

**THE STATUS OF USER SERVICES PROVISION TO RESEARCH  
SCIENTISTS IN GHANA: A CASE STUDY OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY  
THE WATER RESEARCH LIBRARY, GHANA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on the range of user services provided by the Water Research Library. It aims at determining user satisfaction with the services provided and identifying the information needs not fully met by these services and thus determining how best to respond to these needs. The findings reveal that the most important reason for researchers seeking information is to keep updated in their various disciplines. The study recommends that user-needs survey be carried out often to enable information specialists know the information needs of users so as to serve them better.

**Keywords** - user services, information needs, information provision.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Scientists cannot function effectively without relying on a steady supply of books, journals and other forms of information exchange systems. The fact is that information holds the key to past, present and future knowledge.

The Water Research Institute (WRI) has the mandate to conduct research into water and water-related resources of Ghana. In pursuance of this mandate, WRI generates and provides scientific information, strategies and services towards the rational development, utilization and management of the water resources of Ghana needed for the socio-economic development of the country.

The Institute's Library was established in 1966. The first and utmost function of the Library is to make provision for the needed research materials and documents, organised and developed to support all research activities of the Institute.

## **LIBRARY AND SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION SERVICES**

The Water Research Institute is one of the 13 Research Institutes of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The CSIR, otherwise referred to as the Council, has a central Reference and Research Library which is the Institute for Scientific and Technical Information which was

established in 1964. The library has the responsibility for collecting, storing, retrieving and disseminating scientific and technical literature relevant to on-going research in the various institutions under the Council.

The Council attaches a high degree of priority to the development of an effective scientific information service. To assist in this role, the Ghana National Scientific and Technological Information Network (GHASTINET) was conceived in 1987.

The goal of GHASTINET is to establish a well co-ordinated and integrated national network within the framework of national science and technology, based on collaborative efforts of the provision of scientific and technological information to various user agencies through the application of appropriate modern information technologies to assist in Ghana's socio-economic development.

Nine sector areas including water resources were approved to be established with the Water Research Library designated the sectoral nodal point for the water resources sector in 1989. The library is expected to establish links with regional, national and resource centres.

The water sector embraces water related institutions which are;

- ◆ Ghana Water Company Limited
- ◆ Volta River Authority
- ◆ Volta Basin Research Project (University of Ghana)
- ◆ Environmental Protection Agency
- ◆ Irrigation Development Authority
- ◆ Ministry of Food and Agriculture
- ◆ Geography Department (University of Ghana, Legon)
- ◆ Civil Engineering Department of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
- ◆ Meteorological Services Department.

Other functions of the library are as follows:

- i. to collect both domestic and foreign information in the fields of water resources development
- ii. to organise, index and preserve that information
- iii. to disseminate that information to its users as quickly as possible
- iv. to publish abstracting journals as well as specialised bibliographies.

Currently, the library's stock stands at 9,000 volumes of books which includes journals and technical reports of staff. It, however, lacks current scientific journals and electronic sources of information. The study therefore is to find out their opinions on the user services provided by the library.

## ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

Before delving into the study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Staff read scientific journals and articles to gather information.
2. Staff will use electronic sources to gather information.
3. The most important reason for seeking information is to keep updated.

## THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Understanding the basic needs and interests of one's users and how they are related to their usage of the library has been one of the aims of user needs studies and user services provision.

According to Getzels "an interest is a characteristic disposition, organised through experience which impels an individual to seek out particular objects, activities, understanding, skills or goals for attention or acquisition." Armed with this information, the Librarian is able to know what kind of materials, in which areas of study and how many approximately to acquire.

Herpay observes that "a precondition for giving adequate information is the knowledge of the user's needs in a special field of the person to be supplied." She further states that the development of new information services or the organisation of existing ones requires knowledge of potential or future users. She contends that users must not only be supplied with information requested but with information actually wanted. She is of the view that "the work of an information officer requires that knowledge of his or her field and information market."

The more thoroughly librarians know the full range and possibilities of individual needs, the more wisdom can be exercised in book selection and the more effectively librarians' services can be carried out.

## METHOD OF STUDY

A sample of 120 out of 245 staff members were sent questionnaires to ascertain their information needs. Their opinions on the present information service and how best it could be improved upon to meet their needs was the objective of the questionnaire. Interviews were also conducted with staff.

The questionnaire sought to find out:

1. Their disciplines
2. How often respondents use the library
3. The most important reason for seeking information
4. What their sources of information are
5. The access points they use in finding information
6. The attitude of the library staff in the library
7. Whether the Information services available in the library satisfy their needs
8. Their perception of the library and on what they would want improved in the library.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESPONSE RATE**

One hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were distributed to staff, comprised of research scientists, technical and non-technical staff at the main office in Accra and an annex Institute located within the premises of the CSIR Secretariat. Copies were also sent to field stations at Akosombo (Eastern Region) and Tamale (Northern Region).

Most of the questionnaires were responded to and returned. There were, however, problems with returns from field stations at Akosombo and Tamale. In spite of this, there was a 75% response.

## **RESULTS/FINDINGS**

### **Information Needs of Staff**

The study revealed that as far as the research activities of staff is concerned, the most important reason for seeking information is to keep updated in their various disciplines.

In a research institute such as the Water Research Institute, with various categories of staff from various subject backgrounds, staff require information that is well suited for their use; information which must be relevant, timely and current.

The study also established that research officers, technical and non-technical staff need textbooks in subject areas of current interest to them to support their research activities. Such subject areas include groundwater, surface water, aquaculture/fisheries science, entomology, microbiology and environmental chemistry.

Current scientific journals and articles are particularly of great importance to research officers so that they catch up with their counterparts in developed countries.

The study also indicated that staff need information to write papers and also for problem solving.

### **Unmet Needs of Staff**

The study established that the library did not have stock to reflect all the subject areas of the various categories of staff. The Accounting and Administrative officers indicated that they only find a few books related to their disciplines in the library. These categories of staff were of the view that the library has a research bias.

Other divisions which expressed the fact that their information needs are not being addressed are the cartography section and the transport and maintenance sections.

It was also apparent that sources of information on areas of interest to the research grade staff are lacking in the library. These disciplines include coastal engineering,

remote sensing, economics, geodesy, environmental biology, limnology, watershed management and phytoplankton.

### **PERCEPTION OF STAFF ON THE INFORMATION SERVICE ON OFFER**

Libraries exist to provide the information needs of both potential and actual users. When such needs are satisfied, users tend to use the resources of the library effectively. This could be used as a justification for requesting for funds to provide essential services to the benefit of users. It was against this background that a question was asked to determine user satisfaction with the services provided by the library.

The study revealed that staff would want the library to be updated with books, journals, magazines and electronic equipment to facilitate their search for relevant information. Some suggested that furniture at the library should be upgraded. Others suggested that equipment needed for a conducive atmosphere to enhance effective use of the library include "having powerful Air conditioners," "well curtained windows so that users are not disturbed by rays of the sun," "swivel chairs and wall to wall carpet," "CD-ROM facilities and easy access to computers in the library so that searches could be performed by themselves."

### **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

The Library does not have access to on-line databases and CD-ROM facilities, instead the most popular source of information was found to be paper-based journals and books. To a question on why paper-based documents are popular, respondents indicated that it was because that was what was available to them. Thus, the first assumption that staff read scientific journals and articles to gather information is confirmed.

It can also be inferred from the study that when electronic sources of information are introduced to the library, users will avail themselves of this opportunity. It was therefore not surprising when most respondents said they were willing to perform their own searches should such facilities be provided. The study therefore established that the second assumption made that staff will use electronic sources to gather information is confirmed.

### **USAGE OF THE LIBRARY**

The study revealed that the library is well patronised by staff for various purposes. As much as 86.7% use the library, everyday or anytime the need arises which proves that staff have a strong perception of information as the basis of their work and are aware of the role that libraries play in the organisational set up.

### **RELIANCE ON LIBRARIANS/INFORMATION SPECIALISTS**

On the question on how they get informed about new materials in their field of knowledge, most respondents stated that they are notified by the librarian. It was also noted that some users browse on the shelves. Others said they get informed about

new materials from their colleagues and during attendance at local and international seminars and conferences.

In conclusion, the study showed that though the library is resourceful in its present state there is much room for improvement as it does not have up-to-date stock. Some categories of staff in some divisions and sections are not being well catered for in terms of their information needs.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Sources of Information**

The study established that some divisions and sections were not well catered for in terms of information they required to enhance their research activities. Some technical and non-technical staff were of the view that the library is too research biased. It is against this background that it is recommended that the library should aim at a well-balanced stock to meet the needs of all categories of staff.

There is the need for current and up-to-date scientific journals and textbooks in the various disciplines. Scientific institutions rely more on current publications which should be delivered in a timely manner. It is therefore important that enough resources be available to improve library services. By this, the needs of staff would be met continuously.

The study revealed that there is the need to introduce Information Technology into the library. Respondents were of the view that when these facilities are introduced, they would have access to current literature to enhance their research activities. CD-ROM technology for instance is essential in the library because it could be used for the provision of reference services, compilation of bibliographies and current awareness services.

It is therefore necessary that the CD-ROM technology is introduced into the library as soon as possible because it would enable staff to conduct literature searches on their own and have access to some abstracts on their fields of knowledge thus enhancing their research programmes. It would also enable the library staff to charge for searches performed by both staff and non-staff users to promote the commercialization drive as government is requesting all CSIR institutes to generate 30% of their budgets by year 2005. It is therefore necessary that some research funds are set aside to pay for searches performed by staff.

It is also important that more PCs are acquired for the library to get connected to the INTERNET to allow users to get access to current literature and have access to E-mail facilities. This would be of benefit to library staff who can contact book sellers quickly on their e-mail address for prompt document delivery.

### **USER NEEDS SURVEY**

It is essential that periodic user-needs survey be carried out to enable the librarian or information specialist to know the information needs of the users so as to serve them better. When librarians know what their users information needs are, then they can

provide these materials in the library for them or determine how best to respond to these needs thus motivating them to make efficient use of the library.

User needs surveys also bring out the perception of users on the services on offer at the library. This affords the library the opportunity to know whether they are performing their duties effectively or whether they fall short of expectation.

A suggestion box could be placed in the library for users to give their comments on the services provided or suggest some titles they would want added to stock. Library staff could also request politely that users sign a form of appreciation when their needs are met during a search process.

Information gathered from these surveys could be presented to management to help provide the necessary resources to improve library services.

### **STAFF TRAINING**

With the introduction of Information Technology, there is the need for periodic training programmes for library staff to be able to manipulate this equipment.

Librarians should bring to the attention of management the training programmes that are available for librarians. They should make provision for these programmes in the library budget annually. Attendance at library conference, symposia and seminars is very important and as such librarians should avail themselves of these opportunities.

### **FUNDING**

The study established that respondents were of the view that some research funds should be set aside for the library to help improve library services at the institute.

Funding is very important because it determines to a large extent the ability of libraries to meet the needs of end-users. Government support financially has not been forthcoming for the libraries. It is suggested that some research funds or proceeds from some consultancy projects be set aside for the library's use. Management therefore is being urged to take up the issue of funding the library seriously because the library exists to support staff in their research efforts.

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