

# Challenges faced by libraries in a democratic South Africa: A case of three community libraries in Limpopo Province

Information Development

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## Abstract

Community libraries are crucial for people to have access to information to satisfy their multiple needs. As custodians of information and knowledge in diverse spheres, they play a role in the socio-economic development of nations. This article attempts to investigate challenges faced by libraries in three different settings in post-apartheid South Africa. The study adopted a qualitative research design. The users, librarians and a well-placed official of the relevant department were interviewed. Convenience sampling was used to select users and librarians while purposive sampling was used to select an official. Face-to-face interviews and observation and a checklist were used to collect data. Senior officials of the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture need to study challenges revealed by the findings and to take action to remedy the situation.

## Keywords

public libraries, community libraries, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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## Community libraries in Limpopo Province are faced with a host of challenges that prevent them from carrying out their mandate.

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## Introduction and background

Community libraries are essential amenities for people to have equitable access to information resources to meet their wide-ranging information needs on a daily basis. They play a significant role in improving the socio-economic development of nations. In South Africa, the Department of Arts and Culture is a national department of the government “tasked with creating an environment conducive to growth, development and flowering of South Africa’s art, culture and heritage landscape”. (Mnkeni-Saurombe and Zimu, 2013: 40). As cultural hubs, community libraries fall under this department. However, even in post-apartheid South Africa, inadequate community libraries are faced with an avalanche of daunting challenges which militate against their mandate – provision of library resources for all. Besides enormous

challenges with funding and staffing, community libraries, particularly in the disadvantaged rural communities, are not getting sufficient support from the local governments (municipalities). Outdated policies and flawed legislation currently governing community libraries are a testimony that they are not yet taken seriously in a democratic South Africa (Stilwell, 2016). The Library and Information Services Transformation Charter (2014: 53) states that:

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Public library services are the exclusive competence of provinces, in terms of Part A of Schedule 5 of the South African Constitution. Prior to the new Constitution, this function was shared between provinces and local authorities, with local authorities providing and maintaining buildings and staff and provinces providing the professional and technical services. In the current dispensation this arrangement largely continues in spite of the fact that ‘municipalities have no comparable competence’ (Basdeo and Sibanda, 2013).

Owing to this arrangement, municipalities have an “unfunded mandate” for provision of community library services and they therefore “exercise the function which is not legally theirs” (Library and Information Services Transformation Charter 2014: 53). The distribution and allocation of community libraries in the different communities in South Africa are uneven owing to the inheritance of the apartheid legislation prior to 1994. Kalley (2000) and Laishley and Zinn (2015) provide an overview of inequalities in the provision of library services during the apartheid era in South Africa. Owing to the apartheid inheritance, different communities in a democratic South Africa are still characterised by huge disparities concerning the provision of the community libraries.

To satisfy their diverse and ever-evolving information needs, different people, particularly the youth, need information in wide-ranging formats. Libraries that are responsive to the information needs of the multiple users are therefore needed in all communities. Mnkeni-Saurombe and Zimu (2013: 41) aver that public and community libraries have “a common purpose” – provision of effective information services to all people. The terms ‘public libraries’ and ‘community libraries’ will be used interchangeably throughout this article.

The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto states that:

The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those users who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison (UNESCO 1994: 1).

First, this article explores the situational analysis of LIS in South Africa in general and of Limpopo

Province in particular. Secondly, it highlights the roles community libraries can play as agencies for socio-economic development and how they are responding to the challenges of socio-economic development. Thirdly, the article explores the methodology of how the empirical study was conducted. The findings are also provided. Lastly, the conclusion and recommendations are made.

## Libraries in South Africa

Even in the post-apartheid era, South Africa has a shortage of LIS, particularly community and school libraries. Hart and Nassimbeni (2013: 13) state that:

In 2010, there were 7,384 libraries, made up of:

- 366 community libraries within the six metropolitan areas

- 1,386 community libraries affiliated to the nine provincial library services

- 210 higher education libraries

- 1,801 functional school libraries: 7.23% of all schools

- 112 special and government departmental libraries

- Two national libraries (one in the conventional sense, and a national library for the blind (*South African Yearbook 2011/2012* 2012).

Only a few (7%) schools in South Africa have stocked and staffed libraries (Hart and Zinn, 2015). This means that the quality of education is not yet prioritised even in the new political dispensation. A lack of stocked and functional libraries in most schools puts huge pressure on the available community libraries. As already stated, the current status of community libraries in South Africa is woeful.

Table 1 indicates the uneven and spatial distribution of community libraries in South Africa. While Western Cape has the highest number of community libraries, Limpopo has the lowest number. With the lowest population and land area of 30.5%, Northern Cape has 253 libraries. With the highest population of 10.2 million and land area of 7.7%, KwaZulu-Natal has only 174 libraries. It is apparent that in the mostly rural provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo, the majority of the residents lack access to LIS in community libraries. Statistics South Africa (2014) shows that only 10% of the population has access to information resources in the community libraries.

Fraser (2013: 50) affirms that:

South Africa has a significant backlog in the provision of adequate public library services, especially in the

**Table 1.**

Province	Population size	Land area by province	Total number of libraries
Eastern Cape	6,562,053	13.9%	144
Free State	2,745,590	10.6%	173
Gauteng	12,272,263	1.4%	234
KwaZulu-Natal	10,267,300	7.7%	174
Limpopo	5,404,868	10.3%	74
Mpumalanga	4,039,939	6.3%	111
Northern Cape	1,145,861	30.5%	253
North West	3,509,953	8.7%	102
Western Cape	5,822,734	10.6%	347
TOTAL	51,770,560	100%	1612

Source: National Library of South Africa, 2016:12.

more remote rural areas of the country. At the same time most government funded schools have a woeful lack of school libraries, which are needed to support the school curriculum by providing the necessary resources for both teachers and learners.

The Department of Arts and Culture (2013: vii) states:

There are currently about 1,408 public libraries in the country. This is about 34% of the required number of libraries, which means there is a backlog of 2,762 libraries. The real challenge is that the backlog is very unevenly distributed across provinces and municipalities. At the extremes, Northern Cape only has a backlog of 18%, while Limpopo has a backlog of 85%.

### LIS situation in Limpopo Province

Provision of LIS in the most rural communities of Limpopo Province is inadequate and patchy just like in other rural communities of the mostly rural provinces. The inheritance of uneven allocation of community libraries during the apartheid era is still visible in the province as a whole. Limpopo is a merger of three former homelands, namely, Lebowa, Venda and Gazankulu, which were designated for the blacks during apartheid. Unfortunately, to keep the black population illiterate, community libraries did not feature anywhere in the homelands. The Department of Arts and Culture (2013) indicates that Limpopo Province has only 80 community libraries to serve a population of over 5 million. This implies that unfortunate residents in some rural communities still operate without access to information resources in libraries. With the intention to disempower black learners educationally,

through the Bantu education system, their schools were constructed by local residents without educational amenities such as libraries, laboratories and sports fields, to offer inferior quality education. Only 2% of the schools in the province have stocked and functioning libraries (Mojapelo, 2016). With insufficient and skewed community libraries, the majority of the teachers and learners lack access to LIS. In a broader quantitative study, Mojapelo (2014) states that 74% of urban and rural respondents indicated that their schools are located far away from the community libraries. This means that the majority of the learners and teachers cannot access resources in community libraries even in post-apartheid South Africa.

### Community libraries as agencies for socio-economic development

Worldwide, community libraries are regarded as agencies for development. Members of society need a wide range of information on politics, careers, economy, agriculture, health, science and technology, and education. Users also need information daily for leisure, growth and personal development. Fourie and Meyer (2016: 422) affirm that:

The need to move forward, to address social exclusion and to ensure social justice and access to information for all is globally acknowledged. It concerns health, jobs, human rights and especially education, and many other things. A call for empowering people and educating nations, and the importance of an educated nation has often been raised.

Regarding rural communities, Harande (2009:1) states:

Rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in the development process. People in rural areas, whether literate or not, should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligations, to become better informed citizens generally.

### Education

Quality education is essential to produce knowledgeable and skilled citizens who will make a positive contribution to growing the economy. Sufficient educational resources are critical to improving the standard of education in schools. With a “dramatic shortage of school libraries in South Africa”, community libraries

are regarded as platforms to consolidate the educational activities of teachers and learners (Silbert and Bitso, 2015:53). Balapanidou (2015: 1) avers that:

Public libraries have been for centuries an integral part of the society offering free places and equal access to resources for leisure and educational purposes. They support both organised and self-conducted learning in all education forms, i.e. formal, non-formal and informal learning for all age groups.

Community libraries need to have a wide range of materials to meet the curriculum-related needs of learners and teachers. This is even true in countries like South Africa which are still characterised by dysfunctional libraries in the majority of the schools. South African Vision (2014: 1) affirms that “the level and quality of education in South Africa is one of the worst in the world.” With sufficient community libraries in all communities, learners could use their resources for assignments, homework and research projects.

The impact of school libraries in boosting the performance of learners cannot be over-emphasised. This is true even in poor and developing countries where learner performance is gloomy, particularly in socio-economically deprived communities. Poor learner performance is attributed, among other contextual realities, to inadequacy in the provision of educational resources in all schools. However, as observed by Mojapelo (2014), in poor and developing countries, the provision of well-resourced and functional school libraries is at the periphery of the education system. Funding remains the main obstacle to the provision of effective school libraries in countries such as South Africa and Kenya (Mutungi et al. 2014).

Irrespective of the educational paradigm, information resources are crucial to improve learner performance (Wessels and Mnkeni-Saurombe 2012). Owing to the dysfunctional library system in most state schools in South Africa, community libraries – where available – experience a huge influx of teachers and learners for curriculum-related activities. Consequently, use of resources in these libraries is overstretched, increasing their wear and tear (Hart and Zinn, 2015). Statistics South Africa (2015: 4) states:

Learners and educators require an enabling environment for effective learning and teaching. Learners require classrooms with ample space for effective and interactive learning, well equipped computer and science

laboratories, sufficiently stocked libraries, and suitably equipped sports facilities for various sporting codes. Teachers on the other hand need good and relevant qualifications and experience to deliver quality education.

Inadequate provision of educational resources has a negative impact on the achievement of needy learners. Low literacy levels of teachers and learners, particularly in disadvantaged communities, are a consequence of their lack of exposure to a wide variety of information resources. Community libraries play a pivotal role in promoting lifelong learning. The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (UNESCO 1994) states:

The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO’s belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.

Akparobore (2011:3) affirms that:

Public libraries can richly compliment [sic] the educational activities by assisting adults in no longer of school age, developing their attitudes, extending the knowledge and by acquiring, needed technical or vocational skills. In this way, the adult education products would emerge as responsible members of the society.

Vakalisa (2000: 177) states that the concept of “lifelong learning” originated in developed countries such as the United States and United Kingdom “with the realisation that schooling did not provide learners with all the knowledge and skills they would need through their lives.” In countries where adult illiteracy is high, skills transmission, which includes lifelong learning, is extremely significant. The critical role of community libraries in enhancing the concept of lifelong learning for the poor people cannot be over-emphasised. Mnkeni-Saurombe and Zimu (2013: 42) state that community libraries “promote reading and literature to all ages and the whole of society, enabling learning and literacy from the cradle to grave.” Community libraries are therefore enabling scaffolds for the youth to pursue independent studies and lifelong learning. McMenemy (2009: 95) states that public libraries are key facilitators in lifelong learning because:

- they are open to all citizens
- they provide access to a range of learning materials free
- they are easily accessible with relatively convenient opening hours
- they increasingly offer instructional courses using ICTs and partnerships.

With high illiteracy rates among adult blacks in South Africa, community libraries are critical centres to ensure skills transmission, personal development and to fight illiteracy (Nassimbeni and May 2006).

### *Bridging the digital divide*

With networked computers, community libraries provide free Internet access to users. In poor and developing countries, community libraries are essential to bridge the digital divide. However, South Africa is still engulfed by huge disparities in the digital divide between rural and urban people. Ghosh (2005: 181) states:

Public libraries have a major role to play in bridging the digital divide. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have the capacity to open up new ways of interactive communication between the citizen, public libraries and civil society at large. But before this can happen, modernization and upgrading of public libraries in terms of ICT applications and also staff proficiency is required, with the view of meeting the informational, cultural and leisure needs of the underprivileged rural masses in order to increase the numbers of them who are registered library members.

Community libraries have a significant role to play in offering technology-enhanced services and therefore improving ICT literacies of the users. Internet facilities make it possible for the users to access global information from online databases. Stilwell (2016: 123) states:

Libraries serve as a place for free public Internet access and support. They provide digital literacy and digital inclusion classes, support e-government, serve emergency response roles, and are increasingly involved in the provision of social services and education.

McMenemy (2009: 96) states that “ICTs also offer public libraries exciting opportunities to provide new ways of accessing current information.” However, in South Africa, only 10% of the population has access to the Internet.

### *Poverty eradication and inequality reduction*

Poverty is regarded as a socioeconomic challenge that mostly affects people living in disadvantaged rural communities. Van Zyl (2002: 65) states:

Poverty is viewed as a deficiency in the amounts of food, clothing and finance that are regarded as the minimum criteria for a decent standard of living.

Primarily, poverty affects the lives and living conditions of the people. It also affects quality of education of learners in affected communities. Hart (2010: 81) states:

Poverty is about social exclusion as much as inadequate income. Poor people lack access to the resources that might aid their development.

In South Africa, a decent standard of living is a myth to millions of people because more than half (54%) of the residents live below the national poverty line (Grant, 2015). South African Vision (2014) states that 27.1% of the population in South Africa is unemployed. News24 (2017: 1) further states that more than 25 million people earn below ZAR3500 per month, which is the proposed minimum wage. “The main challenge is to provide jobs and/or opportunities for the youth, where the estimated unemployment level is in excess of 60%” (South African Vision 2014:1). The rural provinces such as Limpopo (poverty level 74.4%), followed closely by Eastern Cape (69.5%) and KwaZulu-Natal (69.1%) have high poverty levels. The poor were only in the minority in the two provinces of Western Cape (36.9%) and Gauteng (32.4%) (Statistics South Africa, 2014: 31).

As providers of career information to job seekers, community libraries play a significant role in breaking the poverty cycle, which affects millions of people. However, in rural communities where unemployment and poverty levels are high, community libraries are inadequately provided. This is an unfortunate situation because poor people lack the assistance libraries may provide to aid them. Stilwell (2016: 120) indicates that:

The LIS Transformation Charter (2014), which prioritizes social inclusion, economic development, and poverty eradication, suggests that many South Africans are unaware of the services and benefits that libraries offer.

In South Africa, the goals of the National Development Plan (NDP) need to be attained for the

development and advancement of people's lives. The National Planning Commission (2010: 24) states:

The NDP aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030. South Africa can realise these goals by drawing on the energies of its people, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, enhancing the capacity of the state, and promoting leadership and partnerships throughout society.

The community library sector has a critical role to play to assist countries to strive towards attainment of their set goals. The Department of Arts and Culture (2013: ii) states that:

Libraries are a very valuable social resource, giving job seekers, entrepreneurs, students and learners access to information, the Internet and photocopy facilities, in addition to serving the reading needs of the public. They therefore play a very important role in fostering social and economic development.

### *Health information*

Community libraries are crucial in providing and disseminating health information to the users. They are viewed as ideal centres for the distribution of information on diseases such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs) – including HIV/AIDS – malaria and tuberculosis. Community libraries play a significant role in reducing the infection rates of STIs and HIV/AIDS. There is a need for community libraries to work together with the provincial departments of health and local clinics on health issues. In addition to offering outreach programmes about HIV/AIDS, community libraries are also suitable places for the distribution of condoms. The youth need information to learn more about HIV/AIDS in order to destigmatise and prevent the scourge from ruining lives. It is noted that where people lack access to information on the pandemic, its prevalence remains high. Libraries have a key role to play in creating an awareness of the scourge and other diseases. Prinsloo (2002: 69) states that in South Africa, “a range of policy initiatives at national level have been streamlined by the government into a national programme to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.” With designed and spelt-out programmes, community libraries have a critical role to fight the war against the HIV/AIDS. Nassimbeni and Shabangu (2015: 84) affirm that:

In developing countries, the public library has been identified as a suitable point for providing health

information services, particularly to the rural population, who are increasingly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

### *Library services to immigrants*

Community libraries play a significant role in providing services to immigrants. Stilwell (2016: 125) states:

Public library services for immigrants create social capital and foster inclusion (Miller, 2014) through services such as classes in English as a second language, and classes in computers and citizenship.

Hart (2007: 14) defines social capital as “the stocks of social trust, norms and networks that people can draw upon to solve common problems.” With the influx of immigrants to South Africa, community libraries can also offer outreach programmes to them to facilitate communication. Classes in computers will assist them in sharpening their computer skills to enable them to search for information on the Internet. Community libraries also provide ideal places for immigrants to meet, network and socialise with the local residents.

With a variety of information resources including ICTs, community libraries, which are responsive to the ever-changing information needs of varied people, are crucial in all South African communities.

### *Services to users with visual and hearing defects*

Stilwell (2016: 126) states that community libraries can make “a great contribution to the lives of some of the most disadvantaged and excluded members of society.” In addition to the National Library for the Blind, community libraries have a role to play to ensure that users with visual and hearing challenges have access to information resources to meet their specialised information needs.

### *Social cohesion, social justice, social inclusion, social transformation and nation building*

Hart (2007) and Stilwell (2016) share the same sentiments that social cohesion, social inclusion and nation building should be entrenched in community libraries. Social cohesion and nation building are significant to the various racial groupings in South Africa, which were fragmented during the apartheid era. Community libraries therefore have a pivotal role to play in enhancing social cohesion, social justice and nation building, and fighting inequality. Dynamic and innovative community libraries are also regarded as agents

of social transformation. Delpont (2009: 139) avers that:

More and more pointers emerge, indicating a growing impatience and dissatisfaction with the nature and tempo at which the South African society is transforming. Amongst many previously disadvantaged people, unfulfilled expectations give rise to disillusionment, potentially resulting in an impatient reluctance to continue the personal journey of transformation.

The need for the government to roll-out libraries in all communities to entrench social cohesion, social transformation, nation building and social justice is therefore urgent.

### **How are community libraries responding to the challenges of socio-economic development?**

In South Africa, community libraries attempt to respond positively to the challenges of socio-economic development despite the daunting obstacles they are facing. Since the inception of the new political dispensation in 1994, transformation in all sectors of life was inevitable to usher in the new democracy to the country. Sufficient provision of LIS in the under-served rural communities was crucial to redress imbalances and promote access to information to all people for development

With the introduction of the library conditional grant by the national Department of Arts and Culture in 2007, the picture and future of the community libraries look brighter (National Library of South Africa 2015). All provinces get funds from the national Department of Arts and Culture “to transform urban and rural community infrastructure, facilities and services with the primary intention of helping the most disadvantaged areas” (Mnkeni-Saurombe and Zimu, 2013: 40). More than ZAR 1 billion has been injected into the coffers of the department to distribute to the provincial departments to roll-out community libraries, particularly in the under-resourced communities. More libraries are currently being rolled-out even in the disadvantaged communities. Although there are backlogs regarding roll-out in all provinces, the situation will never be the same again.

The National Library of South Africa has been offered a ZAR 32 million grant by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to support the Mzansi Libraries Online pilot project to strengthen selected community libraries in South Africa (National

Library of South Africa 2016: 10). With this project, users in rural communities are provided with opportunities to learn how to use computers to access global information from the Internet (Library and Information Association of South Africa 2016). Their computer skills will be honed in bridging the existing digital divide between rural and urban residents. Community libraries provide free WiFi to enable users to access information for personal and social development. In South Africa, community libraries, in collaboration with the National Library of South Africa, organise capacity-building seminars, workshops and outreach programmes to equip “library staff with the skills to market their libraries and promote a culture of reading” (Hart 2016: 2). Community libraries also fight illiteracy because they offer reading and writing programmes, and competitions such as Battle of the Books, Skirmish and spelling bee to encourage learners to acquire reading and writing skills. They also provide story telling sessions to children (Mojapelo 2014). Study guides and textbooks are available in the community libraries for teachers and learners. Community libraries also distribute information brochures on health issues. They disseminate information relating to careers for the youth, thus assisting in breaking poverty cycle. However, more funding is essential for the community libraries to respond to more challenges relating to socio-economic development.

In an attempt to take community libraries seriously, the Department of Arts and Culture has drafted the South African Public Library and Information Services Bill, 2012. The Bill aims to:

- ensure consistency in the delivery of public library and information services in the country;
- put in place measures to ensure redress of the inequalities in the provision of public library and information services
- provide for principles, norms and standards for the provision of public library and information services.

However, “the development of the Library Policy Framework Programme will commence during the 2016/2017 financial year” (National Library of South Africa 2016: 5).

### **Problem statement**

The first democratic elections in 1994 heralded a new political dispensation in South Africa. The abolition

of apartheid in all its manifestations opened doors and equal opportunities to all people, particularly those who suffered under the oppressive apartheid laws. Kalley (2000) and Laishley and Zinn (2015) state that, under apartheid, library provision and allocation were along racial lines. Schools designated to black learners were built without libraries to offer them inferior education, as propelled by the Bantu Education Act (Act 47 of 1953). In addition, there were no libraries in the black communities under the apartheid homeland system. With the notion of LIS for all in the post-apartheid era, the study attempts to investigate challenges faced by the community libraries which militate against their mandate. To achieve this purpose, the following research objectives guided the study:

- To investigate whether a policy exists which govern community libraries in the post-apartheid South Africa
- To establish physical, human and financial resources for the libraries
- To determine library materials including ICTs in the libraries
- To assess space, accessibility and opening hours of the libraries
- To assess security measures to protect resources.

## Methodology

According to the Department of Arts and Culture (2013), Limpopo Province has only 80 community libraries. The study targeted only three libraries in three different environments in the Capricorn district of the province. The qualitative research method was adopted to collect in-depth data from the informants. All informants were interviewed face-to-face to get first-hand information on the sampled and visited libraries. An interview schedule was used to guide interviews (see Appendix A). One librarian and one assistant librarian from each library were interviewed, and seven users of each library were also interviewed. They were all selected through a convenience sampling technique. A well-placed and relevant official from the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture was also interviewed face-to-face. Purposive sampling was used to select the official. All three libraries were selected through convenience sampling. Observations were also used to collect data and a checklist was used (the items on the checklist also appear in Table 2).

**Table 2.**

Resources	Library A	Library B	Library C
Computers and printers	✓	✓	✓
Phones	X	✓	✓
Fax machines	X	X	✓
Internet connectivity	✓	✓	✓
Photocopying machines	✓	✓	✓
Subject literature books	✓	✓	✓
Encyclopaedias	✓	✓	✓
Atlases	✓	✓	✓
Dictionaries	✓	✓	✓
School textbooks	✓	✓	✓
Newspapers	✓	✓	✓
Magazines	✓	✓	✓
DVD/CD-ROM players	✓	✓	✓
DVDs/CDs	X	X	✓
Charts and posters	X	✓	X
Data projectors	X	X	✓
Television sets	X	✓	✓
Tables	✓	✓	✓
Chairs	✓	✓	✓
Shelves	✓	✓	✓
Notice boards	X	X	✓
White or smart boards	X	X	✓
Ramps	✓	✓	✓
Materials in Braille	X	X	X
Materials for users with hearing challenges	X	X	X
Security	✓	✓	✓
Signage	X	✓	✓
Air conditioners	✓	✓	✓
Library management system	X	✓	✓
Information brochures	✓	✓	✓
Talking books	X	X	X

## Findings and discussions

The findings are presented and discussed together with other findings reported in the literature. All community libraries studied are used mainly by the learners and post matric youth looking for jobs. With adequate resources, Library C is frequented by the majority of the users because it is located in the city. Even people from the rural communities without library services use taxis and buses to visit the library. Located in the township, Library B is better utilised compared to Library A, which is serving rural people. It should be noted that the studied libraries were visited during weekdays, Perhaps many users can visit libraries after schools and work. Many users may also visit libraries during holidays and weekends.



As already indicated, in addition to face-to-face interviews with the informants, a checklist was used to determine the resources in each library. The checklist was designed bearing in mind the principal functions of community libraries. Table 2 provides an overview of the resources in each library, based on the checklist. It is acknowledged that Table 2 does not provide an exhaustive list of all resources expected in community libraries. This is a limitation of the study. Another limitation is that the author did not attempt to physically count available resources. The symbol (✓) is used to indicate availability of the resources, the symbol (X) is used to denote their unavailability.

## Policy

Policy challenges and insufficient support from the government remain daunting obstacles to the libraries in rendering efficient services (Fourie and Meyer, 2016). The study found that one community library still uses an old policy on community libraries.

Users from rural communities are accustomed to pay only for electricity and not for water. Users of the community libraries are obliged to pay a membership fee of ZAR76 a year and a “country deposit” of ZAR153 – a total of ZAR229. This tariff is high taking into account the high poverty levels in disadvantaged rural communities. With a target population of 628,999 (Statistics South Africa, 2011), Library C had only 2,033 (0.3%) registered members. With a target population of 33,738 (Statistics South Africa, 2011), Library B had only 89 (0.2%) registered members. With a target rural population of 4,048 (Statistics South Africa, 2011), Library A had only 5 (0.2%) registered members. The interview response indicate that membership numbers are generally very low in the studied community libraries.

“Membership fee needs to be abolished for users to have free equal access to information.”

“The policy is available but needs to be reviewed.”

“There are service level agreements with municipalities. Services are not free because municipalities insist that we charge users.”

## Physical infrastructure

“Initially, the department did not have an infrastructure person to ensure that the conditional grant is fully utilised. Completion of projects, particularly infrastructure (library buildings), were not completed on time. With an infrastructure person, we are positive that things will improve.”

## Space

“When examinations are written, most learners flock to the library and there are space problems in study rooms.”

“Enough space is needed for Internet café.”

“The library is used sometimes as a venue for teachers’ meetings. It is disturbing.”

“We have problems when toilets are not flushing.”

## Signage

The findings indicate that libraries in rural communities lack signage. This means that, where security guards are present, users will keep asking them for directions.

## Closing hours

“I wish closing hours can be extended to six or seven o’clock in the evening to accommodate other users who were either at work or school.”

The LIS Transformation Charter (2014: 55) affirms that:

Opening hours limited to the typical working day also militate against social inclusion. The average opening hours in South Africa are 40 hours per week – not hospitable to working people who travel long distances to and from work. Opening hours are driven by staffing provision which is insufficient in many areas.

## Furniture

“Tables and chairs are insufficient during examinations.”

“We use windows as notice boards.”

## Resources

Resources are essential in libraries for them to successfully execute their mandate.

## Staffing

“We are only two (librarian and assistant) and we are expected to work from Monday to Friday (9:00 to 17:00) and Saturday (9:00 to 13: 00).”

“There are no cleaners and groundsmen. We are expected also to clean the facility and dust materials and shelves. During rainy season, there are no workers to cut grass. This creates a favourable environment for snakes. Three snakes are already killed in this library. This poses safety concerns of the staff and users.”

“We have only one cleaner.”

“Staffing is a problem. We are unable to fill staff component of all libraries due to inadequate budget.”

“Lack of well-trained staff” hinders libraries from effectively rendering their services (Fourie and Meyer, 2016; 423). The LIS Transformation Charter (2014: 55) states:

There are also many examples where inadequately or inappropriately trained people are appointed to positions for which they are not equipped. Disparity in salaries for equivalent positions in metropolitan and provincial library services must be addressed in order to stabilise staffing and obviate the disruption caused by job hopping.

### **Funding**

Fourie and Meyer (2016: 423) state that “lack of funding” remains an obstacle for libraries to procure suitable resources.

“Funds we use come from the library conditional grant, our only source. Municipalities have unfunded mandate to resource libraries. Community libraries are provincial competences of the department.”

“There are no new books on technical subjects, mathematics, electronics and mining engineering.”

“The budget from the municipality is inadequate to buy new books which are expensive.”

“When payments are not done, electricity cuts by Eskom negatively affect the functioning of the library. Users cannot access the Internet for information. A week without power supply is too much.”

“Internet access is also a challenge when service providers are not paid.”

### **Electricity**

“Power supply is very unreliable. Even when payments are done, electricity interruptions is a huge challenge.”

### **Audio and visual resources**

Audio and visual resources play a pivotal role in libraries to stimulate the cognitive functions of the brain. They also play a role in stimulating both sight and hearing.

#### **Television sets**

All libraries indicated that they have television sets. Television sets can be used to receive television programmes and also to play CDs and DVDs.

### **Computers and Internet connectivity**

Robust infrastructure is critical for users to effectively access and uses a network. Internet connectivity is still a daunting challenge in rural communities owing to poor network connectivity. However, the provincial department deserves to be congratulated for installing WiFi in rural communities. Fourie and Meyer (2016) affirm that poor, subsequently unreliable and ineffective telecommunications infrastructure is a challenge in rural communities.

“Even when electricity is available, network is a problem. As a presenter in a local community radio station, we rely solely on the availability of the Internet to get news for our listeners.”

Mugwisi (2015: 38) reaffirms that “poor internet connectivity” in a rural community is an obstacle for youth to access the Internet.

“Not all libraries in the province have Internet access. Some libraries are still under construction. They can only be connected upon their completion.”

“Internet access is limited to one hour per user per day.”

“We are given vouchers to access the Internet and there is a queue. After one hour of Internet use, the voucher expires and you are kicked out.”

“Computer laboratory does not have enough space. In addition, there are insufficient computers for Internet access.”

“Internet is down most of the time.”

“With Mzansi Libraries Online, we have a mandate to train users to use Internet to access e-resources effectively.”

### **CDs and DVDs**

CDs and DVDs can serve as educational resources when carefully selected. The findings indicate that there are few or no CDs and DVDs in most libraries.

### **Data projectors**

The findings show that there is a lack of data projectors in some libraries. Without data projectors, life-long learning initiatives and activities, which involve skills transmission, are stalled.

### **Talking books**

Talking books may arouse the reading interests of the users. Sounds of animals may attract and stimulate children and learners to read books. However, the

findings indicate that some libraries do not have talking books.

## Equipment

### *Phones and fax machines*

The findings indicate that some libraries still operate without phones and fax machines, which are significant communication tools. Librarians also need phones and fax machines to communicate with service providers and other libraries for interlibrary loans.

“Without a phone, we are obliged to use our cellphones to communicate with other libraries. This is very costly.”

### *Library Management System (LMS)*

“LMS is not installed in this library which means that all routine functions such as issuing and returning of materials are done manually. However, some libraries in the province use a LMS called Papyrus.”

## Materials

### *Newspapers*

“There are no Sunday newspapers to look for jobs.”

### *Charts and posters*

Educational charts and posters may benefit users of libraries. However, the findings suggest that some libraries operate without them.

### *Materials for users with handicaps*

To cater for the specialised information needs of people with visual defects, materials in Braille need to be available. All the libraries studied lacked these specialised materials. The checklist indicates that there are also no materials for users with hearing challenges. These findings indicate that services in the community libraries in the province are not yet available to all.

## Security

Although security guards were visible in all the community libraries visited, the findings suggest that some libraries still lack alarm systems. Alarm systems are crucial to strengthen security measures and to prevent vandalism and theft of expensive items such as computers and their accompanying technologies.

“Some users have a tendency to steal a mouse. Mouse is not detected by the system because it is not tagged.”

“My bag was stolen where we put them.”

## Conclusion and recommendations

This article has tried to outline the challenges faced by community libraries in the post-apartheid South Africa which negatively impact on their services. The article has outlined the LIS situation in South Africa in general and that of Limpopo Province in particular. It has also articulated community libraries as agencies for socio-economic development and how they respond to challenges relating to socio-development. The library conditional grant has made a huge impact in rolling out libraries to the under-served communities. Msanzi Libraries Online project will bridge the existing digital divide between rural and urban users. Based on the empirical findings and literature review, the study concludes that the community libraries are still faced with a host of challenges and contextual realities that prevent them from effectively carrying out their mandate. With daunting challenges affecting these facilities, their services are hampered. This not only frustrates users, but also the librarians themselves. Officials of the provincial Department of Sport, Arts and Culture need to study the challenges identified by the informants in this study and draw up a plan of action for implementation to improve services in the community libraries.

## Appendix A: Interview schedules

### *An Interview Schedule For An Official*

1. How many public and community libraries do you have in the whole province per district?
2. Does the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture have a library policy to manage public or community libraries?
3. How many new libraries were built using Library Conditional grant?
4. Which challenges do you experience concerning Library Conditional grant?
5. Are libraries adequately staffed?
6. Tell me about funding for libraries.
7. Are all libraries connected to the Internet?
8. Are users trained to use the Internet?
9. Do librarians attend courses or workshops for professional development?
10. Do you have service level agreements with municipalities? Yes or No and substantiate.

### An Interview Schedule For Librarians

1. Do you have qualifications in Library and Information Science? If YES, mention them.
2. Could you please share with me your experiences with this library?
3. Is space for resources and users sufficient?
4. Do you experience any challenge with users?
5. Tell me about security in this library.
6. Tell me about resources in this library? What are the challenges you experience concerning resources?
7. Tell us about staffing.
8. Do you attend any workshops or courses for professional development?
9. Tell us about library orientation programmes particularly for new users.
10. Tell me about funding for this library.
11. Are you satisfied with the use of the ICTs in this library?
12. Is this library accessible to the users?
13. Tell me any challenge you have concerning this library?
14. What needs improvement in this library?

### An Interview Schedule For Users

1. Give reasons why you use the library?
2. Do you have space problems in this library? YES or NO. If the YES, mention them.
3. Is the library meeting your information needs? YES or NO and Why?
4. Were you orientated to use library resources? YES or NO. If the answer is NO, how do you cope?
5. Which mode of transport do you use to visit the library?
6. Is this library far or near your place?
7. Which challenges do you experience concerning the use the library?
8. Are you satisfied with the opening and closing times of the library?
9. Do you have access to the Internet in this library? Yes or NO. If NO why?
10. Do you have skills to retrieve online resources effectively?
11. What do you think can be improved in this facility?

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