

Development of Libraries in Kenya and Their Role in Economic Development

Joseph B. Ojiambo

DVC (Academic and Students' Affairs), University of Kabianga, Kericho, Kenya.
ojiambojb@yahoo.com

Judy S. Kasalu

Margaret Thatcher Library, Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya.
kasalu2012@gmail.com



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Abstract:

The development of libraries in Kenya is associated with the coming of Europeans and Asians in the 19th century. The colonialists and the Asians who settled in Kenya during this period set up libraries to support their educational and economic endeavours in the country. The Europeans set up special libraries to cater for their needs with the Asians of Indian origin later setting up public libraries. Use of these libraries was restricted to Europeans and Asians in total disregard of the information needs of Africans. The needs of the Africans were not considered until late 1948 when recommendations by the colonial government were made for the establishment of the East Africa Literature Bureau. The Bureau was supposed to encourage African authorship, publish materials in vernacular languages and establish lending libraries for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The library functions of the bureau were later split and each country established its own public library service board. This led to the creation of the Kenya National Library Services Board in 1964 in Kenya which was mandated with the task of promoting, equipping, managing maintaining and developing library services in Kenya. The post-independence era has witnessed growth and development of all categories of libraries including academic and school libraries throughout Kenya with academic libraries taking prominence. This paper analyzes the development of libraries in Kenya from the colonial to post-colonial period. It also examines the role and the impact that these libraries have had in economic development in the country. In spite of the fact that Kenya has witnessed a remarkable growth in establishment of libraries, there has been a slow development of these libraries due to economic hardships and diminished funding by the parent institutions. This has hampered the vibrant participation of these libraries in economic growth and development of the country.

Keywords: Development of libraries in Kenya, libraries in Kenya, history of; Libraries in Kenya-challenges, library and Librarianship in Kenya.

Historical Background

The development of libraries in Kenya is closely linked with the beginning of the British colonial rule and the arrival of European Missionaries and settlers mainly from Britain, and the Indian traders from India. Factors that contributed to the development of libraries in Kenya include the desire by the colonial government: to provide library services to the white settlers who had settled in Kenya and East Africa to exploit good agricultural land; to provide library service to colonial administrators who were employed in various government departments and; to provide religious reading materials by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and other missionaries. The earliest library to be established in Kenya was a government library namely the High Court of Kenya Library in Mombasa in 1902 along with the then Supreme Court which was later moved to Nairobi in 1905. In 1935 the library moved to its present location in the law courts building. In 1910 the Kenya National Assembly Library was established to provide information to members of the legislative council as it was then known and also to store recorded parliamentary proceedings (Kent, 1990).

In 1903, a group of Asian immigrants in Mombasa donated funds for the establishment of a public library and free reading room which was mainly for use by Asians and Arabs. This library was later renamed Seif Bin Salim Public Library and Free Reading Room. The library materials reflected a bias in favour of Indian community. Seventy years later, on July 1, 1975, Seif Bin Salim Library was acquired by the Kenya National Library Service Board (Ojiambo, 1990).

McMillan Memorial Library

In 1928, Lady McMillan provided funds for the establishment of McMillan Memorial Library in Nairobi in the memory of her husband, Sir William Northrup McMillan; for the use by Europeans only. The construction of the library began in 1928 and by June 30, 1931 the library was officially opened. The objectives of the library were to: establish, maintain, and develop a library in Nairobi to offer reference services, reading room, and lending services for Europeans only; establish, maintain, and develop a Circulating Library Service, with headquarters in Nairobi, for the circulation of books to various parts of East Africa, known as the East African (Carnegie) Circulating Library; organize, promote, and encourage cultural, vocational, and recreational activities; cooperate with or contribute to any other library, institutions, societies, corporations, and trusts.

In 1962, McMillan Library was taken over by the Nairobi City Council and formed the nucleus of the Nairobi City Council Library Services. With the City Council takeover in 1962, the library was opened, for the first time in its history, to all Kenyan population regardless of race, colour, or creed. Currently library comprises of the McMillan Library serving as headquarters and two branch libraries. However, the library is not adequately funded by the government (Opondo, 1984). In 1944, a group of Asians in Nairobi also established a public library known as Desai Memorial Library for use by the Asian community.

Developments of Public libraries were based on racial lines, were privately maintained, and were not accessible by Africans. The turnaround was end of II World War when British colonial government began to show some interest in improving the social welfare status and education system in their colonies. Several Africans returning from service in World War II, were more enlightened than before, and demanded recognition from the British colonial government. This coincides with the awakening of African nationalism resulting in political agitation against colonial rule.

The Huxley Report

Consequently, in 1944, the Conference of the Colonial Governors of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika commissioned Mrs. Elspeth Huxley to investigate and report on book production and library facilities for Africans in East Africa. In 1946 Mrs. Huxley completed and presented her report which recommended that the East African Literature Bureau be established with the following functions: to publish general and educational books; to publish popular magazines; to promote and encourage African authorship; to develop book distributions; to establish lending libraries for Africans. The report further recommended that each of the East African countries should establish large central libraries which would form the nucleus of provincial or regional libraries. In 1947, following Mrs. Huxley's recommendations, the Governors Conference appointed Charles Richards as advisor to the governments on the literature for Africans. Subsequently, on January 1, 1948 the East African Literature Bureau (EALB) was established with its headquarters in Nairobi (Ojiambo, 1990).

The East African Literature Bureau (EALB)

Charles Richards was appointed as the Bureau's first director. Among other functions, the Bureau was to provide for public library services to Africans throughout East Africa. Three medium-sized libraries were established, one in Nairobi (Kenya), Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), and Kampala (Uganda). Richards recommended the appointment of a public librarian for the East African Literature Bureau. This recommendation was accepted by the governors of East Africa, and George Annesley was appointed the Bureau's Librarian. After beginning his job in March 1948, Annesley produced a report recommending the establishment of a unified public library system for East Africa, with its headquarters in Nairobi. However, Annesley's recommendation was not implemented. Instead EALB instituted two services: the book box library services to institutions; and postal services to individuals who lived in remote areas.

The 1960s was a landmark decade for the development of libraries in Kenya. In 1960, the British Council appointed S. W. Hockey to study and report on the development of public libraries in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Hockey's report recommended the establishment of a National Library Board by an Act of Parliament in each of the East African countries to promote, establish, equip, manage, maintain, and develop libraries in the respective countries. His recommendation led to the establishment of Kenya National Library Service Board (KNLSB) in 1965.

Kenya National Library Service Board (KNLSB)

The turning point of the history of library development in Kenya began when Kenya attained her independence in December, 1963 from British rule. As a result of Hockey's recommendations, the KNLSB was established in 1965 by an Act of Parliament CAP 225 of the laws of Kenya. KNLSB began operations in February 1969 and opened its first branch in Kisumu in the same year. The KNLSB is a corporate body mandated to provide library and information services for national development. KNLSB was established to perform many functions key among them being: establishment, equipment, management, maintenance and development of the national and public libraries services in Kenya; and planning and co-ordinating library documentation and related services, advising the government, local authorities and other public bodies on all matters relating to library documentation and related services (Hockey, 1960).

The KNLS plays a dual role of public library and national library of Kenya. The public library services are provided through their sixty (60) branches spread within Kenya while the national library is available at the headquarters in Nairobi. KNLS provides the both the public and national library services including being an international centre for the International Standard Book Number, ISBN and International Standard Serial Number, ISSN thus assigning the ISBN and ISSN numbers to Kenyan Publishers.

Other Historical Development

During the 1970s more public, academic, special, and school libraries were established. Five branch libraries were established by the KNLS throughout the country. Several academic libraries were established, notably, Kenyatta University College Library in 1972, Kenya Institute of Education Library in 1974, and Kenya Teachers Technical College Library in 1978. During this period several research institutions were also established by the government and international institutions. These research institutions established special libraries to offer specialized information to their administrative and research staff. The 1980s witnessed the growth and expansion of all types of libraries in the country resulting from the establishment of new academic institutions and the increased need for library and information services. In July 1984 Kenyatta University moved into a new library complex. In June 1984 the second national university, Moi University was established near Eldoret with its library opening in September 1984.

Academic Libraries

The development of academic libraries is linked to the establishment of universities in Kenya. Before independence Kenya had only one institution of higher learning; Royal Technical College which was transformed into the first national university and renamed the University of Nairobi in 1970. In the 1980's it was realised that one university was not adequate to provide higher education in the country and that resulted in the establishment of Moi University in 1984, Kenyatta University 1985, Egerton University in 1987.

Since 2013 the government has established 31 public universities and their constituent colleges, 22 private universities and their constituent colleges and 13 universities with letters of interim authority bringing a total number of universities in Kenya to 66. All the 66 universities have established libraries which are providing various information services in support of learning, teaching, research and extension. Notable among these are University of Nairobi Library, Moi University Library and Kenyatta University Library.

University of Nairobi Library

The development of the University of Nairobi and its library systems can be traced back to 1947. That year, the Colonial government drew up a plan to establish a Technical and Commercial Institute in Nairobi to provide higher technical education for East Africa. In September 1951, a Royal Charter was granted for the purpose of setting up the Royal Technical College of East Africa in Nairobi. At the same time, the East African Asian community was also planning to build a memorial college to Mahatma Gandhi. A 1954 agreement between the colonial government and the Gandhi Memorial Academy Society incorporated the Royal Technical College with the Academy. As a result of these arrangements the former main University of Nairobi Library was renamed the Gandhi Memorial Library. The library has since been moved to an ultra modern building and named after the Kenya's founding President Jomo Kenyatta.

In 1963, the University of East Africa with campuses at Makerere (Kampala, Uganda), Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), and Nairobi (Kenya) was established and the Royal College was renamed once again as the University College of Nairobi. However University College of Nairobi became the University of Nairobi established as a national university by an Act of Parliament after the dissolution of University of East Africa.

The University of Nairobi library system is comprised of the main library the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library and college and campus libraries. The library maintains the largest and most comprehensive library system in Kenya; it has the largest stock and employs most librarians. As part of its functions, University of Nairobi Library has a national responsibility to assist researchers who are non university members, and also acts as a national reference library (UoN, 2015).

Kenyatta University

Kenyatta University before becoming a fully fledged university was established as constituent college of University of Nairobi. It was granted full status of a university in 1985 and re-charted in 2013 (KU, 2015). The Library was first established in a small building as a college library with a capacity of 200 users. As the population of students and staff increased the need for a bigger library was noted. Consequently a new library was constructed with funding from Kenya government and the British Government. The phase one of the library was completed in 1984 with a sitting capacity of 400 users. In 2005, phase two was completed and was converted into a reading area due to pressure of the growing user population. Kenyatta University embarked on the construction of Post-Modern Library which was completed in August 2011. The Post-Modern Library is a five (5) storey building equipped with cutting edge information and knowledge resources. It has a seating capacity of over 6,000. The library has branches in all its colleges and campuses spread out in the country.

Moi University Library

Moi University was established by an Act of Parliament in June 1984 as a Second National University. The university started operating from a temporary location in Kaptagat near Eldoret town. Moi University library was established in September 1984 at a temporary site near Kaptagat, Eldoret (Ojiambo, 1990). The library occupied four different spaces in its first five years before it was moved to its current space at Margaret Thatcher building in 1992. Margaret Thatcher library building was funded and built by the British government. It is the Main library based at the main Campus in Eldoret with other branch libraries in all Moi University colleges and campuses spread across different parts of the country. The library has a collection of nearly 1 million volume of print resources held within the main library and its colleges and campus libraries and serve a population of more than 30,000 students and staff.

Special Libraries

The history of special libraries dates back in the early 1900. As noted earlier in this paper, the first special government library, the high court of Kenya Library in Mombasa was established in 1902 along with the then supreme court. This followed the establishment of the Kenya National Assembly Library in the 1910 and the Kenya Museum Library in 1910. However, it was not until after independence that Kenya witnessed the growth of special libraries. Specialized libraries in Kenya are comprised of: government and parastatal (quasi-government) libraries; Libraries of international organizations; libraries of private companies and institutions.

Government and Parastatal Libraries

Government libraries comprise those run by government ministries and parastatal organisations. Their function is to acquire relevant information resources in support of the vision, missions and objectives of their organisations hence improve the effectiveness of performance and decision making of staff and stakeholders. The first government library to be established was the High Court of Kenya Library in Mombasa in 1902, followed by the Kenya National Assembly Libraries in 1910. The Ministry of Agriculture Library was established in 1907 to provide agricultural information to the staff of the department of Agriculture and the colonial settlers. Currently the library is housed at the Ministry of Agriculture headquarters. Its major role is to provide information to decision makers, agricultural planners, administrators, researchers, extension agents, agricultural students, and farmers. The library has a large collection in agricultural related areas both in print and electronic. In 1977 the Ministry of Agriculture established another Information Centre known as Kenya Agricultural Documentation Centre (KADOC) to improve the availability of agricultural and related information. KADOC's responsibilities included acquiring particularly gray literature produced by the Ministry of Agriculture and other government agencies, organizing and disseminating information to research experts, government planners, and extension agents for their utilization. KADOC was also the input center to the international information systems for the Agricultural Science and Technology (AGRIS).

Similarly, several parastatal and research organizations created by the 1979 Act of Parliament established their own libraries and information centres. Examples of these libraries are Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute Library (KIRDI), Kenya Medical Research Institute Library (KEMRI), the Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute Library, Kenya National Museum Library, Kenya National Archives and Documentation Centre and the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute Library. Others include the Kenya Bureau of Standards Library and Central Bank of Kenya Library established in 1967 (Otike, 2004).

National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) was established in 1977 by an Act of parliament and mandated to determine priorities for scientific and technological activities among other objectives. To meet its objectives NACOSTI established the Kenya National Information Documentation and Communication centre in Nairobi which has a well established online library services for access by researchers, scholars, inventors, entrepreneurs and policy makers.

Libraries of International Organizations

Kenya has attracted major international research organizations which have established libraries and information centres to provide information to their decision makers and research scientists. These include:

- The International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) was established in Kenya in 1970. The ICIPE Library System comprises of Library in Nairobi and Mbita Point Field Station in Nairobi Duguville Campus. The library provides information and services to the researchers, staff and students doing research related to its mandate.
- The International Laboratory for Research and Animal Diseases Library (ILRAD) was established in 1977. It has a large collection of print and electronic information resources animal production, parasitology, pathology, sciences, genetics, biochemistry, and immunology.

- The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Library established in 1973 and acts as a depository library for the United Nations. The library does not only cater for staff for UNEP but is also accessible to stakeholders on request.
- United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) library
- World Bank library
- The International Council for Research in Agro-Forestry (ICRAF) Library.
- The Regional Centre for Services in Surveying and Mapping and Remote Sensing Library (ICMS).
- American Embassy Reference and Documentation Centre –owned by the American Embassy in Kenya and accessible to students and staff of all public and private universities and the general public in Kenya on request.

Libraries of other Institutions and Private Firms

Kenya has several outstanding libraries which do not fall under any specific category. These are libraries owned by foreign government agencies, Non Governmental Organization and private companies. Notable ones are: the American Cultural Centre Library; the Goethe Institute German Cultural Centre Library; the French Cultural Centre Library; the Japan Information Centre Library; and libraries owned by media organizations in Kenya. These libraries provide vital information not only to their organization but also to the Kenyan Citizen.

School Libraries

School libraries are critical to the development of the teaching and learning and also equipping students with reading culture and lifelong learning skills. As stated by Herring (1988) and quoted by Mutungi (2012), the objectives of School library are: to support the teaching and educational work of the school by supplementing classroom work with further reading; to equip student with skills that will enable them learn more effectively through using variety of materials held within the library; to develop in student the habit of reading both for pleasure and for the purpose of gathering information which is not taught as part of the curriculum; to develop in student an enquiring mind that will continue to prompt them to use the library in later life

School libraries in Kenya suffer from neglect (Ojiambo, 1990). Where they exist, they are poorly financed, structured, and organized. There are no specific government policy guidelines on school libraries. The establishment of a school library is left to the initiative of heads of school and parent associations. Consequently, the quality of school library services varies from school to school. The wealthier or, so called, high cost schools, private and international schools have well-stocked libraries with multimedia resources. Similarly, some secondary schools, particularly large ones in urban areas, have some libraries. However, most of the libraries do not meet the minimum library standards. Majority of schools, especially in the rural areas, have no libraries, and where they do exist, they have inadequate information resources (Ojiambo, 1988).

Efforts to provide library services to schools were expended by the KNLS Board by allowing schools to borrow up to 200 books per term upon payment of a fee (Ng'ang'a, 1982). KNLS also provides book mobile library services to rural areas, which schools can utilize. However, only a few schools take advantage of this service. This is because KNLS books are usually of general reading interest, not necessarily geared to curriculum support.

With the exception of a handful of wealthier schools which have employed trained library staff, most school libraries have no trained personnel. The library is entrusted to English teachers with no library training and experience. However, in recent years, all secondary teacher training colleges were required by the Ministry of Education to teach school librarianship courses to all teacher trainees. Upon their graduation the teachers are expected to take charge of school libraries as one of their teaching functions.

Role of Libraries in Economic Development

The role of a library is to educate the community it serves through the provision of information resources in all formats. Community in this respect include students, teaching and non teaching staff in academic settings; researchers in academic environment and research organisations; employees in all organisation, business community, agriculturalist, farmers and children, and unemployed persons. All human beings are in search of information and knowledge that can help them achieve their desires and objectives. People need to be educated in many areas of their interest. Libraries and information centres are the only place that provides a variety of information that can help its user's to support education learning and other information needs. IFLA/UNESCO public library manifesto notes that "the public library is the local centre of information, making all kind of knowledge and information readily available to its users" (IFLA, 1994). Libraries in Kenya have been instrumental in the social economic development of the country. The socio-economic role of the libraries can be categorised as follows:

National and public libraries

- Provide information in all formats to their community at all level to help them make informed economic decision.
- Provide mobile libraries services to the rural community
- Promote literacy and reading culture. National and public libraries have provided practical and cost-effective solutions for creating literate environments in Kenya even in poor communities where they share books and other information materials. A good example in the provision of mobile libraries using camels and bike in remote parts of Kenya.
- Support and sustain independent and lifelong learning. Libraries have helped develop a reading culture in children in Kenya through setting up tents that mix reading with other enjoyable activities such as games, competitions and story-telling for children to encourage participation
- Supplement formal and informal education. Use of public libraries during school holidays has been encouraging with many school going children using their services
- Provide opportunity for people of all age to learn how to use information and associated technology
- Train people of all classes, age and sex in the use of information technology

For instance, a study by Macharia (2012) revealed that use of mobile libraries and telephony has transformed Kisumu town. For instance the study notes that farmers have been able to adopt new farming techniques which has improved their income among other economic benefits.

University libraries and libraries of research organisations

University libraries are centres of learning, teaching, research and extension in the university. The information and service they provide such as teaching information literacy, access and use of ICT, access to reading materials has enable the country to build human capital that has

transformed the economy of the country. Information resources and services provided by these libraries have seen new innovation development which has also improved science and technology in Kenya.

Challenges

Development of libraries and their effectiveness in supporting economic development in Kenya has been hampered by different challenges. These challenges include:

- Inadequate funding by parent institutions (Kavulya, 2006 & Rosenberg, 1997). Odini (1998) notes that libraries and information services have a low priority in Kenya and whenever financial problems occur, these institutions are always the first to suffer.
- Lack of professionalism due to lack of professional or employment of unprofessional library staff in some libraries; a practice prevalent in school libraries in Kenya. It is assumed that any volunteer or teacher can manage a library. The quality of a library service depends on the professional quality of its staff, and this in turn depends on the quality and relevance of the training that they have received (Krolak, 2005).
- Lack of adequate and relevant information materials. Many libraries depend on donations of information materials from foreign countries which in many of them are outdated and content not relevant.
- Lack of need analysis of the targeted user communities. This is due to unprofessionalism in running these libraries. Krolak (2005) notes that many librarians recruited lack research skills hence unable to carryout user needs analysis.
- Challenges in adoption of modern Information Technologies due to inadequate funding and lack of well- trained personnel in ICT skills
- Lack of library co-operation for resource sharing among libraries of same and/or different genre.
- Lack of National information policy. Kenya does not have a national information policy
- Colonial background of libraries and information centres has hampered growth and use of libraries in Kenya. Kenya like many African nations is an oral society. Books and libraries are seen as redundant in societies based on oral tradition (Krolak, 2005). Many people stop reading once formal education is completed. Totemeyer (1994) observes that such societies derive more pleasure from the oral and performing arts – talking, singing, dancing, socializing – than from the rather private and individual reading of a book. As a result, the reading culture in Kenya has remained low.
- Under-developed and struggling local publishing industry to support acquisition of information materials with local content and in local context. Most libraries (especially academic) import atleast 90% of their information materials from Britain and India (Ng'ang'a, 1982; Rosenberg, 2003).

Conclusion

Significant progress in library development in Kenya can be noted. Since independence many libraries have been established in universities, research institutions, and private companies. The Kenya national library has established 60 public and community libraries throughout the

country. The adoption and use of ICT has improved information access and libraries no longer rely only on print materials. The level of automation of the libraries depends on the financial support and the clients they serve. Libraries in Kenya have played a significant role in the social economic development of the country. However, the expansion of the libraries and their role in economic development is still constrained by numerous challenges in Kenya.

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