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Can the mini-libraries (mini-libs) be a solution for library users with print disabilities? A case of the North West Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

A library should be accessible and provide inclusive services. This is a challenge for many developing countries. However, with limited funding and infrastructure, there have been concerted attempts to mitigate this challenge. This paper focuses on mini-libs as a possible solution for library users with print disabilities. A case study approach is used to focus on a South African partnership between the North-West University and the North-West Provincial Department of Arts and Culture. Funding was sought to establish and support mini-libs in the North West Province community libraries through a leading South African petroleum company. Using a qualitative approach, the study investigated the implications of establishing mini-libraries (mini-libs) as a possible solution. The main results identified challenges in resource provision, negative attitudes in library staff, and accessibility to the mini-libs. Training for both library patrons and library staff is recommended to resolve some of the challenges reported. The paper also recommends that resources be allocated for the mini-libs to be relevant to the library patrons.

KEYWORDS

Collaborative partnership; community libraries; mini-libraries; North West; print disabilities; South Africa

Introduction

In an estimated population of 59,62 million people in South Africa, the national disability prevalence is 7.5% of the countries' disability rate, of which 5.8% is from the North West province (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Statistics South Africa (2001) states that 0.49% of people in the North-West province live with some form of sight impairment, and 0.45% are print disabled in the world (International Federation of Library Associations, 2019). However, according to the IFLA (2019); Coates, Christiane, and Keninger (2018, p. 7); Rae (2009, p. 2), only 5–7% of published information is fully accessible to persons with a print disability.

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Disability can be described as a complete or partial state of physical or mental condition that prohibits individuals from using their bodies (Phukubje & Ngoepe, 2017, p. 182). In this vein, print disability is the inability to read or see standard printed material due to visual, organic or physical limitations. Given recent developments in technology, the ability to read digitally accessible information materials is important. Although some content is available in the dual mode, this is not always the case in print and electronic formats. Various platforms and modes of communication systems make information available and accessible in private and formally structured organizations.

Alemna (1995, p. 40) raises the importance of community information services being rooted in and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve to support people with print disabilities. Against this backdrop, the Department of Arts, Culture, Sports and Recreation (ACSR), the South African Library for the Blind (SALB) and the North-West University (NWU) entered into a tripartite service level agreement through the Sasol Community Trust fund in October 2018 to support and enhance the existing service for the visually impaired citizens who live with visual disability. The project supports the current established twenty-four (24) mini-libraries in all municipalities in the North West Province through a partnership between the ACSR department and SALB. In the context of the project objectives, capacity building through enablement, efficient use of infrastructure, enhancement and access to shared resources, skills development and enhancing provincial information literacy, continuous support, and equity in access to resources and facilities, the visually impaired citizens can be prompted to inclusive practices in mediating reading practices. The second phase of the project prioritized book narration services to facilitate transcribing books in predominant indigenous languages in the form of audio files in the North West Province.

Inclusive services offered by community libraries

Community libraries are established to meet the needs of the community. Common principles in the establishment of libraries are that resources should cater for community needs and should promote resource sharing. Basic services that are provided tend to concentrate on disseminating traditional oral materials (Alemna, 1995, p. 43). However, more services could be made available. For example, there has been interest in eradicating illiteracy since literacy levels tend to differ amongst community members. The promotion of educational and social cohesion programmes calls for a cautious approach. Information provided is survival information, health, legal protection and political rights.

Community libraries are essential partners in promoting democracy and providing educational materials, social opportunities, and cultural information. Community information service is entrenched in responding to people's needs, thus being free of charge nationwide.

Where a service gap is identified, action is guided by the promulgated policies and legislative framework to provide and meet the needs of all members. For example, the Conditional Grants and earmarked funds received by libraries assist in transforming urban and rural community infrastructure, facilities and services, specifically targeting previously disadvantaged communities through various programmes. The Grant also focuses on increased access to library and information services and promoting amenities for people with visual disabilities (Department of Culture Arts and Traditional Affairs, 2016–2017, p. 72).

Amongst other services, the Conditional Grant improves Information Communications Technology (ICT) connectivity in libraries and enables libraries to stock more reading materials and equip librarians with the necessary skills to serve people with print disabilities (Department of Culture Arts and Traditional Affairs, 2016–2017; Satgoor, 2015). In addition, new library buildings are constructed to extend services to more people in communities, including people with special needs. The Department of Art and Culture (2013, p. 65), however, cautions that the Community Library Services Conditional Grant should be seen as a short term solution for the libraries service sector and that it should eventually be rolled out in such a manner that managing services, collection development, and placement of librarians becomes the responsibility of the Municipality. Municipalities are expected to maintain new assets, deal with the shortfalls and the contingent liabilities associated with the services while the provinces are mandated to contribute to funding new libraries.

Services for people with print disabilities

In South Africa, people with print disabilities receive comprehensive library services provided by libraries and some well-resourced organizations. Delivery is often from a central point through various platforms, such as the postal office and mini-libraries. In addition, Braille and audiobooks, magazines, and newspapers are offered.

Blind SA launched Book Share in 2020, an electronic library for its members, while Tape Aids for the Blind were progressive in establishing studios nationwide to produce new reading materials (Blind South Africa, 2020; Tape Aids for the Blind, 2021). Tape Aids produces 5000 books per day in their 29 studios that generate audio books in all eleven SA languages (Tape Aids for the Blind, 2021). The number has increased since last recorded as

27 (Rowland, 2008, p. 85). Each registered member is assigned 6–8 books and these are distributed by free post through South African Postal Services. Services are largely online, accessible via an online catalogue, currently with around 3 200 titles. Audio magazines are also available and circulate approximately 12,000 copies per month. Tape Aids has 8 national centers for recording new material. In addition, their mini-libraries have about 200 fiction and nonfiction audio books. Skype-linked services are available for volunteers (Tape Aids for the Blind, 2021). The South African Council for the Blind (2015) produces and renders accessible and available assistive devices for blind persons. Various social groups are catered for, including numerous organizations and schools, through a validated registration process.

People with print disabilities receive basic services from their parent organization, ranging from academic, school, public and special libraries (Salanje, 2012, cited in Mapulanga & Chaputula, 2016, p. 2). The policy framework guides the process of making information materials accessible in alternative formats. Alternative formats are described as a device product, equipment, or tool designed or adapted to enable people with disabilities to participate in activities, tasks, or actions (Department of Social Development, 2016, p. 13). Since most academic books and prescribed materials are not available in an appropriate format, this is often transcribed for students (Phukubje & Ngoepe, 2017, p. 181; Stilwell & Mazinge, 2013, p. 39). Producing these materials often takes a long time. In the face of this challenge, some universities outsource the service to private/independent organizations. Universal access designs are enablers to various services rendered to people with print disabilities.

Best practice in providing services for people with disabilities includes assistive devices and technologies adapted to meet their needs (Mapulanga & Chaputula, 2016, p. 2). Information materials include Braille, large print books, audio and tactile graphics, talking books, newspapers, and article recordings (Eskay & Chima, 2013, pp. 5–6). The use of appropriate technology improves literacy levels among this designated group. Various information material formats, advances in ICTs such as digital platforms, use of specialized software in the form of JAWS and training users on the efficient use of these resources collectively increase access to people with print disabilities (Kaunda & Chizwina, 2019, p. 13; Stilwell & Mazinge, 2013, p. 40).

Mini-libraries

Mini-libraries are referred to as mini-libraries in this study. Mini-libraries are housed in community and public libraries whose functions and services are listed in Part A of Schedule 5 of the Constitution (Department of Art and

Culture, 2013, p. 47). Mini-libraries owe their origin to the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa, where they were first established in rural community libraries to create a decentralized approach to access libraries and reading material for the blind/visually impaired following an agreement between the SALB, local and national authorities (Nassimbeni & de Jager, 2014). The identified libraries served as digital mini-libraries, set up with appropriate infrastructure and technology to serve the sight impaired people. In addition, basic computer literacy classes were offered, and each member was issued with a Daisy player on permanent loan (Nassimbeni & de Jager, 2014, p. 250). The enriched success of the service and the positive impact had mobilized more government support with special funding and the provision of advanced technology and stable internet connectivity. Mini-libraries were later then implemented in other provinces, with KwaZulu-Natal being the first to follow.

Dedicated spaces with suitable furniture, assistive technology, information and communication technology resources are made accessible in mini-libraries (Kaunda, 2021). Only members of the blind and partially blind community are allowed access in these spaces. Library staff and members are trained in the use of specialized software, such as JAWS, Zoom text, and other resources. These include Braille, audio and e-books, screen and video magnifiers, reading machines and scanners. Workshops and seminars are also hosted as part of training interventions.

Organizations for the blind such as the SALB, Blind SA, and Tape Aids for the Blind provide access to information in user-friendly formats that seek to improve the quality of life of print-impaired users. The statistics show a steady growth of resources at 1,6%, with the establishment of 35 mini-libraries in 2019/2020 and 30 mini-libraries in 2018/2019 (South African Library for the Blind, 2018/2019; South African Library for the Blind, 2019/2020). Every year there are new establishments. However, there were fewer in 2021 in other provinces such as the North West Province, which has 25 mini-libraries to date. The focus is dedicated to supporting and maintaining these libraries in 2021.

The support is highly dependent on the capacity of the South African Post Office (SAPO) to distribute accessible reading material to mini-libraries across South Africa. New titles are added annually, such as 1 112 audio and braille titles were added to the catalogue, and 910 new members joined the Library in 2020 (South African Library for the Blind, 2018/2019; South African Library for the Blind, 2019/2020).

Literature review

The concept of mini-libraries has different meanings. Yang (2008) refers to small libraries in Korea, which are formed through partnerships between

the government and the public sector. Choi (2012) states that a Village mini-Library (VmL) was developed for rural communities in South Korea that did not have public libraries. In the Philippines (Cabanilla, 2013), alludes to mini-labs referred to as lumad, a school mini library. Anna and Perdana (2019) refer to mini-libraries as an extension of the public library known as the Pusmintali service. This service is an additional service of the Public Library to reach all people. Services are provided by building a mini library at the bus stop, where the collection consists of periodicals, novels, general-topic books, and Islamic books.

The aims behind the creation of mini-libs are to solve a particular problem. For example, the lumads were developed to increase literacy and they are run by classroom teachers and community librarians (Cabanilla, 2013). Similarly, the VmL objectives encompass urging people to read and share knowledge.

Research shows that the community should be more involved, especially in planning for new services. In this process, communication should include all relevant stakeholders. Moreover, providing different types of information services is essential (Mostert & Vermeulen, 1998, p. 19). Alemna (1995, p. 43) highlights that decisions should not be imposed when introducing and rendering services to people with special needs.

In some contexts, the technological divide challenges libraries on how to remain relevant given the impact of technological changes, especially in meeting the emergent generation's expectations. For example, Rowland (2008, p. 88) raised concern that the technological barriers pose threats to effective library services for the blind everywhere. Creating the right balance for avid readers satisfied with the print collection and the younger generation that prefers to access information via the Internet stretches the limited resources available. Further, the digital divide might result in social exclusion when there is no access to connectivity (Mnkeni-Saurombe & Zimu, 2015, p. 45). In addition, some community libraries may lack financial resources to access online facilities.

From the literature, it is evident that more specific measures are required as articulated by (Kaunda & Chizwina, 2019; Mapulanga & Chaputula, 2016; Nassimbeni & de Jager, 2014; Stilwell & Majinge, 2013). These effective strategic measures to improve information literacy and services in mini-libs can be achieved as follows:

- Promotion of services and providing necessary support;
- Sensitization of the society on how to interact with visually impaired people;
- Training of staff in various types of libraries;
- Integration of library functions to cater for all societal groups;

- Promotion of social cohesion through inclusive reading; and
- Exposure of visually impaired societies to latest ICT resources.

Given the background, this study was guided by the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of the library patrons on resource provision in Min-libraries?
- What skills are required by library patrons in the mini-libraries?
- What are the attitudes of library staff toward helping patrons with print disabilities?
- Which services are required by the library patrons in the mini-libraries?

Methodology

Twenty-four mini-libraries were stocked up with Braille and audio books; however, additional computers with assistive software were supplied to all mini-libraries through the collaborative project. Through the collaborative partnership between NWU and the North West Provincial Department of Arts and Culture, the total reach of library patrons was three hundred and sixty-three (363) and one hundred and fifty-nine (159) trained librarians.

In this study, a qualitative methodology was used. Interviews were conducted to collect data from 20 patrons used as a sample from 163 patrons. Purposeful sampling was used to identify the interviewees. The sampled interviewees were part of the regular library patrons. In this study, the researchers used thematic analysis to analyze the data using qualitative methodology, which involves data codes being clustered into superordinate themes. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). During the thematic analysis of the data, responses provided by the participants were analyzed for themes (patterns) that related to the data (Alhojailan, 2012). It is important to underscore that a theme is a coherent and meaningful pattern in the verbatim text. It is relevant to the research question, captures important issues, and represents a response pattern in the data set (Braun et al., 2016, p. 82).

Findings

In this section, data analysis involved a thematic approach, with data codes clustered into superordinate themes by the qualitative data analysis software Atlas-ti 8.0. Emerging themes, subthemes, and recurring explanations were categorized, summarized, and interpreted.

Table 1. The themes, codes, and quotes for library patrons' perceptions of resource provision.

Family	Themes	Codes	Some quotes
Perceptions of library patrons regarding resource provision	Technology	Availability of assistive technology	Assistive technology needed please Daisy reader reads mostly English well – Reading quality was very good. It is useful.
		Lack of equipment	We need Braille printers Braille books are required
		Awareness	I think it is a lack of awareness, and lack of knowledge about it
	Equipment	Training on the use of equipment	Need training in use of computers
		Availability of equipment	Additional equipment would enhance services for the visually impaired people.
	Prevalence of books	Librarians not stocked with relevant books	Inadequate number of books Good books often not available
Languages	Use of vernacular languages	Audio books in vernacular languages needed "Would like to read books in Setswana, Sotho, isiXhosa and isiZulu". Daisy reader reads mostly English well – Reading quality was very good. It is useful.	

Resource provision

The interview responses on library patrons' perceptions of resource provision in mini-libraries are presented in Table 1. Analysis of the data from the interviews identified the following themes concerning resource provision:

- Technology
- Equipment;
- Availability of reading material
- Language

Table 1 presents themes, codes and some quotes for the data categorized according to the perceptions of the library patrons. A discussion based on the themes identified, codes, and quotes provides useful insight into the findings of the interviews.

Technology

Some of the library patrons who were interviewed perceived that there was a lack of assistive technology in the libraries. This is despite the procurement of the following equipment for each mini-lib: 4 new laptops, 46 Large Print Desktops, Black to Yellow Keyboards, 46 for ACSR libraries, 10 Talking Typing Teacher Pro 35 User Network License, and 20 Talking Typing Teacher Single Install. When this was posed to the interviewees, one interviewee stated: *I think it is a lack of awareness and lack of*

knowledge. The indication is that library patrons were not aware of the different technologies available to support them. Other interviewees were of the opinion that the existing technology was useful. One interviewee stated: *Daisy reader reads mostly English well - reading quality was very good. It is useful*. From the quote, the Daisy reader's need to support reading in other languages is palpable.

Equipment

Training in the use of equipment such as computers emerged as a limiting factor from these interviews. The library patrons' view was that they could not use the available equipment. This indicates the lack of training offered to the patrons by library staff. Another interviewee had this to say: *Additional equipment would enhance services for the visually impaired people*. These responses indicate that libraries did not organize training for the patrons and that there is a need for additional equipment which is not currently available in the libraries.

Availability of reading material

The library patrons who were interviewed perceived that the availability of reading material was one of the factors that influenced mini-libraries. The perception was that there were inadequate books and that "good books" were always in circulation. One of the interviewees had the following to say: *Good books are often not available*. Therefore, the collection development of mini-libraries is an area of concern. In addition, the popular titles are always in circulation, meaning there is an inadequate number of books per title. In addition, books are preferred over other reading materials.

Vernacular languages

The interviewees allude to the need for material in vernacular languages instead of only being in English. For example, one of the interviewees stated: *Would like to read books in Setswana, Sotho, isiXhosa and isiZulu*. From this submission, it is evident that there is a need for reading material in vernacular languages. The current situation reflects that the reading material is not in the preferred language, a point that contradicts the constitutional proviso regarding parity and equity of the eleven official languages.

Table 2. Themes, codes and quotes: Skills required by library patrons in the mini-libraries.

Family	Themes	Codes	Some quotes
Skills required in the mini-libraries	Skillset	Training and workshops required which do not exist	Training needed in use of equipment, computers and assistive technology. Require training to use daisy devices. JAWS demo would be helpful. Wish to learn to use computer(s) and assistive devices.
		Use of technology tools	Like to download books on smartphone JAWS demo would be helpful. Like to download books on smartphone. Read from Smartphone. Do not have a Smartphone.
		Reading	Most of those that can read Braille. 90% use Grade 1 Braille. SALB can supply Grade 2 books

Skills required

The interview responses (Table 2) report the skills that library patrons require. Upon analyzing the data from the interviews, the following themes related to the skills required by library patrons.

- Training and workshops
- Use of Technology Tools
- Reading

The themes, codes, and some of the quotes for the data, categorized according to the skills required by the library patrons, are presented in Table 2. A discussion based on the themes, codes, and quotes illuminates the findings of the interviews.

Training and workshops

The library patrons interviewed registered that there was a need for training and workshops to assist them. This is evident in the quote *training needed in the use of equipment, computers, and assistive technology*. In their view, patrons required training to use assistive technologies such as the Daisy readers and JAWS, which contradicts the earlier assertion that there was no equipment in the libraries.

Use of technology tools

The use of the smartphone was one of the skills mentioned by the interviewees. The library patrons wanted to use their smartphones to download books, read,

Table 3. Themes, codes and quotes: Library patrons' perceptions on library staff service in the mini-libraries.

Family	Themes	Codes	Some quotes
Attitude of library staff toward patrons with print disabilities	Willingness to assist Actions of library staff	Welcoming environment Service delivery	Warm welcome particularly for new members would be nice, friendly assistance is lacking The community leaders conduct awareness campaigns for the community not to burn libraries when striking

and use JAWS. The rationale for this could be that most library patrons owned smartphones and required instruction on using them. The smartphone could thus be used in mini-libraries and at home, ensuring that the library patrons could access information. From the submissions, it would appear that training should be provided on tools that patrons own and use daily.

Another emerging theme was the lack of smartphones. Some of the participants indicated that they did not own a smartphone, yet the smartphone is indeed a useful tool in the mini-libraries to assist patrons with print disabilities.

Reading

A library should promote reading and develop reading comprehension skills by providing appropriate and relevant reading materials. In their view, most of the patrons can read Braille. *90% use Grade 1 Braille* was what one patron reported. However, there is a need for "Grade 2" books indicating the absence of appropriate developmental reading material.

The attitudes of library staff

The responses of the interviews (Table 3) about the perceptions of library patrons on library staff who assist patrons with print disabilities identified the following themes:

- Willingness to assist patrons
- Actions of library staff

The themes, codes and quotes for the data categorized for library patrons and are presented in Table 3. In order to obtain more insight into the findings of the interviews, the identified themes, codes, and quotes are interrogated subsequently.

Table 4. Themes, codes, and quotes: Services required in the mini-lib.

Family	Themes	Codes	Some quotes
Services offered in the mini-lib	Library services	Role of the Librarian	The Library should employ more staff to promote library services and create greater awareness. Provide accredited training and learnerships
	The library as a social space	Social spaces and programmes	Coming to the Library enables me to meet other people and make friends. I would like to participate in poetry workshops. Participate in writing workshops. Participate in general to specific conversations about interesting issues.
	Use of facilities	Access and use	Use Library to borrow books, read, search for a job, do research, and use daisy devices – daisy reader, however need training. Use Braille printer Need to be able to get to the Library without assistance Need assistance to get to the Library, however expensive as we have to take two, taxis.

Willingness to assist patrons

The library patrons interviewed on the willingness of library staff to assist patrons with print disabilities admitted that they were not offering a warm and welcoming service. For example, an interviewee said: *A warm welcome, particularly for new members, would be nice.* Additionally, some interviewees had the impression that there was a lack of friendly assistance.

Actions of library staff

The view on this topic was that the library staff were not competent in how to assist patrons with print disabilities. The library staff were not comfortable or had not been trained to provide services to patrons with disabilities. One interviewee said: *“Librarians sometimes avoid helping us because they do not understand our needs and how to communicate with us.”*

Type of library services to support mini-lib

Interview responses (Table 4) regarding the type of services they would want to be provided identified the following themes:

- Role of the librarians
- Inclusive programmes
- Use of facilities

The themes, codes, and quotes for the data categorized for library patrons are presented in Table 4. The following segment discusses these to elaborate the identified themes, codes, and quotes.

Role of the librarians

Some patrons reported the need for increased library staff to promote library services, which is explained by the following quote: *“The library should employ more staff to promote library services and create greater awareness.”* The issue raised in this vignette relates to the need for improved awareness of library services available in the community.

Another emerging theme was the need for training programmes offered in the Libraries to offer *“accredited training and learnerships.”* Patrons view the mini-lib’s role as being able to provide formal qualifications and work-integrated learning.

Inclusive programmes

The mini-lib’s are viewed as social spaces where library patrons can interact and dialogue on different issues. An example of this is embedded in one of the quotes: *Coming to the library allows me to meet other people and make friends.* The role of the library space is further emphasized, as one of the interviewees indicated: *Participate in general to specific conversations about interesting issues.*

The interviewees stated that library programmes should be inclusive and not only targeted at people with print disabilities as they did not want to be treated differently. In addition, programmes in the min-lib’s should not only focus on reading but, as suggested by the interviewees, also include poetry and writing workshops.

Use of facilities

In terms of using facilities, interviewees indicated that they used the min-lib’s for several reasons: *Use libraries to borrow books, read, and search for a job, do research, and use daisy devices; daisy readers, however, need training.* Another interviewee indicated: *To use Braille printer.* From the responses, the emerging theme was a lack of assistive devices, which in most instances can only be accessed in mini-lib’s.

Access to the min-lib’s is a significant challenge that was identified by most of the patrons. Most of them live far from the community libraries. Examples are shown in the two quotes: *Need to be able to get to the Library without assistance* and *Need assistance to get to the Library, however expensive as we have to take two taxis.* The majority of the interviewees use public

transport to commute to the libraries and may require assistance from a friend or family member to travel. The current model of min-libraries is that they are not mobile, thereby posing some challenges to the library patrons.

Discussion

The resource provision in terms of equipment and availability of material in vernacular languages in min-libraries emerged as a significant challenge. Many libraries in different countries are under pressure to produce reading materials in national languages relevant to users. In South Africa, some organizations are responding to the need: The SALB, Tape Aids for the Blind, and the Center for Book in Cape Town, are a few of such fora. The latter supports numerous libraries with books in vernacular languages and provides reading materials for book clubs, and some hosted at community libraries. However, there are still challenges related to book production. Legal restrictions are a hindrance in the multiple production of books. Not all countries have permission to produce alternative format reading materials, and there are copyright-related hurdles. One possible solution to the availability of resources could be in digitizing content and converting it into accessible formats which have been a success for many libraries providing more reading material for their users. In some academic libraries, student notes and book chapters are converted and made available to students with special needs (Kaunda & Chizwina, 2019; Stilwell & Majinge, 2013). This is one way in which services could be inclusive and universal. Literacy for people with print disabilities is affected by the lack of training opportunities, the lack of reading equipment and material, and the attitudes of library staff. This supports the assertion by Rowland (2008) that literacy levels for people with print disabilities are affected by inadequate support for material resourcing (Rowland, 2008, p. 87). Generally, the culture of reading is low amongst persons with vision impairment. Intervention through stimulation is a challenge, as most librarians lack skills and have to be trained to assist. Training, therefore, becomes essential. There is also a scarcity of Braille services. In South Africa, very few people are capable of reading Braille. Preference is toward audio reading, depending on which stage of their lives people lost their sight. Those who learn Braille have received formal education in special schools.

There appears to be a negative attitude toward assisting people with print disabilities in the mini-libraries, even though a training manual for library staff was developed. This is similar to the finding that training library staff to provide services to print impaired people is a challenge expressed by most libraries in South Africa (Department of Arts and Culture, 2015; Department of Culture Arts and Traditional Affairs, 2016–2017; Rowland,

2008). To train and guide such a user group calls for patience and empathy from the library staff. Librarians need to be confident and should be equipped with the necessary skills to conduct information literacy classes for the blind and those with vision impairment or low vision. Basic skills in communicating comfortably with visually impaired and print-disabled users are critical. Creating a user-friendly, safe library environment for this specific user segment is important. Consistent staff training is necessary to engender the capacity to assist users with special needs.

The concept of mini-libraries being a dedicated space with suitable furniture, assistive technology, information and communication technology resources, and being to the blind and partially sighted community members hinders some programmes and creates discomfort amongst library patrons. Perceptions are that the community libraries should be inclusive in access and programmes offered. Blind and partially sighted community members want to join the library programmes that are offered to everyone. In addition, mini-libraries are required to provide accredited training and learning opportunities. The need for accredited training and learnerships comes to the fore because of a lack of opportunities within the community that apparently considers the community library as the be-all-and-end-all solution.

The majority of community members live far from community libraries. Even the modest fees that local mini-bus drivers charge seem unaffordable for the members. This becomes extremely challenging for print impaired people who have to depend on social disability grants. This economic situation affects library programmes and services as some are poorly attended. Inevitably, librarians lose interest. In addition, there are no mobile library services available for mini-libraries.

Conclusion

The establishment of mini-libraries responds to the educational and social model of the visually impaired people by creating an enabling user-friendly environment. Libraries and other cultural organizations respond to uneven user needs with a variety of strategies. They all advocate positive action to change the lives of the visually impaired people and librarians serving users with special needs. Embracing fundraising efforts and developing partnerships in the sector is important to address financial challenges and budget constraints. For many, limited resources can be expanded through partnerships and sharing information. It is much easier to share information once it is digitized; thus, mass book digitization trends are encouraged. This study addressed disparities in communities and presented numerous

opportunities for research, innovation, enhanced teaching and learning, information literacy instruction, and facilitation.

More can be achieved through established public-private partnerships such as information sharing and knowledge transfer, closing collections and specialized equipment gaps. An example is seeking partnerships and formalizing relationships with the local mini-bus owners, locally referred to as taxis, to subsidize the cost for the print disabled users on specific days when visiting the library. The possibility of free transport is an option as part of the mobilization strategy. The Provincial Municipalities Authorities would be key players acting in the best interest of communities. Traditional leaders also have a significant role to play in rural communities.

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