



Modelling the rural community library

Characteristics of the Kitengesa Library in rural Uganda

Valeda Frances Dent

Reference Division, Hunter College Libraries, New York, New York, USA

Abstract

Purpose – To provide background on how the Kitengesa Community Library in rural Uganda, which serves as both a community library and a school library, might be seen as a model for other similar libraries in developing countries. To use a case study of the library to highlight certain characteristics of rural libraries as developed by B.J. Mostert and presented in his 1998 article.

Design/methodology/approach – The information in the article comes from a two-year study of the Kitengesa Community Library. The methodology included focus groups, interviews, door-to-door visits, questionnaires, examination of library circulation information, and many hours of observation. Information from the study was then used to support the comparison to Mostert's characteristics of the rural community library. A review of the professional literature is also provided.

Findings – Findings indicate that the Kitengesa Community Library is a successful working model that might be used in other similar rural villages to serve both schools and the community. Implications of the findings are discussed in detail.

Research limitations/implications – Future research might include the impact of the library on the achievement of students, and the impact of the library on the teaching and learning practices of users.

Practical implications – The information presented in this paper offers some basic considerations in terms of the implementation of rural library services. Provision of such services is becoming increasingly important as more and more of the world's population becomes literate, and more of the world's attention is focused on the welfare of those living on the African continent.

Originality/value – The study itself is unique in that the data hail from a two-year study of a small village library. Literacy is a major factor in terms of development in underdeveloped nations, and libraries have the potential to play an important role in the eradication of illiteracy, and provision of services for the "newly literate".

Keywords School libraries, Literacy, Developing countries, Uganda

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The idea of the community library/community information center has existed in Africa for more than 35 years. As early as 1968, according to Rosenberg (1993), 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. The need was seen as being important, and as a result, projects such as the Village Reading Rooms in

The author wishes to thank co-principal investigator Lauren Yannotta, Professor Kate Parry, Headmaster Emmanuel Mawanda and librarians Dan Ahimbisibwe and Lucy Namwanje for their vision, hard work and ongoing contribution to this research project.



Botswana, the Osu-initiated libraries in Ghana and the village libraries in Tanzania were founded. Sturges (1994) highlights several other rural community-based projects in Africa that provide users with reading services, including the reading rooms in Tanzania and Botswana (local rooms in homes or churches that provide a place for people to sit and read); the book distribution services in Mali; the Bulawayo Home Project in Zimbabwe (an individual's home is used as a gathering place to read and exchange information/materials) and the 23 school/community libraries in rural Zimbabwe set up as part of the Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme. These libraries are organized and managed by local organizations such as churches, schools or community groups, and have very close ties to the community. They rely on donations from supporters to operate, as opposed to funding from the government. A number of scholars (Rosenberg, 1993; Mostert, 1998; Alemna, 1995; Stilwell, 1989) have examined the history, operation and management of the rural community library, as well as its importance in a part of the world where access to information is limited, and illiteracy a roadblock to utilizing the information that is available.

The Kitengesa Community Library in rural Uganda is one such example of a working rural community and school library. In 2004, researchers Lauren Yannotta and Valeda Dent from Hunter College Libraries in New York City, along with Professor Kate Parry from the Hunter College english department, conducted a research study on the impact of the library on the community. The study provides the basis for this article.

The community library in Africa

Seymour and Lane (1979) pose a series of provocative questions in their book on libraries in Africa: "How do you make library services available to people who do not have motivation and characteristics of conventional library users? How do you reach people who, if they think about their community library at all, view it as an alien and fearful world which may be, perhaps, accessible to their children in school but certainly not to them?". These questions are difficult to answer and get at the very heart of information provision in rural communities. Community libraries have been promoted by Rosenberg (1993) and others as a sustainable option for providing reading materials to rural peoples. The author offers two potential models for rural community information centers/libraries. The first model includes the rural information center as a library, which provides reading material, and as a referral center that provides advice to local citizens. This type of establishment is supported by the community financially and administratively. The second model involves rural information centers and libraries as part of a larger public library system, making use of pre-existing structures to provide services and meet user needs (Rosenberg, 1993, p. 29). Alemna (1995) states that the first model is more appropriate for most rural areas in Africa, and is already being tried in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. Library scholars such as Kempson (1986) define rural community libraries by developing guidelines for their creation and operation. Kempson lists three guidelines that should be considered:

- (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.

- (3) The services should be a channel for transferring information both to and from the local community.

Mostert (1998) points out the pitfalls of ignoring guidelines such as those advanced by Kempson. He articulates some implications of ill-matched information service provision in rural areas, and reminds the reader that there were high expectations of public libraries when they were established in Africa, but most of these services fell far short especially with regard to providing services that were capable of reaching all readers. The author suggests that the “passive” services provided by public libraries were geared towards the middle class and those who were literate, and excluded the newly literate and those who could not read or write. He describes a public library in a formerly black township in South Africa as an example, and states the library was underutilized due to several factors, including lack of knowledge on the part of librarians with regard to rural information needs, inaccessibility of the library, and lack of understanding on the part of community members regarding how the library might be used and the type of services available (Mostert, 1998, p. 73). The author advances that community libraries, when established by the communities themselves, might be more successful than the traditional public library. Community library services, he urges, should not be imposed from outside the community, nor should they be based solely on the Western concept of the library (Mostert, 1998, p. 76).

No study of the rural library is complete without discussion of the role of the librarian. The literature suggests that the community librarian has great responsibility in the development, promotion and running of the rural library. Stilwell (1991) explains that the community librarian often lives in the community, is known and trusted by the community members, and is able to identify and meet the needs of the community. 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, p. 20). Researchers agree that there is great advantage in having library staff with local knowledge. They are able to re-package information, offer explanations and recommendations to library users, and make relevant decisions in terms of collection development.

Information needs of rural communities

Kaniki (1994) observes that “one of the most difficult activities in the provision of community information is the assessment of information needs. This must be done regularly if established resource centers are to continue to be relevant”. Consideration of how to meet the information needs of rural communities must first take into account the method of delivery for these services, and how best to present information so that it is acceptable to and understood by the community. Durrani (1985) recognizes the importance of needs assessment, no matter how basic, and states: “Although there are token [information] services, these do not provide relevant information. To do so, they need to undertake investigations to decide on the form and the content of the information needed by rural people.” The author goes on to say: “No ‘modern’ information system will succeed in the rural areas unless it comes to terms with the existing oral system and with those who run it.” (Durrani, 1985, p. 150). Aboyade (1987) points out that even those who are semi-literate or not yet literate can begin to take advantage of libraries as long as the services “are tailored to their own structure of

information demand". The author strongly urges that any new method of providing information align with modes of information transfer that already exist in the community, which in the case of many African rural areas would be oral exchange (Aboyade, 1987, p. 57).

In addition to considering the mode of information delivery, the type of information most important to the community must be evaluated, and in the best case scenario, some type of needs assessment (albeit informal) conducted. A number of researchers have identified, through case study and observation, some of the most prevalent information needs in rural African communities. Mchombu (1996) presents five common categories of information needs from research done in rural communities in Botswana, Malawi and Tanzania:

- (1) health information specifically related to common diseases;
- (2) economic information to enhance small business endeavors and income generating activities;
- (3) information to support self-governance, self-management, and leadership;
- (4) environmental preservation and renewal; and
- (5) literacy education.

These categories were common in all three countries. Mchombu and his colleagues also note several specific information needs in each area. In Botswana for instance, community members wanted information about raising crops in an arid environment. In Malawi and Tanzania, community members wanted information on fishing such as breeding and migration patterns (Mchombu, 1996, p. 79). While researching library use of non-literate peoples for the 1981 RUDIS (Rural Development Information System Research) project, Aboyade (1984) defined six areas of information need and documented specific requests from users in each category. The six areas were health, problems of daily existence, occupation, government and society, recreation and leisure, education and religion. One of the most prominent areas of need was health information. Specific requests included information on the treatment of malaria, pre and post-natal care, nutrition, dealing with infertility, nearest hospitals/medical care, effects of smoking, and environmental sanitation and pit latrines. Problems of daily existence were also highly ranked. Specific requests included water supply, electricity, roads, and employment problems and opportunities.

Paying attention to specific community needs can result in libraries that are highly utilized and valued, as opposed to buildings with books and other materials that are out of date, irrelevant and unusable by most of the population.

Objectives of rural community libraries

The discourse on rural information needs would not be realized without suggestions for library objectives. Aboyade (1984) demonstrated during the Badeku pilot project that the rural library should have service to those he refers to as "non-literates" as one of its main objectives, as well as service to those who can read and write. He suggests that the rural library has an advantage over other communication channels such as media and printed materials in that it can deliver highly personalized services to the village. In his 1980 speech to the Library Services for the Rural Population conference, organized by the Kenya Library Association, Philip (1980) set forth six objectives of

rural libraries. Although these objectives were developed with Kenya in mind, they are general enough that they might apply to other African countries as well:

- (1) To help the rural children and adults maintain knowledge gained from their education.
- (2) 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.
- (3) To help rural people understand the country's social, political and economic endeavors and nation building efforts.
- (4) To aid in the development of a wholesome family life, providing materials about health, family planning, and health care.
- (5) Providing materials to help get rid of tribalism and provincialism.
- (6) To inspire members of the community to read, use books, and enjoy these items for education and recreation.

The Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme, a voluntary organization founded in 1990, began the process of setting up small libraries in rural areas throughout Zimbabwe. One of the objectives of the program was to use local expertise to establish and run the library. Obadiah Moyo, program coordinator, outlined the following three objectives (Atherton, 1993, p. 37):

- (1) To support and encourage the development of libraries and resource centers among rural communities in Zimbabwe.
- (2) To stimulate an interest in reading by disseminating relevant information.
- (3) To promote and contribute to the cultural, social and economic development in the rural areas.

These objectives are straightforward and simple, and they provide a basic roadmap for those involved in the establishment of rural libraries.

Kitengesa Community Library profile

Kitengesa is a rural village in Southeastern Uganda. It is a small community, and up until 2004 there was no running water or electricity. To date such utilities are still limited. Masaka is the closest town, located about 3km away on a dirt road. The village shares the name of a nearby trading centre, and has several primary and secondary schools in the area. The majority of the community members are farmers, and there are a large number of small children orphaned as result of the AIDS epidemic. Much of the population can read, as access to education has existed for quite some time in the community. Some residents can read in English, but most read in the local language of Luganda. In 1997, the Ugandan government instituted free universal primary education, which increased the numbers of those now able to read. However, access to reading materials is still minimal, and the challenge remains providing reading materials for the newly literate.

In 1999, Emmanuel Mawanda, the headmaster of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, began a collaboration with Professor Kate Parry, an English

professor from Hunter College in New York City and part-time resident of Kitengesa. Volunteers began to lend reading material to students of the school out of a small box of 161 books (Plate 1).

They asked students to provide some feedback on what they learned from or enjoyed about what they had just read. One of the goals Mr Mawanda had for the school was to eventually have a library on the premises, and for the library also to be open to members of the community. He collaborated with Professor Parry, and in 2001, a one-room library was built on the grounds of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, funded primarily with a grant from the UN One Percent for Development Fund. In 2004, another grant from the UN One Percent for Development Fund allowed for the purchase of solar panels to provide limited lighting in the library after sunset. The library is the only building in the village to have electricity, and users can now read during the evening hours.

The purpose-built library seats about 28 users and has a collection of 1,739 books, as well as subscriptions to two daily newspapers (Plate 2).

As of August 2005, there were 503 members of the library. Membership is free for students and teachers, and community members are asked to pay \$1.00 per year in order to check out books. The library is maintained by a small staff, which includes two librarians and four library scholars – students who work at the library in exchange for school fees and room and board. Funding for the library comes exclusively from individual donations and grants – there is no government support provided for the library.



Plate 1.
The Kitengesa
Community Library staff
and the original
“Box of Books”

Plate 2.
The Kitengesa
Community Library
during the final stages of
construction



The Kitengesa Community Library is unique in several ways. The collection features a reading materials in both English and Luganda (1,739 books as of August 2005), and many of the Lugandan books are published by Ugandan publishers. This keeps the collection relevant and meaningful for community members. The location of the library on school grounds provides immediate access to students and teachers, but it is also conveniently located for community members to use. The library is managed by a small board of directors, which includes community members and the school's headmaster. In addition to providing access to reading material, the librarians also provide literacy instruction to those in community who seek to improve their reading/writing skills, or learn how to read and write for the first time.

Characteristics of the Kitengesa Community Library as a rural school library

As indicated earlier, the Kitengesa Community Library has a dual role as both a community library and a school library. Magara and Nyumba (2004) suggest that there are a number of school library models that might be implemented in Uganda, though only a few would be appropriate for a rural area such as Kitengesa. One of the models they mention is the one community one library model – a library that has more than one intended purpose; the Kitengesa Community Library fits this model. A number of well-known organizations have publicly endorsed the importance of the school library in rural areas, including the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), which published a *School Library Manifesto* in 1999. The manifesto stated, in part, that “The school library is essential to every long-term strategy for literacy, education, information provision and economic, social and cultural development . . . It has been demonstrated that, when librarians and teachers work together, students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving and information and communication technology skills” (IFLA (International Federation of Library

Associations, 2000). Magara and Nyumba (2004) specifically cite the need for school libraries in order to support “child-centered” teaching and develop a “culture of reading”. One of the issues the authors address is the under-defined role of the school library in Uganda. They state that without clearly articulated goals and well-thought out policies to govern them, school libraries in rural areas are many times nothing more than a room with boxes of books, or containers of unorganized materials set to the side (Magara and Nyumba, 2004, p. 315).

A number of scholars have addressed the need for school libraries in order to promote the creation of a reading culture in the developing world. Ambili (1994) articulates a number of functions of the school library: to acquire books and other materials for reading, to promote the desire to read during leisure time in children, and to stimulate reading habits in students. Ijari (1994) suggests similar objectives, including the promotion of reading amongst young adults, the eradication of illiteracy, and promotion of a deeper understanding of classroom content. There are not many empirical studies on the impact of the rural school library on student performance in sub-Saharan Africa. However, there is anecdotal evidence, which suggests that the access to books and other reading materials as part of the curriculum enhances student learning (Bristow, 1992, p. 75). In an unpublished study, Lutaaya (1999) found that there were significant differences between the numbers of students who passed their O-levels who had a school library when compared with those who did not. In 1998, 77 per cent of students at the school with the library passed their O-levels, compared with 60 per cent of students without the library. The author found similar results for 1995 (63 per cent compared with 10 per cent), 1996 (81 per cent compared with 21 per cent) and 1997 (68 per cent compared with 35 per cent). The author goes on to conclude that the library had some degree of impact on student performance.

Ojiambo (1988) states that school libraries play an insignificant role in developing nations because there are so few of them, and they are often seen as “peripheral” to classroom teaching. De Perez (1971) on the other hand, states that providing school libraries is one of “the most effective means to renovate education.” She suggests that this is because school libraries are valid for all levels of education; that they have functioned well in other countries with varying types of educational systems; they make more materials available to teachers and students than can normally be provided by the school, and at a much cheaper cost; and that they encounter less resistance than other methods of educational reform such as curriculum change.

The Kitengesha Library is used by students and teachers from the secondary school in a variety of ways. Students use the library during the day to follow up on school assignments, to review of material they have just learned in class, for classroom-based activities, and for homework. They also check out books to read during their free time. The students work alone and in groups, and frequently consult the librarians for assistance. During the day, the library buzzes with activity and the reference materials are heavily used, especially Geography-related materials such as atlases and maps. Teachers rely heavily on the library to supplement classroom teaching and learning, and to help them prepare for and research class lessons. They actively integrate the library into their curricula by assigning specific exercises such as using newspapers for current event lessons. The library helps to relieve the burden on teachers of having to provide all of the reading materials for students themselves, and the teachers are able to encourage students to review their lessons daily using library books. In

addition, teachers use the library materials to support the teaching they do at other local schools that do not have libraries (teachers in the village often have more than one teaching assignment to make ends meet). Finally, teachers check out materials to read in their spare time, and use library books and newspapers for professional development and personal enrichment.

Educators agree that the school library should play an important role in the curriculum. Though school library characteristics vary, the ability of library materials to supplement and support classroom learning and teaching is key. The Kitengesa Library collection is still growing, and the needs of the students and teachers are given the utmost priority.

Characteristics of the Kitengesa Community Library as a rural community library

Mostert (1998) describes the community library as one that has “moved away from the western public library model towards active service-oriented systems, based on the needs of the community as a whole”. He further asserts that community libraries are agents of development and empowerment for its users. In his study, Mostert (1998) set out to define norms for community libraries based on a review of the literature, and observation of five libraries in the borough of Pinetown in South Africa. As a result of the research, Mostert was able to define nine components and related characteristics of rural community libraries (Table I).

In what ways might the Kitengesa Community Library, a unique resource that serves both local school children and community members, be defined as a rural community library? Hunter College researchers Yannotta and Dent were interested in comparing the services, development, and operation of the library to the criterion set forth by Mostert. This informal evaluation provided an overview of the library from a variety of different perspectives – the user, the library materials, the staff and the services – possibly creating the opportunity to improve current services and develop new services. To assess how Mostert’s characteristics relate to the Kitengesa Community Library, the Hunter College researchers posed a series of evaluative questions which corresponded to each of the criteria. Table II presents the results of the review.

It is evident from this review that there are a number of implications for the Kitengesa Community Library in terms of ongoing development. One very important component is the role of the library staff. Researchers such as Philip (1980) and Kempson (1986) have articulated the importance of the library staff and their interaction with the users, and Atherton (1993) found that employing a librarian who is a member of the community helps the villagers feel a greater sense of ownership. In the case of the Kitengesa Library, the library staff are at the heart of the operation. Mostert (1998) asks readers to consider several important questions when evaluating the role of community library staff:

- Is there interaction between librarians and users?
- Are services tailored to meet specific community needs?
- Are the librarians known and trusted by the community?
- Do the librarians have good communication skills?
- Do the librarians know how to share information in ways that are understood by users?

Establishment	Established at the request of the community Needs full co-operation from community
Governance	Participative management in the form of a community committee Participation ensures relevant services
Finance	Funds provided by community/sponsors
Aims	Proactive service Empowerment of all community members, especially the disadvantaged Making all community resources available to all community members
Users	Can determine membership – either open to whole community or restrictions can be imposed
Information	Directly linked to the everyday lives of community members Two kinds of information: Survival information, for example, on health and childcare. Citizens' action information, for example, information concerning social, political and legal rights Mainly alternative materials such as pamphlets, brochures, newspaper clippings and oral material Proactively provides information to the disadvantaged in the community to help them cope with problems in their lives
Services	Active interaction between librarians and users Proactive approach necessitates different forms of service, for example: Information and referral – Linking the correct service with the correct user. Direct service – Face to face contact between the librarian and user to solve user's problem. Back-up service – based on active involvement of library staff in community activities and services that can make the community aware of sources that can solve their problems. Self help – teaching the users to become self-reliant Each community determines the type of service rendered
Staff	Different qualities than those of traditional librarians are required from staff members, for example: Staff are known to and trusted by the community. Good communication and motivational skills are essential. Staff are able to repackage information
Co-operation	Active co-operation exists between library and community organizations

Table I.
Mostert's characteristics
of the rural community
library

The Kitengesa librarians are active members of the community, well-known and respected, and both speak English and Luganda. They actively suggest new services and programs and think of ways to implement them. They are very familiar with the library's collection of materials, and keep track of what library users are reading, what items they have a hard time understanding and suggest new titles accordingly. The librarians assist members in understanding what they have read and also provide tailored instructional services such as teaching members to read and write. Readers frequently ask for help understanding something they have read and the librarians, because they are themselves avid readers and have read nearly every item in the library collection, can provide feedback and answer questions. Finally, the librarians are well-known outside of the village, and this exposure affords them some degree of status in the wider community.

The goals of the Kitengesa Community Library with regard to meeting the needs of the community members also highlight its status as a community library. One example

Table II.
The Kitengesa
Community Library in
relation to Mostert's
characteristics

Establishment	Was the library established at the request of the community? Did the community cooperate in order to establish the library?	The school's founders both have significant ties to the community, thereby facilitating full co-operation from community members. The library is located on the property of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, and the school's headmaster serves as "director" of library operations. The other founder, an English scholar who works in New York City and resides part of the year in Uganda, has familial ties to the community
Governance	Do community members participate in the running of the library?	The school headmaster is a member of the community, and his role in the library means that community members have a voice in certain aspects of library operation. One of the librarians, also a community member, works closely with the headmaster to advise of user needs, events, and management issues. The librarian, who spends a great deal of time interacting with community members, conveys user needs in the form of requests for materials, to the school's founder in the USA, who in turn purchases books and other materials for the library
Finance	Is the library financed with funding from community members and/or sponsors?	Non-student community members pay a small fee (\$1) to join the library annually. The library is also funded by donations from sponsors such as individuals and organizations abroad
Aims	Does the library provide proactive services? Does the library empower users? Are library resources available to all community members?	The librarians provide proactive service by anticipating the needs of users and conveying those needs to the individuals responsible for collection development, implementation of programs, purchase of supplies and materials, and administration of the library. All library resources are available to every user, and some of the material as well as some library initiatives serve to teach and empower users
Users	Is library membership open to all community members?	Membership is open to the entire community; few restrictions are imposed. Users are entrusted to care for the materials they check out and return them in a timely fashion
Information	Is information in the library relevant to everyday lives of users? Is information on everyday issues such as health and civic concerns available? Are newspapers available? Does library information help users cope with everyday concerns?	Every effort is being made to link information directly to the lives of the users. Local newspapers provide important information about the local area and the rest of the country. Local publications such as <i>Young Talk</i> , a news-zine format that targets adolescents, contains articles and information about topics such as sexual health, family, and relationships. The library has also hosted programs aimed at female community members in attempt to provide resources for keeping a healthy family and household. All of these efforts are intended to help community members cope with issues that might arise in their daily lives

(continued)

<p>Services and staff</p>	<p>Is there interaction between librarians and users? Are services tailored to meet specific community needs? Are the librarians known and trusted by the community? Do the librarians have good communication skills? Do the librarians know how to share information in ways that are understood by users?</p>	<p>Interaction between librarians and users is one of the most important services the library facilitates. The librarians are community members with a long history in the library. They are trusted by the users and frequently suggest materials appropriate to the reader. They are familiar with nearly every reader, their reading habits and reading history. They also help readers with comprehension – readers frequently ask for help in understanding something they have read and the librarians, because they are themselves avid readers and have read nearly every item in the library collection, can provide feedback and answer questions. The librarians are also well-known outside of the library, and their status as librarians affords them some degree of notoriety. They have solid communication and motivational skills; both cited as being essential. Another important component of the relationship between the librarians and the users has to do with fostering self-reliance. Librarians are involved in activities such as literacy instruction with several library members, and these activities are seen as promoting self-reliance. At least two library members have learned how to read and write, in English and their native language of Luganda, as a direct result of being tutored by one of the librarians</p>
<p>Co-operation</p>	<p>Does the library work with other community organizations?</p>	<p>The library has a number of unique relationships with members of the local and extended community. For instance, a local radio broadcaster borrows books about the history of the Ugandan people from the library and reads them on the air. He stated that listeners were very interested in their history, but many could not read. This transfer of information orally meant a large audience could learn about the topic in an engaging manner. The library also has an agreement with the local primary school that allows the primary school teachers to utilize library materials for class, and to bring their student to the library to read and study during school hours</p>

Table II.

of a program based on user needs is the literacy instruction that is provided free of charge by one of the librarians. A number of community members have learned to read and write, both in Luganda and in English, due to the efforts of the librarian. This service is highly individualized and of great importance to its participants. They are now able to make better use of library materials and more importantly, participate in civic and community activities that have bearing on their quality of life.

Another example that demonstrates the high priority given to the needs of community members is the initial “needs assessment” that was undertaken by those involved with the Kitengesa Library at the very beginning of the project. A door-to-door survey was conducted in the village, and more than 1,000 community members were asked about their reading habits and what types of materials they might be interested in reading. This type of targeted effort is one not normally undertaken in the public library sector. It is a distinct feature of the Kitengesa Community Library and indicative of efforts to tailor the collection to the needs of those community members who use the library.

Mostert advances the importance of development as well, stressing the importance of the library’s connection to the community. The Kitengesa Community Library founders both have significant ties to the community, thereby facilitating full co-operation from community members. The library is located on the property of the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, and the school’s headmaster serves as “director” of library operations. The school headmaster also plays an important role in terms of governance. He is a member of the community, and his role in the library means that community members have a voice in certain aspects of library operation. One of the librarians, also a community member, works closely with the headmaster to advise of user needs, events, and management issues. The librarian, who spends a great deal of time interacting with community members, conveys user needs in the form of requests for materials, to the library’s founder in America, who in turn purchases books and other materials for the library.

The type of information provided by the library is at the heart of the library’s usefulness. Mostert proposes that the information be relevant to the everyday lives of the users. At the Kitengesa Community Library, every effort is being made to link information directly to the needs of the users. Local newspapers provide important information about the local area and the rest of the country. Local publications such as *Straight Talk* and *Young Talk*, news-zine formats that target adolescents, contain articles and information about topics such as sexual health, family, and relationships. These publications are exceptionally important because of the increased rates of HIV transmission that have plagued the country in recent years. The library has also hosted programs aimed at female community members in attempt to provide resources for keeping a healthy family and household. All of these efforts are intended to help community members cope with issues that might arise in their daily lives.

Future implications: a potential model for other rural libraries

The Kitengesa Community Library is an example of a successful rural community library. One of the outcomes of the research project is the promotion of the library as a model for other libraries in Uganda and elsewhere on the African continent in rural communities where there are no policies or schema for establishing libraries. Philip (1980) suggests that it is not necessary to have elaborate schemes for setting up rural

village libraries. There are a few simple key elements needed to support their establishment. As indicated in the literature, most rural libraries require only minimal space, modest collections and small staffs to operate. The Kitengesa Community Library had a relatively simple development plan and maintains a simple structure for its management. The library has several features that align it with Mostert's characteristics of the rural community library, and other characteristics that make it unique, including its ability to meet the needs of both the school and the larger diverse community – which includes farmers, parents, business owners, and teachers from other areas, to name a few. In order for the model to be useful, the story of its success must be shared. Plans to disseminate information about the library include publications, presentations at conferences (including conferences held on the African continent) and a presence on the world wide web. As many of those in need of such services and the desire to create community libraries might not have access the web or be able to attend international conferences, it is also important that the model be promoted locally, by word of mouth, both within Uganda and outside the country, by those involved with the project. Current library staff might eventually disperse to other nearby communities and share the experience of Kitengesa by helping to establish similar library services; and those involved with the project at the advisory board level might develop and disseminate simple guidelines and find other systematic ways to help rural villagers set up libraries in their area.

For more information about the Kitengesa Community Library project, visit the library web site at <http://www.kitengesalibrary.org>

References

- Aboyade, B.O. (1984), "Communications potential of the library for non-literates: an experiment in providing information services in a rural setting", *Libri*, Vol. 34, pp. 243-62.
- Aboyade, B.O. (1987), *The Provision of Information for Rural Development*, Fountain Publishers, Ibadan.
- Alemna, A. (1995), "Community libraries: an alternative to public libraries in Africa", *Library Review*, Vol. 44 No. 7, pp. 40-4.
- Ambili, K. (1994), "The role of libraries in secondary education", *Role of Libraries in Education*, Beacon Books, New Delhi.
- Atherton, L. (1993), "Community libraries in Zimbabwe", *Information Development*, Vol. 9, pp. 36-43.
- Bristow, A. (1992), "The role of the rural school library in development", *Mouaion Part Third Ser.*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 71-82.
- De Perez, V. (1971), "Modernising education in Latin America through school libraries", *School Libraries*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 36-40.
- Durrani, S. (1985), "Rural information in Kenya", *Information Development*, Vol. 1, pp. 149-57.
- International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) (2000), *IFLA/Unesco School Library Manifesto: The School Library in Teaching and Learning for All*, available at: www.ifla.org/VII/s11/pubs/manifest.htm (revised February 16) (accessed September 21, 2005).
- Ijari, S. (1994), "Indian school libraries: an overview", *Role of Libraries in Education*, Beacon Books, New Delhi.

- Kaniki, A. (1994), "Community resource centres and resource centre forums in the transformation and post-transformation era in South Africa", *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 27-54.
- Kempson, E. (1986), "Information for self-reliance and self-determination: the role of community information services", *IFLA Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 182-91.
- Lutaaya, C. (1999), "Effect of library services of secondary school students: a case study of Ndejje Secondary School Library and Ndejje Day Vocational School", unpublished dissertation, Kampala.
- Mchombu, K.J. (1996), "A survey of information needs for rural development", *Resource Sharing and Information Networks*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 75-81.
- Magara, E. and Nyumba, J.B. (2004), "Towards a school library development policy for Uganda", *Library Review*, Vol. 53 No. 6, pp. 313-22.
- Mostert, B.J. (1998), "Community libraries: the concept and its application – with particular reference to a South African library system", *International Information and Library Review*, Vol. 30, pp. 71-85.
- Ojiambo, J. (1988), "School library services in Sub-Saharan Africa", *International Library Review*, Vol. 20, pp. 143-55.
- Philip, A. (1980), "Organization and management of rural (village) libraries", *Maktaba*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 45-50.
- Rosenberg, D. (1993), "Rural community resource centres: a sustainable option for Africa?", *Information Development*, Vol. 9 No. 1/2, pp. 29-35.
- Seymour, W. and Lane, E. (1979), *For the People: Fighting for Public Libraries*, Clive Bingley, New York, NY.
- Stilwell, C. (1989), "Community libraries: a brief review of their origins and nature with particular reference to South Africa", *Journal of Librarianship*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 260-9.
- Stilwell, C. (1991), "Community libraries: a viable alternative to the public library in South Africa?", *Progressive Librarian*, Winter, Vol. 1, pp. 17-27.
- Sturges, P. (1994), "Using grey literature in informal information services in Africa", *Journal of Documentation*, Vol. 50, pp. 273-90.

Corresponding author

Valeda F. Dent can be contacted at: vdent@hunter.cuny.edu