Information Accessibility by the Marginalized Communities in South Africa and the Role of Libraries[1]

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Abstract
This paper discusses the nature and levels of information access by the information deprived communities in South Africa and the role libraries play in supporting information access to the information poor. The marginalized communities and information access are defined, and how, why and where such communities access information is discussed. The library system in South Africa is described and its role, activities, programmes and services examined. The paper further discusses how the libraries are resourced and managed, and the challenges and opportunities they face. An attempt is made to compare South African library model support to the information poor communities with those of other countries of the region. It is concluded that South Africa has a strong information access capacity and library services, though comparatively better than those in other African countries in terms of management, resource support and distribution, but still lacks the capacity for effective information provision to the marginalized communities largely because of their location and information content and format that is largely in favour of information rich environments.

1. Introduction

South African population is estimated to be 48 with a female to male population ratio estimated at 50.5:49.5 million. This population is made up of a diverse and multicultural society whose major population groups are blacks/Africans 76 per cent, whites 13 per cent, coloureds 9 per cent and Indians/ Asians 2 per cent. Most of the white population is Afrikaans (people of Dutch origin) or of British origin. Other smaller groups are of German, French, Jewish, Italian and Portuguese descent, among others. Out of 31.3 million (76.7%) of the historically marginalized Blacks, only 13, 6 million were living in urban areas while 17.8 million (57%) live in non-urban areas (Survey of the IT industry and related jobs and skills in South Africa 1999: 21). A speech by the former Minister of Education cited by Nassimbeni and May reveals that "*3.5. million adults over the age of 16 have never attended school; another 2.5 million adults.. have lost their earlier ability to read or write. That makes essentially 6 million South Africans who are essentially barred from the written word, from the whole universe of information and imagination*

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that books hold; and also from the more functional everyday empowerment that written languages gives – for employment, for travel and to be a responsible citizen (Speech by the Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal in Nassimbeni and May 2006:13).The black population is also diverse. The major nine ethnic groups are Zulu (the largest), Xhosa, South Sotho, North Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Ndebele, Swazi, and Tsonga. The South African Constitution permits the use of 11 official languages that include: isiZulu (22.4%), isiXhosa (17.5%), Afrikaans(15.1%), Sepedi(9.8%), English(9.1%), isiNdebele(1.5%), Setswana(7.2%), Sesotho(6.9 %), Xitsonga(4.2%), isiSwati (2.6%) and Tshivenda(1.7%) [Republic of South Africa, Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2003].Another 2% is spoken by others. However, English and partly Afrikaans are widely used in most official work environments and documentation. A large part of South African history, until 1994 when democracy downed the country, consist of shameful periods (popularly known as apartheid) of repression, racial discrimination and violation of human rights in awful ways that are widely discussed in the political and historical literature of the country. This period created a large number of politically, economically and socially deprived communities whose plight is still being addressed by the current democratic government that began governance in 1994.

Information poor or marginalized community is often viewed in several ways. Some of the five ways of categorizing this community was once defined by Ocholla (1998: Introduction) for an IFLA Social Responsibilities Discussion Group concept paper in Amsterdam. First, the economically disadvantaged populations of the developing countries (The South); Second, the rural people who are often geographically isolated by lack of communication and transportation systems. Third, those marginalized/ disadvantaged by cultural and social poverty, especially the illiterate, the elderly, women, and children; Fourth, those who are discriminated against by race, ethnicity, creed and religion; and fifth, the physically disabled. A large number of South African populations are economically deprived, geographically isolated, culturally and socially marginalized. There are also those who fall within the fourth and fifth categories of this definition. An extension of this definition is also provided by Ocholla (2002:2) on the conceptions of diversity in a LIS workplace.

As this author once observed(Ocholla 1998:abstract),accessibility to, and availability of information for exploitation and usage by all people pose a major challenge to, and responsibility for, the modern societies that increasingly consume post-industrial products and services. The poor, the illiterate and the rural communities, who also consume these products and services, are the most affected when dealing with information oriented materials. They are most vulnerable to cultural discourses that influence exploitation and use, promote alienation and servitude, often, exploiting the disadvantaged members of the community like the poor, the children and women. Ironically, despite all the social evils that reduce information access and exploitation, the same disadvantaged are required to bring up decent families, consume modern products and services, provide labour for the sprawling modern life styles and economies, while they are also expected to understand their rights and responsibilities, be custodians of ethics, values that can breed humility and homogeinity. Admittedly, the demand put on these unfortunate people is incomprehensible and insurmountable. This invites an obvious question, whose social

responsibility to provide them with information? Can libraries and other information systems and services within a country as well as outside intervene strongly. But again we are quotioned by Paul Sturges and Richard Neil(1999), in a book that this author calls a masterpiece on libraries and information in Africa, with the following narrative *"Travel in Africa, especially by bus, can be a disconcerning experience for the first time traveller or the unwary tourist. Trustworthy time-tables don't exist and the bus will usually not leave until it is full, which may lead to a wait of an hour or more before the journey actually commences. Even then, several detours, delays and unscheduled stops along the way will usually occur, adding even more time to the journey. Despite the inconvenience, the delay in a sense serves a useful purpose as it enables Africa's own information system to function properly. In the constant talk and close interpersonal contact can be witnessed a higly complex information system at work. Its contents vover a wide range of topics from the current market price for chickens to the prospect of Dan Quayle becoming the next president of the United States. Almost untouched by the technical complexitie s and expense of computer technology, or even by the diverse messages conveyed by books, Africa possesses a rich and adaptable mode of information transfer in the social and psychological make up of the people themselves".(Sturges and Neil 1990:7).* In concluding their remarks, these authors are of the opinion that to see information in Africa as only represented by one or both of the two poles of poverty and wealth would be inadequate. The richness of African oral traditions is enormous. However, oral traditions are overwhelmed by modern lifestyle that increasingly depend on western gadgets that range from the night gown to the cellphone that, unfortunately or perhaps fortunately, you will find in the remotest parts of the poor communities that do not have either running water nor electricity. This is a paradox that one of the leading political scientist in Africa, and probably also in the World, Ali Mazrui, warn us about. In his cautionary note on adapting to western culture he expresses his pessimism thus:

"Africa as a whole borrowed the wrong things from the West - even the wrong components of capitalism. We borrowed the profit motive but not the entrepreneurial spirit. We borrowed the acquisitive appetites of capitalism but not the creative risk-taking. We are at home with Western gadgets but are bewildered by Western workshops. We wear the wristwatch but refuse to watch it for the culture of punctuality. We have learnt to parade in display, but not necess arily the West's techniques of production"(Mazrui,1990:5)

I would wish to develop this intriguing analogy. We are thrilled with the information service capacities of modern information systems but apathetic to their development and maintenance.

Although people may share reasons for information access, the nature or levels of information need vary. Studies have shown that people access information for several reasons. Among them are leisure, curiosity, uncertainty, challenges facing the individual or group, uses, gratification, diversion/escapism, networking, comparison and enlightenment. Although information can be accessed textually, electronically, visually audibly and orally, most information poor communities prefer information orally and such information should be provided closest to them by sources familiar to them such as

colleagues, neighbors, relatives and friends as attested in most studies. The conception of knowledge sharing through 'community of practice' works fairly well in this environment. It does seem to me that modern technologies that share methods of information access with those of the information deprived communities in terms of proximity and orality such as wireless technology both old (e.g radio) and new(e.g mobile phones) are increasingly popular sources of information access. The means of enabling people to send and receive messages at close proximity anytime, that mobile phone technology seem to do quite well, has gained or achieved a tremendous success in South Africa and with more content on board are likely to play a prominent role in reaching the information poor as this author has witnessed in rural areas in Africa. Libraries have lived longer than the emerging technologies in Africa and elsewhere in the World. Unfortunately, libraries have not been able to reach the information poor largely because they were not designed for the information poor communities and until now they project lack of sensitivity to the information needs and information seeking of the information poor and marginalized communities no matter how much they try.

2. The role of the Libraries

Although the roles of libraries are well documented and perhaps widely known, it is also recognized that library roles vary with the nature and type of library. For instance, such roles could be influenced by the territorial distribution, for example, province, state, county, district, municipality, town/city, region; the location of the library e.g rural and urban; ownership e.g. government or private owner; category of users e.g. general public or special user group(workers or employees of an industry or private company) researchers, academics/faculty, the physically disabled, school learners or tertiary institution students; governance e.g central/main and branch library systems or centralized and decentralized; place or status of the library in a country, for example a national library; subject scope and form of information collection(law, agriculture, medicine, music), mode of operation(stationery or mobile); demographic characteristics of the users: adults or children; social and physical status of the users: patients, prisoners, minorities, blind; nature of the organization(parliamentary, research, business and technical) and scope of the collection: general, special among others(see Ocholla 1993:23)

Essentially, the role of libraries are to inform, entertain, enlighten, educate, empower and equip individuals and communities for life long learning in order that they can know their rights and responsibilities in the society and fulfill their social roles knowingly and responsibly. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the specific roles of libraries vary. For instance, the roles of school libraries as outlined in the School Library Manifesto are to provide "*information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops the imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens"*(IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto 2006) There mission is *supporting and enhancing educational goals as outlined in the school's mission and curriculum; developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives; offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding,*

imagination and enjoyment; supporting all students in learning and practicing skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communication within the community; providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities that expose learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions; organizing activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity; working with students, teachers, administrators and parents to achieve the mission of the school; proclaiming the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are essential to effective and responsible citizenship and participation in a democracy; promoting reading and the resources and services of the school library to the whole school community and beyond.

While the roles of public libraries is articulated in the Unesco Public Library Manifesto in the most influential way thus, " *The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision – making and cultural development of the individual and social groups. The Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds o men and women"*(IFLA/UNESCO public library manifesto, 1994). The key mission of public libraries as outlined in the manifesto are *creating and strengthening reading habits in children from an early age; supporting both individual and self conducted education as well as formal education at all levels; providing opportunities for personal creative development; stimulating the imagination and creativity of children and young people; promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievements and innovations; providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts; fostering inter-cultural dialogue and favouring cultural diversity; supporting the oral tradition; ensuring access for citizens to all sorts of community information; providing adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups; facilitating the development of information and computer literacy skills and supporting and participating in literacy activities and programmes for all age groups, and initiating such activities if necessary.* The roles and missions of libraries as articulated are not always fulfilled.

3. The library system in South Africa

South Africa has one of the largest and perhaps the fastest growing information sector in Africa or in the Developing Countries. Reporting on information sources, systems and services in South Africa, Mostert (2005:55-61) provides an informative overview on information access capacity and potentials in the Publishing and Printing Industry, Libraries and Information Centers, Archives and Records Centers, Museums, NGOs, Embassies, Commercial Database Industry, Mass Media(press and broadcasting),the Internet sources and the Tele-Density and rightly concludes that South Africa is endowed with a large and wealthy information sources, systems and services for accessing information that when compared to other African countries is far developed. South African main library systems can be grouped into four categories. The public libraries that managed but not necessarily owned by the Metropolitan and Provincial Authorities, the National Library with a main library based in Pretoria and a branch library in Cape

Town, the school libraries, the academic libraries and the special libraries particularly the parliamentary library systems. However, access and use of the libraries just like other information centers , systems and services described by Mostert in the country has largely neglected the information poor and deprived communities either intentionally because of lack of sensitivity to their information needs or unintentionally because of having the desire but lacking the means to deliver the desire.

In recent years, significant debates and research reported widely have dwelt on libraries with general information on day –to-day activities and developments of libraries reported in LIASA-in- Touch. This paper will not dwell on the activities and services of the Parliamentary libraries in South Africa (Mostert 2005, Mostert and Ocholla 2005) nor the Academic/HEIs libraries (see Vedsman 2002) as these libraries mainly service the information needs of communities that would normally are associated with the information rich.   However, it has been noted that information literacy, that is fundamental for life long learning, is essential or crucial within tertiary/academic institutions that increasingly admit students from information poor environments that do not know how to access, explore and use information effectively (see De Jager and Nassimbeni 2003, Underwood 2002).

Public libraries development has received significant attention (van Helden and Lor 2002; Lor, van Helden and Bothma 2005; de Jager and Nassimbeni 2005, Hart 2004, Fredericks and Mvumelo, Nassimbeni and May 2006 etc). They do receive most attention World wide in any case. Notably for this paper is a recent initiative by the Print Industries and Cluster Group (PICC) and the National Library of South Africa (see Van Helden an Lor 2002; Lor, van Helden and Bothma 2005), in 2002, to provide a "comprehensive and informative inventory of South African public/community libraries, the Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa (PaCLISA)" (Lor, Van Helden and Bothma 2005:269). As outlined by Van Helden and Lor(2002:section 3) "the aim and objectives of PaCLISA project was to create an inventory of the public /community libraries in South Africa, quantifying major parameters including the physical distribution of libraries, library statistics (numbers of books, circulation of library materials, staff, services, etc), and the population served by the libraries". The two authors qualify that as an "inventory", the focus of the project was to enumerate and describe the library entities and not to analyze the trends or performance of library services. The main objectives of the project, according to van Helden and Lor, were to:

Obtain reliable and up to date data about each library;
Create a database containing the data about all the libraries;
 Map the location of the libraries in geographical context;
 Obtain demographic information of the areas served by these libraries;
 Obtain market information on book and print purchasing by libraries;
 Produce a directory of public and community libraries.

It is noted by Lor, van Helden and Bothma (2005:269) that "plotting the physical location and hence spatial distribution of the public and community libraries in a geographical information system (GIS) was a key dimension of the project". Although it is recognized

(Lor, van Helden and Bothma 2005) that the PaCLISA project has not achieved its objectives as, for instance, data collection proved cumbersome, preliminary information obtained from van Helden and Lor (2002) and the GIS information shows that the distribution of the 1295 public libraries in the country are still largely concentrated in the information rich environment. The historically marginalized communities that also form the bulk of the information poor and deprived communities are left out. Immediately after 1994 a rapid growth of public libraries in the previously marginalized areas was commendable. However, this progressive momentum slowed down for unknown reasons to this author even through insufficient resources is cited among the main reasons. Equally important attention focuses on publication of books in indigenous South African languages and their availability and use in public libraries (Fredericks and Mvumelo 2003). The two authors have raised a genuine concern that affects literacy and information access to the information poor and the role and impact of public libraries in a country that is constitutionally expected to enable information access in all the eleven languages by observing that publishing houses and libraries in South Africa largely provide information materials in English and Afrikaans and that publication in indigenous languages constitute less than 1% of the collection of the sampled public libraries in Western Cape. It is also worth recognizing the recent concerns raised on adult education in South African public libraries (Nassimbeni and May 2006), where the failure of adult education [close to 77% of the 589 public libraries sampled by Nassimbeni and May (2006:14)] did not participate in adult education, is a major challenge to "taking libraries to the people" and " libraries: partners in learning, nation building and development" that was and scheduled to be conference themes of Library and Information Association of South Africa in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

School libraries development has also received strong coverage particularly the absence of National School Library Policy guidelines (Le Roux 2002) despite the existence of several draft guidelines (e.g. South Africa. Department of Education 2001, 2002). More contradicting in these debates is the departure of South African Education system, in schools, from the traditional education dispensation to outcomes based education (OBE) that is resource –based and learner –centered learning paradigm, in the absence of school libraries to support the learning policy as only 19.8 % (School Library Policy- Directorate of Education Library Information and Technology Services 2003:8) of South African Schools have school libraries. School learners have been compelled to seek for library services from the scarce, urban centric and overburdened public libraries (see Hart 2004). There is significant hope that the recently launched School Library Policy by the Department of Education and Culture(School Library Policy- Directorate of Education Library Information and technology Services 2003) that, in the words of the Minister of Education KwaZulu –Natal, ' *provides a framework for planning, development and evaluation of school in the province'* focuses on redress and equity in resource provision to schools and recognizes the importance of school libraries would be a success to be emulated nationwide. It is unfortunate that while school libraries are regarded important for addressing yet another marginalized community, the majority of the school children in the deep rural areas of the country have no access to libraries of any kind.

Efforts to reach the information poor communities were made by setting up community libraries in the country that were intended to be non-elitist and serve the information poor

communities before 1994(Mostert 1998; Mostert and Vermeulen 1998). Some of such libraries were later absorbed by the new public library systems either under metropolitan libraries or under Provincial (South Africa has nine provinces) library authorities. Community libraries did not fulfill their intended functions largely because; their design had more to do with ideology than with promoting information access to the marginalized Communities.

Another recent attempt to provide information to information deprived communities was through telecentres or the centre approach(Snyman and Snyman 2003) that Synman and Snyman(2003:96), citing Benjamin et al, "refers to the practice of establishing centers as information resources and communication nodes in disadvantaged rural areas to meet the telecommunications and information needs of the members of such community". This grandiose 'South African government's initiative to use ICT for the dissemination of information to the information deprived rural communities by establishing Tele-Centers in the rural areas' and that was once described by World Bank (in Snyman and Snyman 2003:97) to be "a powerful engine of rural development and a preferred instrument in the fight against poverty" is reported by the two authors to have been unsuccessful. Snyman and Snyman (2003:105) associate this failure with a misconception that ICTs would answer all social problems relating to information access, focus on technology rather than building human and social capital first and the governments top-down approach to solving social problems. More specifically, the major problem has been associated with poor management, lack of training of service providers, and insufficient preparation of the community or service beneficiaries and stakeholders to buy into the novel idea. The authors suggested collaboration between the government and the information workers/specialist to support the venture in future.

4. Activities, programmes and services

Activities are things such as events that libraries organize in order to fulfill their roles and functions effectively. Such activities can be encapsulated under specific broad areas or programmes or may not belong to a specific programme.Thus; programmes are focus areas of library activities. Services in this context are specific to information provision or dissemination activities or functions. In essence, no library may function without activities but can operate without a programme that is a pity. At the national level, library activities and programmes in South Africa are largely organized by Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) (see http://www.liasa.org.za). Notable LIASA activities and programmes are: LIASA annual conference, LIASA advocacy, LIASA publications(e.g LIASA Online, LIASA –in- Touch, South African Journal of Libraries and Information Sciences-SAJLIS),Continuing Education and Professional Development(LIASA Programme), LIASA Library Week and LIASA Partnership. Some of these activities are conducted in all the nine provinces and individual libraries. For example the following activities were scheduled by LIASA in 2005 and 2006 respectively (see http://www.liasa.org.za/activities/calendar2005.php)

Calendar of Events 2006

March	
13 - 18 March	SA Library Week 2006
April	
10 - 12 April	UKZN & LIASA Mini-Conference, Howard College Campus, UKZN
May	
16 - 17 May	4th Southern African Library Acquisitions Conference, CSIR International Convention Centre, Pretoria
31 May	Deadline for nominations: Librarian of the Year Award for 2006
June	
14 June	WCHELIG Winter Colloquium 2006, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, (Bellville campus)
September	
25 - 29 September	9th Annual LIASA Conference, Saint George Hotel, Pretoria

Calendar of Events 2005

January	
26 - 29 January	Executive Committee meeting, CICD orientation for Representative Council & Representative Council Business meeting
March	
12 March	Launch of SA Library Week, Kliptown
14 - 18 March	South African Library Week (Theme: Libraries: Opening the doors of learning and Culture to all)
April	
2 April	International Children's Book Day
23 April	World Book Day
August	
14 - 19 August	World Library and Information Congress/IFLA Conference, Oslo, Norway
September	
8 September	International Literacy Day
5 - 9 September	Readathon Week
26- 30 September	8th LIASA Annual Conference, Nelspruit, Mpumalanga (Theme: "Taking Libraries to the People")
October	
24 October	International School Libraries Day

There are several other activities organized at provincial levels and at library levels reported in LIASA –in – Touch. Do these activities and programmes and services reach the information deprived communities that were defined? How do they reach them?

It has been noted that a large number of information deprived communities when using the library prefer to use the library reading halls/rooms for accessing information. This situation is common within the public libraries in densely populated poor urban areas as well as in the rural areas. The popular argument is that home environments are not conducive for reading or accessing information partly because of congestion and lack of reading facilities. This argument can help to explain why collecting library statistics or performance measures based on the number of items borrowed or the number of registered users may not favour libraries whose users rely on the library for reading shelter/venue. Another library service that is largely ignored because of absence of readiness, planning, priority, resources and support in adult education in South African libraries. Nassimbeni and May(2006) study recognized the importance of adult education in supporting the information poor to eliminate poverty and illiteracy and while quoting disappointing statistics on the level of adult illiteracy in South Africa, found that adult education in South African public libraries is extremely low.

5. Challenges and opportunities

Are the public libraries fulfilling their mission if most of the 1253 identified in South Africa are located in the urban areas, serving largely the affluent communities of the cities? (See Van Helden and Lor 2002, Lor, Van Helden and Bothma 2005; De Jager and Nassimbeni 2004). Are the information content in the libraries sensitive to the information needs of the community they are serving if the language of the library documents is almost entirely in English or Afrikaans (Fredericks and Mvunelo 2003) and information overwhelmingly provided in print format? Would the full completion of the Pac LISA project or related mapping and auditing activities for the performance indicators, that according to De Jager and Nassimbeni(2005:40) includes " input measures-staff, materials, funds; process measures; output measures-products, services, activities, circulation, reference queries, interlibrary loans; outcome measures-take-up of services, user satisfaction", of public library system in the country help to measure level and extent of information accessibility to the information poor?

As was established, only 19.8% of South African Schools have libraries and most of the schools with libraries are located in urban areas. In addition a large number of the existing school libraries are under resourced and poorly managed. For instance, the absence of functional school library policy means that there is no standards and regulatory mechanism to ensure that these libraries function properly. This is an extremely painful situation. This scenario invites several questions. Will school library policy help to deliver information to the marginalized schools and children as policies a lone does not deliver the services required? Does the purpose and mission of school libraries in the manifesto meaningful if less than over 80% of schools do not have libraries?

One way of enabling libraries to reach the people, the marginalized and the information poor, to concur with the Nassimbeni and May (2006), is support adult education through libraries particularly in the Africa as the figures shown by Nassimbeni and May(2006:17) show high pass rate among those who participated in adult education. Secondly, Information literacy seems to feature strongly as essential tool for equipping learners for

life long learning and reducing information poverty. So far information literacy has been popularized in tertiary institutions rightly so to reach out to students coming from information poor environments some of who access libraries and the Internet for the first time in their lives. This social intervention should be considered in all libraries in the country as suggested by Underwood (2002). The PacLISSA project is another challenge. Ideally without knowledge of the performance indicators that are succinctly discussed by De Jager and Nassimbeni (2003) in libraries, it becomes difficulty to determine how well libraries perform and how they reach the marginalized communities. Thirdly, this author finds it extremely painful that the tele-centres initiative that has been widely applauded internationally (Snyman and Synman 2003) has not been successful in South Africa. This could be another challenge to be overcome. Finally, the community library concept discussed by Mostert and Vermuelen (1998) in the context of South Africa seem to be a viable idea for information delivery to the information poor within a public library platform. This author strongly concur with Rosenberg that *"Originating from the initiative of a group from the community or an aid agency, their birth is followed by a year or two of rapid growth and a good deal of local publicity and attention. This is followed by a period of slow decline, accompanied by theft, the departure of the initiators, loss of interest among staff and users—the library still exists but signs of life are barely discernible. Sometimes this period continues indefinitely, but often a final stage is reached when all remaining books are removed, stolen, or damaged beyond repair and the premises and staff are allocated to another activity"*(Rosenberg in Mostert 2001: Lack of sustained effort to find an alternative library framework)". This, however, does not suggest that community libraries or information resource centers are irrelevant. Mchombu(2004) passionately shows how they should work in his chapters on the content of information and knowledge in community resource centers, information sharing and processing, how to keep the community information resource centre alive and also provides interesting four case studies and lessons learned at the grassroots on setting up community information resource centers.

6. Conclusions

There is no doubt in my mind that information access to the information deprived communities in South Africa is feasible. South Africa is endowed with a strong economy; extensive information sources, systems and services; one of the fastest growing information and communication technology infrastructure in Africa; excellent higher education institutions and sensitivity to transformation, redress and equity. The professional association, Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), is the largest and, perhaps, the fastest growing library and information association in Africa. There is a visible interest by the government to support library and information development with policies, legislations, management structures. The library and information research community is also very vibrant. The country has a potential to transform the challenges discussed into opportunities. Doors should be widely open as they have been in the past 12 years in the government and the civil society to discuss, plan, implement and evaluate social interventions that brings information and libraries to the information poor and marginalized communities. It worth singling out information literacy, adult education, and community information services to be done within public libraries, development of school and public libraries services and ICT access particularly

access and use of the wireless technology are fundamental. These should go side by side with poverty alleviation and general literacy campaign. A new model for information access to the poor need to be formulated within the outlined framework.

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