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Abstract

Traditional book donation programs are a favored method for North American clubs, service groups, libraries and individuals to help rural African community and school libraries. This study draws together book gifts and donations literature of North American and African librarians to discover whether traditional book donations from North America to Africa fulfill the needs of recipients of the aid. The theories of sustainable development and appropriate technology are used to examine African information needs and donated books are considered in terms of relevance, condition, language and reading level, and cultural appropriateness. Using this lens it is found that used book donations are not useful and may in fact do damage to libraries and literacy in developing countries. Several practical alternatives are suggested as replacement for traditional book donations.

Headings:

Book Gifts

Gifts, contributions, etc. – Africa

International book programs

Information needs – Africa

Libraries and socio-economic problems -- Africa

Appropriate technology

TRADITIONAL BOOK DONATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: AN INQUIRY
INTO POLICY, PRACTICE AND APPROPRIATE INFORMATION PROVISION

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Table of Contents

TRADITIONAL BOOK DONATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: AN INQUIRY INTO POLICY, PRACTICE AND APPROPRIATE INFORMATION PROVISION	2
Table of Contents	3
Introduction.....	4
Problem Statement.....	9
Purpose of Study	10
Theoretical Perspective.....	11
Research Questions.....	20
Definition of Terms.....	22
Literature Review	24
Information Needs.....	24
Book Donation Programs	26
Research on Donations: Librarians from the North.....	27
Research on Donations: Librarians from the South	32
An Alternative Policy for Developing Sub-Saharan African Libraries	35
Book sales	35
Book Donation Organizations	36
Book Coupons.....	38
Co-publishing.....	38
Book Fairs.....	39
Make Use of the Internet	40
Conclusion.....	41
Bibliography.....	43

Introduction

For the last eight years I have been working in southern Africa helping rural communities and schools create, manage and use libraries and information centers. Quite often children in rural communities will learn how to read but they lose those skills because they cannot practice. South African Education Minister Kader Asmal notes that “there is no room for complacency; literacy is not forever – unless it is utilised regularly and properly, we lose the skill and, regrettably, the interest in reading.”(Asmal, 2003)

In most of the communities where I’ve worked there are no libraries, not even in the schools. Bookstores are often several hundred miles away and newspaper and magazine delivery just doesn’t happen locally. At home in the US people are always offering their used books to me to take back over to Africa to give the children and other community members something to read, something to begin a collection or library. And, in fact there are many organizations that take used or second hand books from more developed countries to less developed countries like those in southern Africa. It sounds like a perfect solution. But is it?

I have visited and worked in African libraries composed of books donated and shipped over by North Americans and Europeans. One in Plumtree, Zimbabwe is a delightful

lending library filled with colorful children's books from the United States. Local students flock to the library as soon as classes let out; eager to return the books they've read and get new ones to take home. Community members with the assistance of a Peace Corps worker founded another such library in Mashashane, South Africa. I heard from the lead volunteer community librarian Herman Mongoale several years after the opening. He reported that the biggest problem they face is not lack of use and interest but rather the need for more volunteers to staff the library so that it can remain open long enough to meet the needs of the community.

However, throughout my eight years of work, U.S. Peace Corps workers, other foreign nationals and African librarians working in developing countries have told me "horror stories" about donated books. One US Embassy librarian reported a library in West Africa getting about 20 copies of Vanna White's biography - Vanna being a US television game show hostess whose claim to fame is that she turns letters around on a board. Another person told about finding ski instruction manuals and microwave cookbooks in a non-electrified village in Zimbabwe.

Perhaps these are apocryphal stories. But in my own experience at Zenzeleni High School, Mseleni, South Africa I found a wonderful, though old, set of encyclopedias – but every book was a copy of Volume A. At another South African school library they had the dress code for 1905 co-eds at the University of Pittsburgh and at a provincial book depot I found mounds of donated books from American service organizations that included books with whole sections missing, directories of health care providers offered

by an HMO in Connecticut and a book from the 1920's of "Negro" folk songs with lyrics in pidgin English and caricatured racist drawings of thick lipped stupidly grinning black faces singing on the cover.

This study grew out of my many years working in libraries in developing countries. Most of these libraries have been in southern African countries, specifically South Africa, but I have also visited community libraries in Honduras and had some contact with libraries in China during the 1980's.

I have heard the horror stories and have seen first hand the problems with donated materials. I have direct experience with libraries that no longer receive funding because officials see donations from abroad as the most cost effective way of building a collection. I attended a library training session for schoolteachers in Zimbabwe in 1999. After the training session we were all excited to learn that we would get a sneak preview of a brand new community library whose book stock had come almost entirely from donations, both abroad and in the country. The teachers were energized by the workshop and their evaluations showed that they had identified many new ways of integrating library materials into the classroom. At the conclusion I was talking to one of the teachers as we expectantly filed in to the new library. The first thing he reacted to was the strong smell mold and mildew. Undaunted he began going through the stacks, pulling out books here and there. He would look at the titles, the condition and the copyright dates. I watched as his face began to fall. He would turn to me showing yet another book published in the 1920's. He handed me a book on snow skiing, which had no relevance to his life in Sub-Saharan

Africa. He continued to wander around the library after that, muttering under his breath, “this puts me off, this really puts me off.” I know that the people who want to donate books do not send these books to put people off. They do it to spark their interest in reading or to give them important information they need for their lives.

But when I went to the literature I could not find any substantial research on this topic. I found many opinion pieces and reports. *International Leads*, the newsletter of the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association devoted a recent issue to donation programs. In the introductory section, Robert Doyle (Doyle, 1994) notes that libraries and other organizations have been doing book donation for years. “Many librarians who have been connected with such efforts know, however, that donation programs do not necessarily result in effective provision of needed books.” (p.1) He observes that book selection is a difficult professional job where the selectors know something about the books, and who and how they will be used. “For these reasons, the American Library Association’s International Relations Committee (IRC) is convinced that book donation programs, if they are not carefully planned, too frequently represent the indiscriminate dispositions of discards, and are impractical and unwise.” (p.1)

He further lists components for successful donations. These include the advice that such programs be initiated, led and selected by the recipients who understand their needs.

Sending inappropriate books is more harmful than sending no books. Books should be weeded before being sent and evaluation before sending must be followed by recipient evaluation. He notes that, “For evaluation to be effective, however, it is essential that

recipients provide honest feedback” (p.2) This study seeks to compile that feedback from the literature, especially in the voices of African librarians.

To prepare for this inquiry, I reviewed the LIS literature on donation programs, often referred to as gift programs. In my review I found many studies of international academic library gifts and exchange programs and non-empirical articles about books given by the local community members to libraries in North America, Europe and Australia. I found research, though limited, on the topic of rural information provision in developing areas of the world. But rarely did I find researchers investigating book donations from the developed world to rural areas of the developing world.

A great deal of money, time, and goodwill is spent to collect and ship books overseas. Books for Africa, BFA, is just one of many organizations and groups of individuals donating books. According to their website <http://booksforafrica.org/>:

Since 1988, Books For Africa has shipped more than 10 million books. They are on once-empty library shelves, in classrooms in rural schools, and in the hands of children who have never held a book before. Each book will be read over and over and over again. When the books arrive, they go to those who need them most: children who are hungry to read, hungry to learn, hungry to explore the world in ways that only books make possible.

They go on to state at <http://booksforafrica.org/howhelp.html> that, “It costs \$9,500 for BFA to ship a sea container of 25,000 books to schools and libraries in Africa...”

Clearly people donate to encourage a culture of reading in other countries and feel that they have done something of benefit. They want to “feed the hunger” of children less fortunate. According to BFA they *are* helping as confirmed by the testimonials of gratitude on their site. But neither these testimonials nor anecdotal examples can be substituted for independent research. A search of peer-reviewed articles written by Africans does not produce a single article about the positive effects of this kind of book donation.

Problem Statement

Donors genuinely want to help. Traditional book donation programs are a favored method for North American clubs, service groups, libraries and individuals to help rural African community and school libraries. Earlier I stated that these book donation programs seem like the perfect solution. But do traditional book donation programs help? Is it a perfect solution from the viewpoint of African community libraries or is it a perfect solution from the viewpoint of the U.S. clubs, service groups, libraries and individuals?

According to Huebner (2005)

...An action is genuinely altruistic just in case: 1) it is directed at meeting the needs or interests of another person, 2) it is motivated not by self-interest but instead by the representation of that other person as having these particular needs and interests, and 3) the action is motivated by a representation of another person’s situation as requiring action to prevent the frustration of her interests (rather than one’s own situation as requiring action to prevent the frustration of one’s own interests). This characterization of genuine altruism distinguishes it from actions that inadvertently benefit another. (p.2)

We know it seems like a perfect solution to send our used but books overseas to feed hungry minds. But how do we know if we are meeting the needs and interests of these other person’s?

An example from a more familiar context is food aid in emergency situations. Here the issue is *literally* feeding the hungry. An Oxfam briefing report titled Food Aid or Hidden Dumping? states,

Oxfam believes that food aid can, sometimes, be essential to humanitarian response. However, for many development and humanitarian needs, food aid is not an appropriate or efficient tool. Even in most emergencies, in-kind food aid often fails to improve access to food due to delays in delivery, as well as mismatches between recipient needs and the commodities donated. (Oxfam International, 2005)

Are our used books “appropriate and efficient tools” to feed the hunger of African minds? We need to discover this and if these books are a match “between recipient needs and the commodities donated.” One effective way to judge is to learn about users needs and to seek the experiences and perspectives of the trained librarians who work with the donated materials, both in the United States and abroad.

Purpose of Study

This study has three purposes:

1. To draw together the gifts and donations literature for ways to think about the needs of rural community and school libraries. African users
To address the situation of libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa from my own perspective
To articulate a tentative policy as a replacement for traditional book donation programs to developing countries particularly in Southern Africa.

Once completed, this exploration of literature and perspective will serve as the foundation for a subsequent inquiry using African librarians as informants.

Theoretical Perspective

In economic, agricultural, technical and social sciences the concepts of appropriate technology and sustainable development have changed the way we understand and evaluate aid programs from developed nations to developing nations. It is no longer seen as valid to provide aid only from the perspective of the donor without looking at needs and outcomes and including the genuine participation of the recipients. A perfect example of this is the Oxfam International (2005) paper mentioned above, Food Aid or Food Dumping?, where the question is asked from the perspective of the recipients needs for appropriate help.

Originally used in the ecology movement these concepts are now frequently used in scholarly discourse including research about developing country libraries in Asia, Latin America and Africa. In the case of libraries appropriate technology can mean appropriate information technology. If the setting is a community or school library in Sub-Saharan Africa, which most often cannot depend upon electricity or landline telephones, appropriate technology usually means books not computers. But the term appropriate technology also includes information resources, access, services and settings.

The Barefoot Librarian by Wijasuriya, Huck-Tee and Nadarajah published in 1975, was one of the first major efforts to use this lens. Chapter 1 provides the framework,

Before the study of Southeast Asian libraries is possible, it is necessary to examine the nature of the environment which will permit or hinder their development, for like biological organisms, libraries must be studied in relation to their environment. A study of the ecology of libraries, the way they interact with the physical, social, cultural and economic environment, is crucial towards an understanding of the character, nature and development of Southeast Asian libraries (p.9).

Kantumoya (Kantumoya, 1992), Mchombu(Mchombu, 1994), Rosenberg(Rosenberg, 1994), Otike(Otike, 1993), Alemna (Alemna, 1995)and others argue that public libraries in Africa are still legacies of colonial structures and institutions. Kantumoya (1992) says,

Their aims, objectives and the services they provide are essentially European institutions in an African setting. ... The time has come when the traditional functions and services of the public library should be put to vigorous scrutiny in light of the social, cultural, and economic situation prevailing in Africa.” (p.34)

The Gabarone Declaration (1995) from the 1994 Seminar on Information Provision to Rural Communities in Africa says,

The key to information provision to rural communities is appropriateness of information resources in form, content, relevance and language to meet the needs of the communities. Recognizing this need, the creation of such information sources must focus on the identified needs of the community and the communities should be involved in the process to the greatest possible extent. Furthermore, the type and form of information resources must cater for the wide range of groups in the communities, e.g., literates, non-literates, the blind, children and so on. Hence print and non-print media, talking books, Braille and so on will be needed and indigenous information must be seen to be reflected in the resources.(Seminar on Information Provision to Rural Communities in Africa, 1995)

The non-profit organization Early Learning Resources Unit, ELRU, in South Africa uses some definitions that help us understand “sustainable” and “appropriate” in the context of education programs and reading materials needed for the South African learner or

student. They define developmentally appropriate as "... materials... suitable for the level of development of all the children in the group. [It] also refers to age-appropriate..."(ELRU, n.d.) materials. They discuss cultural appropriateness in terms of inclusivity: materials and programs that aim "at eliminating bias, preventing discrimination and maintaining high expectations and standards of excellence for every learner. Learning programmes [that] acknowledge the contribution of diverse racial, cultural, class backgrounds including those of indigenous origin. (ELRU, n.d.)

In other words, when we consider information provision to any community we must evaluate it in terms of literacy levels and reading comprehension levels, the characteristics of the special populations being served and the nature of education in rural settings; the type of information needed with regard to health, agriculture and economic development, and, perhaps most often overlooked, especially in the U.S., its inclusivity and indigenous content.

Literacy levels in South Africa are reported by the government as being quite high, as much as 82% yet a literacy organization working in South Africa, Project Literacy, states that the country has a 46% illiteracy rate (i.e. a 54% literacy rate).(Project Literacy, n.d.a)

The Adult Education Association in Zambia considers a person literate if he does most of the following:

1. Signs a name in the right place
2. Writes name correctly
3. Writes an address on a letter
4. Reads an address on a letter
5. Matches a picture with a word

6. Votes without assistance
7. Reads local newspapers
8. Reads instructions on medicine bottles
9. Counts from 1 - 100
- 10 .Identifies denominations of money”(Project Literacy, n.d.b)

This type of literacy is quite different from being able to read books published for an American school or reading public.

One special characteristic of rural African population relates to language. Many of us Americans have tried to learn a second language in high school or in college. After learning the alphabet and pronunciation we could sit down and ‘read’ a children’s book. But would we understand the vocabulary enough to get the meaning? We might get the general idea but perhaps not.

Now imagine that we’d never learned to read in our mother language. Suddenly the task of reading and comprehending gets even harder. We are learning the mechanics of sounding out the letters, recalling the meanings of the words, trying to decode the messages and at the same time we are trying to learn the language. This is a Herculean task. Project Literacy notes that,

Learning to read and write is a complex enough process, without further overloading the brain with another, but different complex process which is the learning of a second language.... Despite the fact that English is recognised as the language of commerce and science, it was spoken by only 8,2% of South Africans at home in 2001.(Project Literacy, n.d.b)

English ranks fifth in South Africa after IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, and Setswana. (Project Literacy, n.d.b) South Africa has 11 official languages but other Sub-Saharan countries have many more. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth ed.

counts the number of living languages in each country; living languages are languages that are still the mother tongue or primary language of people living today. (Gordon, Raymond G., Jr., 2005) The following map shows the distribution of different languages in African countries.



As you can see, even small Sub-Saharan countries have many languages.

In the South African educational system students study English as a subject until the third grade. From fourth grade, theoretically, the medium of instruction is English while the mother language becomes only one subject studied. In practice educators in rural communities teach mostly in the mother language interspersed with English. Often they do not understand English as well.

But book donations are often intended for urban dwellers as well. Consider college students in South Africa. These students are from the top of their high school classes and are largely from urban schools. Deputy Minister of Education Mosibudi Mangena notes, “Many black university students, including those that are enrolled for language studies and the arts, have generally been found not to have developed the level of reading proficiency that is required by international standards”. (Mangena, 2001) He says that low graduation rates “especially in townships and rural areas, are often attributed to the dearth of the students’ reading skills” but that “this cannot be attributed to the lack of books; it is due to a poor grasp of what they have to do with books. (Mangena, 2001)

Imagine the majority of students in rural schools trying to decrypt the school textbook sent from the United States. If they are studying subject X using a U.S. textbook requiring a U.S. middle school level reading comprehension, it is unlikely, at best, to expect them to derive any meaning or learning from that text book.

Book aid organizations and other donors often note that they are weeding out inappropriate resources or are adhering to collection development guidelines from the recipients. Leaving aside the issues of reading level, language and rural education, we must still ask whether the information in the books from developing countries meets the information needs of the African library user. Adult education researcher Monica Rakoma lists these needs as health-, job-, and education- related. (Rakoma, 2001)

I have personally received requests from many fledgling libraries for donations of books on education, jobs (agricultural and business) and health. Yet US books usually do not provide the type of information needed by rural or even urban Africans. Our agricultural books are useless in a village that doesn't have access to tractors, special fertilizers and insecticides and grows completely different crops. Our books concerning job creation and economic development are useless in a village or town that doesn't have the same infrastructure, consumer base and market forces, let alone a bank that would lend them money. Our business texts seldom discuss micro credit. Our accounting books are confusing in an African country using British money notations with commas where we would put periods and periods where we would put commas. As an example, notice the quote in the last paragraph of page 12 which refers to an "8,2% rate. This direct quote shows that commas and periods are reversed in most other countries – in the U.S. we would write that as "8.2%." Our educational materials are of little help in a country with a different educational system and history plus vastly different teacher training. I've been offered books for creating learning materials at low cost, which at first seem quite fitting. But the low cost scraps in those books refer to plastic baggies, paper lunch bags, used socks,

hangers and glue made of flour. These are actually quite expensive in many parts of Africa and may not be available at all.

US nutritional education books are useless in a rural subsistence farming area. They do not meet the information needs or cultural context of rural villages and towns where doctors and clinics require a full days' walk to reach, where non-literate traditional midwives are responsible for infant and maternal mortality. Our books about care of AIDS patients are often of little use: AZT is a not widely available and people do not get tested or use condoms because of cultural factors.

Perhaps most importantly, our health books assume we have a foundation of knowledge, and a belief in the efficacy, of Western medicine. They do not contain any indigenous knowledge of health care. According to the Indigenous Knowledge Association, "Indigenous or local knowledge is knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society..."(IIRR, 2005) It is defined as "the unique, traditional and local knowledge existing within and developed around specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area." (IIRR, 2005) It is used as a foundation and system for making decisions about every aspect of life from health and education to security and food production. Our books reflect the knowledge and context of a developed country. They do not recognize that there could be a different knowledge system. They contain no knowledge or cultural context that is African.

The examples above discuss indigenous health, agriculture and business needs. But is that still necessary with fiction and literature? Mandla Maseko is the project manager of Masifunde Sonke, Zulu for 'Let Us All Read.' This is a major initiative of South Africa's government and private sector to inculcate a culture of reading. Maseko says the initiative "is central to getting more young people accessing African literature as it depicts issues that most Western literature, which is available in abundance, has omitted.... Young people should start reading African literature as they will identify with it. It is important that they understand their environment and knowing these African authors is critical to this." (qtd. In Moalusi, 2003) It is true that many people get excited and interested in reading books by and about other countries and cultures. But if the majority of books available are from abroad it can actually discourage and put off people from reading. Dr. Machet (1994) at the University of South Africa supports this claim in her article Black Children's Ability to Access Western Literate Stories.

Research Questions

This is an inquiry into practice and policy. We know book donation from North America to rural African communities and schools seems like a perfect solution; let's send our used books overseas to feed hungry minds. But how do we know if we are meeting the needs and interests of these other persons? Using the theories of sustainable development and appropriate technology, we must look at what librarians say about book donation. We need to understand this from the perspective of trained librarians and library workers who have received or been involved with processing, distributing or using traditional book donations and with regard to factors such as relevance, condition, language and reading

level, cost, and cultural appropriateness. Is this a method of genuine altruism rather than an action that fits our needs well but perhaps not the African communities and schools? What are the characteristics of appropriate information provision in Sub-Saharan Africa? What alternatives to book donation programs might serve as appropriate models for practice and policy? What would be an appropriate basis for new policy?

This inquiry will contribute to the field of international librarianship and to those who work with disadvantaged rural communities in developing countries. A great deal of research has been done on the topic of rural information provision in developing areas of the world. Limited research has been done on donated library materials in Europe and North America. But rarely have researchers investigated book donations from the developed world to rural areas of the developing world. The data collected should be especially relevant and a significant contribution to the field because it will bring together from a new perspective the experience and perceptions of people whose voice we do not often get to hear in LIS research using the lens of appropriate technology.

There are many potential implications for this research: we can develop best practices and become better advocates for donations that meet the needs and expectations of the donors and the recipients. This study seeks to better our understanding of the issues above and perhaps of other issues or aspects not yet anticipated or developed.

The topic will be of interest to all the stakeholders affected by traditional book donation. This includes international librarians from developed and developing countries, education department officials in both regions, and the aid agencies who deal with libraries in

developing countries. It is hoped that this will be of value to librarians in North America and Europe who provide guides to book aid organizations for potential book donors. Further, as US librarians we are often asked for advice on where people should donate their books. I believe our profession has an obligation to understand the issues and experiences involved, in order to best be able to inform the public as they begin book donation drives and campaigns.

Definition of Terms

By *traditional book donation or book donation*, I am referring specifically to books that have been collected in developed countries, for instance, in North America, and have been shipped as a donation to a developing country for distribution to community and school libraries. Admittedly this is an unwieldy term; it may seem easier and clearer to refer to it as used book donation and I do at times. It is hoped, though, that within the context of this paper readers will remember that I only refer to donations from developed to developing countries. I do not intend to look at other donated library materials such as software, processing supplies, or equipment. Exchanges, medical information and solicited donations to tertiary institutions are also not within the scope of this study.

By *Africa* or *Africans* I am referring almost exclusively to Sub-Saharan Africa. The *African librarians* I refer to are qualified librarians and support staff who are either members of a national library association or are employed by the various provincial departments of education and who actually work in the field delivering library materials

and conducting workshops for the schools and teacher librarians. Their experience should be more meaningful to study because they are trained professionals who are most often the intermediaries between the provincial book depots receiving and processing the donations and the actual rural school libraries, the ultimate destination of the donations.

Throughout the paper I will refer to *developing* and *developed* countries. UNESCO and the World Bank (2000) define a developing country as “low- or middle- income countries in which most people have a lower standard of living with access to fewer goods and services than do most people in high-income countries.” Most African countries fit this definition. Earlier terms used in research include *First World* and *Third World* countries, terms that are politically charged and do not make sense in the post-Cold War world.

I will sometimes use the terms *the North* and *the South*. In most African and European literature the developed countries in North America and Europe are referred to as the North not the *West* as is commonly used in US literature. This usage reflects the observation that most developed countries are north of the equator while most developing countries are south of the equator. In any case, African countries never really fit into East or West categories.

Literature Review

A preliminary review of the literature was done using the online versions of Library and Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and Library Literature. The review begins with an overview of the information needs of Africans. This research will inform us about the issues involved in the special case of African libraries with regard to relevance and cultural appropriateness, condition, language and reading level, and cost. A short section follows on the different types of book donation – both traditional and new innovative programs. Next research is reviewed to understand book donation from the developed world perspective and also from African perspectives.

Information Needs

In the initial review of literature, it immediately became apparent that all but one of the articles by Africans was highly critical of traditional book donations especially in terms of relevance and appropriateness. What are the information needs of Africans? We need to ask this in order to understand what donations might be relevant and appropriate.

Mchombu (1994) points out the complexity of answering this question. “When we asked rural people what information they required we found that in some cases up to 50% said they had no need for information” (p.128). This shows that even local researchers

sometimes have difficulty discovering real information needs. After working on more effective ways to ask the question, the results of his study showed that, the common needs were for the following categories of information:

information support for health in relation to common diseases;
 information support in basic economics to enhance efficiency in small-scale business ventures and income-generating activities;
 information support for self-governance, leadership and community self-management;
 information support for environmental renewal; and
 information support for literacy education.” (p.128).

Abid (Abid, 1994) says that, “information needs ... relate first to the main characteristics of the communities (what they are and what is important to them) and should reflect the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of their development aspirations” (p.12). He mentions a study in Uganda that seeks to provide community libraries with information, self-education and recreation and another in Tanzania that provides materials in support of literacy programs (p.14).

Moyo (Moyo, 1994) suggests that the information needs of rural Africans in Zimbabwe includes “technical skills, pre-school, academic and adult education, and recreational and other relevant reading materials aiming at improving the quality of life of rural people” (p.58). He feels that “self empowerment of rural people can only be made possible through access to appropriate information sources at the village level” (p.62).

Fettahi (1994) notes that women need “sanitary, family care, and social information” (p.86). He also points out that book stock is an essential factor. “It must satisfy all the

categories of readers from the school pupil to the adolescent to the farmer, the trader and the craftsman” (p.87).

An important question is to ask how well donated books from abroad will meet these stated needs, especially in terms of language and reading level, cultural appropriateness and content. The comments cited above would seem to indicate that books donated from abroad will not be relevant to the information needs of the recipient library users, unless they address health, rural economics, governance and life-long learning within a rural African context.

Book Donation Programs

It is important to understand the various types of book donation described in this paper.

Otike (1993) makes the following distinction,

Book donations are of two major kinds: solicited or unsolicited. Solicited donations are those where the librarian has a say in their procurement. Here the librarian is accorded the opportunity to select and evaluate the donations. Unsolicited donations comprise all such aid for which the librarian does not have prior knowledge, where their arrival simply takes the librarian by surprise.

Solicited donations are of two types. The first is that which comes in materials form. The librarian presents a case to a donor for a specific requirement. The request may be for a set of encyclopedias, or a complete run of a periodical title, or for the financing of a given number of current periodical subscriptions. ... This assistance comes only in kind. The second is that which comes in cash form. The librarian approaches the donor to develop his collection. The donor ... will endeavor to make available to the librarian a cash sum for the stated project. Where, when, who buys the materials is immaterial in this case. Both kinds of donations exist in developing countries although the former is more popular among donors, particularly foreign governments and agencies. (p. 10)

Otike (1993) has created this definition in order to discuss positive changes in book donation programs to developing countries. I would argue that the term ‘unsolicited donations’ includes not only books arriving as a surprise but also books sent to a country without the ability of the local librarian to evaluate, select and refuse. In this paper I refer to the unsolicited donations as traditional book donations. Otike (1993) feels that traditional book donation is fine in some instances. He notes, “As for public and school libraries, a number of organizations in the developed world exist specifically to serve them” (p.11). He feels that some of these donated collections may not be directly relevant but, “all the same, they alleviate serious situations” (p.11). The British Council, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) and the Canadian Overseas Book Centre are some of the more prominent book aid organizations he mentions. In the policy section below these organizations and the positive changes Otike refers to are discussed in more detail.

Research on Donations: Librarians from the North

It is useful to review articles from the US and other developed countries to discover what their research has to say about donations from within their own countries. Almost all this research is about gifts in academic libraries, which are out of the scope of this study.

Clearly there is a need for further study of non-academic library gifts. Still, I have included the articles here because it was the only way to find research on donated books.

How do North American and European librarians view gifts within their own collections?

Blue (1994), Cooper (1990), Kairis (2000), Norris (2002) and Rose (2003) are all North

American or European researchers who have published relevant articles on book donations, or gifts, the term favored over donations in this literature. Most of the research involves gifts to US academic libraries and deals with issues of relevance of gifts, donor relations, true cost and what to do with unwanted gifts. It is difficult to find gifts related usage studies or research on donations to schools and public libraries. In fact, Kairis (2000) states that, “The literature on gift materials is limited and provides little data on the use, usefulness and cost of the gift materials in libraries” (p.352). Kairis is right. Articles exist; however, few of them involve empirical research. Norris (2002) says that between 1995 and 2002, “more than 400 articles have been published concerning gifts and/or donations to libraries” (p.42). And “the majority of articles published concerning gifts enthusiastically describe large gifts or valuable collections that have been donated to libraries” (p.42). The articles by Norris (2002), Cooper (1990), and Rose (2003) point out the positive side of gifts. They see it as good public relations and donor relations and a good method to supplement US academic library collections.

Norris (2002) acknowledges that US libraries see gifts as both a blessing and a curse (p.42). She goes on to say that “donated book collections invariably include items that are not useful to educational or research goals.... They also contain items that range in condition from good, nearly new or new to very poor, to essentially worthless” (p.42-43). She quotes a study at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee that found that “purchased books circulated four times as often as the gift books”(p.43). Kairis’ (2000) article, “Comparing gifts to purchased materials: a usage study” notes that “The lure of obtaining something for free often results in the relaxing of normally applied selection criteria. Not only does this lead to the addition of materials that would not typically be added, it can be detrimental to

the collection as a whole...” (p.351-2). He attributes the detrimental effect to the addition of gift books making the collection less useful and less used. Kairis does not mention, but it is important to note, especially in a paper about libraries in Africa, that gifts sometimes inflate acquisition figures thus lessening the perceived impact of budget cuts on collection development. He briefly mentions a study asking 47 academic libraries about gifts; 71% of these respondents felt “most gift books are not useful!” (p.352).

Janes (2002) criticizes Kairis’ usage results because he did not study usage of materials in the same call number areas. However, he thinks that gifts usage studies are very important. He begins his article with what seems to be the prevailing view of US librarians:

Gifts are lovely to receive, aren’t they?.... Except of course when they are real dogs. Those of us in the library world know only too well that when a ‘gift book’ comes in, it can be a wonderful addition to the collection, or it can be a pain in the neck that makes no sense to the institution and its mission, probably a tax write-off or a cast-off more appropriate for the annual friends’ book sale” (p.469).

In reference to the idea of tax write-offs, an article in Publishers Weekly by Rosen (2001) urges more publishers to donate books, pointing out that,

By donating...publishers get a double tax deduction from the IRS...[US] federal tax law allows them to deduct from their taxes all of the costs incurred in the production and manufacture of the books, plus 50% of any unrealized markup or profit, up to twice the cost (p.20).

Cooper (1990) sent a questionnaire to 150 health sciences libraries to look at the methods they use for disposal of unwanted materials. “The respondents in each library type answered overwhelmingly (92%) that, indeed, they are asked to accept donations they do not need. Several characterized themselves as dumping grounds and welcomed new alternatives to this old problem”(p.389). She says that respondents found that their current

methods of disposing of unwanted materials were expensive, time consuming and required a lot of staff hours (p.389). Another problem with gifts is the amount of storage needed. “It is difficult to sort, list and box donations when adequate storage or work space is unavailable.”(p.389). She found that, “most libraries (96%) resorted to destroying donations they are unable to keep”(p.391). Her conclusion was that the “study clearly demonstrated that donations are a problem for almost all libraries. Well-meaning donors bestow many volumes of books and journals on local libraries. While donors’ intentions are good, these donations often result in a series of problems for the receiving libraries” (p.391).

After relating all the problems involved with book donations Cooper notes the overwhelming interest in sending unwanted materials overseas and even includes an appendix with contact information for donation organizations. In many ways this seems absurd. Health sciences libraries are among the most well resourced libraries in the United States. If storage space, lack of staff time, and expense to process gifts is a burden in a health sciences library in the U.S., surely those burdens are exponentially increased in developing countries. In defense of Cooper, perhaps her audience, medical librarians, does make specific donations that address relevance.

Otike (1993) reports an example of ‘useful’ medical donations,

In Zambia in 1979 ... [a colleague’s] library received about 32 boxes from a prominent WHO executive only to turn out to be old copies of the Lancet and the British Medical Journal. Apart from the fact that these constituted a duplication of the collection, the library was already experiencing shelving problems with its own back issues of the same titles. In addition, the library was requested to refund the freight charges incurred by the donor. Some donations can involve [sic] the library additional expense (p.13).

Norris (2002) mentions many of the same problems. She says, “Transportation, storage and processing costs still exist and technical processing costs may exceed those of a book acquired through the normal acquisition means with the additional labor. The gift book has the potential to be extremely labor intensive, due to adding examination of the book’s condition to content evaluation, which also increases the load on binding and processing units, and the potential donor recognition costs. Although not directly purchased, a gift book is never free.” (p.43).

Rose (2003) discusses the creation and use of a referral web page she created for unwanted donations at her health sciences library in Buffalo, New York. She created the page to provide an alternative to the difficulty of saying no to donors.

As humans, we suffer from the fear of an unruly exchange, worry about tarnishing the library’s image, or just hate to disappoint a good patron... Donors ... are not fully aware of the reasons (cost and appropriateness for the collection) for libraries rejecting titles that donors view as perfectly good educational material. (p.305-6).

She reports many emails from people who have received useful and even desperately needed book donations because of her page. Unlike Cooper, the other health sciences librarian included in this literature review, Rose’s web page also includes requests from non-medical libraries, including school libraries. In any case, she reports that the response from donors and recipients has been great.

Blue (1994) supports these claims. She cites a letter from a Volunteer Services Overseas physician in Cambodia who received medical donations from Book Aid International.

Considering the difficulties the medical profession in Cambodia has faced, their knowledge and skill is remarkable though large gaps still exist... They have an immense desire to learn. The contribution of Book Aid International forms the focus of a new library. Your gift is bang up to date and far more than we dared to expect. (p. 41).

A major theme in the articles mentioned above is that while no one is suggesting an end to donations almost every library in the US sees them as a potential problem, in terms of hidden cost, staff time and public relations. Usage studies seem to indicate that gift books are not as useful as books selected and purchased. Therefore it is puzzling that in articles discussing these costs and problems there still seems to be the idea that the useless materials might somehow turn into useful materials in completely different cultures and libraries. There are always wonderful exceptions and they should not be belittled. But successful overseas donations seem to have the same characteristics as successful US donations; they include guidelines, solicited gifts as well as the participation of the receiving library staff. It is further necessary to add the voices of those recipient libraries to the discussion. Whether their experiences match those of librarians in the North remains to be discovered.

Research on Donations: Librarians from the South

In the meantime it is useful to take another look at what the African research says. I review the perspectives of the African researchers and then look at the similarities and differences of their research. It is significant that many of these authors discuss the motivations for donating. Otike (1993) says, "Some donors donate material just for publicity. Publishers both local and overseas based, have a tendency to donate substantial collections of books to libraries in the Third World just to be seen to be charitable..." (p.13). He notes that a

fraction of the collections will be useful but that the majority are outdated and are given because they did not sell in the first place. He mentions the serious storage problems with these collections as well.

Kantumoya (1992) uses the theories of post-colonialism, sustainable development and appropriate book technology in his discussions of donations to African countries. He notes that the libraries in existence are perpetuating the colonial legacy and says, “Closely related to this ideological problem is the fact that our public libraries are mainly stocked with foreign literature that is not only out of date but also irrelevant to the information needs of the people expected to read them. The majority of people in Africa are struggling to earn a living. ...they [do not] need the generous donations of books that are irrelevant from the British and the Americans. What they need is information on modern farming methods, importance of vaccinations for children, sanitation and civil rights” (p.34).

But Otike (1993) does not paint all donors with the same brush. He says in conclusion,

The essence of this work is not to blame the donors as such, but to highlight the pros and cons of book aid... Let us not blame donors wholly. Some donors have genuine intentions, to assist the needy. Some have been known to spend thousands of dollars trying to ferry materials to the needy in the Third World... Since some donors, particularly the foreign based, do not have inside knowledge of libraries in recipient countries, it transpires that some materials end up being irrelevant to the library's coverage. (p.13).

In effect he is saying that it is important for us to have more information in order to make better decisions about book aid. This is precisely why this study of African librarians real life experiences and perceptions of traditional book donations is an important addition to the literature.

The information about donated books I seek from African librarians is about their personal experience, the usefulness of non-African materials in an African culture, their experience of factors such as content, relevance, language and reading level, condition, and processing and distribution and how they would rank donated books as a method of acquisition. They alone have the inside knowledge of libraries Otike mentions above.

An Alternative Policy for Developing Sub-Saharan African Libraries

An organization or individual considering book donation must honestly examine the motivation for donating to a developing country. Is it an altruistic wish to help or an act that inadvertently benefits others as Huebner (Huebner, Larry Bryce Giles, 2005) characterizes gift giving? For instance, is a library trying to discard weeded material or has dearly departed Aunt Jane left a house full of books that must be disposed of? In these cases perhaps the motivation is to be rid of “perfectly good books” in a way that would “surely benefit” libraries overseas. If, as I believe this paper points out, those books are not appropriate information for an African community or school library there are still some alternatives that would be appropriate. It is true that following some of these suggested alternatives may take more time. But they are that much more likely to provide the kind of assistance that meets the true needs of African community and school libraries.

Book sales

The missionary organization, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee explains,

Often, people want to send food, clothing, or other items to poor communities. While this is a generous idea, the impact of handing out gifts like this can be harmful to a community's ability to be transformed. Instead, consider selling your new or used item at **MissionFish**. Associated with Ebay, the world's largest and most respected online auction, MissionFish allows people to auction off saleable items and give the proceeds to the charity of their choice. (Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, 2005)

Some libraries have begun to sell weeded material on web sites like Ebay. This may be illegal for publicly funded libraries but it is an option open to the family of Aunt Jane. For those not interested in Ebay-like auction sites consider selling the books at yard sales, to used bookstores or at Friends of the Library book sales. American Libraries magazine has a classified section with ads offering to purchase library materials.

Proceeds from these sales can be donated to some of the alternatives listed in the next section. Although people often have a horror of throwing out books, be prepared to do so or to recycle the books left over from these endeavors. If the horror is too strong consider donating them to scrap exchanges, schools or day cares that may be able to use the paper for art classes. As a last resort ask a friend to throw them away for you.

Book Donation Organizations

Book donation organizations have not been completely deaf to the voices of the African librarians. Recently, new and innovative programs have supplemented traditional book donation programs. Many organizations that previously sent used books and remainders abroad have begun to incorporate new methods. For instance, Blue (1994) describes the change in name and focus of Book Aid International (BAI), formerly Ranfurly Library Service, a UK charity begun in the 1950's. The director at that time, Sara Harrity, is quoted in the article saying, "In recent years we have broadened the scope of our activities to include book-buying work to meet the specialized needs and projects to support the development of local publishing... This is crucial for a long-term solution to the crisis in book provision" (qtd. inBlue, 1994).

BAI tries to involve local librarians in the process. According to Blue (1994) they match books to requests received from their affiliated librarians who are either from the countries or have worked extensively in the countries (p38). They have begun programs to support indigenous publishing initiatives by purchasing and distributing books published in Africa and in 1993 alone BAI bought £290,000 worth of African published books to distribute. They have created educational materials for indigenous publishers and will not send books to places where a publishing industry feels it would damage their potential sales (p.37-43). In the section on ways librarians can get involved the first suggestion is with money, the second suggestion is by volunteering their time and mentioned last is donating books to send overseas with the caveat that potential donors write for BAIs book selection guidelines before donating (p. 45).

It is also essential to lobby book donation organizations to phase out or drastically change traditional book donations. A sure way to encourage this is to donate money to these organizations on the stipulation that the money be used for new innovative programs and not for the provision of second hand books or remainders.

A good resource exists for individuals or groups who wish to evaluate or start a book donation program. Mauro Rossi's Book Donations for Development is available on the CODE website in .pdf version. CODE is a Canadian development organization that promotes literacy and education. To view the .pdf version go to http://www.codecan.org/english/documents/Book_Donations.pdf

Book Coupons

Ling (2000) in a paper presented at the University of Illinois mentions books coupon schemes and co-publishing initiatives for sustainability. With book coupons, donating organizations send book coupons instead of the physical books. The receiving librarians use these coupons just like cash to purchase books they have identified for their libraries. Oxfam, the Food and Agriculture Organization, Book Fairs and many other international organizations offer coupon schemes or vouchers. Consider sending proceeds from book sales to these organizations.

A closely related method is to search for non-profit or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that publish materials for rural communities and the extension agents that work with them. There is a plethora of health, agriculture, and micro-finance NGOs that produce such material. Literacy and Adult Education organizations regularly post their catalogs online. Often their publications are free or low cost. The NGO websites frequently allow North Americans to pay for publications but will send the books to the community or school library in a developing country. It is important to check the country's Customs regulations to be sure that duties will not have to be paid by the recipient library.

Co-publishing

Co-publishing is an exciting innovation. Governments, international publishers and NGO's sometimes form partnerships with a local publisher to produce books.

Sometimes the aid agency agrees to purchase enough of a print run to cover the basic cost of publishing the items. Anything that is sold by the local publisher above that print run is pure profit for them. In some instances the donor organization simply grants the publisher operating monies for a specific book or

series of books then donates the copies they have purchased to libraries that would not be able to afford books in any case. Thus they are not competing with local publishers. (Ling, 2004)

An example of an NGO doing co-publishing and distribution is Biblionef SA.

Biblionef is a book donation agency specialising [sic] in providing new or unused books to children aged 3 to 18 where they have no access to a library or relevant reading material. Biblionef SA is unique in that it donates books in all eleven of South Africa's languages. Children who are proficient at reading in their own language have great advantages in their schooling.(Biblionef South Africa, n.d.)

Biblionef SA works with publishers and distributors in South Africa as well as governmental agencies such as the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) to finance and distribute print runs in mother languages. They also commission “appropriate books including the fairy-tales and legends that are part of our heritage.”(Biblionef South Africa, n.d.) In 2004, I needed books for a project in rural Mbazwana, KwaZulu Natal. Biblionef arranged with a publisher to print runs of several beginners’ books in Zulu. We were able to give children participating in the program a book of their very own and in their own language. Biblionef operates in other countries and accepts financial donations through a secure server on their web page.

Book Fairs

Book fairs, where publishers display their titles, happen regularly throughout the developed world but also in developing countries and regions. Some book fairs feature publishers from developing regions or countries. Others, like the Cape Town Book Fair and the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, take place in developing countries and also highlight a different country each year. As mentioned above they often have book coupon or voucher schemes. In addition they may also have programs that pay for local librarians transport to

and from the book fair so they might choose appropriate books. According to Otike (1993), “The advantage with this particular scheme is that the library staff are directly involved in the selection of materials.” (p.11) If you assist a particular library or school and wish to send them, contact local and regional library associations who may be able to help with arrangements.

Make Use of the Internet

We are fortunate in the North to have cheap or free Internet access. Make use of the Internet to find alternatives. You do not need to be an expert on Malawi or Ghana to find library associations, literacy programs and publishers in those countries. As mentioned above many organizations, service clubs and individuals wish to assist specific libraries or communities. This is not only laudable but is now truly possible. Use your favorite search engine or one of the regional search engines. For Sub-Saharan Africa you may begin with <Ananzi.co.za> or <woyaa.com> or <Afrika.no>. Use the name of the country as a search term and add terms like literacy, publishers, health organizations, micro credit, sustainable energy or agriculture, and library associations.

Conclusion

Traditional book donation programs abound in the United States. I work in a university library. At the end of last semester I found donation boxes for used textbooks in the student bookstore. It was time for students to try to get their used textbooks bought back by the bookstore to be sold in to students taking the same course in the following semesters. When I asked a manager about the donation boxes he responded that when the bookstore doesn't want the books students still want to get rid of them. A campus student organization was collecting them to ship to Africa. He felt it was a win-win situation: students were rid of unwanted books and African libraries got book stock. It was an easy public service for the bookstore.

My university library receives donated books throughout the year. They are evaluated and are either added to the collection or are given to the Friends of the Library to sell at the annual book sale. Our gifts assistant lobbied for the books still remaining after the book sale to be donated to one of the bigger book donation organizations, which would send them, after evaluation, to Africa. She is genuinely concerned about African libraries. During my years working in African libraries she has been very interested to hear about my work. She even gave money to our book certificate program. She genuinely wants to feed those hungry minds mentioned in my introduction. Are her lobbying efforts

providing the assistance she intends? She would be dismayed if the answer is no. There is a serious lack of research on traditional book donation to African countries to advise.

Using the theories of appropriate technology and sustainable development it is imperative that the voices of the users of these donations be heard and incorporated into the development of any such program. Rossi's book, Book Donation for Development available on the CODE website discusses the impact of donations on the 'book chain.'

This term refers to the creation (authors and illustrators), publishing, printing, distribution and, ultimately, the reader. He writes,

In short, the donation of books is a **useful** practice when it helps to create or strengthen the book chain; it is **useless** when it does not serve to create or strengthen the book chain; it is **harmful** when it ultimately weakens one or more links in the book chain.(CODE, 2005)

My personal experience and this paper argue that traditional methods of book donation are largely useless and harmful. However, alternatives do exist. They may take more time and effort but they are out there. If we follow these practices, lobby donation organizations, and think creatively we can provide that altruistic gift that will truly feed the hungry minds.

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