

PSC-CUNY Grant Renewal
Project Description
A rural community library in Africa: a continuing study of users & patterns of use

Introduction

The Kitengesa Community Library project was started in 2001 by Professor Kate Parry of the Hunter College English department. A grant from the UN One Per Cent for Development Fund enabled a one-room library to be built in the town of Kitengesa, Uganda. The library, formally opened on June 22, 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 to roughly 50 members of the community and about 200 school students.

In the Summer of 2004, with the help of a PSC-CUNY 35 Research Award, the co-investigators traveled to Kitengesa to study the use and users of this library. Through observation, interviews and focus groups, as well as circulation data, we were able to answer a number of important questions, including who in the community uses the library, how users go about finding books in the library, the kinds of materials that are most used, the kinds of informal education practices that are taking place at the library, and the impact the library has made in the lives of users. The information gained during our visit is allowing us to create a user profile, an evaluation of the collection, and a profile of the information and reading needs of the community. The success in gathering information for this research project raised many new questions about the use of the Kitengesa Community Library that warrants further investigation for a follow-up grant.

The objective of the follow-up research is to look at three specific uses of the library and implications for other community libraries on the continent. Observation, interviews and focus groups will be used to investigate the following:

1. Library use by teachers, specifically:
 - *How library books are utilized for class preparation and in-class use
 - *The kinds of exercises, activities and homework teachers give using library materials
 - *How teachers at schools with no library or less developed libraries/library collection fare
2. Patterns of use (specifically nighttime and increased access)
3. New library activities and workshops

The preliminary findings from the initial project show that the Kitengesa Community Library is having a large impact on the community in terms of literacy and the building of a reading culture. This follow-up research will delve into more specific uses of the library that may be affecting educational efforts and economic development in Kitengesa and beyond. This user study will fill a void in the literature and also serve as a model for other rural communities that are interested in building a library.

The project will again be based at the Kitengesa Community Library. The relationships that were built in the Summer of 2004 will enable the researchers to conduct this ambitious research project in approximately 4-6 weeks. Again the nature of the work, workload and timeframe warrant two researchers to successfully carry out this project, and the requested budget amount reflects the *minimum* amount for the researchers to successfully accomplish this research while operating in a rural environment without electricity or piped water.

Background

Community libraries have shown great promise in providing rural areas in Africa with needed books and information. Community libraries differ from public libraries in that they are established by and for local populations and usually are not supported with government funds. The needs of the community are of the utmost importance and the collection and services of the library represent those needs. These libraries often also provide informal educational services, such as literacy instruction (Raseroka 1994).

The Kitengesa Community Library in Uganda is one successful community library project. It is located near the trading center of Kitengesa, in Buwunga sub-county of Masaka. Education is well established there, with five primary schools and one secondary school in the immediate neighborhood. Although much of the community can read, if not in English at least in the local language, Luganda, most of the population has no access to reading materials. In 1997, Professor Kate Parry received a PSC-CUNY research award to study literacy in Kitengesa. As a result of her research, she found that the need for reading material was not being met and donated 200 books to the secondary school to be used by students and the community. Since then, with the help of a grant from the United Nations One Per Cent for Development Fund, the headmaster of the secondary school has built a one-room library on the school's land and Professor Parry has raised several thousand dollars to expand the collection of books. The choice of books has been guided by the following factors: the availability of books in Uganda, especially of ones produced by Ugandan publishers, since these publishers can be presumed to be responding to perceived local demand; the preferences of students in the school as evidenced by their choices when borrowing from the initial small collection, and by reports on who besides themselves either read or listened to the books; and, the suggestions made in early focus group discussions in which participants, who represented various groups on the community, were asked to state which books they would purchase, considering the funds available and the prices of the books. Also, a concerted effort was made to purchase any books that were available in Luganda.

In the Summer of 2004, almost three years after the library was built, Valeda Dent and Lauren Yannotta, traveled to Uganda to conduct a user study at the Kitengesa Community Library. There are several reasons why this user study is important. First, as more money has been raised and the number of library members has increased, it became imperative that the community's needs be examined in order to be reflected in the books and services provided by the library. Second, this information will be helpful to other rural areas that want to build a community library and existing libraries that want to improve their collections and services. And, third, it is acknowledged that user studies are greatly needed in Africa, thus this study will add to the literature (Mostert 2001). The researchers were able to gather an enormous amount of information and are currently compiling and analyzing their findings. These findings will include a profile of library users, an evaluation of the library collection, a profile of the reading needs of the community, and a profile of the potential services the library can provide.

As the research was being conducted it became clear that several areas of library use need further investigation. These are areas that were not considered by the researchers in conducting the initial user study but have major implications for community libraries. The areas of use that need further study are as follows: the use of the library by teachers and how it is leading to independent study by students; the use of the library at night which is attracting previous non-users; and, other library activities, such as workshops, that are being implemented by the staff of the library. The potential impact of these activities in terms of literacy, education, development, and health is significant and warrants further study.

Having spent six weeks in this community, the researchers already have established excellent working relationships with the staff of the library and the secondary school. Having built a strong foundation in the initial study they hope to build on that work and provide a much more detailed picture of the impact a library can have on a community.

This research will make a significant contribution on several important levels:

1. It will add to the body of literature on community libraries in Africa, which is lacking.
2. It will add to the body of literature on literacy, especially regarding the ways in which newly-literate people are using libraries.
3. It will begin to document the impact a library can have on a community in terms of literacy and development.
4. It will allow existing libraries on the African continent to extrapolate the data for use in their own communities, as well as provide a model for the creation of new community libraries.
5. It will help in the development of a methodological framework for rural libraries across Africa to conduct studies of their own libraries, which is greatly needed for the success of libraries in Africa.

Project Design

Statement of Areas for Further Investigation

As stated in the Project Description, and based on the findings from the PSC CUNY 35 grant, *A rural community library in Africa: a study of its use and users*, there are three primary areas that warrant additional investigation by the researchers:

- Library use by teachers, specifically:
 - *How library books are utilized for class preparation and in-class use
 - *The kinds of exercises, activities and homework teachers give using library materials
 - *How teachers at schools with no library or less developed libraries/library collections fare
- Patterns of use (specifically nighttime use and increased access)
- New library activities and workshops

Each of these areas produced interesting preliminary findings during the 2004 study, but require more first-hand information, such as that gathered from interviews and user observation, be gathered in order to develop a comprehensive user profile.

a. Library Use by Teachers

Miller (2004) suggested that a successful school-based library “becomes an extension of the classroom,” and though the context for the Kitengesa Community Library is not the same as a school-based library in a more developed country, certainly the library plays a key role at the Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School (KCSS). The researchers intend to investigate the ways in which the library and library materials have impacted students, teachers, learning and teaching practices. Teachers use library materials from the Kitengesa Community Library to help prepare their classes, provide study and reading material for their students, provide information for classroom and library-based activities, and support their other teaching assignments. The researchers found that teachers make up one of the largest user groups of the library. 71% of the secondary school teacher focus group members use the library daily, while 100% use library materials to provide exercises, examples and further study for their classes. Many teachers at KCSS teach at other schools in the community to make ends meet, and 100% of teachers in the focus groups said they use the library to help prepare lessons for use at these other schools. This information is important, as it is an indication of the many different ways the library is having an impact in the wider community. The researchers thus intend to spend more time looking at these issues, and to investigate the impact of the library beyond the local secondary school and the immediate community.

b. Patterns of Use, Nighttime Use and Increased Access

The Kitengesa Library is the first building in the small village to have electricity, thanks to solar energy panels installed during the summer of 2004 (the solar panels were funded with a small grant procured by Prof. Kate Parry from the United Nations One Percent Fund). The advent of light means that users can now use the library after dark, for many, this means being able to visit the library after work. During the previous study, 57 % of individuals in the secondary school teacher focus group said they would visit the library more often if the hours were more convenient, and 66% of individuals in the community member focus group said the same. The longer hours mean the library is now accessible to a wider cross-section of community members, and may perhaps attract new members for whom the library is now more convenient to use. Since the researchers did not have enough time to observe the changes in patterns of use in this regard, this “evening” observation would be important.

c. New Library Activities & Workshops

The interviews and focus groups conducted by the researchers revealed that community members would be interested in attending workshops sponsored by the library, on a variety of issues. These included but were

not limited to health (many mentioned AIDS workshops), child development, farming, and business management. New activities implemented since last year's study will be reviewed by the researchers, and additional activities observed. Attendees will be interviewed and their feedback about the activities documented. As well, feedback will be gathered from the librarians, presenters, facilitators and others involved with the organizing of the activities.

Methodology

Site Visits – Since this phase of the research will include gathering information on how teachers, both KCSS and non-KCSS, use their school libraries, and the extent to which the Kitengesha Community Library impacts teachers (both KCSS and non-KCSS) who work at other schools, the researchers will spend a good deal of time visiting neighboring schools, mostly secondary schools, to gather data. The site visits will consist of two components:

- a. **Class Observation** – The researchers will arrange with each school headmaster to observe a select number of classes, in different subject areas. The researchers will target classes in English, Luganda, the Sciences and Geography – teachers in each of these areas, when interviewed during the previous study, indicated high use of library materials to prepare their lessons. The researchers will pay special attention to use of library materials inside the classroom, and also pay close attention to gender (an effort will be made to observe equal numbers of male and female teachers). The researchers will observe those teachers at secondary schools who do **not** have access to a library, and either use only school-provided texts, or use the Kitengesha Community Library to provide material for their classes, and how this affects their teaching.
- b. **Library Visits** – The researchers will visit school libraries at other schools in the community, and work with either librarians or the headmaster to assess the degree to which the collections support the curriculum, collection relevancy, and issues of access and patterns of use.

Interviews – The researchers will conduct interviews with the following targeted groups, asking specific questions about how they use the library, and how the library has changed the way they teach (teachers) and/or learn (students), how having electricity has changed the way they use the library and whether they have participated in any library workshops/activities:

1. KCSS teachers not interviewed during previous study
2. KCSS teachers who teach at other schools, interviewed during previous study. The researchers would like to gather information on the way their library use has changed over the past year, and whether new additions to the collection, suggested by them previously, have had any impact, and how they have been used in the classroom
3. Non-KCSS teachers in the community who use the Kitengesha Community Library
4. Library staff at other community libraries connected to secondary schools
5. Students at other community schools, taught by KCSS teachers, who do not have access to a library
6. Nighttime users of the library
7. Library users/community members who have attended library workshops/activities

Focus Groups – The focus groups will be designed to elicit feedback on how teachers, students, and other community members have been affected by the library, with a specific focus on the areas mentioned above (see Statement of Areas for Further Investigation). The focus groups may include:

- Non-KCSS teachers from neighboring schools
- KCSS teachers who teach at neighboring schools
- Library staff at other school-based libraries
- Community members who have attended library activities
- Community members who use the library mostly at night.
- Students at other community schools, taught by KCSS teachers, who do not have access to a library

The groups will have an average size of 6 people. The researchers will alternate videotaping/recording/transcribing the focus groups and conducting them. Focus group meetings will most likely take place in the library and/or at the schools.

Circulation/Patron Statistics – The researchers will use the Access database, which was implemented on site during the previous study and serves as the library's information management system, to organize and evaluate patron and circulation statistics in keeping with the above areas. The researchers will be able to compare data from the previous year, and hope to investigate the following:

- The number of books being checked out by KCSS teachers
- The number of books being checked out by non-KCSS teachers
- The types of books being checked out by both these groups
- The types of materials being checked out by teachers for use at other schools
- The types of books being checked out by girls vs. those being checked out by boys

The researchers hope as well to be able to examine the circulation data from other school libraries, if such information has been kept, and look at the same issues as listed above.

Findings & Dissemination

Once the above information has been gathered, the researchers hope to add on to the previous year's report, including updating the detailed user profile, evaluation of the current collection (based on the types of material most used and/or borrowed from the library) and updating the profile of the information and reading material needs of the readers. One of the main objectives of the project continues to be dissemination; the literature review conducted by the researchers in preparation for the project suggested that there have not been many first-hand user studies of the rural community library, thus publications and other dissemination efforts detailing this research would add an important area to the literature. The researchers would also continue to work with Professor Parry to co-publish the complete findings of the study, as well as co-present the findings at conferences such as the 4th Pan African Conference on Reading for All to be held in Swaziland in 2005, and the 26th Annual Ethnography in Education Research Forum in Philadelphia in February 2005. Professional journals such as *World Libraries* and *Information Research* would be likely places to seek publication. A preliminary letter of interest from the journal, *Library and Information Science Research*, from 2004, was provided with the previous grant.

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