

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

**LIBRARY FUNDING: A STUDY TO IDENTIFY RELIABLE AND EQUITABLE SOURCES OF
PUBLIC LIBRARY FUNDING IN KENYA**

THESIS PRESENTED IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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ABSTRACT

The premise from which this research project begins is that public libraries particularly in the developing world, are unable to fully finance their services and thus should seek alternative sources of funding. This project attempts to identify sustainable funding options for the Kenya National Library Services (KNLS) with specific reference to user fees for library services.

In order to put the study into perspective, an outline of library history in Kenya is presented together with an overview of social, economic, technological, and social factors which influence the provision of library and information services. The literature review traces the origin of the user fee debate and summarises the arguments for and against fees in libraries. It also attempts to determine whether economic theory could present a theoretical perspective in reconciling the divergent views. The review shows that the issue of charging for library services is hotly contested within the LIS profession and that there is no easy solution. The position of the public libraries within the African continent is contextualised by briefly detailing prevailing conditions, particularly the pressures brought to bear on library budgets during difficult economic periods. An overview of user fee policy in Kenya and the current position of library funding and income generation in South Africa are presented.

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. A survey method was employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The study used questionnaires and personal interviews to collect data from users in 20 of the 36 KNLS branches. The questionnaires contained both open and closed ended questions. In total, 249 library users from all 20 sites responded to the questionnaire. Using descriptive and relational statistics, the data from the survey were analysed using the STATA software package to establish specific and general aspects of the study and opinions relating to the ability and willingness of the respondents to pay user fees. This was then followed by an in-depth analysis of interviews with 20 willing library users who had taken part in the initial survey. The aim was to establish underlying reasons for the users' perceptions. Interviews

were also conducted with senior librarians drawn from five of the KNLS branches, specifically to elicit their professional views on the topic of user fees and to determine whether the KNLS has the legal framework to support such a policy.

The results show that while the majority of the respondents were willing to pay user fees, they were not willing to pay for the traditional 'core' library services. It emerged, however, that although the respondents were willing to pay for annual subscription fees, the amount likely to be generated would be of little significance since the patrons were only willing to pay a minimal amount. It is clear that while the respondents have the will to pay subscription fees they lack adequate income to translate their willingness into a tangible contribution.

The study demonstrates that the issue of user fees is complex and the project further shows that the complexities are exacerbated by the nature of the public library, in itself a complex institution. The public library is one of those institutions tied into legal, economic, educational, social and political processes. Therefore, the issue of user fees transcends the library. It is a public policy issue.

The study indicates that the introduction of fees for specific library services would have a range of undesirable effects, and would not solve the library's funding problems. In addition, the study shows that user fees will negatively affect those who are in most need of the service but may be unable to pay. Taking into consideration the financial implications and staff time needed to implement and manage the scheme it also became evident that it will not be cost effective for the KNLS to introduce user fees. The researcher therefore does not recommend the introduction of user fees, but rather the setting up of sustainable income generating options and cost saving measures which could be adopted by the KNLS.