



## World Library and Information Congress: 70th IFLA General Conference and Council

22-27 August 2004  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Programme: <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla70/prog04.htm>

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**Code Number:** 122-E  
**Meeting:** 74. Division VII. - Education and Research  
**Simultaneous Interpretation:** -

### Post-Independence Literacy Programmes in Botswana: Implications for Library Services

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#### **Abstract**

*Literacy has always been viewed as an important ingredient in the improvement of quality of life. On attainment of independence in 1966, the new Botswana government was faced with problems of having to address imbalances in many sectors. One such problem was illiteracy resulting from the colonial education system. Due to the many and varied problems, however, the problem of illiteracy was not addressed immediately. It was only after ten years of independence that literacy was given priority in government agenda. The Department of Community Development and the Botswana Christian Council conducted some literacy programmes which were to a large extent, uncoordinated. In 1981, The National Literacy Programme was launched to target a wider national audience. Sustainability of literacy skills to be acquired from the programmes was uncertain and the library service was the logical place to provide continuity. A Botswana Library Association conference on “**Libraries and literacy**” helped librarians and literacy educators to plan together, a strategy for literacy education. This paper aims to discuss post-independence literacy programmes, the role of the library services in promoting literacy, assessing achievements made and examining the current situation. The paper also discusses new impetus and challenges for library services in the advancement of literacy programmes.*

**Keywords:** Literacy; library services; Non-Formal education; Literacy-Botswana; literacy programmes

## Preamble

Botswana attained independence from Britain in 1966. Botswana is a landlocked country located in the Southern part of Africa, sharing borders with Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It has an area of 581.7 thousands square kilometers. The population is currently 1.7 million growing at 0.6%. Literacy level stands at 79.8% (2003 estimates) with 76.9% for males and 82.4% for female. The population is widely dispersed across the breadth and width of the country with more concentrated to the east. The distribution of the population over wide areas makes it difficult to reach far flung people with any kind of development programmes including literacy.

I have added a map of Botswana below for additional information for the audience to better conceptualize the country. Figure 1 below shows a map of Botswana indicating some major places and showing borders with neighbouring countries. Table 1 and table 2 show a drop in illiteracy rates over the years.



Source: CIA World Fact Book Source: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bc.html>

Literacy rates (%) 1981 – 1993, 2003			
Year	M	F	Total
1981	32.0	36.0	34.0
1993	66.9	70.3	68.9
2003*	76.9	82.4	79.8

Table 1: Literacy by gender

Source: *Report of the First National Survey on literacy in Botswana*  
\* From World Fact Book

### Literacy rates by age group

Year	1990	1995	2001	2002
Youth	83.3	86.1	88.7	89.1
Adults	68.1	72.6	78.1	78.9

Table 2 Literacy by age

Source: World Fact Book <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bc.html>

## Introduction

Literacy at the basic level means the ability to read, write and handle simple numeric problems. Literacy programmes are important components in many countries' development agenda because in a broader perspective, literacy entails transformative qualities that extend far beyond reading, writing and numeracy. Literacy entails learning that impact on behaviours and attitudes. The Department of Non-Formal Education of the Ministry of Education in Botswana, sees literacy as "a set of language and communication skills, attitudes and knowledge involving an integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and critical thinking which people require and can effectively use to varying degrees" (Central Statistics Office, 1993. p. 3). Maruatona (2002 p. 83) identifies two forms of literacies as conventional and transformative. Conventional literacy refers to a situation where providers (such as government) of the literacy programme assume that the individual participants can be shaped to fit in the government development agenda. It is assumed that conventional literacy helps the overall personal growth in terms of mobility, social progress and cognitive development. Transformative literacy, on the other hand, is intended for critical thinking and problem solving. It assumes that literacy should empower and transform learners to increase their awareness and help them to take control of their lives with their broader socio, economic and cultural context.

Literacy is an important ingredient in government plans because it is expected to improve the individuals' quality of life be it by way of elevating the personal social status or facilitating participation in national development and hence contributing in a broader scene. At the individual level it is expected that literacy improve life style and income opportunities, enhance assimilation of technical training ideas and ease out constraints on running individual business. (SIAPAC-Africa. 1990. p. 7)

On a broader scale, it has been observed that "inadequate literacy does have both social and economic costs to a country." (Central Statistics Office 1997. p. 4). For example it is observed that illiteracy very often result in low productivity in workplaces and hence resulting in low returns. Botswana prison statistics of 1996 indicate that majority of inmates have low level of literacy. Inmates are indeed a burden on public resources as they depend on public funds for their keep.

## Post independence literacy programmes in Botswana

In 1966, when Botswana attained independence the country had an education system which was predominantly foreign, selective and relatively expensive such that it was only accessible to the privileged few who could afford it. This situation created a population of illiterate adults. Literacy has always been viewed as an important ingredient in improvement of quality of life in Botswana, hence the present Botswana free basic education for all aims to put an end to children growing into illiterate adults. Since 1966, a number of literacy programmes were established. The literacy programmes were, however, sporadic and uncoordinated with the main players being the Department of Community Development and the Botswana Christian Council. The public responsibility for improvement of literacy was entrusted with the Department of Community Development. In 1972, a UNESCO consultant tabled a proposal for a literacy campaign project to reach a quarter of a million people in a period of eighteen (18) years. The proposal was rejected by government since at the time “the mass campaign approach advocated was regarded as too ambitious and too demanding on existing extension services” (Gaborone et al 1987, page 1). The next ten years, following the proposal, therefore, did not register any marked concentration and interest on adult literacy.

In 1977, the National Education Commission recommended that literacy be considered in other development programmes. During the same year, the Government white paper, “The National Policy on Education” was published. It was noted in the policy document that; “Government will give priority to developing opportunities for people to learn out of school” (Botswana. Government 1977, p. 11). The same policy incorporated the establishment of a new unit of Non-Formal Education in the Ministry of Education. It also sought to establish an inter-ministerial body (Cultural Council) to take charge of cultural and recreational learning programmes.

The first systematic adult literacy experimental programme was undertaken by Botswana Extension College in 1977. Another pilot project was run in 1978. The idea of a nationwide programme initially rejected by government was revisited and adopted. The Ministry of Education established an inter-ministerial group to formulate policy and strategies for adult education. The group compiled a document entitled “*The eradication of illiteracy in Botswana: a national initiative consultancy document*”. In addition to providing baseline information on objectives, strategies, methods content, materials and others, the group set a target of turning 250 000 illiterate adults and adolescents to neo-literates between 1980 and 1985. This, however, proved to be too ambitious a goal. Maruatona (2002 p. 86) observes that due to many constraints including limited resources, the Department of Non-Formal Education could not eradicate illiteracy as planned.

In 1981, the National Literacy Programme was officially launched. By 1986, the programme had undergone three evaluations and was perceived to be effective and hence managed to attract funding from such organisations such as GTZ and the German Foundation for International Development (DSE). Although government is the one major role player in the provision of literacy programmes, there have always been other players. For various reasons, religious groups, NGOs and some companies have conducted literacy sessions.

## **The Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) programme**

The DNFE programme is the largest single systematic literacy endeavour in the country. The literacy programme has to a large extent been successful. The adult illiteracy rate has been reduced over the years (*see Table 1 and 2*). The programme managed to provide solutions to most participants' problems that drove them to enroll in the programme. Participants in the literacy programmes indicate that they do enroll in order to be able to read and complete government forms, read medicine instructions, read labels on food stuff, write letters to family members employed outside the villages and the country, be able to read text encountered in workplaces, decipher prices on grocery items and determine prices for their small farm produce (Manowe & Onkabetse 1998, p.3). It is not, however, everybody who had targeted these minor objectives. Some participants had expected a complete change in quality of life. These people and the government had higher target, they expected self transformation. Meisenhelder (1992, p.8) quotes the Ministers of Education saying that "For the great majority of people in modern society, if life has to be lived to the full, they must be released from the bondage of illiteracy if they have to make their best contribution to their families, their communities, and their nation". Such a statement gives hope and anticipation that after graduating from the literacy programme, one's life would be transformed for the better. Reality is that while satisfying the desire to read, write and be able to solve simple arithmetic problems, the non-formal education does not change the status of the participants as long as it does not result in job worthy qualification or open opportunities for a continuum for further qualifications upon completing the primers.

### ***Challenges for the Department of Non-Formal Education (DFNE) literacy programme***

Manowe and Onkabetse (1998, p. 11) describes the Botswana national literacy curriculum as teacher centered because the curriculum is developed centrally and all groups throughout the country tend to use the same kind of materials regardless of their literacy needs. Their conviction is that there is not just one kind of literacy but an array of literacies based on community practices. Adult literacy materials are in Setswana (the national language) in spite of the country's rich linguistic diversity. Literacy Group Leaders are volunteers with very little or no training. The programme mainly conducted in villages, prisons and mines is run without real infrastructure such as would be expected for a teaching/learning environment. The government literacy programme has been criticized for not taking into consideration the language and cultural background of the recipients. It has also been stated that the social roles of the target groups have not been considered. An adult programme running through the year is not realistic in the rural Botswana. People drift to their farming lands during the farming season and they remain there until after harvest. Depending on the part of the country and way of live, patterns of roles and responsibilities differ. These should be reflected in the literacy programmes if they have to reach their targets.

Thupe, an interviewee in Setlhoboko's report is quoted saying that there are two main problems in educating the youth in remote areas and citing the two problems as their cultural and language differences (Setlhoboko 1995, p. 3). Cultural differences also continue to hamper literacy endeavors in the remote area settlements. While some tribes within Botswana believe that punitive action may deter children from repeating unacceptable behaviour, others are not accustomed to that and the children quit school should the teacher punished them and this results in a new gen-

eration of illiterates. Government introduced boarding schools to create a better learning environment for the children in some remote areas too far from schools; this separation of children from parents, however, is not acceptable to some groups depending on cultural background. Basarwa (San) for instance believe in staying together and sharing whatever they have, therefore when children go to boarding schools, both parents and children feel separated (Manowe et al. 1995. p.12) While the education system which stresses the use of Setswana as a medium of instruction continues to create illiterates, adult illiterates in these rural areas of Botswana cannot benefit from the literacy programmes taught in a “foreign language”. Youngman (1992) in criticizing the programme goes further to say that in Botswana; the provision of literacy is a means of the dominant groups securing their legitimacy within society rather than an opportunity for individual to acquire particular skills. While this is too radical a view, there is still a need to give more consideration to the recipients within their socio, linguistic and cultural background.

Some critics have also indicated that the programmes have been superficial and brought no real change for the target groups. Riemer (2000) observes that “despite the country’s human capital investment, the increase in literacy rates, low debt, high cash reserves and an official World Bank Ranking of Middle Income, poverty in Botswana has increased and socio-economic opportunities remain unequally distributed across gender, ethnicity and geography. According to a study conducted by Botswana Institute for Development Policy Analysis in 1997, 47% of the nation was still below the poverty datum line. Riemer, concludes, therefore that literacy programmes have failed to “liberate Botswana poor and uneducated from the bonds of ignorance, disease and hunger”. It is true that some people enroll in the programme hoping that their quality of life will be improved after graduating from the programme. However, they complete the programme and find out that they neither can find jobs on the strength of their newly found skills nor can they find opportunities to continue to achieve higher qualification.

Some criticism has been leveled at the structure and implementation of the programme. The programme was started without proper meeting places. Classes were held under trees prone to sudden cancellations due to adverse weather conditions. Traditionally men of Botswana sit on a stool or some elevated object and as such to expect them to attend classes where they would now sit on the ground is over presumptuous.

Literacy Group leaders (LGLs) are considered as volunteers and thus receive only a stipend for each class they teach. While volunteerism is good and should be encouraged, the reality of the matter is that it does not put food on the table so the LGL will not think twice about quitting if they find a job and as such causing discontinuity in the entire class progress.

### **Primary schools role in literacy**

Primary schools are expected to provide basic literacy skills and also to absorb and transform all who would otherwise grow up into illiterate adults. The 1977 National Policy on Education states thus; “Primary education will aim to make children literate, first in Setswana and then in English, to provide a basic command of mathematics and knowledge of science and social studies”. It further states that through primary education, children will be orientated towards the realities of life in their environment. Primary education is therefore, supposed to lay a solid background for other developments. To enhance this, the 1994 revised national policy on education recommends

among other physical facilities a library for each primary school. This is to train children from early stages to be literate and sustain their literacy through reading so as not to continue increasing the youth and adult illiteracy rate.

While the policy (Botswana. Government, 1994) stipulates the need for libraries, most primary schools especially those in rural areas still do not have them. It has been reported that some education officers have taken initiatives to start libraries in schools within their areas. Of significance is a project in the Maun area in the Northern part of Botswana and that in Kanye to the South. The Maun project started in 1999 and to date has established libraries in sixty (60) primary schools in the area. The Kanye project is relatively new and it has so far started libraries in 12 schools. The School library projects are developed as community development projects where the education officer, teachers and parents collaborate to develop them. Parents volunteer time and other resources. The community developed school libraries, collect information from their localities and the children repackage it for later reading. These projects have enhanced literacy and also help develop the children's love for reading the library and school in general while also improving the pass rate.

## **NGO participation in literacy programmes**

### ***Children's Information Trust (CIT)***

CIT, established in 2002 by information and library professionals and later joined by representatives of other interested groups, views literacy in a different perspective from other groups. The Trust sees literacy as going far beyond the ability to read, write and compute basic numerals problems. Literacy as conceived by the Trust entails a whole array of life skills including the ability to seek, find and use information in a world that relies heavily on modern technologies. In collaboration with UNICEF, the National Vision 2016 (*A twenty year national strategic plan for Botswana*) secretariat and the Ministry of Education, a sensitization workshop was conducted where stakeholders were brought together to discuss different initiatives and chart a collaborative way forward. The Trust seeks to work with stakeholders to build a reading culture among children. CIT was still relatively new at the time of writing this paper and programmes were still at the planning stage. CIT's aim is to collaborate with stakeholders to facilitate the following:

- i. The production of reading materials with local content in development of primary school libraries.
- ii. Children's exposure to computers through practical word processing skills.
- iii. Development of the joy of reading, a sustained culture of sharing thoughts and experiences through reading as a medium of communication
- iv. Transfer of these skills to reading of other experiences reflected in foreign library materials
- v. development of children's skills for exploiting information sources and resources (Children's Information Trust, 2002)

### *Cultural groups*

Two cultural groups, the Society for the Promotion of Ikalanga Language (SPIL) and Kamanakao Association (KA), both registered as NGOs in Botswana with the objectives to promote cultures and languages of minority groups, have made some notable achievements in literacy development. Each group has had collaboration with the University of Botswana's Department of Adult Education in initiating literacy projects. The projects were initiated as pilot and capacity building focusing on two languages, Ikalanga and Shiyeyi to provide learning points for the needs for adult literacy in marginalised linguistic groups.

Some work was done on both Ikalanga language promoted by SPIL and Shiyeyi promoted by KA before Botswana independence. In the 1960s, Mr. Pitoro Seidisa, a member of Wayeyi (people of Yeyi tribe) group from Gumare in the North –West of Botswana, started work with Professor Westphal of the University of Cape Town to develop a writing system for Shiyeyi language. The two also did some work on the translation of the Bible and compilation of a dictionary. The projects started by Seidisa and Westphal were never completed or if they were, there is no record to verify that. (Nyathi-Ramahobo, 1998) KA found in March 1995 by Wayeyi aims to continue the work started by Seidisa and Westphal. Kamanakao in the Shiyeyi language means remnants. Kamanakao's objective is to pick up the remnants of their language and culture and develop it to form part of the overall national culture in Botswana.

In pursuance of this objective, Kamanakao is engaged in language development activities which include conducting research on Shiyeyi language and culture, development of standard orthography for the language (work commenced in 1996), production of grammar books and compilation of a dictionary. The Association also aims to develop literacy programmes. In November 1998, Kamanakao and the University of Botswana Department of Adult Education held a workshop in Seronga to which community members were invited. The aim of the workshop was to identify the aims, content and structure of the adult literacy programme. The overall aim of the project was formulated as to “enable adults to learn reading, writing and numeracy in their mother tongue in order to preserve and regenerate Shiyeyi language and culture. (The Kamanakao Association 2004, Internet site)

The workshop resolved that the literacy programme should contain aspects of Shiyeyi culture including farming, hunting and fishing, initiation processes, wedding procedures, taboos, traditional clothing, proverbs, song and stories. It also recommended religious items such as the bible and hymns. Not much emphasis was placed in socio-economic subjects such as government programmes and HIV/AIDS information. It was suggested that numeracy should be offered selectively when there is an indication of interest.

Other activities of the Association have included production of children's story booklets, pamphlets containing information considered important for adult literacy as well as conducting classes for literacy groups including children and adults. Also of significance is the plan to build a cultural centre where most cultural activities will take place and some literacy projects will be conducted.

SPIL was founded in 1982 with the aim to promote Ikalanga language and culture. SPIL constitution lists the following as core business:



- Material production in print and in film
- Development of a cultural centre for preservation of cultural artifacts and library materials
- Informal instruction in Ikalanga language for children and adults
- Collection and storage of folk culture and language of Bakalanga people
- Drama and music performance to promote the language and preserve the culture (Society for the Promotion of Ikalanga Language, 1986, p.1)

SPIL has to date made significant achievements in its core business areas, especially on literacy. With the help of the Lutheran Church of Southern Africa, the Bible has been successfully translated. An Ikalanga standard orthography manual “*Ngatikwaleni Ikalanga: a manual for writing Ikalanga as spoken in Botswana*” was published in 1995. From the Bible translation exercise, a few small religious documents were also produced.

A complementary organization to SPIL is the Mukani Action Campaign (MAC) which was formed in 1997. MAC collaborates with the Lutheran church of Southern Africa to produce Ikalanga written materials. MAC has today published 30 literacy titles including a primary school text book and cultural and religious works for adults. MAC and SPIL produced a newsletter entitled “Tjedza”.

SPIL in collaboration with the University Of Botswana Department Of Adult Education held a workshop in Francistown (a city situated in the North Eastern part of Botswana) in 1999. Community members were invited to design the Ikalanga adult literacy programme. It was agreed at the workshop that “the overall aim of the Ikalanga adult literacy project was ...to enable adults to learn reading and writing in their mother tongue in order to increase their ability to cope with daily life in modern society and to preserve Ikalanga Language. (Nyathi-Ramahobo & Chebanne 2000, p.8). The workshop identified the following topics for the project:

- Arithmetic for business
- Banking and shopping
- Bible and other religious translations
- Health messages
- Business related information and government forms
- Traditional and cultural topics including praise poems, work songs, lullabies, folk tales, proverbs, children’s recitations and historical information especially on origins of villages.

Literacy classes were to be conducted in the afternoons during the months of July, August and September when there is little or no farming activity. MAC as an organized entity was elected to spearhead the project.

At independence, Botswana adopted Setswana as the national language to strategically unite all citizens of the country under one language regardless of their mother tongue. The national language was to be the only local language taught in schools. The imposition of the one language disadvantaged some indigenous groups. Although basic primary education is offered free in Bot-

swana, some communities find it difficult to access it. Some indigenous linguistic groups do not speak either one of the languages used as medium of instruction. Some of the most disadvantaged groups are the rural area dwellers in the areas inhabited by people who speak mainly San languages. In 1991 the Naro Language Team was formed, initially to work with the Reformed Church to translate the Bible under the Naro Language Project. In some instances teachers from other ethno-linguistic groups are deployed in areas of local languages they neither speak nor understand. The Naro Language Project Team in the Ghantsi area helps such teachers in the Ghanzi area. The Naro Language Project operating under the bigger NGO umbrella of the Kuru Family of Organisations works with the government and San communities to improve literacy and education. Government has assisted in the project by hiring Naro-speaking assistant teachers. In addition to enhancing literacy in schools Other activities include teaching adults to read and write. The Naro Project Team has, over the years, compiled Naro-English dictionary, produced HIV/AIDS material in the language, produced riddle booklets to encourage reading, and have started translating the Bible into Naro. (Naro Language Project 2004, Internet site)

### **Religious groups**

Religious groups have a long history of being involved in literacy programmes. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the London Missionary Society (LMS) then based in Domboshaba, a village near the Botswana-Zimbabwe boarder on the Zimbabwe side started work on production of Ikalanga language material. In 1929, the New Testament was translated into Ikalanga. The LMS work resulted in the production of some primary school level Ikalanga books and other such materials especially those with religious content. Schools on the Botswana side of the boarder used the materials for pedagogical purposes. These materials, however, lacked standardization. The language also carried variations of the language not used by Bakalanga of Botswana. The books were used in schools until independence when only two languages, English and Setswana were made the only two teaching languages. The use of Ikalanga books created semi-literates who could only read and write in Ikalanga. To date, there are still some adults in this situation.

The Francistown Lutheran Federation provides classes for out of school children. The Young Women Christian Association. (YWCA) provides basic education for teenage mothers while providing nursery facilities for the babies as well. About 60 kilometres West of he Capital of Botswana, Gaborone, there is a Sekole sa Annes-Stine in Molepolole which provides education for the disabled.

### **Botswana National Library Services (BNLS) support for literacy programmes**

In 1985 and 1986, prior to the Seventh Standing Conference of the Eastern Central & Southern Librarian (SCECSAL VII) held in Botswana, there was a lot of activity and discussion on literacy and information delivery among librarians and other interest groups. One pre-conference workshop on scientific information repackaging for the illiterate and a conference on libraries and literacy were held in preparation for the Libraries and literacy SCECSALVII conference. Both events came up with recommendations that emphasized the role of libraries in literacy programmes. SCECSAL VII discussed strategies and ambitions for library services to the predominantly rural literary disadvantaged. There was a consensus that librarians should be leaders in encouraging literacy through the appropriate packaging, assisting learners to produce indigenous

information, initiating production of literacy materials in vernacular as well as national languages and improving communication networks. Library associations were challenged to urge governments to fund permanent inter-agency literacy material production and distribution and to forge closer cooperation between the different information provision institutions. The conference resolved that in order for librarians to deliver information effectively and enhance literacy, they needed reorientation in training. It was, therefore, resolved that there was a need to re-appraise library teaching programmes with a view to incorporate elements from disciplines that were not part of the library studies departments. Elements of education with a focus on literacy, elements of sociology with emphasis on, communication skills, interpersonal communication and public relations also suggested was material production including typing and reprography. (SCECSAL VII. 1987, p.166).

Public Libraries in Botswana are under the Botswana National Library Services (BNLS), which was established by an act of parliament 1967, with a “Mission to provide information to all, nation-wide by means of an efficient and effective library service” (Botswana. Government 2004, Internet site). Botswana Public Libraries have sound structures through which literacy services could be enhanced significantly. Village Reading Rooms (VRRs), Book Box Service (BBS) and the Mobile Library Service (MLS) are all services that are already in place that can be enhanced and exploited for the improvement of literacy in Botswana. The library’s involvement in the production of a literacy reader series, “*Ipalele*” puts it in vantage spot to make further contribution to literacy improvements.

Village Reading Rooms are well developed in Botswana. They are a result of collaborative activities of the local community and BNLS where the local community provides the building and BNLS provides staff, stock and solar panels for power. The current network consists of sixty seven (67) Village Reading Rooms throughout the country. VRRs are probably the most significant contribution that the library is making towards literacy in the country. These were started by the Department of Non-Formal education in the Kgatleng District as an initiative by some enthusiastic Literacy Trainers who found out that reading materials in the public libraries were not suitable for neo-literates. Following recommendations made at a workshop held in Kanye, Botswana as prelude to SCECSAL 7, the library took lead in the development of the VRRs. Though now also used by other groups such as students, the VRRs initial intentions were to provide relevant level reading materials for participants and graduates of the Adult Literacy Programmes.

The Book Box Service is a system of information delivery where library materials are circulated to where they are needed in box consignments. It is one of the oldest library services in Botswana which started as early as 1939 with a grant from the Carnegie Corporation (Modise et al. 2003, p. 3) The book consignments were circulated to the various villages. Due to logistical problems the service was discontinued only to be revitalized with a focus on primary schools in 1978 by BNLS. Currently book consignments are circulated to 286 primary schools across the country. Any primary school may apply for BBS. Although this service is meant for primary schools, it is a potential service for literacy programmes.

The Mobile Library Service is currently provided in three different places; Gaborone, Serowe and Francistown. The aim of the MLS, also known in some parts of the world as the Book Mobile, is to reach schools that are too far from the libraries. Three more mobile libraries in Selebi Phikwe,

Tutume and Letlhakane were expected to be introduced in the current financial year. This again is a service that can be extended to encompass literacy programmes.

Ipalele Readers Series consist of easy-to-read functional books for new literates. The BNLS cooperates with the Department of Non-Formal Education through the Inter-Agency Material Production Committee (IAMPC) to produce the 'Ipalele Readers Series'. The Department of Non-Formal Education and the BNLS take turns in producing this series titles. Ipalele is a good reader title series which not only aims to enhance literacy but covers a wide range of functional titles such as *Tshomarelo ya metsi* (Water conservation); *Itekanye Morwalo* (Don't overload yourself) a book on family planning; *Malwetsi a bana* (Children's diseases) and *Kgwebo e potlana* (Small business).

## Way forward

Librarians need to promote services available to the relevant communities. Marketing and promoting library services are not very often done and it should be encouraged. Perhaps a paradigm shift in the librarians' perspective could bring about a shift in the thinking of the general public about the library. Librarians at public libraries should stop being happy with clients limited to students and the few privileged elite making the library an intimidating place for those less endowed. In his speech, addressing librarians and stakeholders, at the Kanye Botswana Library Association conference in 1985, the Minister of Labour and Home Affairs, Kgabo, emphasized the need for public libraries to include all people by observing that "Libraries are not meant for the educated only, but equally for the illiterate" (Botswana Library Association 1985, p.6) and further stating that it is the duty of librarians, non-formal education workers and other people involved in education to create a literacy society where it does not exist. The role players still need to come together to chart a collaborative path to the common goal of creating a literate society.

It would also help if the training institute could enhance the user needs training or community information aspect of the course such that graduates from the school are aware of the unique compositions of their communities and that each community have unique needs determined by a number of factors including culture, religions and traditions. Librarians should view libraries as "social institutions for the encouragement of learning and all round human resource development" (Sinha 1998). Botswana Public Librarians should aim at delivering library services to the people and not expect much grassroots communities to come to the library on their own accord. The communities need to be encouraged and given reasons for using the library and yet if the library could not serve them it would have lost its essence of being a public library. BNLS runs the mobile library services, however, due to lack of resources, such a service does not reach all parts of the country. Within the limited resources available, librarians can still endeavor to deliver materials to the people who need them. Librarians should add to their agenda, the need to work with existing structures to lure the public to the libraries. Do-it-yourself leaflets and talks to local churches, the village clinic, Parents Teacher Associations (PTAs) and the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and others would go a long way.

The National Library Service was to provide continuity. The Botswana Library Association conference on "**Libraries and literacy**" helped librarians and literacy educators to plan together, a strategy for literacy education. The many recommendations made at the conference are today as

valid as they were at the time of the conference. This could provide guiding light for more meaningful collaboration between the many role players in the provision of literacy in Botswana.

Perhaps in bridging the void created by the government literacy programme, BNLS could aim at providing functional literature to the new literates. A lot of public library functions are done centrally at the BNLS headquarters. It would be a wise move for BNLS to gradually develop an information repackaging unit within its headquarters with the aim to provide all important information in more accessible formats and reading levels. For the past ten years, Botswana has run a number of economic empowerment programmes. These programmes are usually documented in ways that automatically eliminate the semi-literate along with the illiterate. For simplification, government programme documents are usually translated into Setswana (the national language). The librarians, as trained information professionals could constantly repackage the information to easy reading levels. The sources of enhance reading as well as giving become usable information sources.

Librarians should reach out to the people who are considered powerful in villages. These people have existing relations with the people of the village. These people would include the chief or headman, the school headmaster, the agricultural demonstrator, the adult education officer, the village clinic nurses. Having these networks would by extension, lead to a wider majority of the community. (Shukla 1998, p.2) asserts that it is an art to select and prepare appropriate study material for neo-literates, as also to create interest among the participants". Librarians of public libraries must learn the art of creating interest. The story telling sessions run by many public libraries where members of the communities are invited to tell stories mainly to children, are good indications that programme designing and targeting different groups could enlist collaboration from groups outside the library profession.

The Kanye conference, discussing the problem of lack of use of mother tongue in instructions, had recommended that since the language issue was political and extended beyond education and libraries, the minority language groups should be the ones taking initiative to develop their languages, producing reading materials and then pressuring government for policy evolution away from insistence on only two teaching languages. The situation has now changed and the library can play a more significant role well within the government framework. The 2001 National Policy on Culture for instance, states that " Other Botswana Languages, which form part of the multilingual and multicultural diversity and are a rich source of cultural heritage should be harnessed and assisted to develop through research and documentation and other media such as the development of dictionaries, orthographies, textbooks etc." (Botswana. Government 2001, page. 20). The national vision document, *Towards prosperity for all* states that Botswana's wealth of different languages and cultural traditions will be recognised, supported and strengthened within the education system. No Motswana child will be disadvantaged in the education systems as a result of a mother tongue that differs from the country's two official languages" (Presidential Task Group 1997, page 5).

Some minority groups have developed literacy materials in their languages. These initiatives, the intentions of government to support development of other languages and the libraries mandate to provide information and education for all lays perfect ground for the public library to be the pinnacle for all literacy developments in the country. The public should liaise with all stakeholders and collect all relevant materials to support both government and other initiatives.

## Conclusion

“Combating adult illiteracy at the national level is not and should not be a responsibility of one government department or organisation alone but a concern for many sectors of society” (Nyirenda 1997, p.2. Internet site). This sentiment has been expressed by many observers including librarians at the Kanye conference. In Botswana there are many literacy programmes conducted by many different sectors including government, Religious groups, cultural groups and NGOs. The main and largest systematic one is the Botswana National Literacy Programme conducted by the Non-Formal Education of the Ministry of Education which aims to serve out of school youth and adults. The use of only two languages; English as the official language and Setswana as the national language hamper literacy progress in both formal primary schools and the government non-formal programme as the two languages are not mother tongue for some indigenous linguistic groups and thus stifle access to the free primary education offered by government resulting in out of school illiterate youth. Some Religious, Non-Governmental Organisations and cultural groups are taking it upon themselves to improve the situation by establishing literacy programmes and producing literacy reading materials in minority languages. Botswana National Library Services through its many already existing services should aim at collaborating with the existing structures to facilitate delivery and advance its mandate.

Though at independence about 38 years ago, Botswana had one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, and government only gave priority to literacy after several years after independence, to date, due to government and other interest groups’ endeavours, Botswana has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. The library services have the right infrastructure albeit in smaller quantities than desirable but some meaningful contribution is being made and should be enhanced.

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