, 1995, p.194). Survey findings of the public library sector in Tanzania revealed inadequate funding and the consequential negative impact on important aspects of public library provision (Leach, 1998). A memorandum drawn up by the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) and directed at various ministers noted that the public library services have been steadily declining and deteriorating as a result of legislative and funding issues resulting from restructuring of government at national and provincial levels. Public library funding challenges were further emphasized by Ford (2004) who pointed out that funding is one of the major challenges for public libraries around the world. Without adequate funds, public libraries are not able to acquire enough information resources to meet the needs of an inclusive society.

7. Bridging the Information Gap and the Way Forward

Librarians as Information providers can make available a variety of information collections which can be used for various physical public library locations. A range of publications and access formats can be accommodated, from remote login catalogues and indexes to the provision of electronic copies of the entire collection or works, in print or other formats (Muddiman et al, 2001). Librarians have knowledge and experiences to build a well-balanced collection to meet social, political and economic interests of the society. This can be enhanced by giving special consideration in the provision of information to predominantly oral rural communities in Tanzania.

Librarians need to shift focus on documents and focus on information seekers**.** Traditional librarianship has been based on selecting materials to fill public library shelves and then wait for information seekers to visit the facility in

search of information. On the contrary, in order for the library personnel to effectively meet information seekers diverse life needs, the information services have to be informed by the communities in which the libraries operate, and information needs to be based on regular assessment processes.

Repackaging the product of reality is essential considering that communities is rich with information that is in oral form that needs to be captured and repackaged (manuscripts and print) in the appropriate media such as video, digital photos, and tapes in a collaborative and ethical manner. This should be based on the understanding of the communities to which the information service is being provided.

Librarians should become researchers to enable them to frequently interact with library users and prompt them to define their information needs. It is the responsibility of the librarian to then prioritize highly relevant information from a pool of interesting information according to user preferences (Kenny, 2002). In addition, the librarian should identify through community profiles and other methodologies such as needs analysis, all groups and individuals that are socially excluded or are at risk of information exclusion for inclusion.

Librarians should effectively play the role of a reference and referral information manager. This will involve directing members of the knowledge community to outside information when appropriate and maintain high level information about sources outside the community (Ibid). A reference librarian needs to be widely knowledgeable in terms of resources and where they can be found for use and appropriately directing information seekers to relevant information resources.

Librarians through their professional Associations such as a Tanzania Library Association (TLA) should establish a Council Committee on social information exclusion. This Council would be charged with the responsibility of highlighting the plight of those socially excluded, draw up strategies for narrowing the exclusion gap and come up with progress reports. The Council should actively engage the socially excluded people through involving them in the planning, implementation and monitoring of services through performance indicators and targets to measure success achieved in tackling social exclusion.

The image and identity of a public library are also an important factor when discussing social inclusion matters. The connotation of some of the public library names is unwelcoming. The librarian can positively influence this by considering local measures such as renaming the libraries, (for example Community resource centres, Idea stores and many more). This is in line with Ward (1996) idea of changing names of libraries when he pointed out that the term "*mobile information delivery systems*" is more appropriate than the "*mobile libraries*". The rebranding of a traditional public library name gives it a new image that is proactive, friendly, relevant and easily accessible environment. Other library practices and procedures should be reviewed to ensure they are not barriers to information access. For instance, procedures of becoming public library members should not be over-bureaucratic. Librarians should also establish more self-help public access terminal to overcome barriers to use experienced by some excluded potential information users.

Librarians need to be careful when planning for new public libraries. Priority should be given to those libraries serving communities in greatest need. Relocation and collocation with community centres, schools, leisure centres and other centres used by socially excluded people should be considered in order to improve the impact of public libraries in tackling social exclusion (Pateman, 2010). Working with neighbouring authorities to effectively deliver services to socially excluded communities may be an appropriate action for librarians to take.

Collection development needs to be critically examined to ensure that it is comprehensive enough and relevant to the community which the library serves. The policy should be based on the needs and interests of local potential information users, reflecting diversity of society as well as defined purpose, scope and content of the collection (Kinya, 2011). Librarians also need to liaise with material suppliers (writers, publishers, booksellers etc.) to identify the range of materials available for socially excluded people and gaps in that provision.

To remain relevant, Librarians should draw up ICT plans outlining how the needs of those excluded communities and individuals are to be prioritized (Jemo, 2008).Take a case in Kenya Mutula (2002, p.3) puts it that *"wider Internet connectivity can enhance Kenya's economic growth meaning more people spending more time on the Internet and many organizations using the Internet to do business and the creation of many technical related jobs"* Tanzania is in the same situation. It is therefore the responsibility of librarians to improve connectivity, increase access, through the use of multiple competing technologies, public and community access points, and sharing of best practices. Public library human resources should also be developed through ICT trainings, enhanced awareness of decision makers, and expansion of ICT learning opportunities to the rural, poor, and disenfranchised (Wolff, 2005).

8. Recommendations

Generally a library and information policy in Tanzania should be able to bring the following benefits:

- To bridge the gaps in existing information infrastructure;
- To institutionalize and coordinate various information services;
- To create a legislative machinery to provide for and promote a coordinated library and information activities;
- To mobilize financial and material support from local and national leaders to support information services;
- To establish appropriate information personnel development programmes (training);
- To facilitate access to information by all members of Tanzanian society;
- To promote wider utilization of information in all sectors of development through information marketing programmes, user education, user sensitization and popularization of information as a national resource;
- To ensure that information services and resources are organized and managed to serve better priority areas in national development.

9. Conclusion

It has been revealed from this paper that library and information is recognized as a sector to a considerable extent in Tanzania. However, it has been pointed out that what is conspicuously lacking is an explicit policy for the library and information sector. Stakeholders are therefore urged to cooperate and affect the formulation of a policy for the library sector. Benefits related to such a formulation has been enumerated and all are geared at overall development of the country.

The status of training librarianship has been established in different level of education in different institutions. The paper has listed some of developmental agenda and the role of public libraries have played. Some of developmental issues are eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, promote gender equality, improve maternal and other diseases and achieve education at various levels. Factors and contribution of public libraries have been identified with the notion that, in Tanzania information exclusion is real, but some efforts are underway to improve the situation. There are a number of challenges facing public libraries in Tanzania some of the are literary levels, language of publications, physical access, ICT skills, funding and connectivity. The paper ends with the idea of bridging the information gap and the way forward and recommendations.

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