

LIBRARIES AND RELATED ACTIVITIES AS INSTRUMENTALITIES OF EDUCATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

by Ken M.C. Newke

INTRODUCTION

Printing technology ended the period of manual transcription of books and broke the monopoly of the rich and intellectual on the possession of books. There has been an explosion of information in the form of printed matter. The number, size and diversity of printed matter represents the growth of knowledge. Printed matter appears in the form of the following information packages: technical reports and feasibility studies on proposed development projects, in-house memoranda, reports of government appointed commissions, government position papers on various issues and subjects, gazettes which normally report the law, statutes and decrees of governments, proceedings of legislative assemblies, learned journals in which specialists communicate the latest knowledge in their areas of specialization, books, newspapers, magazines, and government documents of all kinds whether published for mass circulation or unpublished and of a restricted or confidential nature.

According to Hays (1967), the availability of the written word conditioned the whole development of civilization. A new dimension was given to the mind of man, he could afford to forget since he could store his information outside himself. Thus libraries — the extension of human memories — developed as a result of the need to preserve written records to ensure more efficient use of human accumulated knowledge and information.

Therefore, libraries are repositories of knowledge or storehouses of written records of civilizations in various forms of the information packages enumerated above. The elements of a library are: books and allied resources, building or physical plant, and clients. On the basis of interaction of the elements, libraries play informational, recreational, research, cultural, educational and conservational roles by assembling, preserving and providing access to recorded information to sustain and advance culture and knowledge.

A majority of rural dwellers are illiterate or semi-literate and they live in areas which consist of thinly populated communities or units. Rural areas are known for lack of opportunities for education, especially the non-formal type. Social amenities such as access roads and infrastructural facilities (like electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals, adequate housing, modern communication systems, libraries, etc.) are scarce in rural areas. Poverty and illiteracy are hallmarks of rural settlement. Rural dwellers are therefore underprivileged in every respect. Originally subsistence farming, hunting and fishing were the major occupations of the rural dwellers but recently carpentry, weaving, dyeing, blacksmithing, brick laying, and other small scale industries are gaining importance as rural occupations.

Unfortunately, it is in the rural areas that tribal wisdom, knowledge, history, and non-material culture thrive. The unwritten literature is called oral tradition and is characteristic of non-literate societies.

The objective of this paper is to propose that rural libraries collect, document, preserve, and disseminate oral traditions, extend library resources and services into the audio-visual range, and serve as cultural centers.

The attainment of the above proposal would enable rural populations to realize their creative potential to improve their material conditions of living through judicious use of relevant information. This is development — the process by which man's personality is enhanced. It is that enhanced personality — creative, organized and disciplined — which enables him to participate in making decisions which are vital to the socio-economic transformation of his society. The ultimate aim is to encourage the rural

populace to use enlightened means as a method of establishing a dialogue among themselves, other rural areas, eventually urban areas and, ultimately, government.

LIBRARIES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Libraries designed to serve literates and literacy are irrelevant to the cultural, informational and educational needs of the rural populace which is mainly illiterate or semi-literate. There is need to convert village squares into rural libraries as potent extension services of public libraries and to serve the rural populace with information about their environment and neighborhood. This follows from the understanding that only education in one's culture and history can really satisfy one's thirst for knowledge. To reiterate, the rural libraries need to:

- collect, document, preserve and disseminate oral traditions;
- extend library resources and services into the audio-visual range,
- serve as cultural centers.

Libraries provide the basis for all to share in the accumulation of human knowledge and culture. However, by their current nature and functions, libraries are more relevant in written societies. In oral societies where there is a vigorous tradition of verbal communication, there is comparatively less written literature, but indigenous audio-visual (AV) materials are abundant and only need collection and exploitation to be put to their full use. Libraries are thus still adapting to fulfill their purposes in oral societies because available knowledge and culture have yet to be collected and documented. Audio-visuals blend more with the cultural pattern of oral societies than the printed word because the main ingredients of verbal communication are best captured through audio-visual media.

Therefore, the role of libraries in oral tradition societies is to collect, document, preserve and disseminate oral literature and other resources to sustain and advance knowledge and culture. Rural libraries must replace, as a matter of urgency, village squares in oral societies if they are to fulfill their mission. This will enable the majority of the rural populace that are

illiterate and semi-literate to participate in cultural and intellectual entertainment and enhancement.

FUNCTIONS OF THE RURAL LIBRARIES

As cultural centers rural libraries would perform the following main functions:

- 1) Collection, analysis, documentation, preservation and dissemination of unwritten attributes of the society's cultural heritage;
- 2) Provision of accommodation and facilities for book reviews, booktalks, lectures, musical festivals, meetings, interviews, discussions, drama leagues, debates, seminars, conferences, workshops, reading festivals, etc. to take place in their premises;
- 3) Provision of accommodation and facilities for film shows, storytelling, listening to radio programs, viewing of television programs;
- 4) Provision of reading rooms and reading materials especially light reading material, like rural newspapers and primers;
- 5) Maintenance of cultural groups;
- 6) Organization of book displays, exhibitions and bazaars;
- 7) Organization of regular competitions featuring quizzes, folktales, writing, reading, singing, dancing, etc. in both the vernacular and in the English language with book prizes.

The performance of the above functions will enable the rural populace to appreciate the role of libraries in society. Specifically, it will enable rural libraries to attract more people; sell books, audio-visual material and other information packages at reduced prices; provide functional information; and to instill the love of books and reading into the rural dwellers.

ORAL TRADITIONS

Oral tradition covers all aspects of living in an oral society. The literature is disseminated verbally from person to person and from generation to generation. Some items are sung, others are spoken in narrative form, and others are simply uttered on special occasions. The need for

documentation and preservation of oral literature has become imperative for two reasons. First, there is now a wide range of AV material that is within easy reach of small libraries. Second, the oral literature is being lost at a rapid rate through the death of traditional bearers. Mabawonku (1980) has discussed in detail technologies available for documenting oral literature, their uses and the problems undergraduate diploma students of Library Studies of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, encountered in documenting oral literature as projects.

Cultures and modes of living in oral societies are expressed verbally and through the performing and dramatic arts. It has been noted above that they are best captured audio-visually. AVs are best suited for providing information to the rural library clientele in oral societies. Among valuable AVs are illustrations, photographs, slides, filmstrips, overhead transparencies, motion pictures, gramophone records, audiotapes, cassettes, etc. Film or cinema is popular but by far the most relevant AVs are the broadcast media — radio and television, because of their live presentations.

FILM OR CINEMA

Film or cinema is very popular in rural areas. If it is employed to enlighten and educate the rural populace it will achieve tremendous success. The occasional films shown by the Ministries of Agriculture and Information in rural areas of Nigeria have been crowd pullers. They have provided relaxation and enlivened dull rural life. Regular and carefully prepared film shows would be a most stimulating way of bringing knowledge, enlightenment and information to the rural people. Films are best if they are accompanied by voice in local languages. The kind of films to be shown should provide rural areas with information about activities in their environment and neighborhood. The rural libraries could provide accommodation for film shows.

BROADCAST MEDIA

Mass media, especially radio and television, has been very successful in bringing knowledge and information into the living rooms of the majority of the human race — the educationally underprivileged. Television has

been appreciated more in informal learning because of its combination of sight and sound. Radio, being limited to sound, does not have as much appeal as television.

Some of the specialists required to effectively employ mass media in the education for rural development include radio and television experts, newspaper journalists, editors, cartoonists, graphic artists, film producers, and broadcasters. The specialists would combine efforts and facilities with the rural libraries, Adult Education Departments and Continuing Education Centers of universities and other institutions of higher learning and local government education authorities. The group would draw up and carry out programs designed to cater to rural needs. A national advisory council would be needed to direct the project.

The rural libraries would provide accommodation for viewing, listening, reading, discussing, meetings, etc. as discussed above. The rural librarian would need additional education to enable him/her to answer questions and, if necessary, to supplement the programs. The programs would be direct in content and method of presentation to the populace since most of them do not have the advantage of formal education.

Such radio and television programs as *The University of Air*, already a household program in many parts of the world, can incorporate lectures of local interest in local languages. Press conferences, discussions, quizzes, story-telling, games, plays, the reading of specially prepared texts, (especially by their authors), talks, interviews, etc. could be helpful in communicating information and enlightening the rural populace about current events.

In the evenings, when rural dwellers have returned from the farms, regular broadcasts of topical issues and relevant messages could be used as radio and television literacy teaching programs. Printed and carefully illustrated easy-reading materials and pamphlets to introduce forthcoming radio and television programs as well as film shows depicting upcoming programs, should be available in the rural libraries well in advance of each program. If broadcasts are done in local languages and if they contain some

humor, the curiosity to know in advance should encourage the rural dwellers to attempt reading.

RURAL NEWSPAPERS

Apart from the traditional role of reporting the news, rural newspapers would become one of the prime movers in the mobilization of rural interest and goodwill. They have been a medium of rural education. They bring news as well as development information which helps readers to improve their health, agriculture, general living conditions and civic consciousness.

Rural newspapers that carry reports of events of general interest to the rural populace such as announcements of meetings, social gatherings, naming ceremonies, phases of the moon, forthcoming festivals, traditional marriages, funeral ceremonies, sports; news about local events such as harvests, school programs, crops, weather forecasts, the purchase and sale of animals and farm produce, construction and maintenance of roads or bridges, the development or improvement of the local water supply, etc.; are needed to educate the rural populace for development.

Rural newspapers containing the above listed information in the local and English languages should be produced and placed at rural libraries, sitting rooms of community leaders and other strategic locations such as shops, hair and barbering salons, drinking bars, carpenters sheds, etc., at the rural areas' market squares. This will lead to the formation of reading and discussion groups if the above topics of common interest to the populace are covered in easy-to-read magazine formats.

Rural newspapers provide documentary continuity of information and establish appreciation of written communication. They fulfill local information needs and allow the populace to communicate on matters of mutual social and economic interest, thereby stimulating the flow of information within rural areas. They are a vehicle of dialogue between government, which explains its policies, and the rural dwellers who use it in turn to express their opinions and aspirations. The printed word would be

used to augment the oral instruction given in the radio and television programs, and the film shows discussed above.

The language of rural newspapers requires special skills in constructing simple messages with short, understandable words and sentences. Use should be made of illustrations that, in many ways, carry a message that is better than words.

The newspaper format is the cheapest and most convenient way to prepare and distribute the printed word on a massive scale. A rural newspaper or a nationwide network of such newspapers, prepared and edited by local communicators and editors, could be funded by philanthropies, well-meaning individuals, voluntary agencies, social clubs, governments, international donor agencies, local or international foundations, etc. Rural newspapers try to assist the rural dwellers to be more effective both in understanding their responsibilities as citizens in their societies as well as telling them the rights they enjoy under the government.

Apart from the limited purpose of encouraging the reading habit among new literates, rural newspapers are instruments of health and agricultural education and rural development in general. They also play a cultural role in the development of national languages and the recording and preservation of popular traditions and folklores. In general, they aim to ensure a dialogue between those who govern and those who are governed, and between rural and urban environments.

CONCLUSION

Development is an integral part of the social, economic and cultural structure of every society. Education for development must comprehend the total way of life and be engendered and controlled by the people within each country. There is the need to collect, document, preserve and disseminate oral literature in oral societies so that the education of the rural populace will truly reflect their cultural heritage and history.

As cultural centers, rural libraries will be fulfilling their primary function of preserving cultural heritage. Extension of library resources and services into the audio-visual range will promote the information-seeking

process and facilitate mass education of the rural dwellers who have been used to verbal communication and observing dramatic and performing arts. Appropriate information packages will enable the rural dwellers to obtain the right information at the right time to enhance the quality of their lives.

Furthermore, timely information will enable rural dwellers to participate more effectively in politics and decision-making concerning their welfare. It will allow them to seek and to obtain the good things of life which have become synonymous with development. This would include access to the basic necessities of life such as good drinking water, good health, improved agricultural production, electricity, good schools, and facilities for both formal and informal education to name a few.

Bibliography

Hays, Dennis. (1967). Lux fist. *In Printing and mind of man.* (ed. John Center and Perry Nuir). xvi-xvii. London: Cassel.

Mabawonku, I. (1980). The collection of oral traditions. *International Library Review* 12: 71-77.