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Cultural preservation through public libraries: Lessons from Kanye Public Library

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Abstract:

The significance of public libraries in preserving and maintaining history and traditional culture cannot be overlooked. Ever since Botswana gained independence, a national process took care of people literacy through the establishment of public libraries. These were placed in various areas across the country with a mandate to provide information and knowledge free of charge to communities for the purpose of research, education and recreation. It is from this purpose that libraries are to envisage in their programmes cultural activities which must be collected, documented and preserved for posterity. The usefulness of preserved information lies in the fact that the generation to come will be able to establish their identity. This will also assist them with a foundation to build from. This paper purports to discuss and share ideas and initiatives from Kanye Public Library on culture collection, preservation and management. The paper encourages that it is necessary and possible for public libraries to collect cultural sources as just like any source in the library they can be accessed and used for different purposes such as research and reference by the future generation. It also argues that public libraries as most of their users are from the public they have to create spaces for

storing cultural materials. The study also highlights on some challenges as it tries to gather such information sources and how it plans to overcome them.

Key terms: Public libraries, Preservation, Culture

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INTRODUCTION

The public library over the years has always played a pivotal role in equipping users with information and knowledge which have developed them for lifelong learning. IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto, 1994 alluded that a public library is a local gateway to knowledge and it is a provider of basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision making and cultural development of an individual and social groups. This simply means that as the community uses the public library they access information which in turn make them socially fit in their society and on top of that are able to make right decisions in life. Among the key roles of the public library lies its role as a keeper of cultural information. The public library should provide a focus for cultural and artistic development in the community. It should help to shape and support the cultural identity of the community it serves. In order to achieve this goal public librarians should collaborate with stakeholders in their communities as well as different organizations, sectors so as to work together in gathering cultural collections. Key people in the community who mostly include chiefs and some elderly people are very relevant in sharing culture of the past. The materials collected should reflect the cultures found in the community. (IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto, 1994).

This paper posits that one of the mandates of the public library among others is to collect and preserve cultural sources for posterity. If it does not do this, the community will lose its traditional identities hence the future generation will have nothing to refer to. According to Dim and Osadebe (2009) an endangered society is the one which loses its identity as a result of loss of its cultural heritage, and preserving cultural heritage of the communities it serves for posterity is a must for public libraries as cultural heritage contains the strengths and weaknesses of the community served. Simply put, public libraries are to keep cultural information sources for their communities so that they can always refer to them whenever need arises.

WHY SHOULD PUBLIC LIBRARIES PRESERVE CULTURE

Public Libraries are meant to inspire lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen our communities. First and foremost, if public libraries do not document cultural heritage it will be lost and this means the national identity is lost. Public libraries are to preserve culture in order to show support for the cultural identity of the community. As public libraries collect and document cultural artefacts they are helping their communities to archive their past to be used in the future. Public libraries must document cultural heritage so that researchers may access it as they conduct their studies. These studies are mostly imperative because they can

be read by the future generation. Bolt (2014) Just like archival centres, public libraries keep societal participation in them because they come to access their cultural sources. On the other hand if public libraries are store houses for cultural materials they will at the same time be attracting their communities to the library; this will mean that cultural sources in the library will call for usage by all including the elderly.

KANYE PUBLIC LIBRARY CULTURE PRESERVATION PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The library wanted to collect and preserve local content so as to keep information for the future generation. There is need to build and update the future from the past information; currently local cultural knowledge is limited so, through this collection the library will be able to update local content. User inclusion is another reason why Kanye Public Library is engaged in this project of preserving cultural content; all library users will be interested to use the library and appreciate knowledge that relates to their local culture. As some sources will be stored online users will be encouraged to access information using ICTs and therefore acquiring technological skills e.g. blog, Face book, You Tube. The library intends to make users proud as they will find local cultural information. This will result in making them feel more like part of the library as locals.

Kanye public library realised that Bangwaketse as a tribe has rich culture which has not been documented. This means a lot of it was getting lost as just a few have been recorded. The initiative to collect cultural data came up from the library committee members which among members sit some elders from the village. An agreement was reached that all cultural activities must be captured, recorded and documented in the library in the attempt to preserve it.

COLLECTION STRATEGIES

The committee members came up with a plan which was to guide on how to collect the sources from the village residents. Among the items in the plan was a suggestion to meet with key people in the village to discuss the idea. Consultation with village culture custodians like the chief was done to get approval to collect, document and seek for support. This was found fit as key people in the village know where, and who can assist with specific cultural content. There was another plan drawn to share with different stakeholders who among others include the records centre, museum. Some of the sources already collected include artefacts, video-taped cultural day celebrations at Mmakgodumo dam and recorded interviews on Kgosi Bathoen 11. There are ongoing plans on calling parents to share with the children on Bangwaketse culture of chieftainship, rights of passage.

STORAGE, MANAGEMENT AND ACCESSIBILITY

Collected information is stored accordingly for accessibility. There will be video shows of cultural activities played on request by users inside the library. Other stakeholders like youth department, schools will be allowed to borrow some sources to use in their educational activities.

Audio – CD and DVD will be classified according to topic, author, and date and under closed access (glass cabinets) away from direct sunlight. Print e.g. photos and printed materials will

be labeled according to topic, author and date. Electronic copies of the local content are shared in Kanye Public Library blog for access by many people.

CHALLENGES FACED WHILE COLLECTING MATERIALS

There is a shortage of equipment like quality video cameras and professional photographers for capturing cultural activities. The staff has no training in content collection, storage and management. The other challenge is that some content is not the same from those who offer to give it, there is always need to verify with many people. Transport and funds is also a challenge.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Use of equipment and skilled personnel from stakeholder departments such as are Records centre personnel and friends of the library. With the issue of information being not similar as presented by different people a follow-up is made to other key people.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Kanye public library intends to continue building strong relations with its community to enhance smooth working relationships. This will be done by the library staff and committee members attending cultural activities in the village and where possible join committees in preparation for such activities. The library has a programme which aims at teaching adults reading and writing and it is through this that some connections will be built. Cultural activities like culture day celebrations, traditional food exhibition will be hosted by the library. The library also intends to involve some adults which can volunteer to teach cultural education at children and youth sections in the library. All these will be recorded and stored in relevant formats.

CONCLUSION

Effective collaboration between public libraries and their communities is critical as it paves way to smooth working relationships. If libraries have good relations with their community it will be easier for them to collect cultural information from them. There is also a great need to educate community on the importance and roles the library play in preserving culture. If they understand, then they will give the information freely. Above all public libraries are better placed in documenting and preserving culture for posterity. This is because information in them is easily accessible and they are open to everyone in the community. As they keep cultural information sources, community history will live long and also help to preserve the memory of the society being served.

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