LIBRARIES/INFORMATION SERVICES FOR RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

An Investigation of ECATU Resource Centre Information Services to the Rural Community of KSD Local Municipality.

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INTRODUCTION

Information is raw material for development for rural dwellers. Prosperity, progress and development of any nation depend up on the nation’s ability to acquire access and use pertinent information. Access to information and advice is a key resource for local people in maintaining active and independent lives. Access to information is also critical to letting people know their entitlements to welfare benefits and resources of support to overcome social exclusion.

With the ECATU Resource Centre having been strategically located and placed in the KSD Local Municipality, the center felt a need source strategic partnership with relevant stakeholders that provide information services to these community so that it can play a key role in leading these knowledge sharing initiatives so as to provide access to information especial to rural communities.

The KSD Local Municipality is dominated by rural communities which are marginalized and receives less support for community development. Various projects of rural development were introduced by ECATU into the fields, amongst them being an infrastructure, water and
sanitation, alternative energy and agrarian transformation knowledge management. A key question need to be asked is who works within these fields are these community members equipped with the right information in choosing their career path?

Creation of sustainable communities also lies on the development path of the community members. Among some of the difficult questions that most of the rural community members are unable to answer especially the youth is: what do you want to be when you are grown up? Even if a child is able to respond confidently to the above question and say for example; “I want to be a lawyer”, what becomes the challenge is how one makes this dream to a reality? Is there enough information available to make informed decisions?

In response to the above, the ECATU Resource Centre in conjunction with K.S.D Libraries are hosting career exhibition on an annually basis to the remote rural areas of these communities for grade twelve learners.

The main objective of this paper is to reflect the role of the ECATU Resource Centre’s information services for rural community development purposes. This will encompass some of the initiatives of Centre has taken to make this a reality.

The Resource Centre having been strategically placed at ECATU as a knowledge management asset is a key drivers of these knowledge initiatives driver that are meant for rural development hence the paper will also reflect on the challenges and recommendations that we normally comes across in this process of information services of rural community development in the K.S.D in particular.

THE ROLE OF RESOURCE CENTRE AS A KEY DRIVER OF INFORMATION SERVICES IN THE K.S.D LOCAL COMMUNITY.

The ECATU Resource Centre’s Information Services priorities are guided by the organization’s Annual Performance Plan (APP). Currently the APP dictates that the Resource Centre shall host four knowledge initiatives drive that are meant for rural development one in each quarter. The Resource Centre also provides a complete Information Services package for Researchers and students can also be used as a reference library as it covers information in topics on Rural Development. The ECATU Resource Centre serves as a primary source of Information on:-
a) Rural Development  
b) Poverty alleviation  
c) Basic infrastructure: Renewable Energy, Water and sanitation  
d) Food security: Organic Farming and Agro. Processing  
e) Knowledge Management and  
f) Best practices on tested Appropriate Technologies.

The Resource Centre also supports the organization’s research output through access to a collection of books, Audio visual material, Journals its grey literature and patents relating to rural development/poverty alleviation mechanisms and has also recently launched in ECATU Mini Archive so as to preserve the entity’s memory.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Cavaye, J (2001) “Rural community vitality depends on communities maintaining adequate infrastructure having access to services enhancing business and economic opportunities and establishing policy settings to poster outcomes”. And he further state that vitality also relies on communities rethinking assets developing networks building local cooperation and acting on local passion and motivation.

In addressing the above two aspect raised by Dr. Cavaye in relation to rural development, the ECATU Resource Centre undertook a partial approach by adopting efforts that largely focus on service provision. Information dissemination and also provision of resources to meet identified needs and this approached has since been found to be a very crucial element of rural development.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research paper is informed by Knowledge management initiatives conducted by ECATU Resource Centre within the K.S.D Local Community so as to reflect the important role of Library/Information Services for rural community development. The knowledge management initiative referred to in this paper are amongst others: the 2010 ECATU Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Seminar, 2012 K.S.D Libraries/ECATU career exhibition
seminar, 2012 ECATU emerging farmers Information Seminar and also the 2013 ECATU Mini Archives launch.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this paper are to explore the role of Libraries/Information services for rural community development with special reference to an investigation of ECATU Resource Centre Information Services to the rural Community of KSD Local Municipality. As indicated above the paper will reflect the main fundamental purpose of the four Knowledge Management initiatives conducted by the ECATU Resource Centre within the Local Rural Municipality for the purpose of rural development.

ECATU Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS)

- To solicit inputs from stakeholder to embrace IK in rural development programmes and finding effective methods and implementation modalities for the acquisition recording documentation and safeguarding of I.K.
- Building steps towards the development of the E.C. I.K framework for rural development. Discover contribution of the indigenous knowledge to the rural economy in the E.C as it relates to job creation.
- Flagging the importance of knowledge transfer and community participation.

K.S.D. Libraries/ ECATU Career Exhibition

The same applies for the K.S.D. Libraries/ ECATU Career Exhibition the main purpose was:-

- To increase information access to grade twelve learners on different career options
- To increase access to information on different financial aid options and bursaries.
- To give students an opportunity to network with invited guests.
- To address the skills gap in the province and identify employment opportunities in their region
- To create a career based forum for students and schools to develop networks and relationship
• To inspire and guide the youth
• Providing current “read world” information on jobs, salaries and educational requirements application procedure and career progression.

**ECATU Emerging Farmers Information Seminar purposes were:-**

• To capacitate small hold formers and cooperatives representatives
• Understand their challenges and share best practices
• Highlight the role of emerging farmers and cooperatives in rural and economic development
• Encourage sustainability and self-dependence of small hold farmers and cooperatives.

**ECATU Mini- Archives Launch (2013)**

This was utilized as a platform to showcase that:-

i. A well-organized file plan enables an organization to find information easily

ii. The orderly and efficient flow of information enables the organization to perform its functions successfully and efficiently.

iii. A retention and disposal programme ensures that the organization maintains only those records it really needs for functional purpose.

**CHALLENGES**

• With all the knowledge initiatives drive that ECATU with its stakeholders conducted within the K.S.D Local Community for the purpose of rural development cut across each as there is a generally high illiteracy levels in these rural communities.
• Lack of funding so that these Information Services programmes can be rolled out on a larger scale.
• Lack of recognition of community values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Libraries/ Information Services play a very pivotal role in Rural Community Development as established by the ECATU Resource Centre in the process of service the Rural Community of K.S.D. Local Municipality and should also be noted that:-
• Enhanced rural library programmes should be introduced to empower information services.
• The libraries given the necessary attention will play a great role in advancing the level of awareness of the people in rural areas.
• Adequate funds should be available for rolling Information Literacy campaigns at a large scale to the rural areas so to reduce the literacy levels.

CONCLUSION

Libraries/ Information Services have a huge role to play in developing rural communities as it has been noted during this study that providing information access to the rural communities is still yet a farfetched goal. The fact is without making your surrounding communities’ information conscious we cannot expect a positive rural development. This can be made possible if we on rural community libraries can spare some time for the deprived and make them aware as access to information has become a Human Right issue under our new democratic dispensation in South Africa.
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