

**ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES CONSORTIUM]
(ZULC)**

**OPEN ACCESS AND CREATING A KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY CONFERENCE
HARARE, 24-26 APRIL 2006**

“INFORMATION FOR ALL AND RURAL COMMUNITIES”

PRESENTATION BY:

Obadiah T. Moyo

Secretary General

Rural Libraries & Resources Development Programme (RLRDP)

P.O. Box 439

Bulawayo

Zimbabwe

Phone: 263 9 – 204910

Fax: 263 9 – 215337

Mobile: 263 11 401 432

E-mail: otmoyo@ecoweb.co.zw

1. BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROGRAMME

On the 28th of January 1990, the Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP), a community based not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation was founded. The aim of the RLRDP is to reach remote rural communities, to provide free of charge relevant and appropriate print and non-print material.

To date 300 rural school community libraries have been assisted to establish and development library projects. Ten donkey drawn mobile carts and 130 book delivery bicycles provide an extension outreach service in areas where proper roads are not available. About 105 rural libraries have access to computers. Rural libraries are developed through partnership with rural communities. A set of guidelines on the setting up of a Library Management Committee (LMC), drafting of a library constitution, rules and regulations of a library etc. are provided to all new applicants. The LMC is the authority behind the library, and is responsible for the day to day operations of the library including the appointment of teacher and community librarian, fundraising etc. Almost all RLRDP member libraries operate from either primary or secondary school. As community libraries, they are also open to out of school youths and communities at large. The size of the library and volume of books also differ from community to community.

As RLRDP, our major role is to ensure that all such libraries operate professionally and also meet the needs of their readers.

Each library project is a shared responsibility between RLRDP and the community. Various agencies concerned with school and community development at local level form part of community partnership support. RLRDP provides material and technical support, in the form of print and non-print material and the training of library staff and management committees.

The RLRDP is generally active throughout Zimbabwe, with concentration in Manicaland and Matabeleland North Provinces. Other libraries are also dotted throughout the country.

Field offices of the Programme are found in Nyanga, Manicaland Province and Nkayi, Matabeleland North Province. The main office is in Bulawayo.

2. PROJECTS

The RLRDP is involved in a number of projects operating within the libraries. These projects are designed for rural scholars and communities at large. The RLRDP's core projects are:

- a) Rural Libraries Advancement
- b) Children's Mobile Libraries
- c) Youth HIV/AIDS Resource Centres
- d) Gender-Inclusive Development
- e) Training and Publications
- f) Rural Connectivity Project

a) Rural Libraries Advancement

Libraries close to each other have formed clusters to exchange material and experiences in library development. Refresher courses in librarianship and further provision of library material is an ongoing activity.

RLRDP has in the past arranged exchange visits among some libraries in Manicaland, Mashonaland West, Masvingo, Midlands, Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South Provinces. Through these visits library members have been able to learn how other regions with a culture and language different from theirs tackle various community projects with assistance from knowledge and information obtained from the library. A newsletter (due to lack of funding is no longer in circulation) was a link among the various libraries, as it highlighted what was happening at each and every region where RLRDP operates.

Study circles have been established in most libraries, where literate and illiterate members of the community come together to discuss contents of a particular book which has some significance in the lives of that particular group or community. Theatre groups have also been established among some rural libraries and these are very popular as they send important messages via poetry, art, drama, music and dance.

b) Children's Mobile Libraries

Children form the largest number of library users in the rural areas, as most of them are still at school and have a lot of time at their disposal to read.

Librarians have been given additional training to cater for children's library needs

Six donkey drawn mobile libraries are for use by children only.

Two of the donkey drawn carts are also connected with renewable solar energy facilities fitted with television and radio receiver set which facilitates for playing educational videotapes, audio tapes and compact disks operated from the mobile carts.

c) Youth HIV/AIDS Resource Centres

The Youth HIV/AIDS Resource Centres operate within the existing libraries and provide current information on HIV/AIDS.

The resource centres provide a platform to share information and experiences on HIV/AIDS among the youths. Discussions, theatre, print and non-print material are used to disseminate HIV/AIDS related information. The youth have peer education clubs at each centre, through which they conduct sport, drama, income generating activities in addition to peer HIV/AIDS education sessions.

d) Gender-Inclusive Development

The Gender and Development project deals with gender issues at grassroot level. The project's activities involve both men and women, boys and girls. This is in realization that development is gender inclusive, taking cognizance of the roles played by both gender in the development of themselves and their communities.

Through this project, communities (men & women, boys & girls) are able to express their various information needs.

e) Training and Publications

This project handles the training of rural librarians, library management committees and the production of RLRDP publications.

In order to meet the demand for viable rural community libraries, RLRDP produced a Manual for Rural Libraries in 1992 and revised it in 1999. This is a help yourself manual that assists untrained librarians in initiating and developing small libraries. The high demand for library services in the rural areas prompted RLRDP to design and administer several courses to support the proper management of school/community libraries. The courses are supported by training modules that are derived from the **Manual for Rural Libraries in Zimbabwe**.

f) Rural Connectivity Project

The RLRDP is involved in a Rural Connectivity Project that aims at assisting rural school & community libraries access computers and computer education.

In recent years rural communities have been requesting RLRDP to assist them access information via the computer, thus linking their libraries to the Internet. RLRDP has responded to this request by making appeals to government and private companies to donate computers to rural schools and community libraries.

Various schools and libraries in the rural areas have in recent years acquired computers. Most of the computers are for teaching scholars to master the use of computers, mainly at secondary level. Computer education is currently not available at primary school level.

RLRDP has designated some libraries as computer centres to assist in computer literacy and access in the rural areas. Computer materials/books have been made available to those libraries with computers.

The biggest challenge for RLRDP is to provide training in “Computers and their Application”.

A basic Computer Training Course has been designed under the auspices of the Rural Connectivity Project.

There is need to involve more community members and out of school youths in Information Technology Training.

3. CHALLENGES

In Zimbabwe, the information gap between rural and urban communities is a big challenge to national development. About 80% of Zimbabwe’s population reside in the rural areas and yet the flow of information to these communities compared to urban centres is about 20%.

The provision of libraries and information in the rural areas is left in the hands of charitable organisations and yet information and knowledge is a basic human right. Just as food is to the body, so knowledge is to the mind.

Academics and librarians should be in the lead in advocating for libraries in the rural areas.

Access to knowledge and information should not be a preserve of a few people, but should be made available to all persons regardless of their social status and where they live. This is a struggle the rural people must not fight alone, they need the support of those who believe in the power of knowledge.

University libraries are centres of influence in any country since they are producing the best brains behind any socio-economic and political development of any country.

The improvement of the quality of life in the rural areas lies in the provision of relevant information.

We need library services that support the social integration of all our people including persons with various forms of physical challenges – the blind, the wheelchair bound persons etc.

4. CONCLUSION

The success of Libraries for All and Rural Communities lies in stakeholders coming together to map out a shared strategy in the promotion of Libraries and Information Services where they do not exist.

Community libraries are the only source where rural citizens can visit in order to get current news, access books to improve their academic education or access any knowledge necessary for self-development.

Libraries are capable of assisting nations address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); we are all a part of this challenge and we all have a role to play.

Thank you.
