



***FROM BEER HALLS AND MATERNITY WARDS TO
PUBLIC LIBRARY: the story of Naivasha and Karatina
Community libraries, Kenya***

Irene Muthoni Kibandi
Kenya National Library Service
knls@nbnet.co.ke

Meeting: 73 National Libraries
Simultaneous Interpretation: No

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL
19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa
<http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm>

1 INTRODUCTION

Kenya National Library Service (KNLS) was established in 1965 by an Act of Parliament (Cap 225 Laws of Kenya). According to the Act, the functions of the Board are “to promote, establish, equip, manage, and maintain and develop” libraries in Kenya as a National Library Service. The first Board of Directors commenced its work in April 1967.

The Kenya National Library Service acts both as a National and a Public library. Some of the services offered by the Board include: -

- Adult and junior lending services
- Reference and referral services
- Mobile service – motorized
- Non-motorized mobile service: camel and donkey mobile library services.
- Library user education
- Advisory and consultancy services
- Community information services
- In-house trainings through internships from various institutions
- Services to the visually impaired persons
- HIV/Aids information services
- Gender related information

During its first decade its existence, the Board was able through funding from the Kenya Government and from such donor agencies like the British Council, NORAD and UNESCO to set up libraries in all Provincial Headquarters. The second phase of development focused on district libraries.

At the beginning of the 90’s however funding started dwindling and the Board was forced to rethink its development strategies. The Community Library Development (CLD) policy is an initiative of the KNLS Board, which was adopted by the Board in 1990 as a result of these financial constraints the Board. The overall purpose of the CLD policy is to validate and secure community interests and ownership of CLD projects. It is meant to ensure equitable

distribution and provision of innovative library services to develop a reading culture in communities.

COMMUNITY LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT POLICY (CLD)

Since the inception of the Community Library Development strategy in 1991, the Board has established 31 community libraries countrywide. The demands for these services have been overwhelming. This has exerted a lot of pressure on the Board's resources making it difficult for the Board to meet the demand for community libraries.

It is evident that the development pattern of community libraries over the years has been characterized by geographical (regional) imbalance. This was due to the socio-economic disparities and uneven level of awareness of the end beneficiaries.

The Community Library Development policy operates on the premise that the community realizes the need for a library and initiates the establishment of the facility in their midst. It emphasizes that:

- Community libraries shall be developed, adapted and constructed as indicated under section.
- The stocking and service provisions of community libraries shall conform to the standards applicable in all KNLS Network.
- The staffing levels in the community libraries shall also conform to the approved establishment for community libraries by the Board.

The financial management by the community libraries shall be bound by the Board's existing financial regulations

2 KARATINA





Under the programme the first community library was established at Karatina, Nyeri district in 1990 on a pilot basis. Karatina is set at the foot of Mount Kenya near Nyeri town. The library serves the population through other means such as the book boxes, which is operated by a motorcycle that takes the books round to schools every two weeks. This program is very popular and has had the support of local schools that donated a specified amount of money to start the project. The library is also involved in teacher librarian training. This has especially helped since the introduction of the free primary education program where the government now buys books for schools.

3 NAIVASHA.



Naivasha Library building

The same information wave hit Naivasha when the KNLS Board visited the area and mooted the idea of a Community library to the Council. Since the inception of the Community Library Development strategy in 1991, the Board has established 32 community libraries countrywide. The demands for these services have been overwhelming. This has exerted a lot of pressure on the Board's resources making it difficult for the Board to meet the demand for community libraries.

Back in the late 70's and early 80's, the government of Kenya sanctioned the sale of traditionally brewed beers. As this was legal, provision was made for it and most trading centres had designated beer halls where this brew was sold openly. One such hall was to be found in Naivasha, a town that lies at the foot of the Great Rift Valley. There was even provision for meat roasting. Here, the locals congregated daily to partake of their favourite home made brew.

The Naivasha Council donated the land and the building and began refurbishment of the building in 1993 from a beer hall to a library. By 3rd April 1996 the library was officially opened to the public and the locals changed from drinking beer to reading. The facility has been very well received and currently boasts a clientele of 15,000 on a monthly basis. The local schools and the flower farms in the area are institutional members. They borrow books and use the library. This demonstrates how the thirst for a drink was quickly translated into thirst for knowledge. The people who used to drink beer here are very happy that the facility is now used by their children to gain knowledge.



At the Naivasha Cyber Café

In response to the communities information needs, the library has established partnerships with various persons and institutions in the area. These include:

- The local council who donated the land. They have recently waived approval fee for the architectural plans for the proposed extension of the library.
- Friends Of the Library. These are mostly white settlers in the area who have donated books and magazines over the years. Key among them are Sara Higgins and the late B. Stevenson. Ms Stevenson was a writer on herbal remedies. She donated books on the same to the library.
- The Naivasha maximum Prison. The library has greatly supplemented the reading programs of this institution.
- Rotary club of Naivasha and the Rotaract club of Naivasha who are currently funding the extension of the library
- Medical department gives talks on HIV/ AIDS Naivasha being a conglomerate town has many people and the infection rate is very high.
- Partnered with Computer for Schools – Kenya and Computer Aid International to set up an Internet outlet, which helps in teaching IT skills, E-Resource and offers E-mail services at very subsidized costs.



At the Naivasha maximum security prison

The problems mainly experienced in both these libraries are:

- Both are in dire need of expansion
- Karatina – tents – used as reading room for school going students in the evenings.
- Construction stalled but to be revived this year if funds are availed.
- Book boxes – outreach using motorbike – not adequate
- Very congested
- Children especially are very enthusiastic
- In search of partnership with large flowers owners whose workers and children use the library to help expand

4 CONCLUSION

Many agencies of intervention in Kenya seem to prioritize on urgent services such as health and education, famine relief, water and sanitation. The community library initiative is in line with the Board's long-term strategy to entrench partnerships in the development of library projects, programmes and service delivery. Community libraries and information centres have made a meaningful impact on the rural people as they are developed through community participation and not based on an outsider's opinion. These information centres have enhanced communities' accessibility to information and reading materials. This, we believe, is a step towards realizing a positive reading culture in this country and achieve the social goal of Kenya vision 2030 and the millennium development goals number 1, 2, and 3. Libraries go beyond formal education and they are indeed at the heart of personal and community development.