



# Local economic development in Uganda and the connection to rural community libraries and literacy

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to present a cursory overview of economic development in Uganda, and discusses some important links between the rural library and the ways it might impact human development areas such as economic uplift, education and literacy.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Real-life examples of small-scale economic development projects from the Kitengesha Community Library in rural Uganda are used to contextualize some of these connections. A comprehensive review of the literature on rural development, economic development in Uganda, the relationship between literacy, libraries and economic development and the rural community library provide a context for the paper. This paper reflects an in-depth review of the professional literature on economic and human development in Uganda, literacy, and the rural library. It also incorporates some qualitative data gathered from research studies conducted at Kitengesha Community Library in 2004 and 2005, including individual interviews with library users, teachers, local business merchants, and librarians at Kitengesha.

**Findings** – The article concludes that there is potential for rural community libraries to impact small-scale local economic development. The projects at the Kitengesha Community Library are still in their infancy, and long-term economic outcomes are not certain. At the same time, the projects have created a new sense of hope and possibility for many library users. There are numerous implications for other rural libraries, as income-generating projects may be a way to attract new users, attract outside financial support, showcase the practical nature of these libraries, and provide a means for local peoples to improve their lives.

**Research limitations/implications** – A longitudinal quantitative evaluation of the success of the Kitengesha projects and the income they generate would be the next step in terms of future research – such a study would highlight the role of the rural library in local economic development and provide further support for establishing more rural community libraries.

**Originality/value** – This paper is unique in that it expands on the concept of the rural community library as just a place to read books, and highlights the important role these libraries might play in developing areas where there is a profound lack of access to information, and few ways for residents to improve their economic standing.

**Keywords** Economic development, Wealth and income, Rural areas, Libraries, Literacy, Uganda

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Rural village libraries in developing areas of the world have great potential. They are gathering places, places to learn, and places to interact with others. They provide reading materials and access to different types of information. On a smaller scale, these libraries may also impact local economic development, which can mean a lot in rural areas, where opportunity for economic growth is minimal. This paper presents a



cursory overview of economic development in Uganda, and contextualizes some real-life examples of small-scale economic development projects from the Kitengesa Community Library in rural Uganda.

### **Uganda: historical, demographic and regional context**

Winston Churchill once said of Uganda:

Scarcely any money has ever been spent on Uganda. No European roads exist, no railways have been built, no waterfalls are harnessed, no public works of any serious description have been undertaken. A poor little grant-in-aid has barely supported the day-to-day cost of European administration, and practically nothing in cash or credit has been available for the development of the country. But it is alive by itself. It is vital; and in my view, in spite of its insects and its diseases, it ought in the course of time to become the most prosperous of all our East and Central African possessions, and perhaps the financial driving-wheel of all this part of the world (Churchill, 1908, pp. 125-6).

Today, some 44 years after gaining independence from England, Churchill's vision of Uganda has not transpired, and the country still struggles to maintain some semblance of economic stability.

Uganda's history is inextricably connected to its current economic state. The country experienced civil and social unrest for most of the 1970s and 1980s. The economy was unable to withstand these shocks, and as a result collapsed (Wordofa, 2004). Idi Amin, who ruled the country from 1971 to 1979, electrified an already charged racial atmosphere when he expelled more than 60,000 people of Asian (East Indian) descent from Uganda, giving them less than three months to leave the country. Many of those expelled were land and business owners, employers, and entrepreneurs, and their mass exodus and the chaos that followed tossed Uganda into a downward economic spiral that was impossible to recover from. In 1986, the current president, Yoweri Museveni, came into power with the backing of his party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM). Currently, the NRM remains in conflict in the North with the Lords Resistance Army, making some parts of Northern Uganda dangerous and economically unstable.

Uganda has a total population of more than 27 million people, and according to the World Bank, is one of the poorest countries in the world with a *per capita* income of about \$280 US dollars (World Bank, 2006a). A total of 12 percent of the population is considered urban according to the 2002 Ugandan Census (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2005). The labor force in Uganda is estimated at 9.8 million people, of which more than half (53 percent) are female. According to the Uganda National Household survey, 36 percent of those working are considered to be "working poor", with more than half of these employed in agriculture (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2005). Uganda has an unemployment rate of 3.5 percent, but it is important to note that the total unemployment rate for women is an astounding 17 percent (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

The poverty rate in Uganda dropped from 56 percent in 1992 to 38 percent in 2003, and since 1997, the number of people living on less than one dollar a day has dropped from 44 percent to 35 percent (Wordofa, 2004). However, there is no doubt that Uganda's poverty rates are still higher than those of surrounding sub-Saharan countries. Poverty reduction efforts undertaken by the Ugandan government are notable, with the Poverty Eradication Action Plan targeting major strategic areas such

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as economic management, enhancement of production, conflict resolution, good governance and human development (World Bank, 2006b). Even with these efforts, Uganda still ranks 158th out of 174 countries on the Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2006).

Overall, the literacy rates for Uganda have seen vast improvement since the establishment of Universal Primary Education in 1996. However, the rates are still below those of other sub-Saharan nations. The adult literacy rate for males is 79 percent; for females it is 59 percent (UNESCO, 2004). A total of 78 percent of males and 79 percent of females in the relevant age group attend primary school. For secondary school attendance, that number drops dramatically. Only 14 percent of males and 15 percent of females in the relevant age group attend secondary school (UNICEF, 2004).

There are other factors that have an impact on quality of life and human development in Uganda. There are nearly 530,000 residents living with HIV, and as of 2003, 940,000 children aged 0-17 years were orphaned by AIDS (UNICEF, 2004). How people live is also a factor – only 12 percent of the population is urbanized; in the rural areas, only 39 percent have access to adequate sanitation facilities, and 52 percent access to improved drinking water (UNICEF, 2004). The current life expectancy is age 45 for males and age 47 for females (UNICEF, 2004).

### **Defining rural economic development in Uganda**

Economists, educators and researchers have all expressed concern about depressed economic development in rural parts of Africa. Strategies for improving economic development have been advanced by many, and while some developing nations in Africa have benefited from these efforts, many have not. There are still vast areas where economic development is stagnant, with little or no opportunity for revitalization. Financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have participated in debt relief for the continent, along with various governments, large corporate donors, and non-profits (Wordofa, 2004). Unfortunately, much of Africa remains untouched by these global efforts, and chronic poverty continues from one generation to the next.

Many reasons have been suggested for the poor rate of economic development that plagues most of the continent. For instance, Okpala and Jonsson (2002, p. 87) suggest that “the lack of sustainable economic growth and development in Africa are partly due to political, social and economic instability”. They go on to say that acts of corruption are a major factor, and “are quite pervasive in most African countries” (Okpala and Jonsson, 2002, p. 87). The authors further found that Uganda has the highest economic instability estimate of any African country, which means that it is more likely than other countries to experience economic unrest and lack of economic progress.

How is economic development defined in this context, and more specifically, with respect to Uganda? Jagnayak (1997) presents two definitions of economic development from Rogers and Shoemaker, and Okun and Richardson. Rogers and Shoemaker define economic development as “a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capita incomes and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organization” (Jagnayak, 1997, p. 5). Okun and Richardson state that “economic development is a sustained secular improvement in material well being which may consider to be

reflected in an increasing flow of goods and services” (Jagnayak, 1997, p. 14). Ollawa (1977, p. 402) speaks more narrowly about rural development: “Rural development involves any clear and consciously applied strategy designed to restructure the economy in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the rural masses”.

Abdul Muyeed describes nine indicators for rural development in his 1982 article, “Some reflections on education for rural development” (Muyeed, 1982, p. 231). Muyeed’s indicators highlight the importance not only of income generation, but also of employment, increased access to education and better healthcare. Muyeed’s indicators of rural development are:

- (1) the rate of increase in income gained by the rural poor;
- (2) the rate of increase in productivity of the small-scale farms;
- (3) the degree of increased participation in decentralized administration and planning;
- (4) the rate of improvement in nutritional status among the rural poor;
- (5) the rate of increase in availability of employment;
- (6) the rate of increase in the acquisition of functional literacy;
- (7) the proportion of increase in the budget allocation to education at all levels;
- (8) the degree of social demand for education services in the rural areas; and
- (9) the rate of improvement in the availability of social, health, recreational and other services to the rural poor.

One recurring theme in the fight against poverty in Uganda is the concept of chronic poverty. Okidi and Mugambe (2002) found that 79 percent of the “chronically poor” in rural Uganda work in agriculture. This is significant if we consider that women provide almost “seventy-five percent of the total agricultural labour in Uganda” (Wordofa, 2004, p. 69). The UK-based Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) defines the chronically poor as follows:

Chronically poor people are those who experience deprivation over many years, often over their entire lives, and who sometimes pass poverty on to their children. Many of the chronically poor die prematurely from health problems that are easily preventable. Such poverty is hard to reverse. Chronically poor people have little access to productive assets and low capabilities in terms of health, education and social capital. People in chronic poverty are those who have benefited least from economic growth and development (Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2006).

According to Bird and Shinyekwa (2005, p. 61), chronically poor households in rural Uganda “seldom faced a single problem or constraint, and found few opportunities for accumulation and escape”. The authors also found that 59 percent of the chronically poor in Uganda are children, and identified a host of “interlocking problems” which drive and maintain poverty (Bird and Shinyekwa, 2005, p. 61). Some of these are: disability, ill health, abandonment, household break-up, alcohol abuse, theft, few livelihood options, polygamy, remoteness/isolation, and few assets (Bird and Shinyekwa, 2005, p. 62). Each of these problems in turn creates additional obstacles and problems, and a vicious cycle ensues.

The researchers further found that the poverty faced by many in rural Uganda is the result of both modern-day and historic events whose long-term impact can still be

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felt (Bird and Shinyekwa, 2005). They list the Amin and Obote regimes, the war in the North, and the resulting parceling of land, as having had major detrimental impacts from which the country has still not recovered. The authors conclude that any economic improvements in rural Uganda started from a “very low base” (Bird and Shinyekwa, 2005, p. 65) after long periods of instability and upheaval.

How does one define these rural areas where economic development is often so limited? Axinn (1976) describes rural areas as follows:

- areas remote from concentrated urban groups;
- areas where people tend to live in small and isolated groups;
- areas poorly served by roads and other communications, thus limiting economic, social and political activities;
- areas low on energy generation and consumption, especially electricity and gas; and
- areas where people are heavily dependent on the soil, and are engaged for the most part in economy that is for self-maintenance only.

Other researchers have suggested that poor health standards, low literacy rates, poverty, and severe malnutrition may also be hallmarks of rural areas, though not in all cases or to the same degree (Williams, 1980).

Finally, it is important to note how closely Uganda’s quality of life and financial stability is tied to agriculture. Farming is one of the main ways people earn a living, and crops such as coffee (which accounts for 19 percent of Uganda’s exports), tobacco, cotton, tea, sugarcane, potatoes and bananas account for the majority of food production (Bureau of African Affairs, 2006).

### **The rural community library: overview**

Even in the most rural of locales, residents have information needs that may be met by a village or community library. The rural or village community library – usually a homegrown, locally run and managed small library located in rural areas in countries in Africa, Asia, and South America – has been recognized by a number of educators as a sustainable option for providing reading materials to rural peoples. The idea of the community library has existed in Africa for quite some time, and as early as 1968, the concept of rural information centers was being discussed by professionals and others in Africa who recognized the need for access to information by rural peoples (Rosenberg, 1993, p. 29). Kempson (1986, p. 188) defined three aspects of the rural community library:

- (1) community information services should not solely be based on the provision of printed materials, as many rural users are not used to utilizing printed materials, because so little of it exists in the community;
- (2) community information services of any type should be rooted in the community and for the most part, facilitated by members of that community; and
- (3) the services should be a channel for transferring information both to and from the local community.

Kagan (1982) also describes three functions of the rural library: to provide information to those individuals responsible for rural development programs, to support rural education programs and rural schools, and to serve as centers for community, education and culture. There are a number of well-known community library projects worldwide, including the six libraries set up by the Friends of African Village Libraries in West Africa, the Village Reading Rooms in Botswana, the Osu-initiated libraries in Ghana, the village libraries in Tanzania, the reading rooms in Tanzania and Botswana, the book distribution services in Mali, the Bulawayo Home Project in Zimbabwe, and the 23 school/community libraries in rural Zimbabwe set up as part of the Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (Sturges, 1994, p. 277). One distinction of the rural village library is their management – they are organized and run by local organizations, volunteers, donors and village members. Their financial support comes mostly from donor contributions and small grants, as opposed to funding from the government.

One way in which researchers and educators have tried to define the rural village library and measure its impact is by establishing and considering certain goals and objectives. Philip (1980, p. 47) advanced the following objectives for the rural village library:

- to help the rural children and adults maintain knowledge gained from their education;
- to help the rural farmer increase productivity by providing information about such topics as soil composition, markets for different crops, dairy and poultry farming, farm mechanics, land use, preservation of soil, rainfall and cultivation of different types of crops such as coffee and tea;
- to help rural people understand the country's social, political and economic endeavors and nation building efforts;
- to aid in the development of a wholesome family life, providing materials about health, family planning, and health care;
- providing materials to help get rid of tribalism and provincialism; and
- to inspire members of the community to read, use books, and enjoy these items for education and recreation.

Mittal (1964), in his book *Organising a Village Library*, suggested the following objectives for the rural village library:

- to disseminate authentic news and information;
- to provide motivation for learning, reading and writing, and helping to maintain, enhance and feed literacy among the people;
- to help to keep alive and enhance cultural heritage;
- to increase vocational competence in raising the technological level of a village occupation;
- to promote information of the various factions of the village population wherever they exist;
- to help village institutions and organizations improve their programs;
- to develop the aesthetic sense and refine taste; and
- to help people spend their leisure time profitably.

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Each of these researchers place great importance on addressing illiteracy in their rural library goals and objectives. Mayla (1974, pp. 249-69) summarized this, saying that rural libraries have the potential to “check any relapse into illiteracy, introduce a reading environment, and become a center for social change in the community”. Finally, there are direct benefits to having a library involved in human development efforts. Skrzyszewski and Cubberley (1997, p. 327) list several, including increased visibility for the library, increased community goodwill, and increased user population.

The Kitengesa Community Library (see [www.kitengesalibrary.org](http://www.kitengesalibrary.org)) is one example of a rural community library. The library is located in rural Kitengesa, a small village named for the local trading centre, located three miles away from the Ugandan town of Masaka. Residents of Kitengesa are for the most part without running water or mains electricity, although recent efforts have seen the laying of pipe and other implements necessary to pipe water to the village. Villagers make a living by small-scale farming and some fishing. According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2005), Masaka has between 112,757 and 131,565 households involved in some type of agricultural activity, with 442,650 planted “plots” of various crops.

The library was funded primarily by a United Nations One Percent for Development Fund grant, and constructed in 2001 on the grounds of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School by a professor from Hunter College, her husband (a former resident of the village), and the headmaster of the secondary school. The library was built to serve the needs of the community – mainly students and teachers – as well as to provide service to village members. The library collection is small and consists of about 1,739 books and can comfortably seat 24. There are two librarians who run the library, and a few student library assistants who work in the library in exchange for school fees. The students of the secondary school are automatically members of the library, and community members pay \$1 per year for library use and borrowing privileges. Currently, there are about 500 members of the library. The library is open a total of 77 hours per week, and as of summer 2006, was the only structure in the village with electricity. The four lights in the library are powered by solar panels, purchased in 2004 with a grant from the United Nations One Percent for Development Fund.

### **Making a connection between local economic development, rural libraries and literacy**

Skrzyszewski and Cubberley (1997, p. 324) suggest that “library services can be vital to economic growth” in rural areas. This next section highlights connections between rural libraries, literacy and small-scale economic development, and draws examples of small-scale economic development from the Kitengesa Community Library to illustrate some potential income-generating projects. In addition, Muyeed’s (1982) indicators for rural development (discussed previously in this paper) are incorporated to highlight the development potential of each project. Four of Muyeed’s indicators may apply to the projects from the Kitengesa Community Library, although on a very small scale. They are:

- (1) the rate of increase in income gained by the rural poor;
- (2) the rate of increase in productivity of the small-scale farms;
- (3) the rate of increase in the acquisition of functional literacy; and
- (4) the degree of social demand for education services in the rural areas.

Muyeed (1982, p. 235) astutely observes that “adult literacy has little appeal to the rural poor in developing countries as a means of liberating the mind. It must find a more direct appeal through liberating the poor from the pangs of hunger and poverty”. Researchers agree that certain human development factors such as education are key to development in all forms, economic and otherwise. Browne and Barrett (1991, p. 275) support this, stating that “lack of education and poor education undermine all other developmental efforts”.

The connection between rural libraries and small-scale economic development must begin with a closer look at the impact of these libraries on their communities in general. Much of the measurable impact has to do with improved literacy practices, the provision of non-formal educational activities, and support of what is often a fledgling reading culture. Dent and Yannotta (2005) demonstrated that these libraries have a real benefit to users in terms of access to reading materials, literacy programming, and non-formal educational activities. Muyeed (1982, p. 237) states “nonformal education, because of its flexibility, is particularly suited to addressing itself to the learning needs of any group within the rural community – men, women, out-of-school youth, children, farmers, artisans, landless labourers, etc.”. The libraries also have the potential to impact the academic performance of student users – Dent (2006) demonstrated that students who use the library have measurably higher class rankings than their counterparts without access to a library.

Educators and economists have long tried to illustrate connections between literacy rates, poverty and economic development. In his 1966 article, Marc Blaug suggests that literacy contributes to economic development in six key ways (Blaug, 1966, p. 394):

- (1) it raises the productivity of the newly literate;
- (2) it raises the productivity of those working in association with literates (the spillover effect);
- (3) it expedites the flow of general knowledge of individuals, thereby reducing the cost of transmitting useful information otherwise;
- (4) it stimulates the demand for vocational training and technical education;
- (5) it acts as a device for selecting the more able and enhances their occupational mobility; and
- (6) it strengthens economic incentives.

Blaug (1966, p. 399) goes on to point out that “the world map of illiteracy does, of course, correspond rather closely with the world map of poverty”. Another educator and economist, Arnold Anderson, pointed out in 1965 that no major industrial power at that time had “ever achieved steady economic growth with a literacy rate of less than 40 percent” (Anderson, 1965).

In a study published in 1997, Jagnayak set out to test six hypotheses regarding the impact of rural libraries on education, economic, political and socio-cultural development among villagers living in rural Kerala, India (Jagnayak, 1997). They were:

- (1) the reading habit of the people has considerably improved;
- (2) the libraries in the rural areas contributed considerably to the educational attainment of the rural mass;

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- (3) the agricultural techniques and production have been improved by the activities of the library;
  - (4) the people are economically benefited from the resources and different programs of the library;
  - (5) the political consciousness of the people has increased through the activities of the library; and
  - (6) rural libraries have contributed much to the attitudinal change of the people.

Jagnayak (1997) was able to prove each of these hypotheses in turn by surveying 15 libraries and 450 members. They found that the availability of reading materials improved reading habits, that the library helped young users with educational attainment by providing free classes on certain topics of general interest, and that the economic standing of some community members improved as they were able to look for employment opportunities in the local newspapers. As well, some living conditions improved – users were able to read library material that taught them how to thatch their huts more efficiently.

The importance of literacy and the development of strong reading habits cannot be overstated in their importance to overall human development, especially as it regards women. Browne and Barrett (1991, p. 278) found that literacy rates had a very high correlation to infant mortality rates and immunization rates while conducting a study on the impact of female education in sub-Saharan Africa. The researchers point out that almost 70 percent of the food consumed in the region is produced and farmed by women (Browne and Barrett, 1991, p. 280). “This suggests that investment in women’s education would yield significant returns in food production and agricultural output, as well as improving nutrition for the household” (Browne and Barrett, 1991, p. 281). The authors advance that:

[...] there are both direct and indirect links between education and agricultural output. Literate women are more likely to have the confidence to apply for, and obtain credit in their own right and to be more responsive to innovative approaches to farming such as poultry or rabbit rearing [...] Their attendance at farmer training courses is more likely [...] They are able to read printed material and thus broaden their information network (Browne and Barrett, 1991, p. 281).

They further state that “female literacy is a developmental gain, both for women themselves and for their families” and that overall, the education of women is critical for sustaining developmental gains in the region (Browne and Barrett, 1991, p. 284). This is a point well illustrated at the Kitengesa Community Library, where a number of income-generating activities are led by women.

Jagnayak (1997) points out a number of ways that rural libraries may play a role in economic development. One is by becoming involved in programs that focus on various types of development, such as agriculture, health, nutrition and small-scale industries (Jagnayak, 1997, p. 15). He advances that having literature available, written in the users’ native language about topics related to home economics, maternity welfare, health and hygiene are imperative to rural development. He goes on to state that “In rural areas, and particularly those in the Third World, the most urgent economic problem is to improve the production of agriculture”, to which he adds that libraries might be “useful for economic uplift” by hosting workshops, lectures, and

other relevant programs on these and other critical topics (Jagnayak, 1997, p. 15). At the Kitengesa Library, a forestry project is providing the potential for income generation related to agriculture. In October 2005, a volunteer from Canada implemented a forestry project to generate local income by using the fertile grounds of the Kitengesa Community Library to plant trees. The project, which is closely coordinated with the library, includes planting nursery beds for seedlings (trees and vegetables), and a hands-on training program that teaches students how to care for the trees and plants. It also includes an incentive program that recruits students from the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School to work at the nursery in exchange for school fees, a scholarship program for students who board at Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School and care for the trees, and a way for local students to connect with local farmers who might also be interested in growing/selling trees. It is hoped that as the trees grow, mature and are sold, they will generate enough income to keep the project going, and provide some level of local income for the participants. This venture aligns with Muyeed's first indicator focusing on income generation (income would be generated by plants and trees sold to local farmers). The nursery is a new addition to the farm landscape in Kitengesa, thus representing a possible increase in small-scale farm productivity (Muyeed, 1982, p. 231).

According to Professor Peter Easton, faculty member and scholar at Florida State University's Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies:

Literacy is an essential skill in managing new activities, running local crop markets, administering community government and communicating with constituents [...] Efforts to promote literacy, then, must dovetail with other local development initiatives that create uses for it and that require it. If we can succeed in uniting adult literacy efforts with economic development efforts, then we will have a much better chance of countering some of the other problems that are endemic to this part of the world (Florida State University News Archive, 2006).

The Nyendo Reading Group in Kitengesa is an example of local efforts to promote literacy and connect literacy with better business gains. In 2003, a library member and local schoolteacher from the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School began checking out books from the Kitengesa Community Library, and taking them to the nearby village of Nyendo located about 15 miles away from the library. He distributed the books to local residents, and the Nyendo Reading Group was born. His goal was to bring library services and literacy classes to people in the town of Nyendo. Each week, the teacher borrows books and uses them to conduct reading classes for the group members. The group has a diverse membership, made up of men, women and small business owners. Group members read on their own during the week, and request specific reading material for the following week. The business owners read to improve their literacy and English skills, in order to be more effective traders and communicators. One group member was able to travel to different parts of Africa (Nairobi and Kenya) to participate in trading activities and improve her business.

When interviewed as part of a research study in 2005, all of the members stated that they had little or no English reading/writing skills before joining the reading group (Dent and Yannotta, 2005). After attending the reading group for a period of time, members reported that they could read in English and Luganda to varying degrees. The members also reported that they read in their spare time, and 66 percent said they

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have reading material on hand at work to read when business is slow. A few members also said they read to their children, or would do so in the future.

The Nyendo Reading Group provides access to reading materials for members who otherwise might not be able to make it to the library, and for whom there were few other local resources available. The Nyendo Reading Group intersects with two of Muyeed's (1982, p. 231) indicators:

- (1) the increase of functional literacy; and
- (2) the degree of social demand for educational services.

Although the literacy of the Nyendo group members has not to date been measured in any formal way, self-reports from the members suggest that their reading skills have improved and had an impact on their ability to trade. Connected to this is the desire of group members to continue participating in this informal literacy instruction, which can be seen as a demand for (informal) educational services.

The Library Literacy Instruction program at Kitengesa is another example of local efforts to increase literacy and the resulting potential economic benefits to villagers. Beginning in 2005, the librarian at the Kitengesa Community Library began holding informal literacy classes in the library. At one point, there were as many as seven individuals taking part in the instruction, sitting for hours every day to read with the librarian. Some members continued to attend the sessions for more than a year. One young woman, interested in starting her own business after moving to the village from a more urban area, was able to attend poultry farming workshops after learning to read and write her name. As a result, she was able to start her own poultry business, with more than 200 chickens. She sells the eggs and meat to local merchants at hotel and food outlets, which generates income for her family. The library's literacy program aligns with three of Muyeed's indicators:

- (1) the importance of the increase of functional literacy (the young woman learning to read and write her name in order to support her entrepreneurship);
- (2) the degree of social demand for educational services (the commitment of the literacy group members to participate in the instruction over the course of a year); and
- (3) the increase in income by the local poor (the income generated by the young woman's poultry business).

In addition to the projects directly related to literacy, there are other activities that may impact income generation. For instance, the addition of electricity at the Kitengesa Library is a major developmental gain that presents a modest potential for income generation. Solar panels were installed in the Kitengesa Community Library in 2004 and 2005. Prior to this, the library had no electricity. The solar panels have provided a way for the library to generate some income by charging cell phones for a fee of 500 Ugandan shillings (\$US0.27) per charge. This venture is raising about 50,000 Ugandan shillings (\$US27) per month. The money is used to support library programming such as the Children's Day Reading Tent event, which allows children from the village and neighboring area schools to come and read books for free in a fun, carefree environment. In the future, electricity may also be used to power laptop computers (donated by library supporters), which may in turn be used to teach simple word

processing to local residents for a small fee. This venture is one of the more successful income-generating activities taking place at the library, given that most villagers have no landline telephones, only cell phones.

### **Women and local economic development**

The role of rural women in local economic activities is an important one that deserves some discussion. Bazin (1984, p. 39) states “It is necessary to focus on women and where they are – especially in rural areas. One needs, now, to move towards development through women, supporting women to become agents of change”. House-Midamba and Ekechi (1995) discuss the economic contributions of various African women in detail from historical times to the present, including the Igbo women of Eastern Nigeria, women traders in Kenya, Nairobi, and Ghana, and the growth of women entrepreneurs in South Africa. Women in other countries such as rural China are also involved in income-generating activities in their villages, often providing support for their extended families. Maio and Dong women in China’s Wuling mountains participate in a number of income-generating activities, including pig-farming, raising cattle, sheep and chickens. The women are also heavily involved in handicrafts, including working with textiles like silk to make garments, raising silk worms to provide the silk, embroidery, wax printing and jewelry-making (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2006). In many rural areas, the tasks undertaken by women allow their families to subsist. Dixon (1978, p. 127) writes that “women’s work begins where their husbands’ ends”. The author lists several tasks that are common in rural areas, such as “extracting oil from seeds; cleaning cotton; drying mango pulp; washing and cleaning jute; drying and husking corn; grinding corn, wheat, pulses, or rice into flour; peeling the tops of sugarcane for animal fodder” (Dixon, 1978, p. 127). The author also describes how many women are responsible for retrieving water from far-away wells and springs, and carrying the water in heavy containers back to their homes. Dixon (1978) suggests several ways to integrate rural women better into the economic development process, including locating any proposed income-generating activities in the village, engaging women outside of the home, and providing some type of incentive for participation (Dixon, 1978, p. 35). Dixon (1978, p. 30) also proposes that any new projects consider the type of activities already being done by the women, and upgrading those activities to “income-earning employment”.

Cultural and social obstacles prevent many women in rural areas from participating fully in income-generating activities. House-Midamba and Ekechi (1995, p. xv) discuss the sexual division of labor, and “gendered spaces” – those areas and activities that are in some places, off limits to women. In countries in Asia and Africa, these cultural challenges prevent women from becoming gainfully employed. Dixon (1978, p. 115) discussed female seclusion, and how in certain areas in South Asia, this decades-old practice inhibits the ability of women to work outside the home.

One area of concern is the lack of access to information for women involved in income-generating activities, which links directly to the role that rural libraries can play in terms of development. Vittin (2000) suggests that cultural and traditional factors, as well as poverty, often interfere with women’s ability to access information, thus leaving them without relevant information for the very activities they are involved in. Adjabeng (2004, p. 8) advocates for the rural library as a place for women to go to learn how to find and use information relevant to their needs, stating “libraries

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can provide information to bridge the gap between the rural and urban dwellers which can help break down barriers of literacy, injustices, gender imbalance, eradicate ignorance, poverty and discrimination". In their article, Pickering *et al.* (1996) discuss gender, development and the role of women's groups in Uganda. The authors suggest that these groups are a way that women can become involved in rural development on a number of different levels. The authors note that women's groups "have been able to raise small amounts of capital from the sale of subsistence crops" (Pickering *et al.*, 1996, p. 55). Some of the projects included agricultural ventures such as growing and selling bananas, groundnuts, and honey; raising animals such as pigs, cattle, and poultry; and craft production. There were also other activities such as alcohol production and selling of rainwater (Pickering *et al.* 1996). The authors advance that these women's groups allow participants to raise money more easily than doing it alone. In 2005, a Women's Group began meeting in the Kitengesa Community Library as an adult literacy class, taught by the librarian and a visiting scholar from the University of British Columbia's YouLead (an organization that works with youth all over the world in volunteerism and global citizenship.) In addition to literacy instruction, the group members wanted to discuss possible income-generating projects. The individuals teaching the group thus arranged for a number of local experts to come and talk to them, and share information about raising pigs, goats, cattle, and chickens. The group members also learned a little about bookkeeping to help them track any earnings and expenses. The Women's Group hopes to decide on an income-generating project, and implement the project with the support of YouLead within the next year. If the project is successful and generates some income for the members of the group, then this venture would align with Muyeed's (1982) first indicator, which focuses on increased income generation.

The literature and examples from Kitengesa suggest promising connections between rural libraries, literacy, and small-scale economic development. There is no doubt that in some small ways, the Kitengesa Community Library has contributed to local economic development. The projects at Kitengesa are still in their infancy, and long-term economic outcomes are not certain. At the same time, the projects have created a new sense of hope and possibility for many library users. There are many implications for other rural community libraries and their potential to enhance the lives of local residents in this same manner. The rural library should be seen as one way to provide access to information for the sake of improving certain living conditions and human development areas, whether they be related to health and wellbeing, financial stability, or education. The examples from Kitengesa highlight the fact that even the smallest economic changes can potentially have great impact in areas plagued with chronic poverty. Quantitative evaluation of the success of the projects and the income they generate should be the next step in terms of future research – such a study would provide further support for establishing more rural community libraries, and highlight their role in local economic development.

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