TOWARDS ENHANCING THE DELIVERY OF INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPMENT WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON ADDRESSING POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

CHRISTINE STILWELL

Information Studies Programme
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Scottsville, South Africa
stilwell@ukzn.ac.za

Abstract

Do South African libraries and information centres contribute to development? Such interventions would require the effective addressing of poverty and social exclusion. This article refers to a two-phase survey which identified, documented, and shared examples of local instances of social exclusion initiatives in the public library sector. The research is qualitative, based on a simple form of thematic analysis.

The article concludes that the initiatives identified in the survey do contribute to fostering social inclusion and that public libraries have the potential to be key role-players in development efforts. Adequate measures, using specific criteria, should be developed to enable effective evaluation and monitoring.

KEYWORDS

Development, information centres, libraries, poverty, social exclusion, South Africa

1   INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

Jeffrey Sachs (2005) in his book, *The end of poverty: how we can make it happen in our lifetime*, indicates the various pathways which we can take in addressing development issues. Importantly for us as librarians, he identifies the area of communications infrastructure upon which information for development depends.

The Swiss scholar, Gilbert Rist (1997:238–248), offers a definition of development that suggests the complexity of the concept. He sees development as a set of practices, sometimes appearing to conflict with one another. These practices require "the general

transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations" for "the reproduction of society". The aim of development is to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by way of exchange, to effective demand. Rist (1997:238–248) suggests that we should manage "without illusions a system that is known to be perverse" and try to achieve certain general aims. One of these is for each society to invent its own ways of "living a good life". The production of commodities is required to fund it.

Sachs (2005) links development and poverty when he argues that extreme poverty, as measured by the World Bank, can be eliminated globally by the year 2025. For him, the way forward is by carefully planned development aid. He sees poverty as an inability of very poor countries to reach the bottom rung of the ladder of economic development; suggesting that once this rung has been reached, a country can commence participating in the global market economy, and the need for outside aid would be greatly diminished or eliminated. Sachs (2005) endorses the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a first step towards eliminating extreme poverty. Extreme poverty currently affects 1.4 billion people worldwide (World Bank 2010).

Many factors influence a country's ability to enter the world market, including government corruption; legal and social disparities based on gender, ethnicity, or caste; diseases such as AIDS and malaria; lack of infrastructure (including transportation, communications, health, and trade); unstable political landscapes; protectionism; and geographic barriers. Sachs discusses each factor and its potential remedies. International organisations are using his recommendations in working to help eradicate poverty worldwide with multifaceted sustainable development interventions in areas such as housing, food, education, basic health, agricultural inputs, safe drinking water, transport and – again – communications infrastructure.

May (2010:22) reports on the preliminary findings of a three-year project that looked at poverty and the information and communication technologies (ICTs) in urban and rural East Africa. He investigated the nexus between the various dimensions of poverty and ICT usage in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. He notes that "households without ICT are poorer in all dimensions than those with ICT, particularly in respect of education, services and economic assets". He states further that a strong association exists between financial poverty and digital poverty (May 2010:18). Access to education also emerged as a key factor.

There are many definitions of poverty. The World Bank (2010) measures extreme poverty as living on less than US $1.25[1] per day. It estimates that, in 2005, 1.4 billion people had consumption levels below $1.25 a day. Statistics for South Africa reflect that 26.2 per cent of the population lives on less than US $1.25 a day, that is, in extreme poverty (United Nations Development Programme 2009a). These figures demonstrate the scale of the poverty problem in South Africa.

The United Nations Development Programme (2009b) offers a multi-dimensional alternative to the US $1.25 a day poverty measure, in the form of the Human Poverty Index (HPI-1). This index focuses on the proportion of people in a country who fall below certain threshold levels which are then taken as measures for the dimensions taken into account in the index. The index takes into account "living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and gross enrolment in education) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income)". The HPI-1 value for South Africa is 25.4 per cent and this country ranks 85th among 135 developing countries in the index.

Linked to poverty is social exclusion, but social exclusion is "a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and in some characterisations, alienation and distance from mainstream society" (Duffy in Muddiman 1999:2). In practical terms it is "a mix of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown" (Social Exclusion Unit 1998). Social exclusion is persistent and systematic multiple deprivation, rather than disadvantage experienced for short periods of time (Walker in Muddiman 1999:2). It expresses the complexity of powerlessness in society (Muddiman 1999).

Rist (1997:238–248) speaks of "living a good life" which each society determines for itself, in a balancing act between the various interacting factors in development processes. Amartya Sen (2009:xi) refers to people's life circumstances, and "the lives they are able to lead" noting that "justice is ultimately connected with the way people's lives go" and that "institutions cannot but play a significant role in the pursuit of justice".

Do libraries as institutions, play this role? And how do we choose to elaborate on Sachs' reference (2005) to the importance of communication infrastructure and development, of which libraries are part? Without wanting to be guilty of invoking "oversimplified images of cultural and social change" (Haider & Bawden 2007), this article argues that libraries as social institutions have a major role to play in meeting these challenges. Some recent examples are offered.

The former South African Minister of Finance, Trevor Manuel (2004), confirmed that the groups of people most vulnerable to poverty were inhabitants of rural areas, female-headed households, the disabled, retrenched farm workers, the elderly, and those directly affected by HIV/AIDS. These people are also most likely to suffer social exclusion. Many of these categories of people appear in a diagram adapted from Stilwell and Munyua (2009).
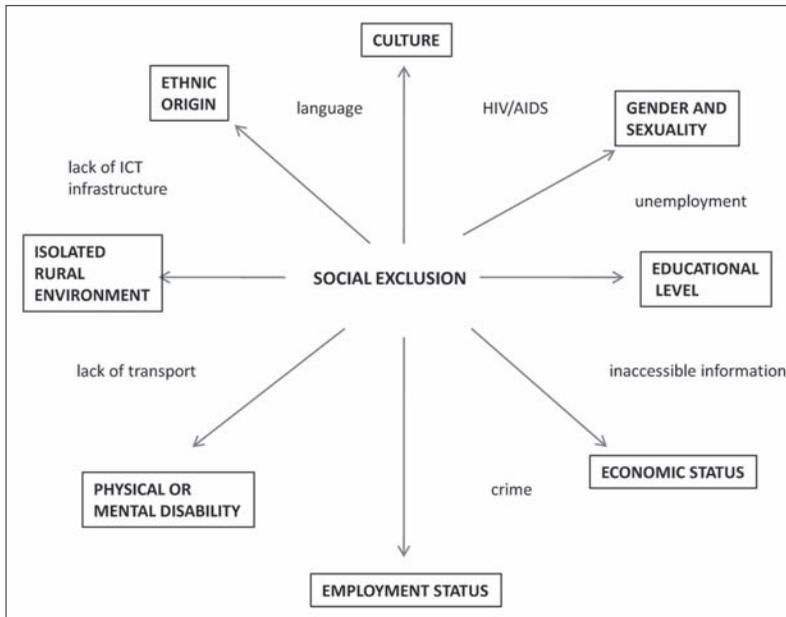
Figure 1: Factors which are related to social exclusion (adapted from Stilwell & Munyua 2009)

Stilwell (2006) described in some depth the vigorous impact of public libraries on many aspects of society and their role as the poor person's university. She addressed two related areas of exclusion which link to Sachs' communications infrastructure (2005) above. These foci are the neglected rural areas and the ICT initiatives which are used in many cases to address problems of limited resources and skills typified in the digital divide. This article builds on the Stilwell (2006) article and on an earlier conceptualisation of the ideas explored in this article (Stilwell 2011). It seeks to answer the question "Do South African libraries and information centres contribute to development by effectively addressing poverty and social exclusion?" In doing so it draws on a survey of social exclusion initiatives in the South African public library sector.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In our quest to support sustainable development we need to ask whether South African libraries and information centres, as social institutions, are contributing to development. Are they assisting communities to reach their idea of 'a good life'? Such intervention would require effectively addressing poverty and social exclusion. This article refers to a two-phase survey which identified, documented, and shared examples of specific, achievable, local instances of social exclusion initiatives. It asks whether, in the examples identified in the survey, access to information provided people with an opportunity to

use information to gain "freedom … and to choose the lives that they have reason to value" (Sen 1992:81).

The first area identified as a focus for combating social exclusion is that relating to ICTs and to concerns about an information gap between those who have and do not have access to ICTs. Powell (2003) argues that "[i]nformation and communication are essential in 'inclusion' but the information gap is 'widening faster than other gaps in access to resources'" (Powell 2003:1). To enable development, we must ensure that ordinary people have the information needed to make choices and their views also need to be heard. While the traditional systems still play a vital role, they cannot provide all the information that is needed for such choice-making.

It is important to heed Heeks' argument (2002:1) that there is a need to recognise "a deeper and more balanced understanding of the relationship between ICTs and development". In pursuit of better understanding of this relationship, and in addressing the research question, the article draws on three scholars in particular. These are:

- Merridy Wilson who refers to the "wealth of local understandings, knowledges and experience that could potentially aid development efforts" in working towards more appropriate development outcomes (Wilson 2003:2–3). She alerts us to various existing assumptions which we need to address to "*allow for a reconceptualising of ICTs and development to emerge in a manner that could be enabling of local development processes towards locally defined development outcomes*".
- John Pateman (2008:12) who argues that the concepts of social justice and equity are ones that can work *to the advantage of the entire community*. An inclusive information centre tailored to the information needs of everyone not only benefits the previously excluded but it benefits the included as well, in that it is more likely to meet the needs of the community as a whole.
- Andreas Vårheim (2007) adds to this point, emphasising the role of the library as a social and public place or 'third place' that is neither work nor home, is a place to meet, a safe place, a place for reflection, a place to build trust in others where access to free and universal services build information literacy. By providing a 'third place' in this way *core library functions are deepened and broadened in their reach*.

3 ASSUMPTIONS AND RELATED SELECT LITERATURE

The background to two key assumptions was presented at length in Stilwell (2006) and is not repeated here. These assumptions also form the basis of another article (Stilwell 2011) and include:

Assumption 1. ICTs are the key enabling technology of the new global economies (Powell 2003:9) and communications infrastructure is among the factors that contribute

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to alleviating poverty (Sachs 2005). ICTs may, however, play only a limited role in addressing social exclusion (Chigona, Mbhele & Kabanda 2008), particularly for the rural disadvantaged.

It is important to recognise, like Wilson (2003:[7]), that there is a digital divide between those who have access to ICT technology and those who do not, that "*lack of access to ICTs does not imply an information or knowledgeless context, rather just the absence of certain forms of information.*" A further point is that *the availability of ICTs also cannot be equated with access and use* (Wilson 2003:[9]).

Rural villagers are the least likely to make use of ICTs for information and, in fact, whether urban or rural, few South Africans have access to a computer in their home and to a reliable electricity supply (Gillwald 2009). A 2009 survey gives a figure of 14.8 per cent for those households with access to a computer at home. Only 4.8 per cent of these households have a working Internet connection (Gillwald 2009). ICT Statistics newslog (2008) noted in 2008 that in an under-serviced area, Umzinyathi in KwaZulu-Natal, 64 per cent of the population had no electricity, 94 per cent no landlines and 69 per cent no mobile phones.

In Moutse village in Mpumalanga province, Dlodlo (2009) found that despite a desperate need for 'survival' information, women rarely used ICTs. Raising the family, generating income and coping with domestic chores and community activities, left little time for attending classes to acquire ICT skills. Instead, these women developed informal information networks with a high dependence on mobile telephones.

While 18 per cent of South African households had a working fixed line telephone in 2008, only five per cent of these were in rural areas (IndexMundi 2008), making the mobile phone even more essential for giving and receiving information on, for example, crop prices, market and weather-related information (Bachelor, Scott & Taylor 2005). Over 90 per cent of the South African population either own or have access to a phone.

These examples indicate the urgent need for the ICT industry to cut costs and improve access, allowing small entrepreneurs to supply telecommunication services to rural areas as larger monopolies tend to focus more on high-income urban areas (World Bank 2002). The launch of SEACOM should open up opportunities at a reduced cost (SEACOM went live in 2009) for South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique, but some users report initial teething problems.

Ungana-Afrika gives ICT support to advice offices in remote areas through organisations such as the Karoo Centre for Human Rights. Discounted telecommunication rates, Internet connections, external funding and up-to-date equipment are on offer to make the advice offices more effective (Von Staden 2007). Legal information, especially concerning rights and government services, is the sort of information most needed by these communities. Other groups, such as the Rural Women's Movement, are working towards political and economic independence for rural women. Despite recent government reform programmes, many women remain excluded and voiceless by customary law (Bachram 2007).

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, funded by the South African Department of Arts and Culture, has launched a project called *Lwazi*, a Zulu word meaning knowledge or information. It aims to overcome the language barrier in access to ICTs by using a simple speech-oriented interface on a mobile or landline telephone. Information is provided in any of the eleven official languages and should assist those with little or no literacy to access information on government and their everyday needs (Mokhema 2009).

In relation to the first key assumption, concerns remain regarding affordable access to services – especially for women and for people in the rural areas. Informal information networks remain popular as well as cheaper, well-established technologies such as radio, that do not require literacy to use, but affordable mobile telephony also has great potential for enabling access.

Assumption 2. That the fair distribution of opportunities as Britz (2004:198–199) has argued is "to a certain extent more important than only the fair distribution of goods".

Addressing social exclusion through policy requires an infrastructure that enables the communication of information, the formulation and application of information policies (Britz 2004:196).

In 2003 a National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS) was appointed by the Minister for Arts and Culture to co-ordinate policy in the field. NCLIS advises the two departments which oversee libraries, the Department of Arts and Culture and the Department of Education.

The Transformation Charter (Department of Arts and Culture, National Council for Library and Information Services 2009) is intended to form the basis for the development of policy. Key aspects are that libraries are forces for justice and social cohesion; they are within reach of all and are places for everyone. The Charter embraces a fresh and vital vision for a bright and socially inclusive library and information services (LIS) future.

The Community Library and Information Services Bill (Community Libraries Bill) 2010, is available in its 6th draft. It addresses the Schedule 5 problem of the 1994 Constitution which states that provinces are responsible for creating the legislative framework in terms of which local authorities are to provide public and community library services. A KPMG survey in 2008 was tasked with finding a way forward in terms of this Schedule 5 problem (Department of Arts and Culture 2007). KPMG surveyed library needs country-wide and produced useful reports detailing, among other things, what people use public libraries for.

A system of Conditional Grants was introduced as a means of recapitalising library programmes at the provincial level in support of local government efforts (Kekana 2009). The National Treasury made an allocation of a Conditional Grant of R1 billion to the Department of Arts and Culture for the period until 2010. Certain provinces were allocated more of the grant. The grants were seen to have impacted on collection sizes, staffing, and the upgrading of library buildings (Jordan 2009).

The problem of obtaining reliable statistical data on public libraries aggravates the funding issue. The Transformation Charter (Department of Arts and Culture, National Council for Library and Information Services 2009) introduces assessment measures for transformation in libraries. In 2008, Gauteng Province commissioned KPMG *status quo* reports for its 11 municipalities and, in this way, obtained the data needed to identify local authorities with limited capacity (Meyer 2009a).

In the public and community library sector, the Public Library Innovation Program encourages libraries to assess local community needs with the help of local organisations and businesses. The projects reflecting the most original and innovative service ideas proceed through each phase fully funded (Electronic Information for Libraries 2009).

Mgwebi (2009) notes that information centres benefit the less needy, rather than those who have limited access to information. This situation contributes to the widening of the information gap between communities and municipalities and the eventual exclusion of people from participation. In rural areas especially, participation in community decisions and processes is a common phenomenon, however, in these traditional *imbizos* (gatherings) participation by men rather than women is preferred. On the other hand, Ngamlana (2009) notes that considerable effort is being made to enable participation in government processes by excluded groups such as women.

With reference to the policy and funding issues much depends on the implementation of the draft bill. The system of conditional grants requires external evaluation to determine the way forward for poorly resourced municipalities. A recent study (De Jager & Nassimbeni 2007) demonstrated how small public libraries in isolated areas of South Africa have achieved major successes in tackling social exclusion. The Public Library Innovation Program and the injection of funding that it represents could also prove a useful catalyst in addressing the assessment of local community needs. The implementation of the projects linked to the programme and their ultimate success in service delivery will depend on the degree to which recipient communities are able to participate in the projects.

4 LISTSERV SURVEY: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Wilson (2003 [12]) calls for a focus on "social and human development" and "locally specific alternative development processes and outcomes" if we hope to "make use of these powerful technologies [ICTs] to improve the life of the world's many and diverse groups of poor people" who are excluded from the mainstream information society. A concern was to identify instances of specific, achievable, local library-related instances of social exclusion initiatives which had, in some way, responded to people's life circumstances.

The author carried out a survey by LISTSERV of local social exclusion initiatives to augment the information from the literature. The approach was qualitative and she

anticipated that much of the material would be informal and therefore difficult to trace in the literature. She also requested referrals from colleagues who knew about interesting relevant projects. She sent out the first notice to the LISTSERV, *Liasaonline*, on 21 January 2009, inviting responses about such initiatives. Ten responses were received with many reporting more than one example. Respondents also sent photographs and documents reporting on their initiatives. For the second phase another request was sent out on 18 November 2010 to *Liasaonline* and to *Sabinews,* and six responses were received.

The research employed thematic analysis. "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question" and represents some level of "patterned response" or meaning in the data (Braun & Clarke 2006:82). The responses were searched manually for patterns and at a simple level of application. The approach was useful for its flexibility and its suitability to working with participants as collaborators (Braun & Clarke 2006:87, 97).

On account of the small scale of the survey, fairly broad themes were used to represent the findings. The themes are presented together with the data and the appropriate in-text citations. The themes echo the factors that contribute to social exclusion in Figure 1 and some of the foci for tackling social exclusion identified in the literature.

The examples from the first phase of the LISTSERV survey were examined in relation to the research question and key areas identified in the introduction to the study. The examples from the 2010 survey were added to those from 2009. The research question to be answered was whether in our quest to support sustainable development, South African libraries and information centres, as social institutions, contribute to development by effectively addressing poverty and social exclusion. In addition, do the themes, projects, and activities identified in the two phases of the survey relate to the reduction of poverty either directly and indirectly, to increasing social inclusion, and ultimately to development?

4.1 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION AT PROVINCIAL LEVEL

At national level, evidence of policy implementation is found in the 2009/2010 Recapitalisation Programme of the Department of Arts and Culture which reports that seven libraries in Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape were established as follows:

- Libraries at Hekpoort, Mogale City and Sicelo, and Midvaal municipality in Gauteng;
- Siyabuswa, Tweefontein, Msogwaba and Wesselton libraries in Mpumalanga;
- Ntsikelelo Tida library in Richmond, Northern Cape.

Overall, country-wide, 43 libraries were upgraded and the following libraries would open in December 2010:

- Fetakgomo and Thulamela in Limpopo;
- Barkley West and Hartswater in the Northern Cape;
- Randvaal in Gauteng.

In terms of library materials, 345 195 items of library materials were purchased and more than 600 library staff employed (Lebelo 2010).

The Recapitalisation Programme's attention and the funding it brings are key to future development. Challenges for the Department are human resources issues, the procurement of goods and services, and infrastructural problems such as tendering processes and lengthy supply chain management systems (Lebelo 2010).

With reference to the Schedule 5 policy problem and the implementation of the draft Community Libraries Bill, as well as the system of conditional grants, evaluation by experts who are external to government is required. The example of the Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation (2008) is important in that municipalities with less capacity were identified. Smaller municipalities with a lower rates base would be more adversely affected in the longer term by the lack of the grant funding and would need to be assisted by the province. The proviso here is that funds are committed by the relevant treasury. The example of this proactive province could inform and assist the other provinces.

4.2 Access to public libraries and community centres as 'third place'

In terms of facilitating access to public and community libraries, the City of Johannesburg's Library and Information Services (2009/10:1) aims to 'provide a free/safe reading and learning environment for all'. It has various initiatives to reach and encourage reading among marginalised groups:

- Social inclusion is addressed through satellite services to new suburbs with low-cost housing such as Leralong, Pennyville, Klipfontein View and Vlakfontein. Others areas earmarked for attention are Bramfischerville and Slovoville. Some sites have container libraries and are the outcome of collaborative partnerships with, for instance, Exclusive Books.
- The Yeoville Library, situated in a mainly poor area, has been moved to an old tramways building which was renovated as part of the Inner City Regeneration Programme. It was enlarged to cater for student needs and in 2010 acquired Internet connectivity.
- Services provided to old age homes for the frail, for example, include large print books and help for people who are unable to drive.
- The Miriam Tladi reading room in Orange Grove encourages young people and their parents to read. The city seeks to improve Early Childhood Development facilities and services. It holds various quizzes to encourage the reading of books by schoolchildren – such as Battle of the Books and Story Skirmish.

These are inter-school quizzes for learners in grades 6 to 7 and for younger, less skilled readers respectively.

- It offers educational support services in the form of science and technology awareness projects and school project support facilities.
- It provides recreational and educational books to prisoners.

Household poverty is addressed through support for orphans, children from vulnerable households and child-headed households. Homework assistance and information literacy programmes have been developed and special homework sessions are held at Diepsloot and Orange Farm on Saturdays (City of Johannesburg 2009/10:5, 12).

A nongovernmental organisation, Twenty30, manages programmes reaching schools, orphans and vulnerable children, community centres and other related fields. It focuses on library start-ups at schools in underprivileged areas. For example, Craig (2010) reports on a project at a primary school in Soweto. Twenty30 (2010) invites skilled individuals to volunteer their time, 'bridging gaps, and empowering South Africans to build a brighter future together'. It has established a relationship with the Gauteng Department of Education and has projects in Eldorado Park, Lenasia, Orange Farm, Lanseria and the inner city (Twenty30: inspiring South African to action 2010).

Boipatong Community Library has an early childhood development programme, a Born to Read Programme for young readers as well as a library membership drive to attract pensioners (Mazibuko 2010).

An informal settlement near Fish Hoek is served by the Masiphumele Library with a reading enrichment programme, a school readiness programme for parents, a homework club, computer classes and careers information among other things (Alexander 2009). It is sustainable as it is in a partnership with the mainstream Fish Hoek Public Library and has private funding (Alexander 2009).

Container libraries are used in service to rural areas of the eThekwini Metro Libraries (EML) (Nyongwana 2009). For communities that are distant from formal communities, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial and Public Library and Information Service (KZNPPLIS) has a 'wheelie wagon' project. Wagons containing 500 books are placed at service points, staffed by volunteers, and are especially popular with learners (French 2009).

The Gauteng Department of Education has a collaborative partnership with the Community Literacy and Numeracy (CLING) project which invites communities to decide on their own priorities. This collaboration led to the Province opening a library in a shack in Evaton North in 2009 (Meyer 2009b).

For the Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation (2008) core services of public /community libraries are survival information and community information for daily living, and career and job information for the unemployed. It seeks to enhance access by mandating that the staff and management profiles reflect the community within which the library is located and support government's broader objectives of

empowering people from previously disadvantaged communities. The librarian should also be suitably qualified.

Addressing issues of language choices as an aspect of access, the Home-Language Project is piloting an approach which enables children in an English-medium school to use their own home languages as tools for learning alongside English. The project operates in five schools in Johannesburg and assists some 600 learners a year. The project enjoys a collaborative relationship with the Literacy for All organisation (Social innovator … 2010; Owen-Smith 2010).

Addressing content choice which affects access, the Recapitalisation Programme has a focus on the re-publication of classics in African literature (Lebelo 2010). The City of Johannesburg held a book fair in May 2010 to celebrate Africa Day and to promote indigenous and African literature, language, writing and film. It also has an African Literary Development Programme which held slam poetry sessions for various regions, attracting some 1 693 youth in 2009/2010 (City of Johannesburg 2009/10:11).

A core concern is access to public and community libraries in rural and peri-urban areas. The projects identified above serve those greatly in need in prisons, old age homes, informal settlements, new satellite areas and so on, and are encouraging examples of what can be done. Others address critical areas of language choices and local culture. Still others are notable for a participative approach to planning, identifying priorities in communities and serving in those communities.

4.3   ACCESS TO ICTs AND ICT SKILLS TRAINING

In terms of access to ICTs and ICT training, the Recapitalisation Programme had as a focus in 2009/2010 the roll-out of ICTs to public libraries and community centres (Lebelo 2010).

Johannesburg Library and Information Services has a 'Free Public Access to the Internet and Electronic Resources @ the Public Libraries' project as a priority for the 2010/11 financial year (City of Johannesburg 2009/10). The Media Works Programme delivers computer-based literacy training (City of Johannesburg 2009/10:9).

For the Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation (2008), technical services include Internet services, access to electronic databases and services, and the maintenance of computer equipment. A key issue remains affordable access to ICT services and it is encouraging that technical services now include these services.

The Digital Doorways project recognises that only 20 per cent of South Africa's some 30 000 schools have only one computer, and is aimed at wide-scale computer literacy. By 2007 it had established robust kiosks, which use keyboard and touchpad technology, in remote rural and peri-urban areas, backed by a joint project of the Department of Science and Technology, the CSIR and Eskom (Opening SA's digital doorway 2007). The EML's Digital Doorways Project provides public access to computing (Greyling 2009).

KZNPPLIS has an Internet project which targets rural libraries for Internet access, and which is staffed by "cyber-cadets" who train users and assist with access (Stannard 2009).

The Recapitalisation Programme's focus on the roll-out of ICTs to public libraries and community centres is crucially important as a core endeavour at national level. Access and training by the Johannesburg Library and Information Services is a key example of what the large metro library services can do. The Digital Doorways and the KZNPPLIS Internet projects are notable for aiming at wide-scale computer literacy as well as providing access to computers in remote rural and peri-urban areas.

With regard to access to ICTs, good initiatives were identified but apart from the library-based services, access is still costly and therefore limited. More information is needed about the general availability of these services in local public libraries and community centres.

4.4 LITERACY

With regard to literacy, the City of Johannesburg uses the services of the University of South Africa's Adult Basic Education and Training Institute to teach domestics and other workers to read, write and speak English and introduces books to them (City of Johannesburg 2009/10:9).

Free State Provincial Libraries have a Reading Programme in 15 libraries which targets newly or semi-literates to get them reading (Smuts 2009). It has a special project called The Freedom Fighters which focuses on texts about these famous individuals.

The Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation (2008:60) requires that its user services be encouraged to institute literacy programmes. Gauteng Provincial Library and Information Services have been working with the CLING literacy and numeracy research project (Centre for Education Policy Development 2007). Researchers engage with local district offices and schools in the selected communities to determine how best to assist the schools in enhancing literacy and numeracy projects (Meyer 2009b).

For those excluded from access by illiteracy, the City of Johannesburg and the Free State Provincial Libraries' Reading Programme, the requirement by the Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation that services must be encouraged to institute literacy programmes, and Gauteng's CLING project are important beginnings.

4.5 PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Physical disability is a key factor in limiting access. The Recapitalisation Project focused attention on the visually impaired with the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) project in which the provinces work with the South African Library for the Blind (Lebelo 2010). The DAISY system is an open international standard for accessible multimedia that provides accessible multimedia to people with disabilities, as well as to the general public, to share information and knowledge. It helps bridge the digital divide, ensuring access to information (DAISY for all [nd]).

A small cadre of people with visual disabilities has been trained to train other people in their community in the use of ICTs in North West Province's pilot project (Ndlovu 2009).

The Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation (2008:60) requires that user services be encouraged to institute specialised services for people with disabilities.

The Recapitalisation Project's focus and collaboration with the DAISY project at national level, the North West Province's pilot project for people with visual disabilities to train others in the use of ICTs and the Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation's requirement that specialised services be encouraged for people with disabilities all represent important beginnings in terms of seeking to enhance access for those excluded by disability. More evidence is needed about initiatives to address access for this group.

4.6 Opportunities for employment through entrepreneurship

To foster opportunities for employment through entrepreneurship, the City of Johannesburg (2009/10:12) has 21 'Business Corners' where young members of the community are helped to find information on business opportunities and the development of business skills. This service also holds interactive workshops and career guidance sessions.

North West Province has a Library Entrepreneurs Programme which educates, informs and develops a culture of entrepreneurship for learners in an informal settlement school in Madibeng Local Municipality (Dlamuka 2008).

The Business Corners and The Library Entrepreneurs' Programmes represent notable initiatives in terms of opening up opportunities and combating unemployment.

4.7 Food security

Regarding the theme of food security, the Emfuleni Local Municipality in Gauteng started a vegetable garden at Bophelong Library in 2003 (Van Wyk 2009:1). It has been sustained by a group of women and most recently by a group of youth who are kept off the streets and away from crime. Vegetables from the garden are given to crèches, AIDS patients and orphans as well as people with disabilities.

A second garden was started at Sebokeng Library. An orphanage in this area was adopted by the Vereeniging Library which collects clothes and donates these, as well as books and vegetables from the garden, to the orphanage (Van Wyk 2009).

A third vegetable garden was developed at the Stephenson Centre, a small depot that opens three days a week. In 2007 a farmer from the retirement home across the road from the library started the garden at the library and it helps to feed the needy. He has been invited to use areas in three nearby homesteads to produce vegetables (Van Wyk 2009).

The vegetable garden projects started at Bophelong Library are an attempt to address food insecurity, basic survival skills and to foster self-help initiatives. They also represent community cooperation across former racial and class divisions.

5   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In our quest to support sustainable development, are South African libraries and information centres effectively addressing poverty and social exclusion? Is there sufficient acknowledgment, in South Africa, of the potential of public libraries and community centres to combat poverty and social exclusion in disadvantaged communities? The article identifies, documents and shares examples of instances where access to information and the services of libraries and community centres has provided people in South Africa with opportunities. This research is, however, constrained by practice and therefore reliant on the best information available at present (Laloë 2007). This constraint should be taken into account in relation to the first part of the research question – that is, whether in our quest for development, local public libraries and community centres, as social institutions, are effectively addressing the problems associated with poverty and social exclusion.

The study revealed concerns about the levels of extreme poverty in the country and about the information gap between those who have and do not have access to ICTs, bearing in mind Heeks' argument (2002:1) about the relationship between ICTs and development. We return here to the factors affecting poverty and related to a country's capacity for development among which, for Sachs (2005), communications infrastructure is key. Are social justice and equity working to the benefit of the entire community? Are inclusive information centres tailored to the information needs of everyone benefiting the previously excluded as well as the included (Pateman 2008:12)? Is a focus on Vårheim's (2007) library as 'third place' helping to deepen and broaden the reach of libraries' core functions?

Drawing on the examples of projects and initiatives above, the findings of the study provide evidence of the following:

- Attempts by local libraries and community centres to address information needs associated with basic survival, hunger, unemployment and ignorance about career choices, illiteracy and other situations of poverty and social exclusion in a variety of ways, both directly and indirectly.
- The range of themes addressed by the projects and activities suggests that the public libraries and community centres collectively reflect a complex understanding of the term 'exclusion'. While small scale in their reach, efforts are being directed at areas where the need is very great, like the rural and peri-urban areas, through access to container and mobile libraries.
- There are significant overarching efforts at national level, such as the further developments in terms of addressing the Schedule 5 issue through the draft Bill, the Transformation Charter and the fresh vision it represents, the rollout of the ICT training and access, and the collaborative partnership with the DAISY project.

- The comprehensive services of the City of Johannesburg libraries and Masi-phumele Library in an informal settlement have the potential to reduce poverty and address social exclusion.
- The initiatives identified give evidence to support the view that the work of public libraries and community centres, both directly and indirectly, is contributing in the areas identified in the discussion section. Much more evidence, gathered through longer-term evaluation and monitoring, is however needed about each initiative.
- The initiatives are scattered over several provinces and the reduction of poverty for those most in need is likely to require many of these services to be offered collectively to the poor and marginalised.
- Addressing poverty requires a multi-faceted approach and there are many other factors to consider besides that of communication. Of Sachs' key areas (2005), food, education and communications (access and to some extent infrastructure) are targeted by various projects.
- Some of the initiatives are likely to contribute indirectly to addressing the powerlessness of those excluded in terms of inculcating literacy, reading skills and ICT skills; all being skills for enhanced education and for better employment prospects and the ability to make critical life choices. The entrepreneurship project should also play a role in this regard.

In terms of the recommendations arising from the study it is noted:

- Social exclusion is persistent and social inclusion entails the addressing of systematic multiple deprivation over many areas through collaborative and multi-faceted approaches.
- In-depth studies of the communities are needed to assess the reach of these projects and their level of success.
- Wider-scale opportunities for employment, improved housing, lower levels of crime, improved health and a reduction in family breakdown, among other things, are required.
- Public libraries and community centres have the potential to be key role-players but the challenges are immense. Collaborative approaches, together with adequate funding from government, could succeed in fostering social inclusion in the longer term.
- There is a need for more evidence, other than what could be collected in this exploratory study, to inform decision making about ways to go forward. The Transformation Charter offers indicators for monitoring and evaluating transformation. Stilwell, Samba, Failler and Laloë (2010:4) argue for the use of composite dashboards "where a range of indicators are used to describe the status, or change in status, of factors affecting the sustainable development of a given economic, social or ecological system". This approach is supported for setting policy targets (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi 2009) as it allows specific targets to be set for specific criteria. One or more of the communities where initiatives

have been introduced should be selected for more intensive research, possibly
in the form of in-depth case studies using composite dashboards.

Finally, the current study provides evidence of a heightened awareness of the potential
of libraries and information centres to play a role in development by combating poverty
and social exclusion in South Africa. It also asks: Would the composite dashboard
approach be a useful tool for setting policy targets as it allows specific targets to be set
for specific criteria?

NOTE

1. According to purchasing-power parity (PPP), "the number of currency units required to
buy goods equivalent to what can be bought with one unit of the currency of the base
country or with one unit of the common currency of a group of countries". It is also
referred to as the purchasing power standard (United Nations Statistics Division 2007).

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