

# *A Rural Community Library in Africa: A Study of its Use and Users*

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The Kitengesa Community Library is a small library built from the ground up near the rural village of Kitengesa, Uganda. The library, formally opened in 2002, currently has a collection of over 1,000 books, and a small staff who work with the community and local secondary school to provide access to books and other services to roughly 50 members of the community and over 300 school students. During the summer of 2004, researchers, both librarians from the Hunter College Libraries, traveled to Kitengesa to study the use and users of this library. The research focused on who in the community uses the library, how they use the library, an analysis of the collection, and the impact the library has had on the community. The methodology included several means

for gathering data, including observation of library use, focus groups, individual interviews, and home visits, as well as examination of library circulation and membership information kept in a database. The findings consist of several implications for ongoing development of the library, including the importance of the library to local teachers, and the impact of the library on classroom activities and learning; differences in the reading habits of boys and girls who use the library and some possible reasons for those differences; and how the collection of reading materials in local languages and about local situations might be key in terms of community libraries and the development of a reading culture elsewhere in Africa.

## *Background*

In the past several years, great strides have been made in the fight against illiteracy in Uganda. The literacy rate for adults is approaching 70%, with youth literacy exceeding 80% (UNESCO 2004). In addition, the gap between male and female literacy is beginning to close. This phenomenon is occurring in many countries throughout Africa. With this effort to increase the literate population comes a major problem: supplying newly literate people with reading material so that they can retain their skills (Parry 2004). Public libraries are one way to provide people with reading material, however, public libraries have shown little success in Africa (Mostert 1998). An alternative to public libraries that has shown great promise in providing communities with reading materials and other services is the community library. The focus of this study is one such library: the Ki-

tengesa Community Library, which is providing books, information, and educational opportunities to a rural area in southwestern Uganda.

Public libraries receive much criticism in the library literature of Africa. It is an acknowledged fact that the majority of the population on the African continent does not use public libraries. This is illustrated in Uganda, where in 1992 there were only 53,000 registered library users out of a population of over 20 million (UNESCO 1995, 7–11). The major criticism is that public libraries are based on an outdated Western model that was implemented by colonialist governments (Mostert 1998; Alemna 1995; Kantumoya 1992). Thus, the collections are mostly in English, which cannot be read by the majority of Africans; the books are mostly donated and reflect a Western worldview; and, the collections are print-based and take no account of the oral culture that is prevalent in Africa.

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Mostert also advances the problems of inadequate training of staff, deficiencies in determining specific needs through analysis, lack of cooperation among agencies involved in library-related work, and the absence of sustained efforts to achieve an alternative framework as failures of public library systems in Africa (2001). These combined factors have resulted in public libraries that are out-of-touch with their users.

In 2000, there were 21 public libraries supported by the government in Uganda. Almost all of these libraries serve urban areas and are greatly underfunded (Issak 2000). As 88% of the population lives in rural areas, there is a large gap between those who have access to information and reading materials and those who do not. To address this problem there has been a move to set up rural library services, but because of a lack of funding by the government, this has seen mixed success (Issak 2000). One alternative framework that is showing success is the community library. In recent years a few small community-based libraries, supported independently of the government, have sprung up in Uganda and are showing great promise in providing reading materials to rural populations.

### *Community Libraries*

Community Libraries can be found throughout Africa. They include the Village Reading Rooms in Botswana, the system of barefoot librarians in Tanzania, the Osu initiated libraries in Ghana, and the Kitengesa Community Library in Uganda. They differ from public libraries in that they are created by and for a local population and usually are not supported with government funds. They may be organized by a school, church or community group, but the needs of the community-at-large are of the utmost importance and the collection and services of the library represent those needs. These libraries also often provide informal educational services, such as literacy instruction (Raseroka 1994).

There are other ways that community libraries differ from public libraries, including the role of the librarian. Stilwell (1991) discusses the function of librarians in community libraries. The community librarian is one who lives in the community and has close personal relationships with the users. The community librarian can identify the

needs of the community and how to provide for those needs in a way that is best suited to the user. Further, she states that, "community librarianship aims at information provision in the crucial areas of people's lives and at those who have limited access to other sources of help" (Stilwell 1991, 20).

Needs assessment has been identified as a major contributor to the success of a library (Alemna 1995; Mostert 1998, 2001; Raseroka 1994; Rosenberg, 1994; Stilwell 1991). Determining what collections and services are needed by the community is imperative to providing relevant library services. Unfortunately in most public libraries needs assessment is not done because of inadequate funding, a lack of staff and a shortage of research skills to carry out an assessment. In community libraries, however, needs assessment is the foundation on which the library's collection and services are based. Alemna (1995) believes this is central to the concept of the community library.

### *Kitengesa Community Library*

Kitengesa is a trading center in southwestern Uganda, in Masaka District, for which the nearby community library and secondary school were named. Until recently there was no running water or electricity in Kitengesa. In addition to an established trading center, there are several primary schools and one secondary school in the area. The closest town, Masaka town, is approximately five miles away on an unpaved road. The majority of the population is subsistence farmers who have very little cash on hand. Because education has been established for quite a long period of time in the area, much of the population can read, if not in English, then in the local language, Luganda. The establishment of free universal primary education in 1997 has played an important role in increasing the population of readers. Although this is a relatively literate community, prior to 1999, there were few reading materials available to the community.

The Kitengesa Community Library Project began in 1999 with a box of 161 books that were lent out to the students of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School. The project was a collaboration between Mawanda Emmanuel, the headmaster of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, and Professor Kate Parry, a part-time resident of Kitengesa and professor at Hunter

College in New York City. In 1997, Professor Parry conducted a study on literacy in Kitengesa and found that the need for reading material was not being met. She then met Mawanda Emmanuel, whose dream was to have a library attached to his secondary school that would serve not only the students and teachers of the school, but also the community at large. Soon afterwards, the Kitengesa Community Library project was born.

In 2001, with the assistance of a grant from the UN One Percent for Development Fund, a one-room library was built on the grounds of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School (KCSS). It seats 28 users and by the end of 2004 had grown to a collection of over 1,200 books and subscriptions to two daily newspapers. As of the end of 2004, there were 380 members of the library. The staff includes two librarians and four library scholars who are students who work at the library in exchange for school fees and room and board. Funding for the library comes from grants and personal contributions. There is no government funding. Membership is free for students and teachers of the secondary school but community members must pay an equivalent of \$1.00 a year for the privilege of checking out books.

In August 2004, a second grant was received from the UN One Percent for Development Fund to install two solar panels on the roof of the library. These solar panels provide electricity for up to eight hours a day in the library. This allows the library to be lit at night and for a laptop computer to be used for several hours a day to record library data. The provision of electricity is important because it marks the library as an important place: it is the only building for many miles to have electricity and implies to the community that reading is important. In addition, electricity is likely to attract new users who were previously unable to visit the library during the day.

There are several unique features of the Kitengesa Community Library. One is that it is located on the grounds of the school and serves as a de facto school library, but it is also open to the public. Another unique feature is that the collection of books is in both English and Luganda. This expands the reach of the library to those who do not read English. In addition, almost all the books in the collection have come from Ugandan publishers, making the collection very relevant to the local population.

The staff and board of directors of the Kitengesa Community Library have been concerned with needs assessment from the outset of the project. Informal focus groups, surveys, and door-to-door interviews have been conducted to gauge the information and reading needs of the local population and the results have guided the acquisition of materials. Every effort has been made to acquire materials in the local language.

Since its inception, the Kitengesa Community Library has become more than a collection of books. The library is also providing learning opportunities to adults in a community that has limited access to education. Literacy instruction has sprung up at the initiative of the librarians with remarkable results. People who cannot read or write are encouraged to come to the library, with the promise of instruction. People from areas up to fifteen miles away are using the library and books from the library are also read on a local radio station.

### *A Review of the literature on reading and rural communities*

The literature presents an overview of some of the issues associated with reading, literacy and libraries in rural areas, materials used by the researchers to provide a context for the research during the course of the project. As highlighted earlier, 31 percent of Ugandans are illiterate; of this number 21 percent are male and 40 percent are female (UNESCO 2004). Aguolu (1975) contends that the majority of African readers fall into two categories. The first group are those newly literate who have learned to read/write in school or through adult education classes. Agulolu states that this group is most likely to lapse into illiteracy after their formal schooling unless they continue to have access to appropriate reading material. The second group of readers are those who might be referred to as semi-literate. They are interested in reading in order to improve their trade, farming, and the lives of their families, but tend to be shy users of libraries. Even those people who have learned to read and write at some point are in danger of losing these skills because of lack of access to materials to read. Malya addressed this issue in the 1974 article about literacy in Tanzania, where the author stated that 60 percent of adults who once knew how to read lapsed back into ill-

literacy because they did not have appropriate materials to continue reading and learning from.

According to Ikoja-Odongo (2004), there are close to 7 million students in schools in Uganda, but very few of these schools have libraries. Ikoja-Odongo suggests that a "reading culture" be cultivated, and that schools play a major role in this type of development. Beilke (1980) states that school libraries are especially important in developing countries because of the ratio of children to adults, and the reality that it is the children who are active learners. Bristow (1996) indicates that the school library is often the first and only place that the rural child has access to reading material. In her 1971 article, De Perez proposes that providing school libraries might be one of the most efficient ways to revitalize education in developing countries. Based on her research on modernizing education, De Perez (1971) suggests that school libraries influence teachers, students and the community in a lasting manner; school libraries are appropriate for all levels of education; they have been successful in other countries; they distribute educational materials more efficiently to larger groups of readers; and they encounter less resistance from teachers and administrators than would a change to the curriculum. Zondi (1982) raises another important point about the school library, stating that school libraries can make up for other inadequacies in the classroom such as the lack of textbooks and other teaching aids. Dumea (2001) implies that access to reading materials, such as that provided through libraries, encourages students to read and re-read books, which improves their reading skills. Each of these points has relevance for the Kitengesa Community Library.

In addition to libraries being of obvious importance in terms of supporting literacy, they may also play a role in development. Aboyade (1984) makes a compelling case for access to information and the link to development in still developing nations. The author contends that national development and rural development are inextricably linked, and that rural community members, many of whom are illiterate, need to be considered since they make up a greater percentage of the community. Aboyade further states that since these community members cannot benefit from more modern or conventional methods of information transfer such as new media, rural

libraries play an increasingly important role by providing reading materials and interaction between community members and information. During the RUDIS study (Rural Development Information System Research) conducted over the course of many years starting in 1981, the author observed the information-seeking habits of villagers at a small experimental library in the rural village of Badeku in Nigeria. The study found that community members made requests for information in the following areas: health related matters, problems of daily existence, occupational concerns, government operations, education, religious matters and recreational matters. The author also noted that community members were very interested in being read to. This was a new experience for them, and was greatly appreciated. Aboyade concludes by asserting that the role of the rural community library goes far beyond just the provision of reading material; these libraries hold great potential to serve those non-literate community members who may not have any other means of obtaining information. It is important to note that each of the areas in which Badeku community members requested information were more likely than not to intersect with local development at some point, in some way – for instance, information about better farming methods helping community members increase their productivity and income over time, thus supporting local economy.

Kagan (1982) suggests that the rural library has three functions: to provide information to those individuals responsible for rural development programs; support rural education programs and rural schools; and serve as centers for community, education and culture. In their 1973 publication, *Adult Education Handbook*, the Dar es Salaam University Institute of Adult Education contended that rural libraries had the potential to "check any relapse into illiteracy, introduce a reading environment, and become a center for social change in the community" (1973, 249–269). Mwasha (1982) provided additional justification for the need for rural village libraries. The majority of villages he surveyed for his research had what he described as an "absence of a literary environment." This absence was indicated by a lack of detailed signage, street names, few newspapers, advertisements or written announcements/flyers for local activities.

The literature on the reading habits of students elsewhere in Africa also provides a different lens through which to view the Kitengesa Community Library student users. In a study carried out by the Children's Literature Research Unit in the Department of Information Science, at the University of South Africa in 1997, researchers surveyed 877 students ages twelve to sixteen. The questions were designed to solicit feedback about how respondents chose books to read, which genres they chose to read, and their attitudes towards reading in general. Some of the key findings revealed that girls had a greater interest than boys in reading about body changes and issues of health. The study also found that interest in certain types of materials such as lists of facts and magazines increased with age. Girls read more than boys in the study, and referred to themselves as "enthusiastic" readers – an indication that they read for fun as well as for study.

### *Purpose of the study*

An initial study of the first two years of the Kitengesa Community Library was conducted by Professor Kate Parry, with a particular focus on the impact of the library on girls. This study looked at the reading habits of the students of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School through the analysis of circulation and membership data and written reports that the students made when returning a book. The study analyzed the number of books loaned to students, the categories of books loaned to students and compared the reading habits of boys and girls. It also looked at the reach of the books loaned, including whether the books were being read aloud to family members, and whether the students were loaning them to family members or friends before returning them to the library (Parry 2004).

In the summer of 2004, the authors conducted a broader study with the goal of exploring the use and users of the Kitengesa Community Library. The researchers wanted to investigate a number of questions, including:

- Who in the community uses the library?
- How users go about finding and using books/information in the library?
- What kinds of materials are being used and what is most popular?

- What kinds of informal education practices are taking place at the library?
- How the library has made a difference in the lives of users?

It is hoped that the results of this research will be useful to the Kitengesa Community Library, and other rural community libraries, in terms of helping to understand better how patrons use the library, the kinds of material that might be most useful in libraries of this type, and the kinds of programs and services users are likely to need. In addition, the researchers hope to bring to light the importance and success of providing appropriate reading materials to rural communities in Uganda and beyond.

### *Methodology*

The researchers had to gather a fairly large quantity of information in a relatively short time frame, thus an efficient methodology was developed that incorporated in-person interviews, focus groups, door-to-door visits, spontaneous interviews and smaller group interviews to facilitate this data collection. The researchers were careful to take into account cultural considerations before designing the study, and inquired about the appropriateness of using such recording devices as video cameras, digital cameras and voice recorders. As well, much consideration had to be given to language, as the researchers did not speak the local language of Luganda. One of the librarians acted as translator and guide, providing valuable support in this area which allowed the research to run smoothly.

The project was divided into four activities: orientation, observation, data collection, and data compilation and reporting. The first part of the project involved the researchers orienting themselves to the environment. It was very important for the participants and community members to feel comfortable with the researchers, and it was equally important for the researchers to be respectful of boundaries and the privacy of the participants. Though guidelines and regulations regarding issues of privacy and human subject use were provided by the home institution, the researchers found there were other participant concerns that had to be taken into account as well. The researchers spent approximately nine

days at the outset of the project meeting with and being introduced to people informally, including community members, teachers and students at the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, and others who were to be a part of the project. These meetings gave community members a chance to get comfortable with the researchers well before the actual project work began.

The next step for the researchers was that of observation. User activities within the library were carefully (but unobtrusively) observed to provide researchers with a better sense of library users, patterns of use, “traffic flow” (busiest library times and slowest times), what materials people were reading, the role of the library staff in interacting with the users, and basically, how the community used the library. These observations formed a core part of the project, and took approximately two weeks. This observation phase was paired with the next step of the project, data collection. The researchers gathered data using three distinct methods: interviews, focus groups, and circulation and patron statistics. The data collection activities took approximately three weeks.

The researchers conducted several different types of interviews during the project. Home visits were conducted to target specific groups of readers, including:

- The most frequent users of the library
- Adults who previously expressed a keen interest in joining the library but have not yet followed through
- Adult reader participants in the adult literacy class currently being held in the library

During these interviews, information about who in the household does the reading, whom is being read to, and the nature of what they are reading were some of the questions that were asked (see Appendix I for interview questions). The researchers also surveyed the types of books, if any, that household members owned. A total of 20 interviews with people from the following groups were conducted:

1. Frequent users
2. Adult participants in library literacy activities
3. Local Reading Group (conducted in Nyendo, a nearby town, via home and business visits)
4. Kitengesa Community Library Staff

5. Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School Administration
6. Community members who have not yet joined library

Eight focus groups with a total of 45 participants were conducted using questions and exercises designed to elicit feedback on the types of material participants read and the kind of materials they would buy if they could (see Appendix II for focus group questions). The researchers took turns recording/transcribing the focus groups and facilitating them, and the group meetings took place in the library and/or the local schools.

The focus groups included: primary school teachers from a local primary school (11); primary school children (boys) from a local primary school (8); primary school children (girls) from a local primary school (5); secondary school teachers from Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School (8); secondary school children (girls) from Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School (8); and secondary school children (boys) from Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School (5).

Next, the researchers gathered circulation and patron statistics, as well as examined older statistics, to gain a historical perspective on library and material usage. A Microsoft Access database, which had been kept since 2000, provided information on library members and related demographic data, as well as cataloging information on the library material. This database was brought up to date during the project, which meant the researchers could compare circulation patterns over the last three years. For instance, a particular point of interest included the male to female ratio of those checking out books and their ages – database queries allowed very specific information about these patterns to be highlighted. To facilitate this part of the data collection, the researchers trained both librarians to use a laptop computer and work with the Access database. This part of the project spanned the entire project.

The final part of the project involved compilation of the data and the generation of reports, including a profile of the users of the Kitengesa Community Library, an evaluation of the current collection, including data on the types of material most used and/or borrowed from the library and a profile of the information and reading material needs of the readers. A key component of the methodology was that of dissemination, and ef-

**Membership by Gender**  
(379 total members as of 10/04)

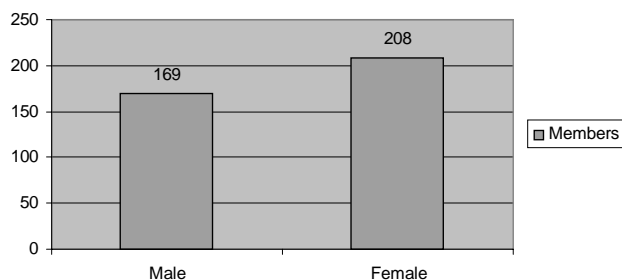


Table 1: Library Membership by Gender

**Membership by Profession**  
(379 total members as of 10/04)

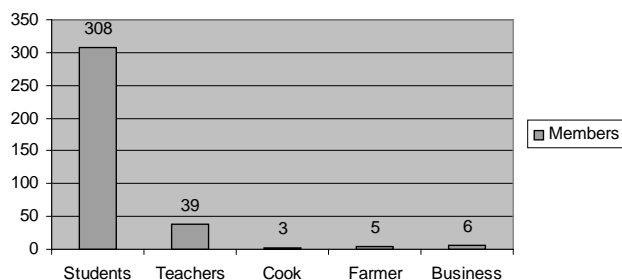


Table 2: Library Membership by Profession

**Items Checked Out by Gender**  
(1066 total items checked out 1/04-10/04)

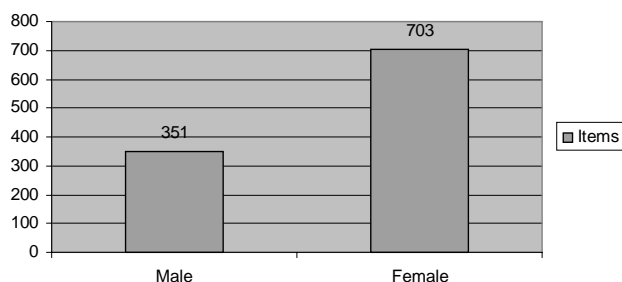


Table 3: Library Items Checked Out by Gender

Table 4: Description and Examples of Select Book Categories

Category	Description	Book
Morals	Books about behavior and emotional health, usually published by a catholic congregation	Adolescents & Parents Talk About Love
Modern Stories	Stories about African protagonists set in a modern environment	Umoyana, the Little Wind
Traditional Stories	African folktales, mostly in English translation	How Hare Was Caught Stealing
Historical Stories	Fictional stories about Africa set in a historical context	Cross to the Gun
History	Non-fiction books about history and historical events	A Short History of West Africa: AD 1800 to the Present Day
Classics	Simplified/abridged versions of classical European novels	Kidnapped, R.L. Stevenson
Language	Books about grammar and language usage	Creative English
Education	Includes prospectus of various educational institutions as well as books about teaching	History and Development of Education in Uganda
Health	Mostly sexual health, of critical importance because of the impact of AIDS in the area	Sexual and Fertility Awareness
Society	A combination of materials about culture, popular anthropology and political systems.	Uganda's Constitution

forts to share the research findings include publications as well as conference presentations.

### General statistics

Descriptive statistics from the Kitengesa Community Library provide context and background for the user profiles, and the research project as a whole. As of August 2004, the Kitengesa Community Library had a total of 379 members, 208 female, and 169 male. Table 1 highlights the male to female membership ratio. Table 2 shows that the majority of the library members are students (ap-

proximately 80 percent) and 10 percent are teachers, with the remaining 10 percent being a mix primarily of cooks, farmers, and business people/shop owners. Table 3 highlights the number of items checked out by gender, with males checking out 351 items, and females checking out 703 items. The Kitengesa Library collection consisted of 1283 titles at the time of the project, made up of 27 categories. Table 4 provides a description of select categories and examples of book titles; Table 5 shows the breakdown of the library collection by category. There are 179 books in Lu-ganda, 1099 in English and 5 in Swahili.

**Library Collection by Category**  
(1283 total items)

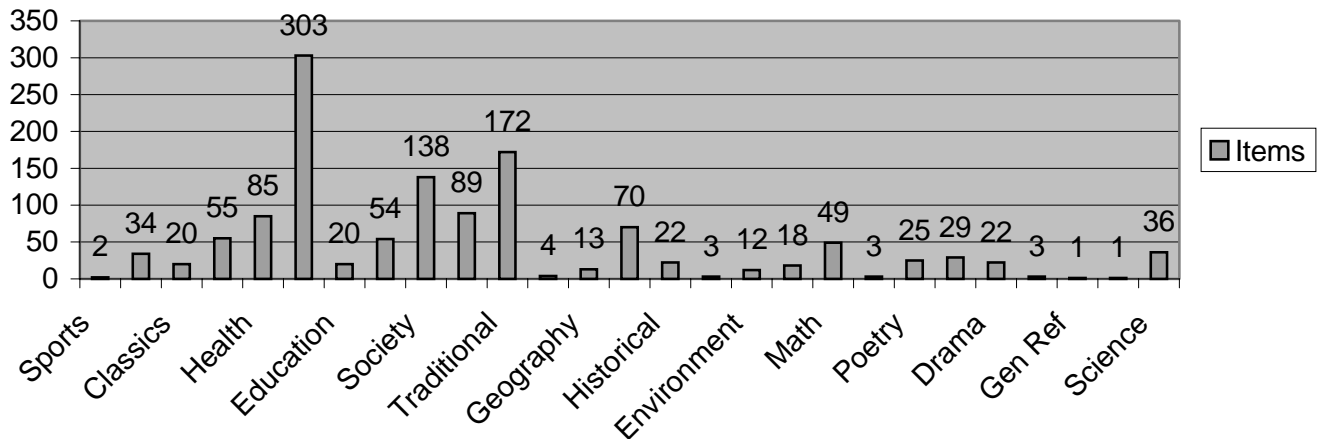


Table 5: Library Collection by Category

The most popular categories for female members are modern stories, traditional stories, moral stories, environment and health. Table 6 provides an overview of the circulation patterns for both men and women. The most popular categories for male members are modern stories, traditional stories, historical stories, and health. Table 7 illustrates that male and female teachers both prefer modern stories, followed by traditional stories and morals. Male teachers checked out 6 classics, compared with no classics checked out by female teachers. Male community members such as cooks, farmers, and business owners checked out a total of 29 items (Table 8). They preferred traditional stories, followed by modern stories, classics and history. No books on farming were checked out by this group. Table 9 highlights female community members who checked out 78 items, and preferred modern stories, traditional stories, and classics.

*User profiles*

The researchers were interested in examining specific trends and patterns in the use of the Kitengesha Community Library. To accomplish this, the library database was queried for several different data sets. A detailed user profile to highlight patterns of use by different groups was one of the project outcomes, and the following section highlights select user profile data, using informa-

tion gathered from focus groups and individual interviews. Statistics on library use (culled from the library’s database) are also presented. The circulation statistics cited below are from data gathered between January 2004 and October 2004, and the membership data are from statistics compiled January 2000 to October 2004.

*Student Profile*

A total of twenty-eight students were interviewed. Thirteen were primary school children, and 15 were secondary school children. 14 male and 14 females were interviewed. Most of the children interviewed said that they read materials related to their studies at home. Girls were more likely than boys to read materials other than school-related at home. Seventy-one percent of students interviewed owned books at home, and all of the students said they shared books with family and friends. Seventy-four percent read out loud to others (family and friends). Eighty-nine percent of the students said they read in their spare time. When asked if they prefer to read in English or Luganda, they were divided equally in their preference. On average, girls spend between 3 and 5 days per week reading, for 2–3 hours each session. Boys reported that they spent 5 days per week reading, for about 1–2 hours each session. Those students who resided on the school’s campus spent slightly more time reading and reading in the library.

### Category Breakdown by Gender (1066 items checked out)

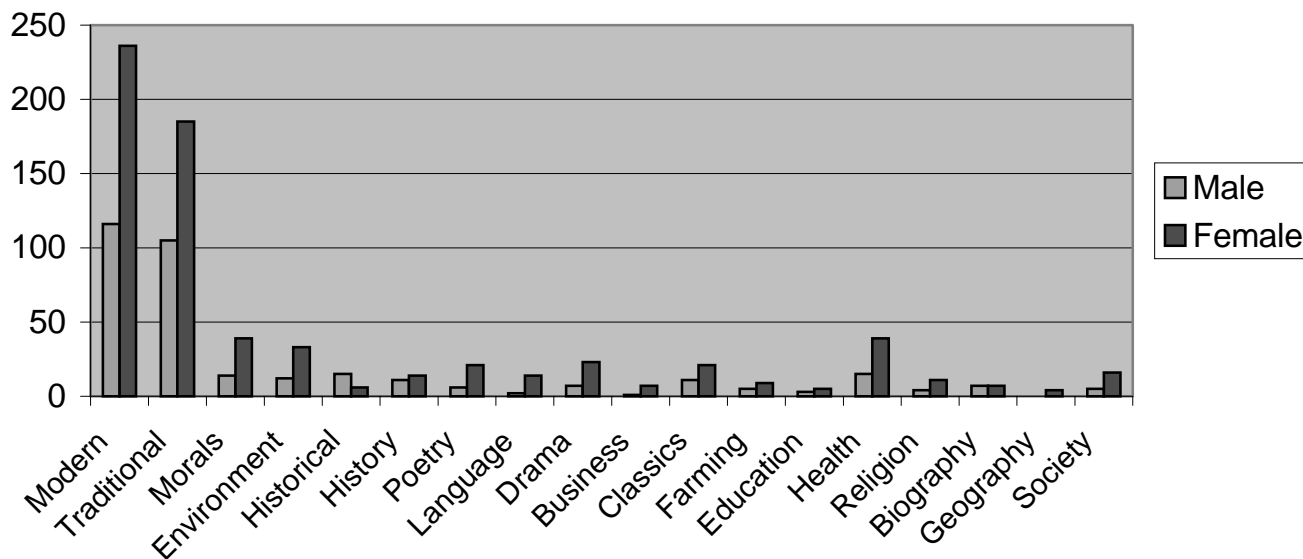


Table 6: Book Categories Checked Out By Gender

### Category Breakdown by Profession Teachers (90 items checked out)

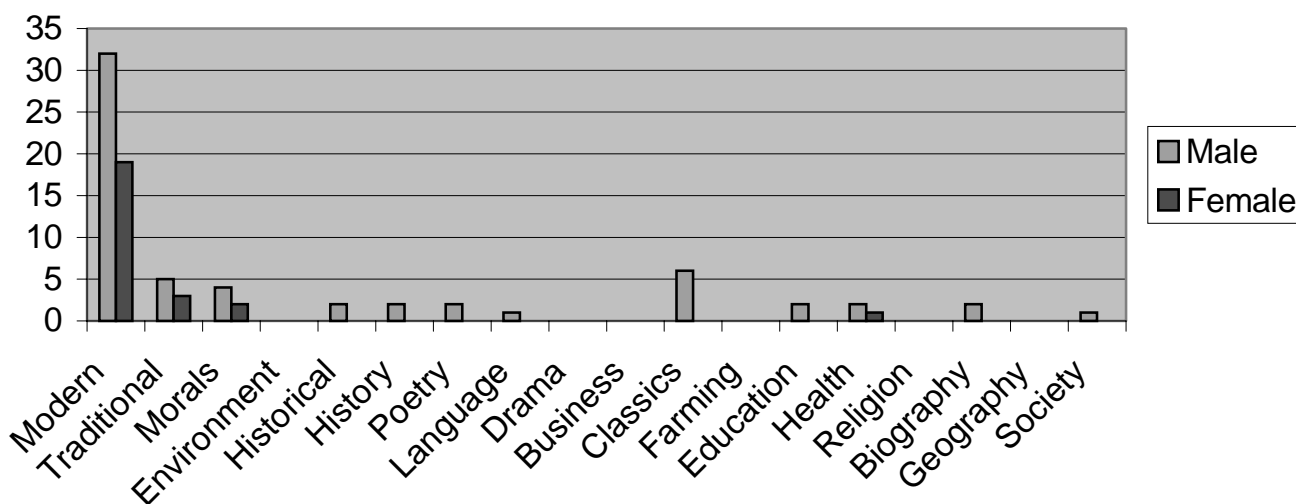


Table 7: Book Categories Checked Out By Teachers

### Category Breakdown Male Community Members

(non-student, non-teacher)

(109 total items checked out)

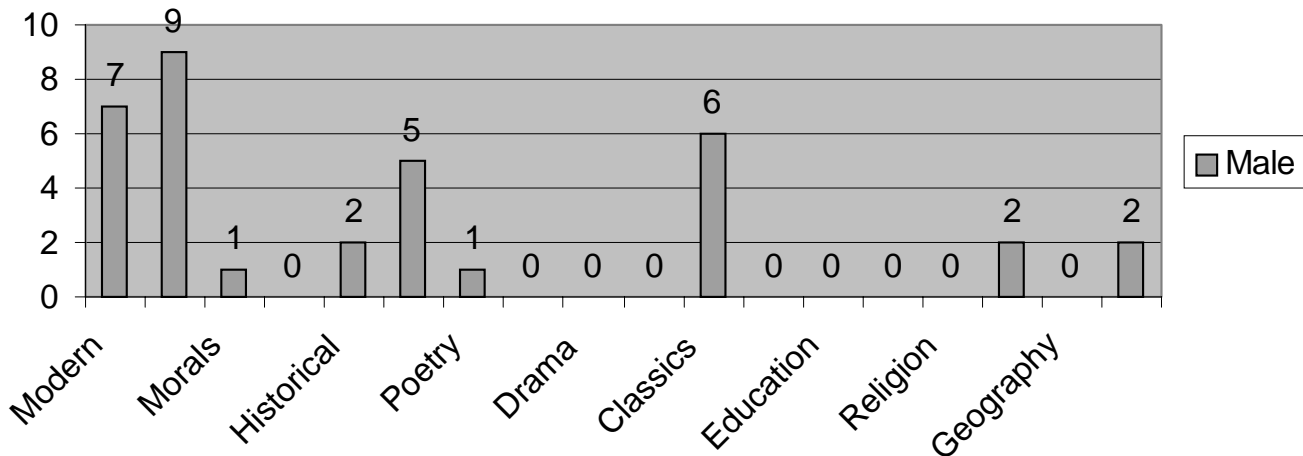


Table 8: Book Categories Checked Out by Male Community Members

### Category Breakdown Female Community Members

(non-student, non-teacher)

(109 total items checked out)

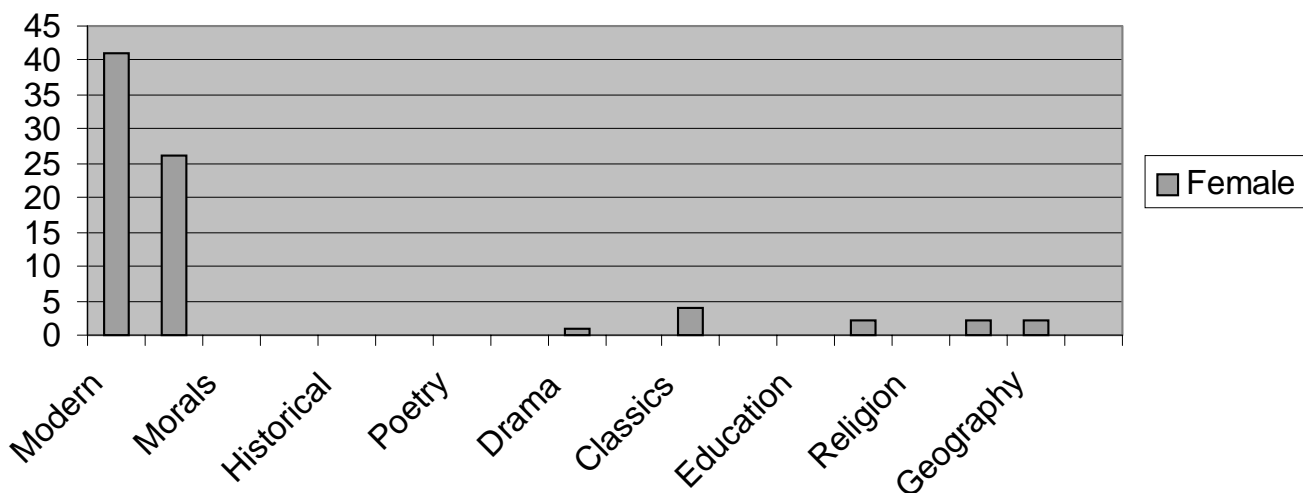


Table 9: Book Categories Checked Out by Female Community Members

Boys and girls differed in their reading material preferences. All students reported that they read mostly texts and materials related to their studies at school. At home, primary school boys read textbooks and a local newspaper series geared toward adolescents called “Young Talk” and “Straight Talk”. Primary girls reported that in addition to reading textbooks at home, they also read novels. Three out of 5 secondary school boys reported they read “novels” at home more than any other type of material, while secondary school girls read material mostly related to school work (37 percent). Secondary school girls also reported reading novels in high numbers at home, by which the researchers understood them to mean traditional stories and modern stories.

The researchers compared the information from the database queries to the feedback provided during the interviews. As illustrated in Table 10, students accounted for 81 percent of the 1066 checkouts in 2004. Five hundred ninety-eight (598) items were checked out by female students (56 percent) and 254 items by male students (23 percent) (not shown in table). The remaining 3 percent is made up of items not identified in the database. Table 11 shows the top four categories checked out by boys. Of the 254 items checked out by boys, 93 traditional stories, 77 modern stories, 13 health, 10 morals, 12 historical stories, 7 drama, 1 business, 3 poetry, 5 classics, 5 farming, 11 environment, 4 religion, 2 society, 3 biography, and 1 education (the total includes 7 unidentified items, not assigned to any category). Table 12 highlights the top categories checked out by girls, to include 179 modern stories, 156 traditional stories, 37 morals and 36 health items, as well as, 14 language, 22 drama, 34 environment, 21 poetry, 11 religion and 16 classics (the total includes 3 unidentified items, not assigned to any category). For the most part, these figures support information gathered during the interviews, for example, traditional stories, modern stories and school-related books are frequently checked out by girls, as was reported during the interview. It is important to note that the above figures do not reflect material consulted by students in the library for study or class purposes that were not checked out, or that were not allowed to leave the library (such as some reference books). The researchers frequently observed students pouring over Geography books and related material – but they did not check these

Items Checked Out by Profession  
(1066 total items checked out 1/04-10/04)

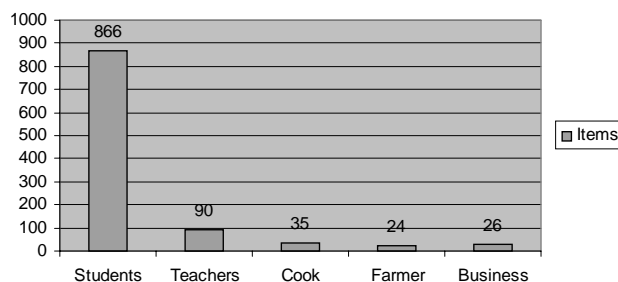


Table 10: Library Items Checked Out by Profession

Top Four Categories  
Male Students  
(257 items checked out)

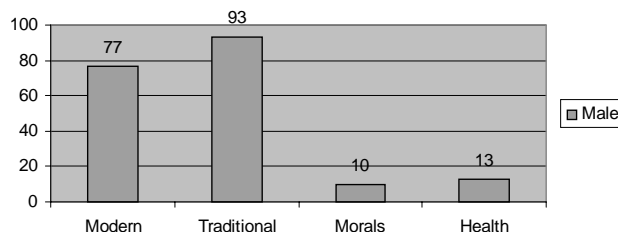


Table 11: Top Four Book Categories Checked Out by Male Students

Top Four Categories  
Female Students  
(598 items checked out)

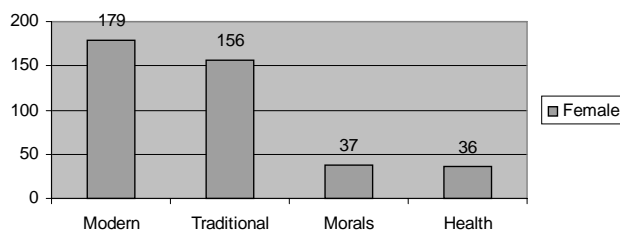


Table 12: Top Four Book Categories Checked Out by Female Students

items out, instead referring to them to confirm class material or for class assignments and projects.

Overall, the statistics suggest that both male and female students are reading modern and traditional stories in high numbers. Female students are also reading moral stories and books about the environment, whereas male students’ preferences beyond traditional and modern stories are minimal and fairly dispersed. The researchers were interested in how these figures compared to reading habits in other countries, and found

for instance, in a survey conducted in Botswana schools by Arua and Lederer (2000), 78 percent of students surveyed said they read textbooks to help with their studies and to pass exams, and only 18 percent read for pleasure. 44 percent of the students said they read English school texts frequently, compared with just 26 percent who read Science texts frequently. In terms of leisure reading, the researchers found that 34 percent of students read local novels, 29 percent read American novels, 62 percent read English novels, and 57 percent read newspapers.

### *Primary School Teacher Profile*

A total of eleven teachers were interviewed; 5 were male and 6 were female. Their subjects included: Science (9); Math (5); Agriculture (3); Social Studies (4); English (6); Physical Education (2); Religious Education (1); Luganda (1); Languages (1); Music (1); and Integrated Production Skills (1). Forty-five percent of those interviewed were library members.

The researchers were interested in how primary school teachers used the library to support their teaching, and whether or not there was potential to provide more services for primary school students. Though primary school students are not automatically members of the Kitengesa Community Library, they have free access if they come with a teacher/class. When asked how many used library materials for lesson preparation, five teachers responded in the affirmative. These teachers reported that they check out materials to prepare school lessons at home. The teachers also indicated that they use library materials for self-study (higher education pursuits such as Diploma in Primary Education, Degree in Primary Education) and to support their own professional development. In their spare time, teachers indicated that they read career guidance materials, music materials, newspapers and various types of books.

With regard to classroom activities and reading, many of the teachers indicated that they arrange for students to read during their free time, however, few of these items are library materials and most are books from the syllabus, novels, and supplementary readers. Most of these items are provided by the school but are in limited supply. When asked about reading exercises for the

children, teachers stated that they use reading cards to help students with comprehension. Teachers stated they use the librarians to introduce them to the library and how it works, to recommend titles, and to help with comprehension if they have read something that they did not understand.

### *Secondary school teacher profile*

A total of seven secondary school teachers were interviewed: 6 male and 1 female. Their subject areas included: Geography (2); Political Education (2); History (1); Luganda (2); Math (1); Music (1); English (1); Fine Arts (1); Accounts & Commerce (1); Biology (1); Chemistry (1); and Physics (1).

All of the interviewees stated that they teach at other schools to help make ends meet. The researchers were interested in the impact of the library not only on their teaching at Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, but also at the other schools at which they taught.

All of the teachers said that they use the library for lesson preparation, and use library books to provide examples for class. Seventy-one percent reported that they use library materials to provide resources for other school students. For in-class activities, 71 percent said that they send students to the library to consult specific titles for revision or to supplement class lessons.

The researchers were interested in how the newly installed lighting would affect library use, since previously, the library had no electricity and once the sun set, the library would close. Fifty-seven percent of teachers – mostly those who lived on campus or nearby – said they planned to use the library in the evening. Eighty-five percent of the teachers spend their free time reading, and like the primary school teachers, they all use the librarians as a resource. On average, the secondary school teachers spend about 5 hours per week in the library.

Of the 132 new members who joined in 2004, 8 were male teachers and 3 were female teachers. As illustrated in Table 9, teachers accounted for 8 percent of the 1066 items checked out in 2004. Of these items, 52 were modern stories, 8 were traditional stories, 6 were morals, 2 were biography, 2 were history, 3 were health, and 7 were classics.

### *Community members/non-library member profile*

One of the most interesting groups interviewed was those community members who had not yet joined the library. This group intrigued the researchers because they were possible future library members, and gathering information from them might inform library outreach to other community members who had not yet joined the library. Four households were visited, and a total of eight people were interviewed, 3 male and 5 female. The questions asked of this group differed from those asked of students, teachers and library members.

All of those interviewed had heard of the library, and 25 percent had visited and/or used the library. Half said they knew someone who was a library member. Sixty-two percent of the interviewees could read in English, and 12 percent could not read at all. Thirty-seven percent stated that they would be interested in attending library workshops on various topics. When asked why they had not yet joined the library, 12 percent cited lack of time as the primary reason. Twenty-five percent cited financial limitations. Of the households visited, one household confirmed book ownership of books in both English and Luganda; one household had a child who read out loud to others in the house; two households had a child who brought books home from the library or from school; and two households had mothers who told oral stories to children.

### *Reading group members' profile*

The Reading Group was started in 2003 by a library member and teacher from the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, in an attempt to bring library services and literacy classes to people in the town of Nyendo, about fifteen miles from Kitengesa. Each week, the teacher borrows books from the Kitengesa Community Library, and takes them to the Nyendo Reading Group, and conducts reading classes. Members read on their own during the week, and request specific reading material for the following week. Many of the group members are business owners, seeking to improve their literacy skills, and more specifically, their English skills, in order to be more effective traders and communicators. A total of 3 people were interviewed, 1 male and 2 females.

One interview took place in the home of a member, the other two at places of business. All of the members the researchers spoke with stated that they had little or no English reading/writing skills before joining the reading group. Those interviewed stated that they currently read in English and Luganda to varying degrees. 66 percent had visited the library, but they also stated that the library was too far for them to visit often. All of the interviewees stated that they read in their spare time, and 66 percent said they have reading material on hand at work to read when business is slow. Two out of three of the interviewees had families and said they read to their children, or would do so in the future. All of the interviewees said there was no other resource for reading material in the area, despite the fact that a small government public library is located in Masaka town.

### *Library literacy program members profile*

The librarian at the Kitengesa Community Library began working with two library members in 2003, teaching them how to read and write in both English and Luganda. The researchers were interested in gathering feedback from these women (both in their 20s) about their reading habits. The researchers noted during their observation period that the women spent a great deal of time in the library each day, reading books and sometimes taking notes. They often worked with the librarian and each other to support their learning efforts. The amount of time they spent reading in the library was approximately 2.5 hours each day, for 5 days per week. At home, they reported spending an additional 1.5 hours each day, 5 days per week. The type of material read by each varied. They reported traditional stories, novels such as *Alice in Wonderland*, newspapers and English grammar books as some of their recent reads. One of the two stated that she reads aloud to the children she cares for, and the other said that her children were very young, but she would like to read to them in the future. When asked why they wanted to learn to read and write, they said that they wanted to be able to participate in community affairs, to improve their communication skills, and to pursue qualifications in various subjects. Both young women shared specific experiences with the researchers about the impact of learning to read and write on their quality of life.

Upon moving to the area, one of the participants was unable to read or sign her name. There were community meetings, where matters of importance to the community were discussed, and these meetings required attendees to sign their name on a roster upon entering. The young woman, unable to sign her name at that point, was too embarrassed to attend the meetings and subsequently missed out on important information about housing, benefits and health. The other young woman, interested in starting her own business after moving to the village from the capital of Kampala, was able to attend poultry farming workshops after learning to read and write. As a result, she was able to start her own poultry business. She now owns more than 200 chickens that she breeds, and sells the eggs and meat to local merchants at hotel and food outlets.

The observed results from the informal literacy activities taking place at the Kitengesa Community Library show the development of information literacy for the improvement of quality of life, economic standing and other social concerns. The library literacy program members and the Nyendo reading group members both gave concrete examples of why they were learning to read, and what they planned to do with their new skills. In some cases, they were able to state what they had already accomplished: The young woman from the literacy program who was able to attend poultry farming workshops in order to start her own business, and the Nyendo reading group member who was able to advance her business by participating in trading activities in Nairobi, Kenya where the medium of communication is English. Though the researchers did not set out to study the impact of the library on literacy in the community, the interviews and observation of the above groups highlight certain changes in the lives of the participants, some economic, others social, that might be attributed to the presence of the library. Abdulla (1998) states that there is a real demand for information in rural communities, and though farmers and small business owners make up the majority of those who are in need of information, they often cannot take advantage of library materials because they cannot read. The Kitengesa Community Library staff has taken an important step in supporting the development of information literacy by providing these informal literacy activities. The impact of

the library's informal program might be better measured over time, as participants incorporate their new skills into their daily activities to a greater degree.

### *Preliminary implications and conclusions*

The user profiles provide just a glimpse of an incredibly diverse member body with divergent needs and abilities. The Kitengesa Community Library research project yielded several important findings and subsequent implications for meeting the needs of these users, growing the collection, and community outreach. The most significant of these implications are noted below.

- Informal literacy instruction spontaneously sprang up at the Kitengesa Community Library largely due to the efforts of the librarians. At least 5 adults have learned to read in the past year and show great enthusiasm for reading and the library. We found that the interest in and need for literacy instruction exists with other adults in the community. More formal instruction may be appropriate in order to attract people to the library, and outreach can be done to inform the community about this service.
- Students are the largest population of users, followed by teachers, and lastly a small number of community members. The purchases of new books should reflect the materials that are being used the most. This would include novels and also textbooks. However, this is a community library and more work needs to be done to attract other populations of the community to the library, especially adults. Electricity, from solar panels, in the library will go a long way to attract adults who in the past have been limited in their ability to go to the library during daylight hours because of work schedules. The acquisition of daily newspapers and events such as workshops on various topics were cited as things that would attract adult users to the library.
- The amount of leisure reading observed in Kitengesa is a sign that a reading culture is developing among the students. The Kitengesa Community Library is an example of how a relevant collection of reading materials can increase the amount and enjoyment of reading. The development of community libraries that collect novels in local languages and about local situations may be the key to developing a reading culture throughout Africa.
- The focus group interviews revealed that the boys spend more hours reading per week than the girls. However, girls check out significantly more books than boys. One reason for this discrepancy is that boys are spending more time in the library reading while the

## *Acknowledgement*

The authors wish to thank Professor Kate Parry, Headmaster Emmanuel Mawanda and librarians Dan Ahimbisibwe and Lucy Namwanje for their vision, hard work and contribution to this research project.

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girls are actually taking the books home. The authors observed that boys, in general, spend more time in the library during their breaks at school than the girls. During the interviews the researchers gathered that traditional sex roles may play into this as boys are allowed to engage in activities after school such as football which leaves less time for reading at home, whereas girls return home after school to help with chores.

- A major use of the library is the preparation of lessons by teachers at the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School. The teachers are using library books for lesson content and also are giving students assignments that utilize books in the library. This method is unique in rural areas because of the tremendous lack of books and libraries, and it is significant because it enables teachers to give out accurate information and it generates active learning by the students. One teacher described this method as being more “student centered” instead of the traditional recitation of lessons by teachers. Students are able to check on the accuracy of what their teachers say, develop research skills, and enrich their lessons by learning more on the subject in a book. Because of this, more copies of textbooks are needed to meet the demand of the students for books in which their teachers have given them assignments.
- Teachers at nearby primary schools have not integrated the library into their teaching to the same extent as KCSS teachers. This is probably because of the close proximity of the library to KCSS teachers and also the collection is geared to secondary school students. Outreach to primary school teachers can be done and more textbooks for young learners should be acquired. The library could also conduct a story time for children to attract them to the library.
- Adult groups expressed interest in attending workshops on various subjects at the library. They see the library as a place to acquire skills and knowledge. Workshops on income opportunities, business, and health issues were most commonly mentioned.

These preliminary findings indicate that the Kitengesa Community Library has been effective in providing reading materials to a rural community and can be used as a model by other communities interested in building a library. Factors that have led to its success include the location of the library on the grounds of a school, a collection of books that reflect the worldview of the population, a staff that are committed to providing services to the community, and the continual monitoring of users' needs. The Kitengesa Community Library has grown into much more than a collection of books: it is a place where the community can gather, learn, and feel a sense of pride in their community.

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### *Appendix I: Sample Interview Questions – Individual Interviews*

1. Personal information: age, sex, educational attainment, occupation.
2. How many hours a week do you read?
3. What do you like to read?
4. How often do you visit the library?
5. Do you own any books? How many? What kinds?
6. Do you read for leisure or for practical information?
7. Elaborate on above answer.
8. When do you read?
9. Do you read aloud to anyone? Who? When?
10. Does anyone read aloud to you?
11. What did you read before the library started?
12. Do you prefer books in English or Luganda?
13. Do you find what you are looking for in the library?
14. Do you know that the library offers activities? Do you attend any? Would you?
15. What kinds of classes would you like to see offered by the library?
16. Do you think having the library in the community has improved your quality of life? How?

17. Do books help you cope with the day-to-day problems, for example, health-related, job-related, parenting, etc.
18. Do you feel the library is meeting your reading needs?
19. What kinds of books would you like to see in the library?
20. How has the library impacted your life?

### *Appendix II: Sample Focus Group Questions – Secondary School Children*

1. How often do you visit the library?
2. Do you read at home or outside the library?
3. If so, how many hours per day?
4. Are the books you bring home different than the books you read at the library?
5. Do you read for fun?
6. What do you like to read most?
7. Do you share your books with friends or family? If so, give us an example
8. Do you talk about the books you have read with friends or family?
9. Do you own any books at home?
10. Can you tell us your daily routine, from the time you get up until you go to bed?

11. Do you have free time?
12. If so, when and what do you do with it?
13. Do you ever read out loud to anyone?
14. If so, what do you read and to whom?
15. Does anyone read out loud to you?
16. How does the library help you with your lessons?
17. Give an example of an assignment teachers might give where you have to use the library
18. Do you prefer reading in English or Luganda?
19. What other kinds of books would you like to see in the library?
20. Are you involved in any activities that take place in the library?
21. Do you have ideas for other activities that could take place in the library?
22. How has the library impacted the school?
23. How has the library made you a better student?
24. Is anyone in your family or anyone you know a library member?
25. How many of you will use the library after dark once there is electricity?
26. Is there anything you would do to make the library better?

*Editorial history:*

*paper received 4 February 2005;*

*final version received 23 February 2005;*

*accepted 24 February 2005.*