

LIBRARIES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ZIMBABWE CASE

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THIS ARTICLE IS not concerned with the history of particular libraries in Zimbabwe; rather, it centres on the role that libraries and librarians can play in the socio-economic reconstruction and development of the country. In the fast-changing circumstances in which we live the desire for the creation of a truly national public library service is, amongst other things, a primary concern.

A PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

A public library service is an integral part of a country's general progress. It is one of the most efficient means of acquiring, organizing and making available on a democratic basis informational and educational materials. This is particularly applicable to a nation the population of which has had little or no formal educational opportunity; for these are the people who, to a large degree, must make their new governments work and must understand and control the great social and technological changes taking place so rapidly. With insufficient schools and teachers even for the children, there is little chance that formal educational opportunities will be available to many adults. Libraries have a major role to play in filling this gap.

In developing African nations like Zimbabwe no library has such an important contribution to make as the public library. No other library takes books to the people through a network of service points. It reaches the largest and smallest communities and it makes contact with the individual reader. No other person is so skilled as the public librarian in assessing the reading needs of the people. Moreover, the children's book service of a good library is capable of bringing great riches to the developing mind and such a service has already proved its value in many African countries.

Democracy demands that the masses, the source of authority, should be well informed about all important matters. Although many are receiving this instruction in schools, the work of schools cannot be complete without the backing of libraries. Libraries are an indispensable companion to formal education. The public library must give persons of all ages the chance to keep abreast with their times in all matters: 'By offering them, impartially, works representing conflicting points of view, it enables them to form their own opinions and preserve that attitude of constructive criticism towards public affairs without which there is no freedom.'¹

¹ A. Maurois, 'Public libraries and their mission', *UNESCO Bulletin for Libraries* (1961), XV, 170.

We in this country have reached a point where books in quantity are necessary for our cultural, social, educational and political development. We are at a point where concerted effort is needed, and past the point where progress is dependent on the work of an educated minority. Judgement and knowledge will be wanted more and more from the masses, and for that the spread of literacy must be accompanied by the greater availability of reading materials. Yet Zimbabwe does not have a public library system in the true sense. The main weaknesses of the present system, inherited from the former colonial set-up, are that it is entirely of a subscription nature and serves mainly the urban areas. The subscription system, outdated and outmoded as it is, is contrary to the concept of a truly public library system; worse still, it is also contrary to the socialist ideals of the creation of an egalitarian society envisaged by our new Government. The present system cannot serve the interests of Zimbabwe. Free access to recorded knowledge and information should be the right of every citizen. Public libraries should provide free services to people who need them, as a benefit subsidized by public funds. The majority of potential users are not able to pay directly for the services. Some local authorities argue that libraries could be self-supporting financially if membership is on a subscription basis. Such a view does not take into consideration the negative effects that this has on membership, especially on the lower income groups which are predominantly African. Administrators are urged to consider seriously the adverse effect such a system has on the nation's socio-economic reconstruction and development. Our lending-library service, including the postal service, should be completely without charges, deposits or subscriptions. A completely free service is of urgent necessity if the whole community is to benefit from the service.

At present, our libraries function separately from one another and without any general plan. Such a situation is very unsatisfactory. Countries like Zambia, Botswana, Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Ghana have realized that their educational programmes need to be supplemented by programmes for widespread access to books and have incorporated such programmes in their national development plans. Even though technical difficulties have slowed down the implementation of some of these programmes, they have nevertheless made an important step forward; in fact, they have made spectacular achievements. There is absolutely no reason why Zimbabwe should not follow their example.

An efficient and effective library service should be carefully prepared as part of our country's general educational development plan. Planning should be at a national level so as to provide equal standards throughout the country. As a first step towards attaining uniformity all public libraries should come under the Ministry of Education and Culture, which should appoint a public libraries advisory committee or board for the complete overhaul of the existing system. This process will involve, among other things, appointing a qualified and experienced librarian to take charge of the task and the preparation of legislation, a necessary step towards ensuring the acceptance of the need for libraries and the implementation of any plans. The national library service board should concern itself with

every aspect of library development. It should also examine the UNESCO Public Libraries Manifesto as a possible basis for library policy. It should also offer guidance on book-selection policy, staffing and financial matters. Central control of the national public library services is thus desirable.

LIBRARIES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

As is the pattern in Africa, Zimbabwe's population is mostly rural. Emphasis for library services must, therefore, be placed on rural areas where the mass of the people live. No doubt, population dispersion is a problem in supplying libraries, but every community has, or should have, a point where people converge for various economic or social activities, where should be placed a library and literacy centre, which should also have radio and television. Libraries should therefore be set up in accordance with the settlement and movement patterns of the people. Book-boxes and mobile libraries should serve the outlying areas.

Books should not be status symbols for the privileged few only. One of the disadvantages that the rural worker has compared to his urban counterpart is the lack of library facilities. Hence he is less informed while his urban counterpart, through the use of library facilities, is able to qualify for better jobs, attain higher academic and professional qualifications and is generally better informed. The rural dweller thus desperately needs libraries to improve his lot. If rural areas are made attractive there will be an added advantage of checking the movement to the urban areas and all its social consequences.

LIBRARIES AND LITERACY

In Africa illiteracy is a special problem which educational and development plans cannot afford to ignore. An illiterate cannot play a full part in the social and economic development of his country. He will not understand his country's socio-economic and constitutional processes.

Oral communication has been used by authorities carrying out political, health, agricultural, religious, and community education in rural areas. But this method is not as effective as the printed word. The ability to read and write is a *sine qua non* of full citizenship and the right to education is one of the fundamental rights of man. The level of a country's socio-economic development depends very much on the reading ability of its people: 'A reading nation is a well-informed nation. It cannot be easily cheated or exploited'.²

In Zimbabwe 40 per cent of the African adult population is functionally illiterate. Such a high rate should be a cause for concern to every librarian. At present most of the libraries' prospective book-borrowers are recruited mainly through the school system. Yet there is a tendency by some librarians to assume a literate public. Even if education becomes free and compulsory in future, up to, say,

² P. J. Mhaiki, 'Libraries are assets in national development', in A. Wallenius (ed.), *Libraries in East Africa* (Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1971), 130.

Grade Seven, libraries will be in a unique position to further the education of those who drop out. But libraries and books will not be of much importance to a majority who are not able to read.

Developments elsewhere have proved that illiteracy is a temporary problem. Russia, where in 1897 only 25 per cent of the population could read and write, provides the most outstanding example of effective Government action against it. By 1959 Russia's literacy rate had risen to 98.5 per cent. In Ghana and Tanzania literacy programmes have been integral to rural development projects. Nearer home, Botswana's efforts to reduce illiteracy are yielding remarkable results.³

Since the inception of UNESCO in 1946 a world-wide campaign to eradicate illiteracy has been at the forefront of its activities. In 1964 the Abidjan Conference was held on the planning and organization of literacy programmes in Africa. Now that Zimbabwe has been re-admitted to the international community the country should be represented at such conferences.

To date, Zimbabwe does not have an official Government programme for the eradication of illiteracy. It can only be eradicated if planning is on a nationwide scale, even if the programme is to be carried out regionally. The need for Government legislation is, therefore, essential. Such a public declaration of policy does not mean that the efforts of other agencies are excluded from this battle. Voluntary non-governmental agencies such as the Adult Literacy Organization (ALO), religious bodies, trade unions, industrial and commercial organizations, can play an impressive role provided they operate within a planned Government policy, which must be widely publicized. With such public commitment there is no reason why illiteracy cannot be eradicated in less than the time, seventeen years, suggested in the Whitsun Foundation programme.⁴

Libraries and librarians should also be involved in the literacy campaign. The value of the professional support librarians can give to others cannot be over-emphasized. Librarians, like teachers, are concerned about the disturbing social effects of illiteracy. It is also important to note that a truly national library service can only be created by improving the standard of literacy. People receiving tuition in reading skills are potential users of the library and must, therefore, be the librarians' concern. There is need for libraries and librarians to have close contact with literacy and other agencies in their efforts to cope with adults learning to read, write or spell. Public libraries, especially in the rural areas, should be used as literacy centres if they are to play an effective part in the campaign. The public library has particular value in relation to educational work, not only because of its widespread accessibility but also because of its general acceptability at all levels of society. But

³ S. M. Made, 'Reading and Library Facilities in Botswana: A Study of the Existing Facilities and Proposals for Their Future Development' (London, Library Association, unpubl. Fellowship thesis, 1977), 169.

⁴ Whitsun Foundation, *Adult Literacy Programme: An Appraisal of the Adult Literacy Organization of Rhodesia and a Plan to Mount a National Adult Literacy Training Programme* (Salisbury, The Foundation, 1978), 47.

the role of the library and its staff must be clear from the outset; it should be merely supportive, to collect, organize and disseminate information concerning literacy. National literacy campaigns should, in turn, seek the co-operation of libraries. It is therefore important that there be good libraries to back up the development of the literacy campaign.

LIBRARIES AND ADULT EDUCATION

The type of adult education envisaged is very different from that of developed countries where it is regarded as a process of continuing the education of the already educated. Ours is, or should be, concerned with educating the masses, most of them having very little formal education, and providing them with reading facilities.

The main emphasis of our type of adult education should be on rural reconstruction and development. Courses should include agricultural techniques and crafts, health education, housecrafts, simple economics and accounting, political education and civics. Priority should be given to programmes that are in line with the country's development plans and needs. The local University's Institute of Adult Education should be called upon to play a greater role than before, providing facilities for a greater number of adult educators.

If a revolutionary programme of adult education is to be undertaken then books should be regarded as essential. The need for libraries to meet the requirements of the various teaching programmes will have to be recognized. Adult education should be closely allied to adult literacy programmes.

MANPOWER

Lack of skills can be a great constraint on expansion. Developing countries generally face a great shortage of qualified librarians. Well trained librarians hold the key to the future development of libraries and library services in Zimbabwe. No planned development programme can begin without suitably trained personnel, particularly as Europeans who at present hold most of the key posts may leave, and reliance on expatriates, in their place, is extremely dangerous, for the supplier can put a ceiling on the amount of manpower aid it is willing to give, as Britain did to Zambia in 1968.⁵ Furthermore, because of the financial implications and the fact that expatriates are not acquainted with local circumstances, the hiring of such people should be avoided as much as possible.

Localization is a difficult matter but it will be more difficult if trained and experienced locals, particularly at the middle level, are few. Recruiting foreign experts at fantastic cost would contribute to underdevelopment.

Too much dependence on imported manpower is only one symptom of a scarcity of skilled manpower. However, our country has an abundant supply of

⁵ R. Jolly, *Skilled Manpower as a Constraint to Development in Zambia* (Brighton, Univ. of Sussex, Inst. of Development Studies, Communications Series 48, 1970), 2.

educated manpower compared with neighbouring countries at their independence. Recruitment to the profession of librarianship should not therefore be as much of a problem as it was in such countries as Botswana.⁶ If our library service is to continue to grow the need for permanent staff with the right qualifications cannot be over-emphasized. Before any plan can be operated, there is need for trained librarians. Training can be partly abroad, but eventually the problem of training within the country itself must be faced.

Libraries will not run efficiently without qualified librarians, and one way to obtain them is to establish training courses. The status of the librarian depends on many factors, but high academic and professional qualifications are of paramount importance. Efforts to develop library services can be costly failures without proper personnel. A generous training scheme for producing qualified personnel is a pre-requisite. There is a tendency to push into the background the question of staff training, with disastrous consequences. Some argue that training should not be undertaken until adequate funds for library development have been secured. But it is important to note that there should always be staff to implement any scheme when money becomes available. Manpower planning should be related to the country's objectives. A comparative study of library manpower development in other developing countries, particularly in Africa, should be undertaken. A properly planned programme of staff training, closely related to projected future staff needs and to the proposed library service scheme is needed. It is as necessary to plan for training as to plan for the libraries themselves.

A working party on manpower needs and library education should be established urgently. A programme of staff training at all levels should be begun. A sound local training school orientated to suit our own particular needs, including research and related fields, must be regarded as essential. Locally orientated institutions have long been realized elsewhere in Africa: East Africa in 1960, Ghana in 1966 and Zambia in 1967; Botswana started a training programme in 1979.⁷

Currently, the only form of local training worthy of note is the one-year City & Guilds part-time library assistants' course conducted in both Salisbury and Bulawayo. This offers only the rudiments of librarianship and is available only to library assistants working in the two cities. It is regrettable that some authorities have argued against the establishment of a School of Librarianship at the University of Zimbabwe because very few professional posts are available in the country. This is a negative approach to development. The shortage of professionals is clearly evident. It is therefore obvious that a properly planned programme of training is urgently needed. However, while plans are being worked out for the creation of a school of librarianship at the University, it would be proper to appoint

⁶ J. S. Parker, *Botswana National Library Service: The First Three Years: A Report on the Establishment and Development of the . . . Services from November 1966 to October 1969* (Gaborone, Botswana National Library Service, 1969), 3.

⁷ Botswana National Library Service, *Library Newsletter and Accessions List* (1978), III, 3.

a person to take charge of in-service training within the library service. It is very difficult to give proper in-service training if libraries are understaffed. In the meantime, too, bursaries could be awarded to citizens to train elsewhere. Zimbabwe has only a handful of qualified patriate librarians, and they have received their training elsewhere.

STATUS AND PROFESSIONALISM

The smallness of the number of professionally qualified librarians is indicative of the low status given to librarianship as a profession in Zimbabwe. Recruitment to the service of persons of the right calibre and possessing suitable academic qualifications is dependent upon many factors, not the least of which is the existence of a sufficient number of salaried posts to make librarianship a worthwhile profession. The status and salaries of librarians should be improved, bringing them into line with other professions. Considering the importance of the place of libraries in the general educational and economic development of the country and the need to attract staff of the highest calibre, the Government should ensure that librarians are accorded guarantees of career possibilities and salaries commensurate with their qualifications and responsibilities, making it a profession worthy to rank alongside other traditional professions.

Those in charge of library services may complain that they are unable to find young recruits in sufficient numbers to ensure the proper functioning of their services. The fact is that prospects for young people taking up librarianship are not as good as in other professions, and the same applies to chances of promotion. Other professions offer greater material advantages, and this explains why gifted young people, discouraged by slow advancement in a library career begun with enthusiasm, may abandon it for other professions. It is therefore necessary to establish uniform conditions of recruitment, promotion and remuneration, equating them with other professions. Unless this is done it may not be easy to retain the services of qualified librarians, let alone recruit others to meet the challenge of development.

LEGISLATION

If our library service is to be placed on a proper footing then legislation is important. Today, there is no general legislation to enforce the provision and development of library services in Zimbabwe. Such a situation has contributed very much to the haphazard nature of our library service. A comparative study of library legislation in other developing countries, particularly in Africa, should be undertaken in order to produce legislation best suited to local conditions. Among other things, the Government should legislate for the establishment and development of a national library service according to set standards; for a National Library Service Board responsible to the Minister responsible for libraries; and for the creation of a national scheme aiming at a free service.

The Kenya Library Service Board Act (1965), which came into force on 1 April 1967, was designed to promote, establish, equip, manage, maintain and

develop libraries in the country. Previously, libraries were mainly of the subscription type which, as here, were confined to the main towns and were intended principally for non-Africans.⁸ Legislation has since changed the situation. Tanzania, through its 1963 and 1975 Acts, has created a splendid nationwide library service.⁹ This is progressive legislation which serves as a lesson.

The national library board should have the powers to create and develop library services throughout the country. Each administrative region should be represented, as should the University, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Zimbabwe Library Association. The board would appoint a chief librarian responsible *inter alia* for drafting a national development plan to be approved by the board and the Government.

FINANCE

Developing a national public library service involves large sums of money. Lack of funds can seriously hamper the development plans and the training schemes envisaged. Developing countries elsewhere, from circumstances beyond their control, are forced towards international assistance for development. In the field of education, libraries included, UNESCO is always ready to assist. The Rockefeller, Carnegie and Ford Foundations may be called upon, as well as friendly Governments. But, whatever foreign aid may be available it must not have any strings attached nor must it be for prestigious projects. Too many aid programmes serve a political rather than a professional purpose. There is a danger that some countries or organizations may offer aid with some sinister ulterior motives. All too often development aid has promoted programmes that have by-passed the basic needs of the people. This may lead, quite rightly, to dispensing with development aid altogether.

International aid to a particular country for any project is likely to be limited in extent. Whatever foreign aid Zimbabwe may get will not be enough for all its reconstruction and development needs, library programmes included. The bulk of the cost of such programmes must be borne by the country itself; finance must be generated internally for such purposes. This means that those in 'the corridors of power', including those directing economic planning and finance, must be convinced that such programmes have high priority in the allocation of scarce funds, that they are of relevance to national plans for development, and that the money so invested will be spent in ways which will provide a maximum profitable return. But the previous Government's remarkable omission of any reference to libraries in its five-year national development plan announced in 1979 is a cause for great concern. It is hoped that the new Government will correct this situation.

While on the question of finance, it is necessary to reflect on the question of

⁸ F. O. Pala, 'The Kenya national library service', in Wallenius, *Libraries in East Africa*, 32.

⁹ K. C. Harrison, *The Importance and Relevance of Librarianship for Developing Countries* (London, The Commonwealth Foundation, Occasional Paper 33), 9.

private support. Many of us underestimate the contribution that we can make as individuals or organizations towards the development of our country. But it is important to realize that many libraries, especially in the Western world, have benefited from the generosity of private individuals and organizations. Zimbabwe may well have potential benefactors such as Bishop Aglionby of Ghana, Karanjeet of the Tanganyika Library Board, William Ewart of England, Von Rauner of Germany, and Andrew Carnegie and J. Passmore of the United States of America, who have sacrificed their energy and resources for the promotion and development of libraries in their own countries.¹⁰ Zimbabwe has many well-to-do people of all races who are generous, but have not been stimulated, sufficiently, into contributing towards the development of the country's libraries. Among the very few examples of those who have is S. H. Leake, whose generosity led to the establishment of the Marandellas Children's Library. This is a challenge to all of us. Consider the huge sums of money lavished in celebrations in beer drinking! Most of this could be put to better use in financing library development if the public is made to understand its role in national development. What determines our success or failure as a developing country is the amount we can raise internally and how we use it. Development aid will bring much success only if it helps us to achieve progress through our own efforts.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Contact with other national and major library organizations would be of value for advice and assistance and in making the aims and needs of Zimbabwe's library services more widely known. Contact, both formal and informal, should be resuscitated with friendly countries now that conditions permit. The International Federation of Library Associations (I.F.L.A.), the Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA), and the Standing Conference on National and University Libraries (SCONUL), among others, are very important international organizations, membership of which Zimbabwean librarians should seek. It should be the moral responsibility of the Government to see that they join so that the Zimbabwe Library Association (Z.L.A.) can have contact through attendance at conferences. It is useful for them to meet and share ideas with other librarians from various parts of the world. By so doing they may realize that Zimbabwe's problems are not unique. They may also learn from other countries' experiences.

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

No consideration of library development in Zimbabwe would be complete without mention of the University Library. As a service department, it has a prime function and responsibility to meet the teaching and research needs of its parent institution. But, as elsewhere in Africa, the library is expected to give its services to a wider community.

¹⁰ C. Kigongo-Bukenya, 'The public libraries board in Uganda', in Wallenius, *Libraries in East Africa*, 160.

By far the largest library in the country, it serves our only university and employs the largest number of qualified librarians. By virtue of this it should offer facilities for training librarians as soon as possible. If librarianship is to be developed as a career open to many, a full-time school of librarianship should be established at the University. Plans for such a school should be worked out urgently instead of waiting for a well-established library service to come into being.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to say that the major problem facing the envisaged library development programme is lack of funds. On the surface of it this looks so, but lack of money is not the sole barrier to progress. The major barrier is an attitude of mind on the part of officialdom. It needs to be convinced of the importance of a national public library service and of the role libraries play in cultural and educational progress. This will come about when libraries cease to be regarded as storehouses.

There is need for propaganda and demonstration, propaganda to change the attitude of those in authority. This can best be done by the librarians themselves. In order to obtain adequate financial backing from the economic planners, librarians must make clear their contribution to educational progress in the new Zimbabwean society. It is also necessary to demonstrate what public libraries can do and how the public can respond to progressive measures.

The problems to be faced are many and varied and we should not delude ourselves into thinking that they will easily be overcome, that time will solve them, or worst of all, that the current situation is satisfactory. Far from it. There is no room for complacency, yet there is cause for optimism. For on the credit side are two factors of enormous importance: the enthusiasm and devotion of many librarians, and the great response from the readers which can be forecast when they are provided with a real public library service.

Developments elsewhere in Africa have shown that the first years of independence have been years of rapid transformation. These are the crucial years for planning and laying foundations for a new society. The myth that good libraries are a luxury of rich countries has been destroyed by the examples of neighbouring countries, most of which are poorer than our own and where appreciable results have been obtained in recent years. It is therefore a challenge to our new Government, with its progressive socialist policies, to provide the framework for the development of a truly national public library service.