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The library as a tool for development: the case of Zimbabwe

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Abstract
The paper analyses the role of libraries in society and how they contribute to the development of the societies in which they operate. The paper is presented in the following format: a brief background of Zimbabwe's developmental goals; definition of. development and its indicators; definition of the term library with a brief background of libraries in Zimbabwe; brief discussion on literacy development in Zimbabwe; a look at the five types of libraries in Zimbabwe with case studies on each of them especially as they relate to literacy and education; conclusion highlighting problems faced by libraries and how best they can be addressed.

INTRODUCTION
Libraries, if well utilized and equipped, can foster the development of society through the provision of relevant information to the appropriate audience. In Zimbabwe libraries work to assist the country in meeting its developmental goals through the provision of relevant information to all levels of society.

Besides her own home grown developmental goals, Zimbabwe also subscribes to a number of regional and international developmental programs of which libraries play a pivotal role as they are the vehicles or instruments of information collection and dissemination. Notable international goals include the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which emphasize various issues including primary education, eradication of poverty and fighting HIV/AIDS among other major diseases.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), an agenda of the African Union, has expected outcomes of economic growth and development, increased employment, and reduction in poverty and inequality, but these cannot be achieved without appropriate education and literacy programs of which libraries are key players as information providers

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) recently came up with a long term visioning document, The Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP), whose core focus is on mainstreaming poverty reduction. The RISDP also identified key intervention areas, and listed among the cross-sectoral intervention areas are information and communications technology, statistics, science and technology.

Since 1980, Zimbabwe has embarked on a number of developmental programs starting with the Growth and Equity Strategy of 1981, the Zimbabwe Transitional National Development Plan, 1982-1985, Zimbabwe First five-year National Development plan, 1986-1990.The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme(ESAP) was adopted in 1991 against a background of factors, this was then replaced by the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), 1998-2000. This was followed by the Millennium Economic Recovery Programme (MERP) in 2001, which was then replaced by the current National Economic Revival Programme (NERP): Measures to Address the Current Challenges.

For all these goals to be achieved there is need for provision of relevant information to all sectors involved, from the policy makers right down to the grassroots. Libraries are therefore essential vehicles of channeling information to the relevant sectors of the nation

Zimbabwe is currently faced with two major challenges that can be overcome by the provision of relevant information. The first challenge is to equip its new farmers under the land reform programme, with knowledge and equipment so they are able to continue with viable agricultural production. The second challenge is to win the war against the HIV/AIDS pandemic which not only threatens to undo development of the past 24 years since Zimbabwe's independence, but also any further development as it affects all sectors of society.

Libraries Defined
A lot of definitions have been brought up in defining libraries. Banda argues that it is important to take libraries, not as collections of books and places meant for reading environments only. He says "Sometimes when people think of a library, they think of books and reading. This results in those who are illiterate distancing themselves from the library as they do not consider it beneficial to them."[Banda, N.A., 1998:5] This is a very important observation because libraries have an important role in the promotion of literacy and the illiterate should be encouraged to make use of library resources and engage in literacy programmes. A library can therefore be taken as a place of interaction, where people can get information to strengthen or dispel their views, where they can get the opportunity to research and get entertainment. There is consensus that a library is an information unit that is concerned with the collection, processing, dissemination, storage and retrieval of information. Lundu states that:
    i.   A library facilitates access to recorded information;
    ii.   Information is interdisciplinary and multidimensional;

iii.   The library staff must be aware of changes taking place in the society where it operates;
iv.   A library is by nature a problem oriented organization ready to respond to the needs of the society in which it functions;
v.   It contains aspects of collection, storage and preservation of information and is essentially one of the many channels of information [Lundu, 1996: 69]

Development Defined

In simple terms development can be defined as "a process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage(especially a more advanced or mature stage"(www.cogsci.princetonedu/cgi-bin/wbwn).

The three basic dimensions of human development can be stated as follows
i.   A long and healthy life as measured by life expectancy at birth
ii.   Knowledge as measured by the adult literacy rate (with two third weight) and the average years of schooling (with one third weight)
iii.   A decent standard as measured by mean income. [IDS.2003: 96]

The above list sets out 'knowledge' (with schooling and literacy as the indicators) as being one of the key capabilities of human development. This can be fully understood from the argument, "lack of education or high illiteracy implies that a person may not easily access information and is therefore unable to make informed decisions." [UNDP.2000]This emphasises the need for education and access to information as vital for human development. The library becomes the most appropriate institution for the provision of such information and so plays a major role in the development of a nation.
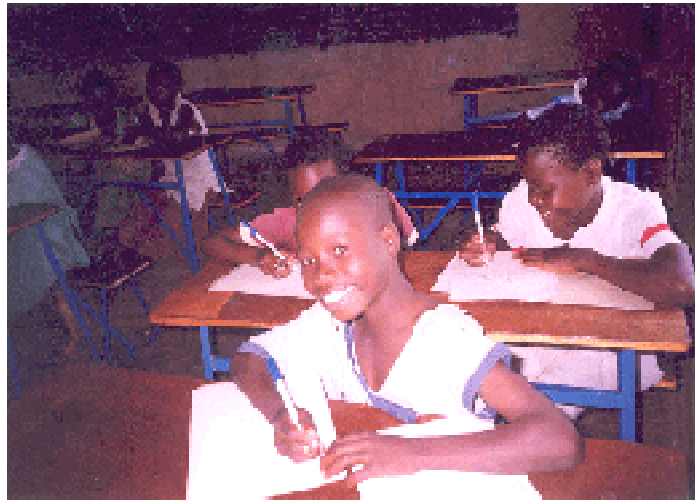
Libraries and Literacy

Literacy is taken mainly as the ability to read and write or a condition associated with reading and writing. However, it should be noted that the definition of the term should not be allowed to remain shallow but accommodate the fact that literacy also counts for the ability to plan one's present and future life and live up to it. In this context, one who is able to plan their life can be taken as literate enough to have used the information available to them to make decisions and literate enough to learn from experiences and live life successfully.

Libraries can play a role in making society literate by providing information that society can understand and interpret. About the role of libraries in enhancing high literacy rates, Banda argues that "…the library can introduce adult literacy classes, with the (teacher) librarian and other interesting volunteers conducting the lessons"[Banda N. 1998: 5]

Dr. L. Hikwa, a seasoned library and information science professional in Zimbabwe emphasises the role of libraries in enhancing education and literacy in society. He argues, "Libraries have an inherent obligation to provide information services to support the educational (needs) and other endeavors of the members of their respective communities. Libraries support all levels of formal and informal education … provide resources that consolidate and affirm the pedagogic process that learners encounter in the classroom while at the same time making sure that the said pedagogic attainments are maintained through a continuous supply of resources and services."

Zimbabwe boasts of a high literacy rate and libraries should strive to maintain and improve this standard. "Zimbabwe managed to increase its adult and youth literacy rate to 89.3 percent and 97.4 percent respectively by 2001, figures that rank among the world's highest"[The Herald 26 April 2004: 9] A case for Zimbabwe is that of Nkayi, a remote rural district in the south of the country in which the literacy rate is around 86% This is partially attributed to the introduction of library services in the area. The literacy rate in Nkayi is an indicator that libraries and their extension services can play an integral part in the development of society by increasing awareness to utilize information.

Education in Zimbabwe

Libraries in Zimbabwe
Libraries in Zimbabwe fall into five major types, rural and community libraries and culture houses; school libraries; public libraries; special libraries and university and college libraries. Each group is at its different stage of development.

Zimbabwe on attaining independence from Britain in 1980 inherited a largely illiterate black majority, a typical scenario for most previously colonized countries. Reading as a culture was limited due to various factors but mainly because the colonial government made deliberate efforts to prevent the black majority from accessing education and information services.

There were only two rural government schools before independence and not surprisingly no libraries and information services for the rural population. In the urban areas there were only a few community centres for blacks and the urban public libraries, which were better equipped, were a preserve of the white minority.

This background shows that the government was faced with a mammoth task to educate and provide information services to its newly liberated nation. The government immediately realized

that education was essential to empower the nation, and moreover education was not possible without the support of library services as these are instruments of development.

The government appointed two consultants in the years between 1981 and 1982. The first consultant, William Alison who produced what later became known as the Alison report, was appointed to examine the state of libraries in Zimbabwe and recommend a strategy for establishing an effective library service in Zimbabwe. He noted that by then 90% of the population lived in rural areas and these should be priority areas in the provision of information. The second consultant, a Swedish Library consultant was appointed to "consider the present state of library services and their prospective development and financing with a regard to cultural, social, economic and technical development needs of Zimbabwe." [Laloo. 1982]. They recommended the establishment of a culture house in each of the 55 districts of Zimbabwe

The government also set up the National Library and Documentation Service(NLDS) under an act of parliament in 1985. The functions of the NLDS are to promote widespread enjoyment in Zimbabwe of publications of an educational, scientific, cultural, recreation and sporting value; to ensure, maintain and develop a high standard of living and to operate a documentation and inter-library loan facility[NLDS Act, 1985]

Rural and Community Libraries and Culture Houses
Following the recommendations of the Swedish Library Commission the NLDS set up the **The Murehwa Culture House** which is situated in the Mashonaland East district of Zimbabwe. The culture house consists of a library, which is the main attraction of the community, an arts and crafts workshop, a community hall and museum of Local artifacts. The library is used mostly by students and school leavers, teachers, local civil servants and adults who use it for leisure reading. All the clientle of this centre are very integral to the overall development of the country.

The Murehwa example was one of the first strides towards addressing the information and literature needs of the people. Though this was planned for all 55 districts of Zimbabwe one has so far being constructed. However, it stands as a model for other culture houses when resources permit. Government, NGOs and other stakeholders should make a joint effort to construct the culture houses for the rest of the districts.

The NLDS has also made strides in the provision of information despite a restrictive budget. Harriet Ncube, the Deputy Director of NLDS, notes that the NLDS has survived trials and tribulations and "has through the National Free Library of Zimbabwe facilitated the establishment of 41 school/community libraries. Most of these libraries are located in Matebeleland South Province, with eleven in Matebeleland North Province, mainly in Lupane District. One Library is in Gutu District."[RLRDP News Bulletin 1998: p.5] The Creation of these libraries is meant to help the people in developing their communities.

There are a number of community libraries in Zimbabwe much to the credit of the Rural Library and Resource Development Programme (RLRDP) which spearheaded the initiative. RLRDP is a non governmental organisation formed in 1990 with a primary objective of establishing and developing community libraries and information services to empower the rural population.

The libraries are in the rural area of Nyanga in the Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe and they include Njajezi Community Library, Kambudzi Community Library and Manjoro Community Library. Others include Mutondwe Community Library in Mt. Darwin and the Huwana Community Library in Plumtree. This is a very important initiative as it penetrates areas where information is difficult to filter due to the poor communication and transport network. These community libraries cater for a diverse group of users that include preschool children, school children, the youth, women, men and people reading for professional, further education, leisure and other purposes.

Perhaps the most interesting development in an effort to bring information to the remote rural communities of Zimbabwe are the **Donkey Driven Mobile Libraries** in the Nkayi District of Zimbabwe. The RLRDP conceptualized these libraries in 1995, realizing that it is a moderately cheap way of transporting information materials. They are advantageous in that they reach where no formal form of communication can reach thus making information more accessible to the otherwise disadvantaged. Transport and communication is not yet well developed in some parts of rural Zimbabwe and this becomes a very practical means of getting information to the people.

Realizing the need for awareness on HIV/AIDS, the National AIDS Council (NAC) decided to support this initiative. It purchased two donkeys and a cart for a mobile library in the Guwe area of Nkayi in 2003. This mobile library is being run by a qualified voluntary librarian, Rebecca Masango. Masango dedicates two days of the week, Saturday and Wednesday when people do not work in their fields to run 30 Kilometres to and from Guwe to Ntonjeni and Rugunje. She is part of this community and is well aware of their information needs. People lacked information and the introduction of this mobile library was a most welcome development The elderly and those who are too sick to read benefit from being read to by the young.

These initiatives are very important to the development of the country as they empower the rural folk with current information and enable them to participate in national programmes

School children reading material from the Donkey Drawn Cart in Nkayi

Donkey Drawn library operated by Rebecca Masango, a qualified librarian

School Libraries

The emphasis on the education sector by the government soon after the attainment of independence saw the construction of more schools especially in the rural areas. The number of

primary schools increased from 2 401 in 1979 to 4 161 in 1984 whilst the number of secondary schools rose from 177 to 1 129 in the same period. Most schools have their own small library collections, however the current economic depression has made it difficult for these libraries as they lack reading materials and technological equipment needed in the delivery of an efficient service. Most of these libraries are also not manned by professional librarians.

A lot still needs to be done on the government, mission and council schools as it is obvious children are keen to read but there is lack of resources. Private schools are in a better position as they survive on the generosity of parents and donors.

However, it is encouraging to note that the NGO and private sector have thrown their weight behind the promotion of libraries. Early this year Barclays bank together with World Vision Zimbabwe and some rural communities joined hands at improving school infrastructure and providing books. Two rural schools, Kangurunguru primary school in Hurungwe and Marere Primary school were the beneficiaries of this donation which totaled 38 000 British pounds. A local Estate Agency firm, Kennan Properties also kick started a library building fund for Chisipite Senior school.

The Edward Ndhlovu Memorial Library in Gwanda, Matebeleand South Province has to date assisted 27 schools with reading material for their pupils. This is done through the Book Box Project where schools receive boxes with reading materials for pupils.

Prince Edward School, a government school is a role model of a school which has made great strides in developing their library in terms of human resources and services.

The library is divided into three components. The main library established in 1963 caters for both pupils and staff and has a collection of well over 4000 books, The Sixth Form Reference Library consists of reference material and multimedia facilities It also offers internet and email facilities. The Music and Computer library, which was established in 2001, is dedicated to music and computer science.

The library is preparing this generation of tomorrow on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as well as cultivating a culture of reading which is very important for national development.

Special Libraries
Zimbabwe has a number of special libraries or documentation centers with a large number of them in the main cities. Special libraries are usually parts of larger institutions and support the overall goal of the institutions which they serve.

Examples of special libraries include those housed in NGOs such as Southern African Research and Documentation Centre(SARDC), Southern African HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS), International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Food and Agricultural Organisation(FAO), just to mention a few.

Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) is one institution which has promoted development by setting up and maintaining a large library collection It has benefited the country as well as the SADC region through its vasy information resources. The library consists of collections on gender, environment, democracy and governance and regional integration and economic issues The Information Resource Centre, under which the library falls, targets government and policy makers, NGOs, the private sector, regional and international organizations, developments agencies and the media. Individual researchers are however welcome to use the services.

Services are free of charge with reading room and photocopying facilities available at a minimal fee. Distribution and requests for SARDCs products has also been done through the library and this includes posters and books to schools and other educational institutions. Government departments have often consulted the library for information in their policy making process. Students from universities and other tertiary institutions have consulted the library for publications that they would have failed to source in other libraries. Researchers and academics have also benefited from the library.

Recently the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education and Sport and culture requested for one of the environmental publications in which they indicated that 'the information is required to assist us in preparing teaching and learning materials for our schools' [Mabvakure, 2004].

ICTs are a major challenge for libraries in the provision of information. SARDC has made strides towards this development having a number of its bibliographic and experts databases accessible through the website. http://www.sardc.net/Library.htm

SARDC also contributes towards the production of important publications such as the Global Environment Outlook and Annual GEO Yearbook and regional publications such as State of the Environment Outlook for Southern Africa. This is made possible through the collection and provision of information from the resource centre.Other publications include national profiles on gender for the 12 SADC countries and a regional one for the region. Some of these books are being used as study texts in universities. These publications might be regional but Zimbabwe policy makers and other stakeholders have no doubt benefited from such publications.

Researchers in the SARDC reading room

Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Information Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS) is another distinguished organization whose library services have gone a long way in collecting and disseminating information surrounding the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

This pandemic has had no doubt a negative impact on all sectors of society and the economy. This has serious implications on the development of the nation especially on the agriculture and food security sectors. "There is a projected loss of labour of 23%."[IDS, 2003: 96] Zimbabwe as an agro-based economy cannot afford this kind of scenario and SAfAIDS works to fill the information gap.

The resource centre is involved in collection, processing and responding to information requests. Documents include gray literature, reports, books manuals, conference papers , journals, CD-ROMS, videos and audiocassettes. One user of the library commented. "I have been impressed by the service provided here and managed to get the resources that will benefit the people in the rural communities. The library is neat and I felt comfortable."[SAFAIDS Annual Report July 2002-June 2003]. This shows that even the marginalized rural communities are benefiting from information supplied by the library. Further to this the resource centre is working on a request from the Development for International Development (DFID) to provide material alternatively in local languages for distribution during their food relief programmes.

School children getting HIV/AIDS material
at the SAFIDS stand during the Zimbabwe International
Book Fair (ZIBF)

SAfAIDS reading room

Public libraries

Public libraries have gone a long way in complimenting school and academic libraries as well as provide services to the general public despite a very limited budget and resources

In Zimbabwe, there are a number of prominent public libraries, these include the Bulawayo Public Library (BPL) and its several branches, Gweru Memorial Library, Harare City Library, and its branches Victoria Falls Public Library. These fall under the membership of the Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA) which was formed in 1959 as the Rhodesia Library Association.[3]

Up to this day, the **Bulawayo Public Library** stands up as one of the best in the country, catering for people of a diverse background.. It celebrated its 100th anniversary in 1996 and its membership has swelled quite remarkably in recent years. It is one of the three legal depositories in Zimbabwe, in addition to Harare City Library, and National Archives of Zimbabwe.

Bulawayo Public Library also operates a mobile library service mainly in primary schools around the city. This service started in 1978 and up to this day, several communities have benefited from it. By 1998 a total of 37 schools were receiving a weekly library service using the two available bookmobiles, and approximately 3,700 children were having access to the library service. The number of schools served, though increasing, is not doing so at a pace that would have been anticipated, mainly because of dwindling financial resources and the persistent fuel crisis the country has been having since 1999.

The Bulawayo Public Library

The Bookmobile Library

Inside the Bookmobile library

The Capital city, Harare has two groups of public libraries.those in the high density and those in the low-density areas. The libraries in the low-density areas were previously meant to cater for the white minority before independence and were generally better equipped. However, there are efforts to bridge this anomaly.

Harare City Library and its five branch libraries in the low-density areas was set up by an act of parliament of 1902, and then known as the Queen Victoria Memorial library. This library is run by an independent board of trustees and gets a grant from the city council. According to Trymore Simango, a librarian at Harare City Library total membership of the library consists of 70% school children who frequent mainly the reference and textbook section. The rest of the users are the elderly, children and university students as well as the general public who come for leisure reading. The library has not managed to purchase a single book in the past three years but the library continues to be popular, evidence that there is thirst for information and a desire to develop among the users despite the limited resources.

The high-density libraries and are quite popular especially among school children and the youth. During exam months the libraries sometimes fail to cope with the large number of users who have to take turns to use the library.

The Harare and Bulawayo libraries have both been threatened with closure several times due to lack of funds but have survived on donor funding. Recently the Bulawayo City Council through funding from the Freidrich Naumann Foundation has set up information centers in the city's nine housing offices. The foundation donated computers and other accessories for the programme the first in the country. The Harare City library also received a donation of books from the Japanese Ambassador to Zimbabwe through its Books Programme

University and College Libraries
The number of higher learning institutions offering degree programmes has been on the increase since the attainment of independence in 1980. From one in 1980 these have risen to 12 with yearly enrollment increasing from 1000 to 54 000 by 2002. Technical colleges have also risen from two in 1980 to 10 today. All these institutions have libraries, which house large collections and cater for thousands of undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as researchers.

Of special mention is the Zimbabwe Open University (**ZOU)**,. The history of ZOU is interesting and fundamental to the development of Zimbabwe. It started as the centre for distance education and targeted headmasters with the aim of equipping all headmasters with degrees. It then extended the programme to deputy headmasters, senior teachers and then ordinary teachers. The library was fundamental in their success and this was a very strategic move as it equipped the very people who administered schools and therefore quality of education, fundamental to development improved. ZOU then targeted all university qualifying students who had at leaset 5 O'levels. These had previously been disadvantaged as the few universities available target those with A' levels and with a high cut off-point. ZOU also targets working class adults.

One of the programs offered by ZOU is on agriculture and according to Mr. Mhlotswa the deputy librarian, this programme is contributing immensely to the land reform programme as graduates are performing better in the field. Industry has also commended ZOU as their employees have

improved performance after undergoing the ZOU programmes. Quality of work produced is depended on the library as according to Mr. Mhlotswa no student can produce any meaningful assignment without use of the library.

The libraries consist of a branch in each of the regional centers manned by two people. Administration and acquisitionists are centralized for purposes of uniformity and easier coordination. The library is catering for a student population of about 35 000 and also has an agreement with other universities under the Zimbabwe University Libraries Associations to use each other's facilities. The libraries are so popular such that they cannot adequately cope with all their clientele. Under its E-Learning initiative the library is in the process of equipping its branches with the relevant equipment and the training of librarians for further training to students. It is encouraging to note that the library is realizing the importance of ICTs in the provision of information and education.

Conclusion and Recommendations
Zimbabwe has made tremendous efforts in building and maintaining its library services since 1980. This is despite the current harsh economic climate. However as evidenced throughout this paper, libraries, save for those in the private and NGO sector are in dire need of funding both for human and material resources. It is recommended that there be a collective action between government, NGOs and other stakeholders in order to improve library services in Zimbabwe. However, some institutions have set the ball rolling and others should be encouraged to follow suit.

The Donkey Driven Libraries should spread wings to penetrate other remote areas in the country. Libraries should also work closely with the publishing industry so as to encourage them to publish more material that is relevant to the needs of communities and in vernacular languages. Many a time irrelevant donated material finds its way to the libraries and this discourages users. They are interested in material that is more relevant and applicable to thei lives.

Hikwa believes that the development of the library service in Zimbabwe is dependent on the governments willingness to support library and information services and innovation by information practitioners. Therfore it is recommended that libraries should:
i.   Secure financial resources , either from donors or government grants, for the purchase of library materials, salaries and the maintenance of buildings and equipment
ii.   Market their products and services
iii.   Employ qualified staff
iv.   Engage in staff development programmes
v.   Be involved fully in the upbringing of the youth and in adult teaching so as to create a literate society
vi.   Help in the creation of a reading culture by assisting organisations like the Zimbabwe Book Development Council (ZBDC) in organizing the national Book Week and the Children's Reading Tents at the (ZIBF)
vii.   Assist impoverished societies and poor rural libraries with materials and consultancies
viii.   Lobby the government for support in library development especially in rural areas

ix.   Cooperate with the Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA) and NLDS to lobby for the promotion of publishing of material in vernacular languages especially in rural areas.

Libraries in Zimbabwe should try and follow the above recommendations to ensure that they continue to play a major role in the development of the country

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