

## Every “reader” his or her “book”: Information services to persons with disabilities in Tangaza University College

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### ABSTRACT

*Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan, an Indian librarian, and mathematician developed the Five Laws of Librarianship in 1931. Principles drawn from these laws undergird the design and delivery of library services to date. The second law states that “every reader his or her book”. This implies that libraries should deliver services and resources which are customised for the specific needs of unique categories of their users. The degree to which academic libraries in Kenya offer appropriate services to persons with disabilities (PWDs), particularly in the post-COVID-19 era, is unknown. This paper evaluates the services offered to PWDs by academic libraries in Kenya using Tangaza University College Library as a case study. Specifically, the paper assesses the preparedness of academic libraries in Kenya to meet the information needs of PWDs, identifies the services and resources offered to PWDs by academic libraries in Kenya, evaluates the usability of the services, and proposes a framework for providing information services to PWDs in academic libraries in Kenya in the post-COVID 19 era. This paper was developed using concurrent triangulated mixed methods research through which quantitative and qualitative data was collected from 11 librarians and 9 PWDs using questionnaires and interviews respectively. Due to the small number of the target population, a census was used. The findings of the study reveal that academic libraries are least prepared to offer information services and materials to PWDs. Although commendable efforts are being made, there are gaps in the conceptualization, design, and delivery of the services. There is a need for a framework to mainstream the needs of the PWDs in the bouquet of services offered by academic libraries in Kenya. The findings contribute to the discourses on the emerging role of libraries in safeguarding the information and communication rights of PWDs in Kenya and abroad in the post-COVID era. A framework to enhance information services to PWDs by academic libraries in Kenya is proposed.*

**(Keywords:** *Persons with disabilities, PWDs, Ranganathan’s Laws, information rights, academic libraries, post-COVID, Kenya*)

### I. INTRODUCTION

Ranganathan’s five laws of librarianship provide guidelines for operating the library system. The first law states that books are for use. This law emphasises the use of books rather than on their storage. The second and the third laws state that every reader his or her book and every book its reader. They lay emphasis on the fact that “books” in a library are supposed to be accessed and used freely by library patrons regardless of their age, race, religion, or economic status. Every “book” should also be facilitated to find an appropriate reader. The fourth law requires librarians to save the time of the library users (readers). Thus, every user should be able to locate the library materials they desire quickly and efficiently. The fifth law describes the library as a growing organism. This means that the library is a social institution and will keep growing just like a living organism, in terms of readers, staff,

services, and collection (Kwanya et al., 2010; Leiter, 2003).

Implicitly, Ranganathan’s laws advocate the information rights of library users to find and use information services and materials of their choice. Information rights specify claims and obligations regarding the communication, collection, access, use, and management of information. Information rights include the rights to free expression, access to information, privacy, and intellectual property (Danilyan et al., 2018). Many national governments have adopted the concept of information rights in their constitutions as an integral component of their citizens’ rights, as defined in the United Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 19. Article 19 of the UDHR states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of

frontiers” (Howie, 2018, p. 13). Every citizen, regardless of their age, religion, or social background, has the freedom to send and receive information (McLeod, 2018). Libraries are service institutions; they not only acquire information materials for each category of users but also actively promote causes such as information literacy, access to information for every age, and personal development including leisure and recreation, and offer a wide range of services. Library services are a core source of information since they provide personal assistance to library users in accessing suitable resources to meet their information needs (Durney, 2021). According to Pugh (2018), libraries offer a variety of library and information services aimed to meet the information needs of the clientele which include all members of the community. These include the youths, adults, students, and special groups of people such as PWDs, and those in prisons, and hospitals.

PWDs are people who have one or more forms of disability. However, in general, a person with a disability is someone who has a physical, mental, or emotional condition that prevents them from living a fully-functional life that their peers consider normal. Disability is a natural feature of the human condition and everyone is potentially at risk of encountering it in some form or another, whether permanently or temporarily (World Health Organization, 2011, p. 3). There is no universally-accepted definition of disability (Mitra, 2016, p. 236). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) acknowledges that “disability is an evolving concept” (Hendricks, 2007). “Persons with disabilities include people who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory deficits that may prevent someone from fully and effectively participating in society on an equal footing with others” (UNCRPD, 2006, p. 4). An impairment, on its own, would not lead to disability if there is a completely inclusive and comprehensively accessible environment that includes addressing attitudinal barriers such as stereotypes, prejudices, and other forms of paternalistic and patronising treatment (Rothe et al., 2018). Academic libraries accommodate people with all forms of disability. The forms of disability may include, but are not limited to, vision impairment, deaf or hard of hearing, mental health conditions, intellectual impairment, acquired brain injury, autism spectrum disorder, or physical disability.

Academic libraries in Kenya are required by law to provide appropriate services to all categories of their users, including PWDs. For instance, the Constitution of Kenya (2010) under Chapter Four (Bill of Rights), emphasises the right of access to information. Article 35 specifically states that “every citizen has the right to access information held by the State and held by another person and required for the exercise or protection of another right”. This Article

applies to all citizens without prejudice. Despite these clearly stated legal and policy requirements, the extent to which academic libraries in Kenya design and deploy services to the specific needs of PWDs is unknown. Similarly, little is documented about the degree to which academic libraries in Kenya apply IFLA guidelines to offer appropriate services to persons with disabilities (PWDs). Furthermore, given that COVID-19 has introduced new challenges for PWDs, little is known about the preparedness of academic libraries in Kenya to offer effective services to PWDs in the country. Using Tangaza University College Library as a case study, this paper assesses the preparedness of academic libraries in Kenya to meet the information needs of PWDs, identifies the services and resources offered to PWDs by academic libraries in Kenya, evaluates the usability of the services, and proposes a framework for providing information services to PWDs in academic libraries in Kenya in the post-COVID 19 era.

Tangaza University College located in Nairobi, Kenya, was established in 1984 by the Religious Superiors’ Association of Kenya (RSAC), now the Religious Superiors’ Conference of Kenya (RSCK). The College is jointly owned by 22 member religious congregations; Benedictine Fathers, Camilians, Consolata Missionaries, Congregation of the Holy Cross, Passionist Fathers, Holy Ghost Fathers, Salesians of Don Bosco, Capuchin Franciscan Fathers, Discalced Carmelite Friars, Conventual Franciscan Friars, Franciscan Friars Minor, Missionaries of Africa, Institute of Charity, Society of Divine World, Brothers of the Christian Schools, Dominican Friars, Congregation of the Mission, Society of African Missions, Order of St. Augustine, Congregation of the Marianhill Missionaries and St. Patrick’s Mission Society. Tangaza offers undergraduate degrees, Master’s degrees, Diploma programmes, and several certificate programmes in its various institutes (Jong, 2013). Tangaza is currently recognised as a constituent college of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (Commission for University Education, 2019). Founded on the religious principles of inclusivity and service to all people, Tangaza is one of the few universities in Kenya with a fully-fledged inclusivity office promoting the interests of PWDs. Therefore, it can serve as a role model for inclusive services to other universities in the country. Thus, it offers an appropriate case to explore the degree to which academic libraries in Kenya offer services that satisfy the information rights of PWDs as framed in the legal instruments as well as professional guidelines exemplified by Ranganathan’s Laws and IFLA.

## II. INFORMATION SERVICES TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

According to Pionke (2020), throughout the years, librarians and their professional organisations have taken various steps to improve services to PWDs and provide barrier-free environments. Librarians are trained on the use of assistive technologies available in the library and to liaise with disability-inclusive offices in their institutions to learn more about their differently-abled users, the kind of assistance they could offer, hiring librarians living with disabilities, developing collections, and strengthening infrastructural facilities. Some researchers such as Addai-Wireko *et al.* (2020) argue that with the introduction of various special media formats such as talking books, video books with subtitles and/or sign language, and the invention of assistive devices such as screen readers, braille devices, screen magnifiers, and special keyboards, the library profession has taken an interest in library services for PWDs, thereby, extending the reach of information services. Several variables, including the accessibility of the physical building and resources, define readiness for the adoption of best practices of inclusive academic libraries and information. One of the essential rights guaranteed by the Kenyan constitution is unrestricted access to facilities, information sources, and services. Promputius (2020) states that excellent practices for inclusive libraries include offering assistive technology and reading materials to persons with impairments. For PWDs, removing obstacles and providing opportunities to access services and resources is critical. Libraries are among the institutions working to make themselves more accessible by creating reachable spaces for PWDs and using appropriate information retrieval methods. As explained earlier, IFLA's checklist in "Access to libraries for persons with disabilities" (Irvall, 2009), and ALA's "library services for people of disabilities policies" are both excellent tools for libraries to assess their current level of accessibility and improve where necessary.

Rayini (2017) asserts that PWDs frequently require that information be transcribed into alternate formats such as audio, large print, or braille, as well as accompanying technologies, in order to fully participate in academic activities. For PWDs, simply having information available is insufficient; the materials must be transformed into accessible formats. Ayoung *et al.* (2021) note that the library's physical space should also be accommodative with accessible facilities such as wheelchair-accessible elevators, wide aisles, and spacious angled bottom shelves to help PWDs to avoid too much bending and self-checkouts. Librarians should also offer computer training or lessons to PWDs to develop essential skills for using advanced technology, provide orientation mobility instructions to visually impaired students to acquaint themselves with their surroundings, encourage free and independent movement, convert print materials into

braille for the visually impaired, as well as aid in the purchasing of braille audiobooks and journals and coming up with appropriate procedures for loaning them. According to Phukubje and Ngoepe (2016), libraries should also provide services through assistive technologies which play a big role in equalizing informational opportunities for PWDs.

Sanchez-Rodriguez and LoGiudice (2019) argue that academic libraries are being challenged to explore innovative methods to provide information services as the number of PWDs grows. Smith and Lowrey (2017) advocate for Ronald Mace design. Ronald Mace, a pioneer in the creation of accessible architecture and industrial products, established Universal Design for Instruction (UDI) in 1970 to identify ways to make everything accessible to PWD. Rao *et al.* (2017) explained that the UDI framework may be used by librarians to create an inclusive information literacy criteria curriculum. They further explain that it is hardly unexpected that UD ideas have influenced the library industry given their significance in architecture and education. The library services for PWDs policy was enforced by ALA states that libraries should work towards facilitating their full participation in society by implementing the Universal Design principles of perceivable, operable, understandable, and robustness. The use of universal design techniques can guarantee that library policy, resources, and services satisfy the needs of all individuals (Peacock & Vecchione, 2020). Improved accessibility of physical and website architecture, providing materials in multiple formats, developing assistive technology resources, and training library staff on effective ways to interact with PWDs are just a few of the UD applications described by library literature.

According to Bricout (2021), for PWDs, digital technologies remove conventional obstacles to communication, engagement, and information access. The expanding number of mainstream, daily ICTs that may be used as access devices, along with increased public and commercial service supply through ICT, is shifting the paradigm of technology-enabled development for people with disabilities. PWDs are increasingly using ICTs to level the playing field in terms of access to lifelong education, skill development, and employment opportunities. The Internet also provides many avenues through which people may access openness, accountability, and monitoring of development initiatives and services. Email, text messaging, phone conversations, and video are among the delivery channels utilised for communication and service delivery. The second is that an increasing number of mainstream, daily ICTs, such as mobile devices, and desktop computers, now have functions that help PWDs communicate and access

information (Park, 2020). Thompson (2018) adds that text-to-speech and voice recognition as well as the ability to modify, contrast, and colour schemes, touch and gestures input, and screen magnification, were previously only available through specialist independent software and hardware. PWDs can obtain information material in the manner that they can comprehend and prefer, thanks to digital technologies.

The need to offer appropriate services to PWDs has become more serious in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic which hit hard in 2020. The resulting lockdowns exacerbated existing inequalities. During the lockdown, as much as most of the society migrated online, inaccessible digital infrastructure made it difficult for those with impairments to access information (Santos & Mare, 2021). Since then, libraries have had to develop new ways to serve their patrons. Total and partial lockdowns occurred with academic institutions reopening under radically different circumstances (Palau et al., 2021). Sing *et al.* (2021) argue that virtual and hybrid learning approaches have replaced in-person learning in libraries. Even though these models are not new, more digital tools are required now than they were before the pandemic. These digital technologies offer services that may be accessed at any time, from any location via any device. After COVID, there is continuous access to research resources and improved library services. Howes et al. (2021) note that the libraries' databases are all accessible via remote access for the most part through the library webpage. Craft (2021) affirms that PWDs have a right to full and equal access to information, and for the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, users with impairments who are unable to come to the libraries are eligible to customised library services, such as full document delivery of library resources. These comprise e-books, book chapters, and journal articles. These documents are restructured to the PWDs' special requirements. Libraries should prepare for five big developments in 2021 and beyond. LexisNexis (2020) suggests five trends that would impact libraries.

It is evident from the foregoing that many researchers have investigated the rationale for and actual delivery of specialised library services to PWDs. However, many of these have been conducted in foreign geo-cultural settings. Similarly, the majority of the studies were conducted before COVID-19 struck. Therefore, they do not reflect the realities of the "new normal" characterized by myriad restrictions. Additional spatial restrictions exacerbate the barriers PWDs already encounter while seeking information services. These gaps motivated this study which explores how academic libraries in Kenya respond to the information needs of PWDs within COVID-19's "new normal".

### III. METHODOLOGY

Three main research approaches have been applied in library and information sciences. These are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach. According to Silverman (2020), qualitative research involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting non-numerical data to understand the phenomena under study. Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey (2020) add that qualitative research typically relies on the experiences of the population of the study. Bloomfield and Fisher (2019) explain that quantitative research relies on numerical data collected which is often analysed and interpreted statistically to test, unravel or predict phenomena under investigation. Goertzen (2017) emphasises that quantitative research uses large data sets to facilitate the generalisation of the findings to a broad population base. Kwanya (2022) explains that mixed methods research is a blended approach to the scientific inquiry which uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches and data. This study applied concurrent triangulation mixed methods research to maximise the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed, and then mixed during interpretation.

This study investigated the delivery of information services to PWDs. Therefore, a single case study was found appropriate to gather in-depth information about the phenomenon in an academic library in an institution that promotes inclusivity. The population of the study consisted of all librarians and PWDs at Tangaza University College. Given the small number, all 11 librarians and 9 PWDs registered by the inclusivity office in the college were included in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from librarians using semi-structured questionnaires with both closed (quantitative) and open (qualitative) ended questions. Additional qualitative data was collected through interviews with PWDs. An interview guide was used to conduct the interviews. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data while qualitative data was analysed thematically based on the objectives of the study. Due to restrictions on physical interactions as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the questionnaire was administered online using Google Docs. The link was shared with all the librarians through email. All 11 librarians, representing 100 percent, responded to the questionnaire. The interviews were conducted with the PWDs on the telephone. Only 6 (67%) of the PWDs were available for the interviews.

### IV. FINDINGS

The findings of this study are hereunder presented according to the main themes of the study which are the preparedness of the library to offer services to PWDs, the bouquet of information services currently delivered to

PWDs, and information resources PWDs access in the library. To understand the extent to which the services meet the information needs of the PWDs, the challenges both the library and PWDs face in delivering and accessing suitable services and resources respectively as well as how these challenges can be surmounted are also presented. The quantitative and qualitative data are interpreted together.

#### ***Preparedness of the library to attend to PWDs***

According to the findings from the questionnaires, 6(54.5%) of the librarians believe that Tangaza University College has a policy on service delivery to PWDs, whereas 5(45.5%) are of the opinion that the university lacks such a policy. These findings imply that the existence of a policy on PWDs is not common knowledge to all the librarians in the College. Therefore, it is unlikely that the library can attain the targets set out in the policy without this awareness. This finding is not unique to Tangaza University College. Tagaki (2021) argued that most libraries do not have policies on PWDs because of the diversity of disabilities they encounter. Even where policies on PWDs are properly formulated, Ayoung et al. (2021) explained that many academic libraries do not fully implement them. Tanuwidjaja et al. (2019) as well as Omino (2020) emphasised that policies are critical in guiding the conceptualisation and delivery of appropriate services to PWDs. This not only calls for the formulation of the right policies but also for their effective implementation and monitoring. Kiruki and Mutula (2021) suggested that these policies should be as broad as possible to cover the major areas of services encompassing both the traditional and emerging digital realms.

The findings from the questionnaires also revealed that whereas 8(72.7%) of librarians affirmed that Tangaza University College has an office in charge of PWDs, 3(27.3%) were of the contrary opinion. Tangaza is one of the few institutions of higher education in Kenya which have offices dedicated to serving the interests of PWDs. Such offices ensure that their parent institutions mainstream PWDs in their service delivery (Omino, 2020). These institutions prepare for PWDs even before they arrive on campus. Ample preparedness leads to the delivery of comprehensive and effective services to PWDs.

All (100%) of the librarians confirmed that the university currently has PWDs. Regarding the types of PWDs that exist in the university community, 100% of the librarians agreed that the university has visually impaired and physically disabled students, 72.7 % said there are hearing impaired, and 27% thought that the university has students with cognitive disabilities. These findings confirm that the university reflects the general prevalence of disability in

Kenya and globally. The latest national census in Kenya which was conducted in 2019 established that about 1 million people lived with diverse forms of disabilities (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). These findings imply that it is a great injustice, and disservice, to a sizable proportion of the population for institutions of higher education do not make adequate provisions to offer services to PWDs. It is, therefore, worrying that only 3(27.3%) of the librarians were aware of the evaluation of information services to PWDs. Nonetheless, this may be explained by the fact that not all librarians may be involved in this process.

In terms of PWD facilities at the university, all 11(100%) of the librarians stated that there are reserved parking spaces for PWDs, 9(81.8%) stated that there are ramps with railing on each side, 7(63.6%) identified lifts with buttons that are accessible to wheelchairs, and staff trained to provide services to PWDs. Some toilets are accessible to people with disabilities, according to 10(90.9%) of the librarians polled, and assistive devices are also available. In terms of reading areas, 5(45.5%) said they are tailored to the requirements of people with disabilities, 2(18.2%) said they have adjustable desks, seats, and tables, while only 1(9.1%) said the shelves are approachable from wheelchairs. These findings indicate that the library has made progressive strides in its preparedness to offer services to PWDs. This opinion was corroborated by data from the interviews with the PWDs which affirmed that the library is on its way to being completely prepared to provide adequate services geared toward them. Mbua et al. (2021) assert that academic libraries should endeavor to provide equipment, facilities, and spaces which are customised to the needs of PWDs. It is evident from the findings of this study that Tangaza University College has made commendable steps towards safeguarding the interests of PWDs in its library user community.

From the interviews with the PWDs, it emerged that they considered the level of preparedness of the Tangaza University College Library to offer services to people with special needs as a “work in progress”. They pointed out that while good efforts are being made to optimise library services for PWDs, several gaps were still discernible. Some of these are captured in the verbatim responses below:

*“In my opinion, the library has made good progress. However, it has not attained the optimal level of preparedness. For example, the staff have not been trained in Kenyan Sign Language to be able to serve hearing-impaired PWDs.” PWD2*

*“It is a work in progress because the technology tools in the library do not fully support PWDs. There are no braille books. PWDs who require physical support to access library spaces often find it difficult to find an escort.” PWD5*

#### 4.2 Information services offered to PWDs

Special services offered by the library to PWDs include library computers equipped with assistive technologies, such as JAWS, to assist with online access to information resources. All the PWDs respondents agreed that the computers are installed with JAWS software. Additionally, PWDs are involved in the design of their services through meetings with the disability and inclusion officer who has regular contact with PWDs and is familiar with their special requirements. Suggestions and input are received from people with disabilities who use the library as well as through a participatory evaluation done by librarians. Despite the fact that they are all there, all the PWDs report that they were not engaged in the design of the library services. These views are captured in the verbatim response hereunder:

*“The mechanism for soliciting the views of the library users on its information services is not comprehensive. I have been in this university college for the past two years yet I have not been asked to make suggestions on the library services.” PWD3*

From the findings, it is evident that Tangaza University College Library is conscious of the needs of its PWD users. It has made efforts to anticipate, establish and meet these needs in the best way possible in its circumstances. However, there are gaps that need to be addressed to enhance the information experience of PWDs in its user community. According to Kwanya et al. (2012), most academic libraries find it difficult to serve the special interests of unique categories of their user communities, particularly if they are a minority. Referring to minorities as the long tail of the library ecosystem, they assert that inadequate resources and diversity of interests make it difficult for the libraries to meet the needs of the long tail. Musangi et al. (2019) recommend the involvement of all categories of library users, including PWDs, in the design and delivery of library services. This enhances the fit of the services and products of the libraries and enhances user satisfaction.

#### Information resources for PWDs

The findings from the librarians indicate that the library has neither braille nor talking books. However, multimedia resources such as audio cassettes, videos, web,

and other media are available. The library also has large print books and JAWS software installed on the computers. It can be concluded from these findings that Tangaza University College Library is only partially meeting the expectations of Ranganathan's laws on the need to enhance the findability, accessibility, and usability of information resources by all categories of potential and actual “book users” in libraries. In view of resource constraints, Carr (2015) recommends the use of technology to facilitate the creation, collection, sharing, and use of information materials. Kwanya et al. (2011) also proposed the involvement of library users in content production in a process they refer to as presumption. This involves library users producing some of the content they consume. This enriches content collection available in information ecosystems where the users collectively produce a substantial proportion of the content they consume.

A user satisfaction study for PWD users was conducted, according to 7(63.6%) of library respondents. Data from the interviews revealed that the PWD clients were generally happy with the library services and information resources. Some of the reasons they are happy with the services and materials are evident in the verbatim statements below:

*“The library staff are friendly; they make efforts to help the PWDs as much as they can. This creates a satisfying library experience for the PWDs.” PWD1*

*“The computers at the MIL for the visually impaired are helpful since they are installed with NCBA and JOT-visual aids.” PWD2*

Thus, Tangaza University College Library gets a thumbs-up for its services to PWDs in their community. This is commendable and worthy of emulation by the other academic libraries in Kenya. This excellent service may be partially attributed to the fact the university has a policy on PWDs and a dedicated office looking out for the interests of PWDs. Academic libraries keen on helping all their potential and actual users to realise their information and communication rights can benefit by benchmarking with Tangaza University College Library.

#### Challenges affecting information service and resource delivery to PWDs

The challenges that Tangaza University librarians face in designing and delivering services to PWDs include insufficient training on how to handle PWDs' information needs; insufficient funds to acquire required assistive technologies such as a braille reader; and in translating

available resources to braille for visually impaired patrons. Similarly, there are no spaces to create reading areas tailored to the requirements of people with disabilities leave alone put adjustable desks, chairs, and tables. There is also a communication barrier between librarians and hearing-impaired clients. These challenges are similar to what other academic libraries in Sub-Sahara have faced (Ayoung et al., 2021; Mayende et al., 2021; Addai-Wireko et al. 2020; Marwexu, 2018).

The challenges from the perspective of the PWDs included tiny font size, which limits the visually impaired; a restricted number of computers for their usage; a lack of information about how the assistive technology provided in the library works; and the lack of braille books. These challenges mirror the challenges PWDs face in general society. Academic libraries as citadels of knowledge cannot perpetuate these inequalities. Therefore, mainstreaming the needs of PWDs should be a critical concern to librarians.

### ***Surmounting the challenges***

The following are suggestions made by both the librarians and PWDs for overcoming these challenges:

1. Adequate training should be provided to librarians, as well as benchmarking with other institutions to acquaint themselves with the information requirements of PWDs, services provided, and assistive technology employed. Indeed, some researchers (Ayoung et al., 2021) argued that most librarians lack the requisite skills to design and offer services to PWDs.
2. An increase in funding allocation as well as soliciting management help in adopting initiatives and developing library policies for people with disabilities. Librarians should find their space in the decision-making entities in the university.
3. Redesign library rooms and services for people with disabilities regularly. The need to remodel academic library spaces, services, and resources is urgent (Ateka, (2018); Musangi et al.,(2019).
4. The PWDs proposed that the library obtain orbit readers, audio and braille books, and reorganise or remodel the shelving to make them more accessible. To ensure their interests in terms of the collection are always catered for, academic libraries should espouse structured mechanisms of soliciting and responding to the suggestions of PWDs on information services and resources.
5. The visually challenged would prefer to have an escort accompany them throughout the library. Academic libraries should think outside the box of conservatism and venture out of their walls to offer the most desired services to all their users.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

It is evident from the foregoing that academic libraries in Kenya are not fully prepared to offer effective information services to PWDs. Although some progress has been made, there are gaps in terms of awareness of the needs of PWDs, infrastructural inadequacies, organisational structural challenges as well as resource inadequacies. Despite the inadequacies discovered, academic libraries in Kenya have made commendable efforts to deliver customised services to PWDs anchored on technology. Similarly, they collect and make available information materials in formats that are suitable for PWDs. However, these efforts are constrained by the diversity of disabilities witnessed which makes it difficult to accommodate all the needs of all PWDs. These challenges are further exacerbated by inadequate skills to handle PWDs. Furthermore, these challenges have become more constraining in the new normal brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there is a need to develop a framework for overcoming these challenges as a means of enhancing library services to PWDs in academic libraries in Kenya.

### ***Framework for enhancing service delivery to PWDS in academic libraries in Kenya***

This paper suggests a two-pronged approach to enhancing the capacity of academic libraries in meeting the information needs of PWDs in their midst. This would involve the contributions of the demand and supply sides. The demand side should be led by the PWDs and their advocacy entities such as inclusion officers or PWD liaison units in universities. These units are best-placed in soliciting, interpreting, and expressing the information needs of the PWDs alongside other needs. They can also help to lobby university management directly for resources to facilitate appropriate services to PWDs. Preferably, these efforts should not be made at individual university levels. They should be made at the national level to attract the attention of university executives. Among other things, they can propose structural and infrastructural standards for libraries and other facilities in universities.

The supply side of the mitigation should be led by librarians. Again, this should be done at the national level by the Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC), Kenya Library Association (KLA), the Kenyan chapter of the Christian Association of Librarians in Africa (CALA), and Government Librarians Association (GLA), among others. An inter-association committee should be constituted to discuss, explore and recommend the best strategies for ensuring the inclusivity of PWDs in the design and delivery of information services in libraries in Kenya. This team can benefit from what international associations such as IFLA have done

but will customise these to fit the specific needs and context in which libraries in Kenya operate.

The two units should collaborate through the Ministry of Sports, Culture, and Heritage for purposes of coordination and unity of purpose. This paper proposes that KLISC, being the custodian of information services and resources, should lead the efforts by reaching out to the Ministry and the parties on the demand side.

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