# Information Behaviours of Non-Users of Libraries in Botswana

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## Abstract

*Public libraries are established to be used by communities. Surprisingly, many people in communities where there are public libraries do not make use of them. This descriptive study investigated the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of such non-library users, so that the libraries could redesign their services to attract them. Also examined are the barriers encountered by non-library users in getting information, their reasons for not using the library, and their perceptions on current outreach efforts by libraries in the communities. The target population for this study was the community of non-library users in Botswana. The snowball sampling method was used to select 302 respondents from 34 research sites in the country. The findings indicated that respondents knew about the existence of the library through friends, Kgotla meetings, and advertisements in local media, and they were also willing to participate in the activities of the library. However, lack of time, distance to the library and inadequate relevance of the library resources and services to the activities the respondents were engaged in seemed to be the main barriers to library use. In terms of information required, it was difficult for the respondents to express their information needs; nevertheless, the study was able to establish that the respondents often needed information on current affairs, education, business and agriculture, and they used radio, newspapers, friends, work supervisors and personal experience to meet their needs.*

## Keywords

Community information needs, information-seeking behaviour, information sources, libraries, non-users of libraries.

## Introduction

The Government of Botswana has envisioned an educated and informed nation by 2016 (Government of Botswana, 1997). To meet the needs of this vision, the public library system provides a nation-wide library and information services' network designed to meet the information needs of all sectors of the community. To date, the system boasts of about 66 Village Reading Rooms (VRRs), 24 public libraries and four community libraries. VRRs are community initiatives designed to extend the public library services to smaller settlements in Botswana. Community libraries on the other hand are an outcome of partnership of the communities, Botswana Government and the Robert and Sara Rothschild

Family Foundation. However, in spite of these efforts, statistics show that not all the targeted sectors of the communities are properly reached as the main beneficiaries of these initiatives. Improved understanding of the reasons why certain groups in the communities do not use the libraries is needed in order to develop effective strategies to promote the use of the libraries to meet the information needs of the target communities.

Communities in developing countries are fairly illiterate with a low reading culture (Aboyade, 1994). This is also true for Botswana today. Therefore, libraries and information providers need to be very creative in putting in place attractive information programmes and services which take into consideration the information behaviours of the communities they serve. Examples of such community social programmes are storytelling, arts and crafts and writing, knitting and weaving, gardening and poetry. Libraries also need to market themselves vigorously to the communities they serve. For example, librarians should be involved in community activities by establishing library committees whose membership is drawn from communities they serve, in line with IFLA's guidelines for information dissemination to communities by libraries (IFLA, 2005).

Several studies are pertinent to the current study and they have been used to provide a theoretical framework for the study. Most of these studies have identified information needs of predominantly non-literate communities (Aboyade, 1987; Mchombu, 1993; Kaniki, 1995; Baratedi, 2000) and the roles information providers could play in meeting these needs (Mchombu and Morais, 1998; Phoi and Rammidi, 2000). Another body of work, comprising particularly studies by Mchombu (1993), Matenge (2003), Anwar and Supaat (1998) and Mooko (2002), identified the information-seeking preferences of communities that do not frequently use libraries. Other studies have specifically examined factors affecting non-use of public libraries (Palmer, 1981; Lange, 1988; Hawkins, et al., 2001; Uhegbu, 2001; Sin and Kim, 2008).

Alemna (1995), Raseroka (1997), and Alegbeleye (1998), among others, have suggested a need to re-examine the public library system in Africa. A conclusion reached in most of the aforementioned studies is that more work is needed in order to understand the complexities surrounding the non-use of library and information services by targeted beneficiaries.

This study therefore answered the following questions: Why are certain sectors of the community not using libraries to meet their information needs? What alternative sources of information do they use? What are the information needs of non-users of the libraries? How can the libraries attract the non-users to the facilities and services they offer?

## Methodology

The study adopted a survey design approach and used the snowball sampling technique to identify the respondents who participated in the study. Three hundred and two (302) respondents selected from 34 research sites participated in the study. The study sites were carefully selected to be representative of four settings in the country, namely: remote, rural, peri-urban, and urban. A questionnaire with both open and closed-ended questions was used to collect data. The questionnaire included items concerning demographic characteristics of the respondents, information needs, sources used to address information needs, constraints to getting information, reasons for not using the library, methods that could be used to encourage citizens to use the library, and information that could be appropriately provided online. The researchers administered the questionnaire with the help of trained research assistants.

The respondents comprised illiterate people; hence, there was a need not only to write-in responses on their behalf, but also to translate questions into the local language. This was anticipated at the conceptualisation stage given the demographics and hence the study settled for this method. A similar approach was implemented successfully in related research (see for example, Mchombu, 1993; Kaniki, 1995; and Mooko, 2002). The analysis of the data collected involved generating descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and cross-tabulations.

## Findings

### Demographic Characteristics of the Non-library uUers

The majority of the 302 respondents were females (53%), whereas the males constituted 46.7%. The ages of the respondents ranged from below ten (one respondent) to over fifty years, with most of the respondents (128 or 42.4%) within the age range of 21-30 years. Sixty-nine (22.8%) of the respondents were in the age bracket of 31 to 40 years, whereas the respondents in the age brackets of 10 to 20 years and 41 to 50 years were 46 (15.2%) and 34 (11.4%) respectively. Only 24 of the respondents were in the age bracket of 51 years or more.

The educational background of the respondents was considered to be a critical characteristic that could predetermine the information needs of the respondents. The respondents included those who had never attended school (6.0%), as well as those with tertiary-level education at the certificate (6.3 %), diploma (9.6%) and degree (4.3%) levels. A larger percentage (31.5%) of the respondents had had junior secondary school education level, while about 24.2% and 18.2 % completed primary leaving school certificate, and Cambridge Ordinary Level Overseas Certificate or Botswana General Certificate in Secondary Education respectively.

The study found out the languages the respondents could read and write effectively, or preferred to use. Preferences for different languages have implications for the languages in which libraries could provide information, materials and services to meet the needs of various members of the community. Out of the 299 respondents who indicated the languages they could read and write, 64.2 % could read and write English and Setswana (National language spoken in Botswana) well, 24.1 % could only read and write Setswana well, 3.0 % could only read and write English well, while those who could read and write other languages well constituted only 8.7 %. However, 46.1 % preferred Setswana, 25.9% preferred English, 23.6% preferred English and Setswana, while only 4.3 % preferred other languages such as Ikalanga, Shikhalahari and Sesubiya.

In terms of the place where the respondents spent most of their time, the majority (219 or 73.5%) reported that they spent most of their time in the village, while 12 (4.0%) and 10 (3.4%) spent most of their time at the cattle post (a place where Botswana communities keep their livestock away from villages) and on the lands (ploughing fields) respectively. Only 17.5% of them spent most of their time in the towns and cities.

About 52% of the respondents reported that they were employed. Only 152 (52%) of the respondents reported on the type of employment they were in, out of which 111 (70.7%) were in formal employment, 33 (21%) were self-employed working in their own businesses, and 13 (8.3%) were in informal employment. In coding for employment, formal employment was coded for jobs that were considered to be attracting a monthly salary, whereas informal employment was coded for jobs that were ad hoc, such as casual labourers. The respondents reported that they were involved in various occupations. Fifty-two out of 208 (25.0%) of the respondents reported that they were government workers, 43 (20.7%) were artisans, 19 (9.1%) were teachers, 31(14.9%) were unskilled labourers, 14 (6.7%) were farmers, and 30 (14.4%) were students. The low proportion of farmers in the sample could be attributed to the fact that data were collected when the rainy season had just begun and most farmers were likely out of the villages ploughing their fields.

The study also sought to establish the community activities that the respondents engaged in. Each respondent was free to indicate as many activities as possible. About 8.3% of the respondents reported that they were members of the Village Development Committees (VDCs), 10.5 % belonged to Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs), 10.9% were members of burial societies (community associations designed to support bereaved families), while 40.9% belonged to other committees (e.g. sports, health, agriculture, home-based care, etc.) in the villages, towns and cities.

### Information Needs and Sources for Non-library Users

One of the objectives of this study was to determine the community information needs through inference from the needs of the sampled library non-users. The respondents were asked to state the information they

needed to carry out their day-to day activities. They were free to give as many information needs as they required. Of the 234 respondents who attempted this question, 68 (29.1%) could not articulate their information needs. This could be attributed to the low educational background of the respondents. Available literature in the field of information behaviour shows that information needs are complex and sometimes people fail to articulate them properly (Dervin, 1998). This, however, does not mean they do not have information needs. It is only an indication that complex techniques are required to learn about the information needs. Such techniques should target people when they are actively involved in their day-to-day activities or discern information from the activities that the people do. It is through analysing the questions they ask in relation to their activities that one could understand what information they require.

However, for those 234 respondents who managed to articulate their information needs, data showed a wide variation in the types of information they required health information for their day-to-day activities. Given that health issues, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, etc, are a serious concern to communities in Botswana, one expected a larger number of respondents to require health-related information. Job advertisements or employment related information was required by 15 (6.4%) of the respondents. Only two respondents reported that they needed legal information to carry out their day-to-day activities.

Table 1 below shows variations in information needs by age group. For instance, agricultural information seemed to be popular among the respondents who were above fifty years of age; business information seemed to be preferred by those in the age groups between 10–20, and 31–40; current affairs information appeared to cut across all age groups; educational information needs were most prevalent among the 10–40 age groups; health information needs appeared to cut across the different age groups; and job adverts seemed to be the concern of people in the age groups 21–40 years.

**Table 1: Information Need by Age of Library Non-user**

| Age | Agri-culture | Business | Current Affairs | Education | Health | Job Advert | Legal | Others | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Below 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 10-20 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 16 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 32 |
| 21-30 | 5 | 10 | 41 | 20 | 7 | 6 | 1 | 11 | 101 |
| 31-40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 31-40 | 4 | 13 | 9 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 52 |
| 41-50 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 28 |
| 51 + | 11 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 19 |
| **Total** | **25** | **30** | **69** | **52** | **18** | **15** | **2** | **23** | 234 |

they required for day-to-day activities. Sixty-eight (29.1%) of the respondents indicated that they required information on current affairs. Current affairs information was coded in the data to include information on politics, culture and local and international news. Education 52 (22.2%) came second among the articulated information needs of the respondents. Thirty (12.8%) respondents indicated business information, whereas 25 (10.7%) respondents required agricultural information. Surprisingly, only 18 (7.7%) respondents reported that

**Information Sources Used**

The respondents were asked to indicate the sources of information they used to address their day-to-day information needs. Again, the respondents were free to select as many information sources as were relevant to their situations. As can be seen from Table 2, the radio came at the top of the list with 72.4% of the respondents indicating it. The newspaper was also a popular 158 (53.4%)) source of information for the respondents. This could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the respondents spent most

of their time in the villages and information on current affairs was the prevalent need among them. About 44% of the respondents said friends, relatives, or neighbours were their main sources of information, while 32.1% got information from reading books. Work supervisors (65 or 22.0%) were also important sources of information. Interestingly, the religious leaders (47 or 15.8%) and church/church group (43 or 14.5%) were also important sources of information for the respondents. Other mentioned sources of information were: teachers (14.1% of the respondents); personal experience (19.5%); women's groups (4.7%) and co-workers (14.8%).

**Table 2: Information Sources Used**

| Sources | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Radio | 215 | 72.4 |
| Newspaper | 158 | 53.4 |
| Friend, relative or neighbours | 131 | 44.1 |
| Reading a book | 95 | 32.1 |
| Work supervisor | 65 | 22.0 |
| Personal experience | 58 | 19.5 |
| Religious leaders | 47 | 15.8 |
| Co-worker | 44 | 14.8 |
| Church/Church group | 43 | 14.5 |
| Teacher | 42 | 14.1 |
| Women's group (e.g. BCW, YWCA) | 14 | 4.7 |
| Others (please specify) | 53 | 17.9 |

## Preferred Formats of Information

The study sought to establish the formats in which the respondents preferred to receive information. The analysed data showed that the majority (164 or 64.8%) of the respondents preferred to receive information by the word of mouth. The printed source was the second most (110 or 44.5%) preferred format to receive information. The video (69 or 27.9%) and the electronic (33 or 10.9%) were the least preferred formats to receive information. The pattern of preference could be because video and electronic content, especially in the most preferred language (Setswana), was not readily available.

**Constraints to Getting Information**

Data showed that getting information was not always smooth, as 189 (62.6%) of the respondents indicated that they had experienced some problems in getting the information they needed. The problems ranged from those related to unavailability of information, which was experienced by 85 (48.6%) respondents, difficulty of access (64 or 36.0% respondents), and delays in getting the information (56 or 32.0%). Thirty-six respondents said they had problems of inadequate information clarity.

**Learning about the Existence of the Library**

The study sought to establish the reasons for the non-use of the library by the respondents. To this end, the respondents were asked if they knew of the existence of the library in their area. Two hundred and five or 80.1% of the respondents reported that they knew that there was a library in their area, while 19.9 % did not know that there was a library. This finding was rather surprising given that the respondents were selected from cities, towns or villages where there was either a public library or community library or village reading room. This finding suggests a need for libraries to improve the marketing of their services.

The respondents who knew about the existence of a library in their area were further asked to indicate how they knew about its existence. About 28.8% of them said they got to know about the existence of the library through their friends, 14.9% got the information from a *Kgotla* (traditional meeting place for Batswana communities in villages) meeting, and 12.1% got the information from an advertisement in the local newspapers, while only 6.2 % got the information through a radio announcement (Table 3). The use of friends suggests or confirms the importance of social networking as a critical source of information.

**Table 3: Sources of Information about the Existence of the Library**

| Sources | Frequency | Per cent |
|---|---|---|
| Though a friend | 60 | 28.8 |
| Through a Kgotla meeting | 31 | 14.9 |
| Advert in the local papers | 25 | 12.1 |
| Radio announcement | 13 | 6.2 |
| Others (e.g. just found it, especially when still attending school, etc.) | 104 | 49.8 |

**Reasons for not Using the Library**

Another objective of the study was to find out the reasons why some people did not use the library. Each respondent was free to give as many reasons as appropriate. The majority (126 or 51.4%) reported lack of time as the main hindrance to using the library (Table 4). The distance travelled to the library came second with 57 (23.3%) respondents. Thirty-eight respondents (15.6%) said they were not interested in the library, while those who said they either did not know what the library did or that what it did was not relevant to what they were doing were 28

**Table 4: Reasons for not Using the Library**

| Reason | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Lack of time | 126 | 51.4 |
| Distance | 57 | 23.3 |
| Not interested | 38 | 15.6 |
| Does not know of the existence of the library | 36 | 14.7 |
| Not relevant to what I do | 31 | 12.7 |
| Does not know what the library does | 28 | 11.4 |
| Others (please specify) | 36 | 15.2 |

(11.4%) and 31 (12.7%) respectively. Lack of time as the most frequently mentioned obstacle may be connected with the opening hours of the libraries, which was during the day when most people were engaged in other livelihood activities.

**Suggested Strategies for Encouraging Citizens to Use the Library**

When asked to provide some suggestions on what could be done to encourage non-users to use the library, the respondents gave varying reasons. Eighty-seven (87) respondents suggested that the libraries should introduce appropriate information and communications technology (ICT) to encourage people to use them. Sixty-seven respondents felt that libraries needed to market themselves to encourage the non-users to use them, whereas 43 suggested that library materials should be updated.

**Using and Volunteering for Community Social Programs of Libraries**

The respondents were asked to indicate if they would be interested in volunteering to do library related works and/or use the library for social programmes. The majority (250 or 84.7%) of the respondents reported that they would be willing to volunteer to serve in a committee that advises the library or village reading room. In terms of using the library facilities for some social activities where information and/or knowledge could be shared with the community, 255 (86.1%) respondents pointed out that they would be willing to use the library for such activities.

The respondents were further asked to indicate the specific social programmes that they would be interested in if introduced in the libraries. The respondents were free to indicate as many programmes as would apply to them. As can be seen from Table 5, the most respondents (112 or 38.8%) indicated that they would be interested in story telling, while arts and craft and writing were each selected by 109 (37.7%) respondents. Ninety-one (31.6%) chose knitting and weaving, gardening had 86 (29.8%) respondents, while poetry had 72 (19.4%) respondents.

**Table 5: Community Social Programmes and Activities for Libraries**

| Activity | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |
| Story telling | 112 | 38.8 |
| Writing | 109 | 37.7 |
| Arts and craft | 109 | 37.7 |
| Knitting and weaving | 91 | 31.6 |
| Gardening | 86 | 29.8 |
| Poetry | 72 | 24.9 |
| Others (please specify) | 56 | 19.4 |

**Information that could be Provided to Citizens Online**

The study also sought to establish the type of information that would be appropriate if provided online through Internet centres. The respondents were asked to indicate the information that they would be interested in seeing online. They were to indicate as many types of information as necessary. Table 6 summarises their responses.

Health information seemed to be the most important with 67.6% of the 302 respondents indicating their interest in getting it online. This was followed by education and agriculture related information, selected by 64.1% and 51.0% of the respondents respectively. Information on business finance and funding also attracted a lot of attention as 45.6% of the respondents showed interest in getting it online. Concerning information on the rights of people, special groups and public services, 44.1%, 38.9% and 32.9% of the respondents respectively indicated their interest. The information on the labour market or employment, and personal finance was of interest to 49.0% and 32.9% of the respondents respectively. The use of Internet for communication captured the interest of 42.4% of the respondents, and tourism development was reported by 38.6% of the respondents. Other types of information in which the respondents expressed interest to receive online included small and medium enterprise development, business funding, and the environment.

**Table 6: Types of Information that can be Provided to Citizens Online**

| Online information/service | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Health service | 200 | 67.6 |
| Education | 191 | 64.1 |
| Agriculture | 152 | 51.0 |
| Labour market/employment | 146 | 49.0 |
| Entrepreneurship (Business finance/funding) | 136 | 45.6 |
| Rights: human, consumer, children, civil and other rights | 131 | 44.1 |
| Using Internet for communications | 126 | 42.4 |
| Special groups (youth; women; rural communities; traditional leadership; people with disabilities; minorities | 116 | 38.9 |
| SME development/funding | 116 | 38.9 |
| Tourism development | 115 | 38.6 |
| Environment | 110 | 36.9 |
| Personal finance | 98 | 32.9 |
| Public service interface(local and central government access | 98 | 32.9 |
| Others (please specify) | 32 | 11.0 |

## Discussion and Recommendations

On community information needs, the study showed that the predominant information needs of the respondents revolve around current awareness (e.g. information on politics and latest news items on government policies), education, business, and health matters. Radio, newspapers, colleagues (friends, relatives, etc.) and teachers were the most popular sources of information. These findings are similar to those of Ikoja-Odongo and Ocholla (2003). Access,

clarity and delays were identified as the main constraints to searching for information. Lack of time, distance, and little knowledge of what the library does were given as reasons for not using the library. Extant literature shows these as the common barriers to using libraries by communities (Sin and Kim, 2008; Dutta, 2009).

The results of the study show that communities expressed willingness to participate in library activities geared towards assisting them to learn various skills or participate in social programmes. Libraries should respond accordingly and put in place structures that will motivate people to use libraries. For example, libraries could form committees (using a model similar to Parent Teacher Associations in schools) made up of people from the communities charged with the responsibility of advising on how best the libraries could serve their communities. Further, libraries need to fast track the provision of community-based information that supports social, cultural and economic programmes (e.g. knitting and weaving, arts and craft, etc.) so that they could attract more users. The information content and modes of delivery should be determined on case-by-case basis depending on the need and locality.

Another important finding of this study, though worrisome, is the inability of many of the respondents to articulate their information needs. Their incapacity could be partly blamed on the non-involvement by information providers, particularly librarians in community activities. It would therefore be helpful for librarians to raise awareness among members of communities on the value of different types of information in their day-to-day socio-economic activities. For instance, librarians could hold open days where library services are showcased to the community. Further, libraries should develop modalities for determining the information needs of the communities they serve such as periodic user surveys, or suggestions boxes in strategic locations. This will help them to develop information services that are aligned to the needs of the community, and thus make them relevant to what the people do.

Another important finding of this study is the problem of clarity of information as a hindrance to getting information. Libraries and all other information providers to communities need to put in place facilities for repackaging and presenting information in formats that the communities prefer. This could include translations of content into local languages, oral presentations, drama and exhibitions. Extension library workers are essential in the provision of information to communities, and all agencies that provide different types of information to communities need to work together to design information repackaging programmes for the communities.

The study has revealed the different information sources used by the non-library users to meet their information needs including the radio, newspapers, friends, work supervisors and personal experience. Libraries need to design services that would utilise or complement these sources. For instance, with regards to newspapers, libraries should ensure that they are readily available for community use. Further, libraries could repackage newspaper information to improve access to communities. With regards to friends as sources of information, libraries need to consider providing avenues for social networking by creating spaces where people could interact and exchange information.

Libraries need to reconsider their opening hours to accommodate the majority of the people in the communities who reported lack of time to visit the library. Alternatively, the libraries could consider offering more mobile services to reach out to those who are hindered by distance or time from using the library. The relevance of the library materials to the activities that communities are involved in is also crucial. Libraries need to carry out studies to determine the information needs of the communities they serve on a continuous basis and thereafter procure library materials which are aligned to those needs.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study have revealed limited visibility of the libraries to the various communities in Botswana. The libraries should put in place strategies for marketing and promoting their services. Further, libraries should be located at strategic positions in the communities where there will be easily seen and patronised by community members. Strategic locations include the *Kgotla*, bus rank, health centres, and the post offices. In terms of policy implications, the findings of the study indicate the

need for government should expedite the implementation of the National Information and Communications Technology Policy (*Maitlamo*) to improve access to information services to the nation.

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