The Impact of Libraries and Information Services in Shaping Vision 2030 in Kenya

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Abstract

Information is increasingly becoming accepted as an important factor of socio-economic production besides land, labour and capital. Credible information and its effective use is a potentially powerful socio-economic development tool. Due to their position as the trusted source of information for many people, libraries play a pivotal role in facilitating socio-economic development by promoting good governance, literacy, social reconstruction, innovation and better decision-making. This paper analyses the impact of libraries and information services on the realisation of Kenya's Vision 2030. The study was conducted using a survey research method. Data was collected from librarians, the general public and national development planners, using key informant interviews. The findings indicate that libraries have so far had a low impact on the realisation of Vision 2030 in Kenya. One of the major challenges hampering the effective support of the Vision 2030 by libraries is the perceived laid-back nature of librarians. Therefore, it is suggested that librarians should be more assertive in their involvement in national issues.

Keywords: *Kenya, Vision 2030; National Development; Role of Libraries; Impact of Information Services*

1. Introduction

The Kenya Vision 2030 is the country's development programme covering the period 2008 to 2030. It was launched on 10 June, 2008 by Kenya's third President Mwai Kibaki. Its objective is to help transform Kenya into a newly industrialising, middle-income country, providing a high quality of life to all its citizens in a clean and secure environment by 2030 (Government of Kenya, 2012).

The Vision is anchored on three key pillars: economic, social, and political governance. The economic pillar aims to achieve an average economic growth rate of 10 per cent per annum and sustaining the same till 2030 in order to generate more resources to meet the MDGs and Vision 2030 goals. The social pillar seeks to create a just, cohesive and equitable social development in a clean and secure environment. The political pillar aims to realise an issue-based, people-centred, result-oriented, and accountable democratic system.

The Vision identifies six key sectors to deliver the 10 per cent economic growth rate per annum envisaged under the economic pillar. These are tourism; agriculture; manufacturing; wholesale and retail trade; business process outsourcing (BPO); and financial services. Similarly, the social cohesiveness and justice is planned to be achieved through strategic investment in education and training; health; water and sanitation; the environment; housing and urbanisation; as well as in gender, youth, sports and culture. The transformation of the country's political governance system under Vision 2030 is planned to be realised through improvements in the rule of law; electoral and political processes; democracy and public service delivery; transparency and accountability; as well as security, peace building and conflict management.

The Vision 2030 is being implemented in successive five-year Medium-Term Plans (MTPs), with the first such plan covering the period 2008-2012, by a semi-autonomous government agency, known as the Vision 2030 Delivery Secretariat. The second MTP (2013-2018) is currently being developed.

If successful, Vision 2030 would alleviate poverty, food insecurity, unemployment and occurrence of preventable diseases. It would also create a democratic society in which the rule of law and respect of basic human rights are upheld for the corporate and individual good of all. Negative effects of globalisation such as market liberalisation, rapid population growth and its impact on social amenities and natural resources, effects of multilateral trading arrangements such as Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC), inadequate infrastructure, high costs of energy, inefficient socioeconomic systems, bureaucracies in government, Kenya's vulnerability to climate change, increase in the occurrence of non-communicable diseases, low levels of Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) engagement, lack of funds, and inadequate human resources are some of the challenges which are likely to hamper the realisation of the Vision.

2. Problem Statement

Information is increasingly becoming accepted as an important factor of socio-economic production besides land, labour and capital. Credible information and its effective use is a potentially powerful socio-economic development tool. It is the link pin of national development. For a nation to devel-

op, it needs to provide reliable, relevant, updated and adequate access to credible information to its citizens.

Due to their position as the trusted source of information for many people, libraries play a pivotal role in facilitating socio-economic development, for instance, by supporting good governance, literacy, social reconstruction, innovation and better decision making. It is not surprising, therefore, that numerous papers on the role and impact of libraries in buttressing democracy, human rights, millennium development goals and myriad national development blueprints exist (Fine, 1990; Waizer and Gruidl, 1997; Calvert, 1999; Glass et al., 2000; Hamilton-Pennell, 2008).

Information on the actual or potential role and impact of libraries and information services in supporting the realisation of Kenya's Vision 2030 remains scanty. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that neither information nor communication management is listed as a significant factor in the implementation of the Vision. The only reference to this theme is made under the training of engineers, technologists and technicians where a progress report of the first MTP identifies low capacity to utilise knowledge and information in the design, production, manufacturing and marketing as a challenge to the Vision (Vision 2030, 2013). This apparent neglect underscores the misperception of the role of information as a facilitator of socioeconomic development. This paper analyses the role public, academic, research and special libraries in Kenya have and can play in helping the country to achieve its Vision 2030 as a way of mainstreaming information as a core enabler of the realisation of Vision 2030.

3. Methodologies

The author used survey research methodology to gather primary data from librarians, general public and national development planners, using key informant interviews. The interviews were conducted personally by the author using interview guides. A total of 31 respondents participated in the study. The respondents were selected through a combination of stratified, information-oriented purposive sampling and snowballing. First, the potential respondents were divided into three categories. The categories were librarians, general public or planners. Seven respondents were then selected from each of the three strata using information-oriented purposive sampling. The researcher also used snowballing to identify and interview additional respondents suggested by the other respondents based on their expertise on the subject. Additional secondary data was collected through relevant documentary analysis. The data was analysed through content analysis.

Findings and Discussions

The findings of the study are presented and discussed hereunder.

Vision 2030 is not Achievable

The majority (78%) of the respondents said that they believed that the Vision is not achievable. They explained that the achievement of the Vision is affected by the seemingly constant cases of corruption which raise the costs of doing business in the country as well as other forms of fiscal indiscipline; lack of supportive political goodwill; inadequate infrastructure; high costs of energy; natural disasters such as floods which devastate the already poor infrastructure; the consequences of climate change and global warming; non compliance to laid down procedures and standards of practice; slowdown of economic growth in the recent past; the inclusion of corrupt persons in successive governments; inadequate levels and pace of governance reforms; inequality in wealth distribution; rapid urbanisation; lack of clear and adequate funding mechanisms; consequences of globalisation; the consistently high unemployment among the youth; and the consequences of brain drain.

These respondents also said that the Vision is elitist and seems to cater for the interests of the wealthy. They opined that the majority of the citizens, who are poor, feel the initiative does not address their interests and so do not feel a sense of ownership of it. These respondents also pointed to myriad similar failed projects in Africa and asserted that Kenya's Vision 2030 will suffer the same fate. Critically, Maina (2011) points out that the *Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and its Application to Kenya* and *Sessional Paper No.1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth* which were meant to facilitate equitable development have not been fully implemented to date. Some respondents also cited the failure of the Government to harness the full potential of rail transport. These failures have been cited as indications of the Government's apparent lack of commitment to implement its own strategies; hence, the scepticism over the magic Vision 2030 will ap-

ply.

On the other hand, 22% of the respondents asserted that the Vision is achievable. They pointed to the remarkable economic growth achieved under Kibaki's presidency; the facilitative legal environment created by the new constitution; the accomplishment of major projects, such as the construction of Thika Superhighway; the rising remittance of funds from Kenyans in the Diaspora; the development of technological infrastructure, such as laying of fibre optic cables; the establishment and use of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) to facilitate economic development at the grassroots; participation in regional trading blocs thus expanding Kenya's markets and economic competitiveness; and the relatively successful implementation of free primary school education programme. They also point out that the Government has a clear roadmap to achieve the Vision, and cited planned projects such as the road to link Lamu Port, South Sudan and Ethiopia as well as the modern techno-based Konza City.

The respondents suggested that improving the quality of and access to education; diversification of the economy; increased access to capital resources to boost economic productivity; increased food security through diversified and improved agriculture; and creation of employment opportunities will likely increase the chances of the Vision getting realised.

4. Involvement in Vision 2030

The majority (76%) of the respondents have not been involved in any way in a Vision 2030 project. Similarly, 80% of the respondents do not know any library or librarian which is involved in any project associated with the Vision 2030. Notably, most of the respondents, apart from the planners, who claimed to have been involved in Vision 2030 projects, said they were doing this as individuals. Furthermore, their involvement revolved around membership to youth empowerment groups or promotion of peaceful coexistence. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are either involved peripherally or not involved at all in any Vision 2030 project. This finding seems to lend credence to the view that the Vision is elitist and does not involve or resonate with the common people. Kenyatta University, the Presbyterian University, and the Catholic University of Eastern Africa librarians were cited as supporting the realisation of Vision 2030 through modernised information services. It is noteworthy that all these

libraries primarily serve their parent academic institutions and are not generally accessible to the public. Therefore, it can be deduced that the majority of Kenyans do not have access to library services which support the realisation of Vision 2030.

4.3 Role of Libraries in Vision 2030

The findings of the study revealed that none of the libraries sampled offers information services specially tailored to support the implementation of Vision 2030. Nonetheless, all the respondents concurred that all library typologies have a potential to support the realisation of the Vision by promoting information literacy; facilitating knowledge creation, transfer, preservation and learning; promoting the development, nurture and sustenance of democratic governance; developing a facilitative national information policy; promoting formal and informal education; providing relevant information resources; enhancing social inclusion and coexistence; promoting and supporting research and innovation; promoting lifelong learning; providing relevant information to support effective socioeconomic planning and decision making; and supporting civic education on the vision.

4.4 Effectiveness of Libraries in Supporting Vision 2030

The majority (40%) of the respondents were of the view that libraries have been ineffective in playing their potential role in the realisation of Vision 2030. Thirty-six per cent (36%) of the respondents stated that libraries have been average in supporting Vision 2030 while 8% were of the view that the libraries have been very ineffective. Only 16% felt the libraries have been effective in supporting the realisation of Vision 2030. This implies that 48%, nearly half, of the respondents felt the libraries have been generally ineffective in supporting the realisation of Vision 2030 in Kenya.

The respondents pointed out that inadequate funding; slow implementation of technology in libraries; inadequate information resources; the prevalence of the digital divide; lack of adequate support from the government and their parent institutions; lack of support from or invitation by Vision 2030 secretariat; ignorance about Vision 2030 among librarians; poor national reading culture; lack of technical capacity amongst librarians to support socioeconomic development programmes; laid-back nature of librarians; lack of a facilitative national information policy; the feeling of inferiority complex amongst librarians; as well

as the lack of involvement of librarians in national policy formulation or implementation are the factors currently affecting the effectiveness of libraries in supporting the realisation of Vision 2030. The other challenges identified by the respondents as impeding the effective support of Vision 2030 by libraries include inadequate financial and physical resources; lack of appreciation and support of libraries and librarians from the general public; inadequate use of technology to conceive and deliver dynamic information services; low literacy levels and poor reading culture in Kenya; low motivation of librarians; lack of cooperation between the librarians and also between them and the other stakeholders; political interference; and the immature state of libraries in Kenya.

4.5 Impact of Libraries on the Realisation of Vision 2030

The majority (48%) of the respondents were of the view that libraries have so far had a low impact on the shaping of the Vision 2030 in Kenya. Thirty-two per cent (32%) of the respondents, however, were of the view that libraries have had no impact at all on the current status of the Vision 2030. Nonetheless, 20% of the respondents felt that libraries have had an average impact on the Vision. Therefore, an overwhelming majority (80%) of the respondents were of the view that libraries have not had a meaningful impact on the realisation of the Vision 2030 in Kenya.

The respondents suggested several ways through which libraries can enhance their impact on the shaping of the Vision 2030 in Kenya. These include proper planning of library activities and services; advocacy, networking and alliance building amongst libraries to boost their visibility and influence on the national agenda; effective use of modern technology to increase access to library services; shifting of focus to the users and striving to meet their unique needs; serving the long tail through disintermediation; collaborating with the relevant institutions to disseminate information on Vision 2030; training of librarians on what Vision 2030 is; providing financial support to libraries to design and deliver services facilitative of Vision 2030; marketing of library services and products; conducting relevant research studies and disseminating the results to the government and the public; motivating the librarians by the parent organisations and government; developing and enforcing standards for service delivery; restructuring to offer more relevant services; promoting reading and literacy amongst the citizens; as well as mobilising

essential resources from diverse sources to enhance service development and delivery. The respondents also suggested that librarians and libraries should not stand aloof, but get actively involved in national issues such as Vision 2030 through personal initiative.

4.6 Potential of Libraries in Supporting the Realisation of the Vision 2030

The respondents were unanimous that libraries have a great potential in supporting the realisation of Vision 2030 in Kenya. Some of these suggestions are discussed hereunder in the respective key economic sectors.

4.6.1 Agriculture

This is the backbone of Kenya's economy. Apart from its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a foreign exchange earner, agriculture is also the main source of food in Kenya. Therefore, it is almost unimaginable that Vision 2030 can be achieved without sustainable development and improvement of agriculture. Any dynamics in agricultural productivity have direct effects on Kenya's national economic development. Libraries can support agricultural development by facilitating research and development of relevant evidence-based policies by collecting, organising and providing access to relevant and timely information in the appropriate format (Rhoe, Oboh and Shelton, 2010). Libraries can also act as sources of critical information on various topics of interest in agriculture. Libraries can also document, validate and promote indigenous knowledge on agriculture in specific communities. Furthermore, they can support agricultural extension and farmer education services through the provision of relevant information services. Particularly, the libraries may offer translation, interpretation and repackaging services to customise information to the needs of the farmers or extension officers. Library spaces and premises can also be used as community centres for learning, dialoguing and networking resulting in the effective sharing of knowledge, development of roadmaps, rallying of calls to action and building of alliances which are supportive of sustainable agricultural production, better marketing of agricultural products and enhanced postharvest practices. Library spaces and premises can also be used to host exhibitions, demonstrations and other agricultural development programmes. Libraries, especially in the rural settings, can also offer access to technology which farmers can use to organise, process, and disseminate information.

4.6.2 Tourism

Tourism is one of the major income earners in Kenya besides tea and horticulture. The then Ministry of Tourism reported in 2010 that Kenya had attracted 1,095,945 tourists and earned 73.68 billion Kenya Shillings that year. This critical source of national revenue is hampered by local insecurity as well as piracy in the Indian Ocean, affecting the number of cruise ships docking in the country's ports; rising incidents of terrorism-related attacks leading to unfavourable travel advisories; socioeconomic challenges such as Euro Zone in its traditional tourist baskets; poaching of wildlife; as well as inadequate infrastructure and accommodation facilities in some areas.

Libraries can support the development of tourism by providing information of interest to tourists such as history or basic facts of the place, hosting cultural events, preserving and holding local cultural artefacts or photos, hosting of cultural and other events of interest to tourists, providing space for the display and sale of unique Kenyan handicrafts. Libraries can also be used to distribute tourism marketing materials, especially to promote local tourism. Importantly, libraries can also be attraction sites to which tourists turn to interact with the local communities and access collections of local works and also promote cultural exchange. Libraries can work with their communities, local tourist guides and other stakeholders to mainstream libraries and make them more visible in the major tourist trails. One of the simplest strategies libraries could use is to produce and distribute souvenirs. They can also develop rare collections of works published in or by the residents. These collections and souvenirs could be managed by specially trained reference librarians.

4.6.3 Education

The fact that libraries facilitate human resource development by supporting education is not in doubt. All library typologies support education in one way or another. Boucher and Lance (1992) explain that libraries provide access to education by teaching information skills by providing leadership and expertise in the use of information and information technologies, and by participating in networks that enhance access to resources outside the school or community. They also explain that libraries help ensure equity in education by: (1) helping children start school ready to learn; (2) addressing the needs of most at risk students; (3) providing access to information and ideas unimpeded by social, cultural, and economic constraints; (4) ensuring free and equal access to information and ideas without geographic constraints; and (5) helping students stay free of drugs and violence by providing an environment conducive to learning. The third role, they argue, is that of impacting academic achievement for individuals and assisting them in lifelong learning, preparing individuals for productive employment, promoting the enjoyment of reading, promoting functional literacy among adults, and preparing individuals for responsible citizenship. By supporting education, effective library services support human resource development by imparting business, entrepreneurial, technological and social skills which are essential for socioeconomic development. This marks a major shift in the perception of libraries as centres for mere passive and recreational reading to active research institutions and socio-economic development agents. Highly educated and technologically skilled workers are essential for the achievement of the Vision 2030.

4.6.4 Health

The fight against disease in Kenya was declared at Kenya's independence in 1963 when the founders of the new nation identified disease, poverty and ignorance as the major challenges which would hamper rapid national development. In spite of the myriad initiatives to improve the delivery of health services, Kenyan households are still entrapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and ill health. Indeed, the Government of Kenya in its Community Health Strategy published in 2006 acknowledges that Kenyans carry one of the heaviest preventable health burdens in the world (Government of Kenya, 2006). Vision 2030, among other strategies, seeks to improve healthcare in the country by developing community health information systems to enhance the communities' awareness of preventive and promotive health.

Community and public libraries can particularly play a pivotal role as hubs in the community health information systems throughout the country. Libraries can provide the space, digital or physical information materials, information services and network which can be used to share health information and thus promote healthy living and avoidance of preventable illnesses. These services will educate communities about risky health behaviours, home-based health care provision, alternative health practices, as well as promote the right attitudes to health issues and conditions. Li-

brary spaces can also be used as health service delivery centres, for instance, for Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) for HIV/AIDS, blood sugar or pressure testing. Libraries can further support health through bibliotherapy which Arulanantham and Navaneethakrishnan (2013) define as the use of reading materials to help in solving personal problems or for psychiatric therapy.

4.6.5 Climate Change

Climate change is one of the greatest and most complex challenges facing the world today. Studies have shown that ninety percent of natural disasters result from severe weather and extreme climate change phenomena (Kaser et al., 2004; Patz et al., 2005; Government of Kenya, 2010). Climate change researchers predict that if the current trends of climate change are not reversed then over the next decade, billions of people will face greater life and health risks emanating from water and food shortages (Patz et al., 2005; Government of Kenya, 2010). Developing countries like Kenya are the most vulnerable to climate change impacts because they lack adequate social, financial and technological resources to adapt to or mitigate it.

Libraries can enhance Kenya's capacity to mitigate or adapt to climate change through the provision of essential information which demonstrate that climate change is real. They can also provide information on climate change projections in Kenya, weather patterns, as well as climate change adaptation and mitigation techniques. Libraries can also provide platforms for dialogue on climate change, leading to the development of facilitative legal and policy frameworks, climate change response strategies and mechanisms, institutional and technical capacity to manage climate change, innovations to enhance Kenyans' resilience in the face of inevitable climate change conditions, as well as the adoption and validation of indigenous knowledge on climate change. Furthermore, libraries can provide services and information materials sensitising the communities of their individual and corporate roles in mitigating climate change.

4.6.6 National Reconciliation, Cohesion and Coexistence

One of the greatest challenges facing Kenya today is negative ethnicity, tribalism, clanism and lack of patriotism. This situation was exemplified by intra or inter-ethnic clashes and conflicts by the 2007/2008 post-election violence which nearly grounded the country's economy. Libraries can support national reconciliation, cohesion and coexistence through the provision of information services and materials that repair or nurture the social fabric holding the country's communities together. One of the creative information service models libraries may apply is the 'borrow a person' concept, which emerged in Denmark in 2000. It is known as the 'human library' approach. The foundation of the concept is to create a forum for library users to meet people whose perspectives, experience or skills they are interested in. Libraries, such as Toronto Public Library, actually have volunteers who act as 'human books' whom users 'borrow' and converse with in the library. In Sweden, the concept has been expanded to enable library users to come face to face with their prejudices in the hope of altering their preconceived notions.

Community and public libraries in Kenya can use this model to confront negative ethnicity and stereotypes in the country. Strategic 'human books' can be used to provide insights into their communities and thus enhance an understanding which would reduce stereotyping. The 'human books' can also be used in peace building initiatives to make appeals for calm and dialogue. Besides the 'human books', libraries can provide information services and collections which promote nationalism and reduce ethnic animosity. Library spaces can also be used for reconciliation and peace building events. These services can be offered in the physical library buildings or through mobile library models. Similarly, library communities can form the nuclei of peace building groups which can be used to champion national reconciliation and healing. Variations of these services can also be used to facilitate the reduction or elimination of gender-based conflicts. The service model can also be used to promote human rights and thus creating an equitable society which is likely to be peaceful.

4.6.7 Accountability and Transparency

Corruption is one of the greatest challenges to socio-economic development in Kenya. Indeed, the vice is one of the factors which have hampered great development plans in the country since independence. The country has witnessed major corruption scandals. In spite of the declaration of zero tolerance for corruption by successive governments and establishment of an Anti-Corruption Commission, Kenya was still ranked number 139, with just 27 points, in the 2012 corruption perception index published by Transparen-

cy International (TI, 2012).

Libraries can enhance the fight against corruption by promoting the use of good record keeping and seamless flow of information. Libraries, as documentation centres, can also heighten the fight against corruption by providing information resources that promote transparency and accountability. They can also preserve records which can be used as evidence in corruption cases, act as places for the local communities to report corruption cases, and can also train the general public on information literacy, thereby building their capacity to seek, analyse, interpret and use credible information on corruption cases.

4.6.8 Wealth Creation and Poverty Alleviation

Library spaces can also be used to support wealth creation. For instance, a community library can provide the space and Internet connection which can support the provision of business process outsourcing (BPO) services by a local youth group. This way, local youth can access business opportunities globally and offer services to offshore companies cost-effectively. BPOs can create job opportunities and alleviate the socioeconomic consequences of unemployment.

Library spaces can also be used to host trade events which can generate revenues for the communities. For instance, the library parking can be used on designated days by women groups, such as a "Maasai Market" to showcase and sell locally produced handicrafts and other artefacts. Youth can also use sections of the library to offer secretarial and reprographic services. Other business opportunities which may benefit from the library space and community include café, gyms, gift shops, theatres and restaurants.

Importantly, libraries can provide business incubation services and support start-ups. For instance, libraries can organise, or host business incubation programmes which may provide opportunities for networking, partnering, exchanges, sharing, and mentoring. Business incubation through libraries may also enable innovators to translate their ideas into commercially viable products, access markets as well as access financial and other essential resources. Incubation may also include advisory on documentation and patenting of innovations to protect the intellectual property rights of the originators.

4.6.9 Democracy and Good Governance

Hyde and Marinov (2008) assert that information plays a significant role in democratic governance. An effective flow of information promotes democracy in several respects. One, the sharing of information on good governance practices facilitates the adoption and use of the same. Two, awareness that information on any malpractices will be shared widely may discourage such practices. Three, access to the right information empowers the citizens to participate effectively in democratic activities such as general elections and thus determine their future. Four, effective flow of information enables the citizens to hold leaders accountable for their governance practices, be they good or bad. Five, citizens empowered through access to information understand their rights and obligations better. Thus, they are able to promote democracy and justice in their societies.

Libraries as custodians of information and knowledge undoubtedly play an important role in creating, collecting, organising, sharing, preserving and promoting the use of information which can stimulate and nurture democracy in the communities they serve. They can organise, host, promote or sponsor activities on democracy and good governance. Library communities can also form networks and alliances which can be used for promote democracy and good governance.

5 Conclusions

It is evident from the foregoing that libraries have the potential to play a pivotal role in facilitating the realisation of Vision 2030 in Kenya. As discussed above, this potential can be realised through the provision of relevant information services and materials; organising, hosting or sponsorship of relevant events which support the achievement of the Vision 2030 in one respect or the other; as well as by stimulating the development, nurture and sustenance of networks and alliances which can be used for activities which support Vision 2030. Unfortunately, libraries are ineffective in playing these roles. Therefore, they have either no or low impact on the shaping of Vision 2030. In spite of the fact that libraries face many challenges in their efforts to support the implementation of Vision 2030, their greatest impedance seems to be the laid-back and passive attitude of librarians. Librarians need to be assertive, active and visible on the national platforms of interest so as to enhance the impact of libraries on socioeconomic development programmes such as

Kenya's Vision 2030.

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