

## The Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Literacy in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

In this paper we argue that literacy is critical for socio-economic development. A literate nation makes positive contributions to the general development of a country. Zimbabwe now has the highest literacy rate in Africa at 92% having surpassed Tunisia which is at 87%. In this paper we seek to establish the strategies that public libraries have employed to promote and sustain high literacy rates in the country. We investigate the innovative strategies like story telling sessions and explain how they have helped Zimbabwe achieve Africa's highest literacy level despite the socio-economic challenges. We also probe the public library services that are available for children, youth and adults and how they contribute towards higher literacy rates. We explore the challenges that public libraries face in Zimbabwe. We seek to establish the strategies in place to promote literacy in an information technology driven society. We end the discussion by making recommendations on how public libraries can contribute toward sustainable higher literacy rates.

**Keywords:** literacy; illiteracy; development; public libraries; education; information technology; culture

### 1. Introduction

*For the great majority of people, if life in modern society is to be lived to the full, they must be released from the bondage of illiteracy if they are to make their best contribution to their families, the communities and the nation (Youngman, 2000)*

Public libraries are positioned to provide and promote access to information and knowledge. They play a key role in information, knowledge, and wisdom development that translate to the development of our communities. For Ramaiah, *et.al* (1997), as captured in Chisita (2011), the modern improvements and advancement in the socio-economic and techno-scientific spheres comes from education and training. In this paper we define education and training as a human development process that involves the acquisition of literacy, information, knowledge and wisdom for continuous innovation and improvement of human life. For us, it is inconceivable to think of human development without literacy (Chisita, 2011). In this paper we argue that there is no development without language and of course literacy in that language. Zimbabwe's high literacy rate of above 92% is largely attributed to the post independent government's democratisation of education, especially the construction of public schools, adult literacy programmes and the provision of public library services close to, if not within the communities. We argue that there is immense potential in human capital development but this can only be realised through promoting and sustaining high literacy rates to enable everyone irrespective of race, creed, gender or other factors to participate fully in the conventional socio-economic activities of the country (Chisita, 2011). We have divided this paper into two major sections: the broader theoretical background and the empirical evidence from Zimbabwe.

### 2. Orientation and Problem Statement

A public library is a library that is accessible by the public and is generally funded from public sources and operated by civil servants. There are five fundamental characteristics shared by public libraries (Rubin, 2010). The first is that they are generally supported by taxes; they are governed by a board to serve the public interest; they are open to all and every community member can access the collection; they are entirely voluntary in that no one is ever forced to use the services provided; and public libraries provide basic services without charge (Rubin, 2010). Public libraries exist in many countries across the world and are often considered an essential part of having an educated and literate population. Generally public libraries are distinct from research libraries, school libraries, and other special libraries in that their mandate is to serve the general public's information needs (rather than the needs of a particular

institution). Public libraries also provide free services such as preschool story times to encourage early literacy, quiet study and work areas for students and professionals, or book clubs to encourage appreciation of literature in adults.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2004) defines literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society." Literacy thus refers to the ability to read for knowledge and write coherently and think critically about the written word. Visual literacy includes in addition the ability to understand all forms of communication, be it body language, pictures, maps, or video. Evolving definitions of literacy often include all the symbol systems relevant to a particular community. Literacy encompasses a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development.

In a technological society, the concept of literacy is expanding to include the media and electronic text, in addition to alphabetic and number systems. These abilities vary in different social and cultural contexts according to need and demand. Key to all literacy is reading development, a progression of skills that begins with the ability to understand spoken words and decode written words, and culminates in the deep understanding of text. Reading development involves a range of complex language underpinnings including awareness of speech sounds, spelling patterns, word meaning, grammar and patterns of word formation, all of which provide a necessary platform for reading fluency and comprehension. Once these skills are acquired the reader can attain full language literacy, which includes the abilities to approach printed material with critical analysis, inference and synthesis; to write with accuracy and coherence; and to use information and insights from text as the basis for informed decisions and creative thought.

Freire (1983) popularised the concept of literacy as a liberating and empowering tool that should equip the society with tool to transform the status quo. He sees an illiterate person as one who "cannot with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life". He further noted that literacy should help people not only to read the word but to read the world, and to interpret events and situations in an intelligent manner. Thompson (1981) views functional literacy as an aspect of literacy that "prepares the individual for his /her social, civic and economic role that goes far beyond the rudiments of literacy training".

Freire and Macedo (1987) note that the provision of public library services enables children to learn independently through exploring and constructing knowledge and making serendipitous discoveries , rather than relying on being spoon fed by the teacher. Torres and Mercado (2006) contend that critical literacy also enables learners to question reality and be able to "...read between the lines of the media messages, question the interests behind them, and learn how to look for alternative ways to be informed and/or entertained..."

In the contemporary Information Age libraries have to come to grips with a multiplicity of literacies which help one to cope with the demands of the modern world, for example, library literacy, computer and information technology literacy, media, visual and digital literacy. Bawden (2001) highlights the importance of the all encompassing multi-literacies as critical tools of the Information Age.

## **2.1 Value of literacy**

The greatest breakthrough in the development of human civilisation was the invention of writing as a means of communication, because, writing facilitated the capturing of knowledge and other forms of human narratives and business transactions. Goody and Watt (1987) note that writing helped to radically alter trade, commerce, economic sector and human interaction. Literacy affects labour quality and flexibility, employment, training opportunities, income from work and wider participation in civic society. In fact illiteracy causes problems for living, working and survival in almost every area of life. The basic routine activities, like using automated teller machines, internet, e-mail, filling in taxation forms or understanding supermarket checkout procedures require literacy, numeracy and other multi-literacies. There is a correlation between employment status, earning capacity and literacy levels because higher literacy levels translate to increased wealth individually and collectively. Kamal and Zunaid (2006) argue that literacy/education is critical since it empowers people to advance their interests and resist exploitation in

whatever form. Throughout history dominant cultures have used education as a form of social control over an oppressed culture through the process of transculturation and assimilation (Chisita, 2011).

## 2.2 Research questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What is a public library?
- What role does a public library play in the promotion of literacy?
- What are the strategies employed by public libraries to promote and sustain high literacy rates in Zimbabwe?
- What are the challenges faced by public libraries in Zimbabwe?
- What recommendations can be made to improve the contribution of public libraries toward sustainable higher literacy rates?

## 3. Research Methods

The research undertaken included an extensive review of theoretical literature as well as the use of empirical methodology. The following sources were consulted to ensure a balanced review of both primary and secondary sources of relevance: published academic works, academic journals, Internet sights, government legislation, municipal bylaws, municipal policy documents, workshop reports and minutes, as well as magazines and newspapers. Data was collected through the use of documented and observation data collection techniques.

## 4. Conceptualising Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Literacy

Information is a basic human right and it is a precondition to a developed community and nation. With information, people develop skills to improve their situations and they learn to make informed decisions and choices on issues concerning their lives. In today's society, marked by acceleration in the use of information technology and the proliferation of information, libraries have to reassess their role and redefine tasks in order to ensure that all citizens have access to information (Isaak, 2000). Information organisation, its availability and, most importantly, its accessibility are powerful concerns that any library needs to take into account. In the contemporary information age it is becoming clear that a considerable part of a library's collection is becoming obsolete, owing to the developments that are occurring with networked information resources.

For Pienaar (1995), public libraries and librarians, in redefining their role and creating new services, can have a dynamic future in serving disadvantaged communities, especially in developing countries, where these communities do not have access to ready sources of information because of their high levels of illiteracy. The author sees public libraries playing an important part in helping all disadvantaged communities to raise the quality of their lives. He argues that public libraries need to move from the traditional library-oriented approach, which at present serves only a formally educated community of users, to a user-oriented approach. The libraries' priorities need to be based on the identification of the information needs of the users, especially those coming from disadvantaged communities.

Wedgeworth (2003) described public libraries as the natural allies, because the transmission of culture relies greatly on communication in the form of literacy. The author further notes that the idea of embracing literacy as a core mission of the library will "...have a liberating effect across the spectrum..." Public libraries play a crucial role in providing users with unfettered access to education, recreation and information. De Jagger, *et.al.* (1994) state that public libraries by nature are concerned with early and adult literacy. In Zimbabwe the public library does complement the pre-school, primary, secondary and higher and tertiary education. The public library acts as an extension of the school library or the educational curricular because the highest numbers of users come from the youth, for example, students do make greater use of the public library on a daily basis.

Having a strong public library contributes to the development of human capital and the social infrastructure of the community. Such a presence means that there is more reading by all levels of society, more access to information and more participation in cultural and social programmes. All of this makes for a vibrant and informed population and community. The children are at stake here because they are the ones who run risk of becoming an illiterate adult.

One of public libraries' primary objectives is to provide adequate collections for reader development. Evidence has shown that public libraries have the potential to play a pivotal role in improving literacy and reading habits amongst children and young adults. Specifically, the primary purpose of public libraries according to Wheeler and Goldhor (1962) are as follows:

- enable information education opportunities for the citizens in the communities;
- enrich the knowledge of individuals in various subject disciplines where they undertake formal education;
- provide awareness to meet the information needs of people;
- support the educational, civil and cultural activities of groups and organisations; and
- provide recreational opportunities and encourage constructive use of leisure time.

Public libraries in carrying out this role of education can identify reading problems of children at an early age and remedy them before they lead to frustration and school drop out. In doing this, public libraries can equip children's department with suitable materials, for example, desks, chairs, shelves, fiction and factual books and talking books of interest to children. In Zimbabwe, Gweru Memorial library, Mt Pleasant, Harare City, Bulawayo City, to mention a few, have managed to create a homework environment, have story telling time and provide necessary materials such as textbooks, journals, magazines and exercise books related to the curriculum of the existing literacy institutions in the community, be it conventional schools or adult classes. In this way, it has assisted in the campaign to make the society a more literate one.

In children's story time, librarians have tried to focus on colours, shapes and letter recognition. Dowd (1997) offers additional insight into how librarians might incorporate emergent literacy techniques: "Dial-a-story" telephone access might encourage children to listen; children could audiotape their own stories; and a supply of crayons and markers at the end of story time might encourage children to draw or write about their literacy experience. Kupetz (1993) also points out that public libraries can serve as essential resources for parents and teachers. First, they can assemble collections of materials appropriate for very young readers such as books of rhymes, 'point and say' books, and 'touch and smell' books. Second, they can guide parents and childcare professionals in selecting books for very young children. Finally, librarians can help parents who feel uncomfortable reading to their children by modelling read-aloud techniques, helping parents develop their own literacy, and encouraging them to enjoy their own reading. For example, the Bulawayo public library and the Mount Pleasant public library staff have noticed that parents today lack the traditional sources of "common-sense advice", as the safety net of extended families and neighbourhood networks has disappeared. To compensate, children's services have focused specifically on parents' needs. Parent/child story hours and other parent/child programmes have proliferated. Parent education lectures are now within the purview of the children's rather than the adult's department.

Story hour encourages children to read long and fill in missing words through repetition. This repetition provides association with words and pictures. Toddlers associate stories with movements and visual cues. With the use of "big books", children can "climb" onto stories, getting close to the shapes of letters, words, and pictures. Reading picture books helps stimulate pre-literacy recognition of action vocabulary, sounds, colours and many others. Every story the child hears is a seed planted. Merely visiting the library encourages children to spend more time in a literacy-enriched atmosphere thus setting up the opportunity for them to browse and check out books and other materials. Librarians offer children a "leg-up" in developing emergent reading skills.

## **5. A Historical Overview of Public Libraries in Zimbabwe**

The public library service has passed through different political and socio-economic eras that have impacted differently on the development of the services in Zimbabwe. The local municipalities within which they are found adopted some of the libraries, while some remained with their founding authorities. Changes in terms of library location and space, staffing, book acquisition and funding, have been witnessed throughout the entire history of the existence of public library services in Zimbabwe.

The history of public libraries in Zimbabwe dates back to the period of the arrival of the first settlers who came into the country in the 1890s. Therefore, the public library system in Zimbabwe has its roots in colonialism, especially in the 1890s when the white settlers established public libraries to cater for their information, recreational, educational and cultural needs. The first library to be opened was the Bulawayo Public Library in 1896, followed by the Gwelo

Public Library in 1897, and then the Queen Victoria Memorial Library (now the Harare City Library) and the Turner Memorial Library in 1902 in Harare and Mutare respectively (Chisita, 2011). The next wave of public libraries came with the Carnegie Cooperation (1928 -1950) which elevated the status of libraries in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia by then) by promoting the development of public libraries for the underprivileged Africans despite the colonial government refusal to co-opt Africans into the mainstream socio-economic and cultural activities that required high levels of literacy (Chisita, 2011). The cooperation was inspired by the need to improve the welfare of blacks through literacy and therefore enhancing social inclusion. Also white farmers' wives started Women's Institute (WI) groups which initiated some public libraries in different farming communities (Chisveto, 2000).

At independence in 1980 there was a relatively proportional growth of libraries to cater for the growing residential areas in high and low income density areas. Presently, library services in Zimbabwe are run and managed by the National Library and Documentation Service (NLDS), which was established in 1985 by an Act of Parliament. The principal objectives of the NLDS are to promote and disseminate publications of educational, scientific, and recreational value; to establish and maintain a high standard of library services; to train librarians and maintain a high standard of professional practice in the various libraries; and to operate services such as inter-library loans and document delivery for all needs. Thus the Zimbabwe government, through the NLDS, promotes a free public library service to all people throughout the country and also supplies books to all areas of the country, both urban and rural, by means of regional library centres (Chisita, 2011). The NLDS has a mandate 'to establish new libraries at local, district and provincial level' (National Library and Documentation Act, 1985, Section 5.5). The programme is however hampered by a lack of funds and inadequate human resources and transport. A number of libraries have been initiated by NLDS in Matabeleland South province.

Although facing many operational problems, libraries for the public are still in existence in Zimbabwe. The National Free Library of Zimbabwe (established 1945), which operates a national lending library and a national centre for inter-library loan; the Bulawayo Public Library, the oldest public library in the country, the Highfield Central Library in Harare and the Mzilikazi Library in Bulawayo, are the most prominent libraries in the country. Currently Harare has two complementary public library systems: the City of Harare and Harare City Library systems. The City of Harare Library system is under the control of local government, while the Harare City Library system is an independent non-profit entity managed by a board of management (Chisita, 2011). The former has branches in low and high density areas mainly Highfields, Mbare, Mufakose, Dzivarasekwa, Waterfalls, Mabvuku, Glen Norah, Glen View, Kuwadzana, and Kambuzuma, while Harare City Libraries are in the low density areas like Mount Pleasant, Mabelriegn, Greendale, Highlands and Hatfield. The two public library systems do complement each other even though they have not been able to amalgamate into a unified group. There are also public library services provided by the United States Information Services (USIS) and the United Nations Information Center (UNIC) in Harare and Bulawayo.

Bearing in mind that the majority of the people in Africa live in rural areas, and have specific information needs, some alternative initiatives for public library services in Zimbabwe have been established. With particular importance and with some positive impact in rural communities, the Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP) is worth a special mention. The programme started in 1990, and has defined as its main objective to help in the establishment of information resource centres in rural communities and to provide relevant reading/information materials identified by communities themselves. The libraries which belong to the programme are based in primary schools, with a few also in some secondary schools, but they are open for use by different members of the community, not only school children. The methods used within the RLRDP to disseminate information include drama, poetry, singing and dancing. Gender and development are two of priority areas. The ownership of the library by the community is reported as one of the strongest factors that guarantee the sustainability of rural libraries in Zimbabwe. The establishment of the RLRDP can be seen as an initiative that has revolutionised the rural library movement in Zimbabwe, although it has to be noted that the RLRDP is heavily dependent on external donor funding.

Other initiatives have been made in rural communities by a wide range of NGOs – for example, the Zimbabwe Book Development Council (ZBDC), the Africa Book Development Trust (ABDT), and the Edward Ndlovu Memorial Trust Fund. The ZBDC has received funding to support both urban and rural libraries with financial assistance to purchase

reading materials from bookshops. The scheme supports local publishing and also encourages local authorship. The ABDT encourages communities to produce reading materials and they are supporting some libraries with reading materials. Through co-operating with RLRDP, some success has been realised in certain communities. The RLRDP also co-operated with the Edward Ndlovu Memorial Trust Fund in setting up some rural libraries in Matabeleland South Province. The Ministry of Education has established district resource centres using funding received from the Netherlands government in its Better Schools Project of Zimbabwe (BSPZ). The centres are used by teachers and other community members.

## **6. Public Library Strategies to Promote High Literacy Rates in Zimbabwe**

Children have a special place in the public library system in Zimbabwe even though the amount of space available for use in libraries does not complement the fact that demographically children make up forty percent of the population (Chisita, 2011). Public libraries are strategically positioned to expose children to both print and electronic resources as well as meaningful language opportunities that are critical for reading achievement, for example, public library services provide reading materials in all the three official languages: English, Shona and Ndebele.

The following are some of the strategies used to promote high literacy rates in Zimbabwe:

**Story telling sessions:** The public library in Zimbabwe uses story telling sessions to restore to life, folklore and oral communications of the past which are comparable to the electronic media that transcend time and place. Amadi (1990) proposes a return to the concept of “libraries without shelves” or “oral librarianship” as part of the decolonisation and demystification of library services. The approach being used by public libraries confirms Amadi’s proposal to “debook” as a way to return to oral traditions. The author further notes that a revisit to oral traditions is helping in the restoration of the vibrancy of Africa’s threatened culture. According to Chinua Achebe (1994) story-telling is a critical tool to educate and provide children with a sense of cultural identity. He argues that “the story is our escort, without it we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? ... It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from another.” (Achebe, 1994; 114)

Mount Pleasant Public Library holds a weekly story telling session which attracts children from surrounding areas in the northern suburbs. Parents usually bring their children to participate in the story telling session. The idea is in line with the concept of “family learning” which refers to intergenerational learning that occurs among family members. Story telling sessions promote and strengthen intergenerational relationship between children and parents since parents do stay and to some extent participate in story telling either as story tellers or just mere listeners. Children tell stories to each other before the story teller begins the official story telling session. Wells (1985) acknowledges the crucial role of stories in promoting early literacy “...stories are self contextualising, sustained symbolic representations of possible worlds, they provide the child with the opportunity to learn some of the essential characteristics of written language...”

**Family reading:** In Zimbabwe the public library provides opportunities for family learning. Family learning generally refers to what people outside the family do to enable and facilitate the learning that goes on in the family. Spacey (2006) notes that through family learning adults and children learn together and this strengthen family cohesion and unity. Through family learning parents develop understanding as to how their children learn, improve parenting skills and knowledge of the educational system. Family learning is a product of adult literacy, community and life wide learning. The promotion of reading groups involving parents, children, teachers and librarians is an example of family learning. School homework also brings parents together with their children. Zimbabweans value education as a tool for socio-economic revolution and the family becomes the first social space whereby parents and children discuss education. The concept of family reading is closely related to family literacy which refers to the process of fostering a culture of reading and literacy within the family. Eyre (2004) argues that “through family literacy programmes, the home becomes an environment where young minds can grow to their fullest potential and where parents can play active roles in their children’s intellectual development.”

**Provision of information and referral services:** The public library also provides information and referral services to clients. They have also established awareness services. A good example is the partnerships with Southern African

Foundation for Acquired Immune Deficiency (SAFAIDS) to establish an HIV/AIDS corner with current reading information for users. Students from primary, secondary and higher and tertiary institutions make use of the reference section which boasts of high quality educational materials covering a variety of subjects. Book famine in schools leaves students with no option other than to rely on the reference services of public libraries. The reference section consists of quality materials as opposed to the non-referral section, for example, fiction section.

**Private public sector partnerships:** The public library cannot eradicate illiteracy alone but they can play a critical role in cooperating with other institutions and this implies the need to prioritise public -private sector partnerships (PPP's). Public private partnerships are partnerships between public sector organisations and private sector businesses that are used as a platform to develop infrastructure and deliver public services on a cost effective and sustainable basis. The current knowledge driven economy requires institutions to develop sustainable partnerships as a way to ensure that they remain in sync with demand of their dynamic environments (Josh, 2003). The City of Harare Library has been able to enter into partnerships with the banking sector to develop an internet centre in the high density suburbs of Harare. It also was able to enter into partnerships with the private sector to run reading and writing competitions to promote libraries and literacy in 2007. Partnerships with private sector have helped add value to the public library service as well as strengthen literacy programmes, restore infrastructure and restock library collections. Partnerships have enabled public libraries to sustain library services through donations from Book Aid International and Young Rotarians and other well wishers. The availability of library services has helped to promote and sustain literacy amongst the locals.

**Publicity and outreach services:** Zimbabwe hosts the annual Zimbabwe International Book Fair and this is a great event that attracts readers, writers, illustrators, storytellers, poets, policy makers, publishers and other stakeholders. The event dates back to 1983. This event has for the past two decades provided the City of Harare Library systems space to exhibit and promote its services. This great event helps to promote and sustain literacy as it provides an opportunity for people to buy books at an affordable price and meet and interact with writers and story tellers. Zimbabwe International Book Fair established itself as Africa's premier book fair as it has grown into a vital meeting-place for first and third world literary cultures as well as a viable marketplace and trading crossroads for the African book industries. People flock to this event for the Writers Indaba, exhibitions, children's story telling sessions and book launches.

Public libraries in Zimbabwe have also embraced the concept of **mobile libraries** with the Rural Libraries and Development Programme championing "donkey drawn carts". These have helped to improve Zimbabwe's literacy levels. These mobile libraries have renewable solar panel energy facilities fitted with television and radio receiver sets facilitating the playing of educational videotapes and compact discs. In the outskirts of Harare, Seke Teachers College provides a mobile library service for those on teaching practice. The concept of mobile libraries is in line with Mchombu's theory on "librarianship of poverty" whereby patterns of library services are dependent upon the country's level of economic development.

## 7. Challenges Faced by Public Libraries in Zimbabwe

All public libraries in Harare and other cities in Zimbabwe have places for children's reading to nurture early literacy. However, the prioritisation of English as an official language affects early literacy development. Alexander and Bloch (2004) argue that lack of material in local languages hinders public libraries' contribution to early literacy languages. This is worsened by the absence of viable publishing industries ready to invest in local content. In Zimbabwe the Literature Bureau used to promote the publication of books in indigenous languages but this government publishing outlet closed down in the 1990s. In the late 1990s the Zimbabwe Book Development Council (ZBDC) began a programme to promote local public and school libraries by giving them vouchers to buy local publications from local bookshops.

Books in developing countries remain scarce commodities. Libraries rely on Book Aid International because there is no funding for collection development, let alone service delivery. Book donations in the form of requests have helped to sustain the public libraries in Harare. There are various local and multinational publishers (Weaver Press, Zimbabwe Publishing House (ZPH), College Press, Mambo Press and Longmans. Zimbabwe International Book Fair

(ZIBF), Rotarians and Zimbabwe Book Development Association also contribute immensely to literacy through exhibitions and seminars. As a survival strategy Public libraries were forced to introduce subscription fees since they needed to raise funds to sustain services. This caused the number of patrons to go down as some could not afford the exorbitant costs. However, with an improvement of the economy there are prospects that the future of libraries will be brighter as more resources are channeled towards education.

## 8. Conclusion

Zimbabwe has registered a phenomenal success in the battle against illiteracy. This is largely a result of the heavy investments in education by government, non governmental organisations, provision of public library services, and a resilient and disciplined citizenry whose quest for education is second to none in Africa. As Zimbabwe stamps its mark on the knowledge economy its high time public libraries should start working on how to exploit multiliteracies and integration of local and formal scientific knowledge to sustain high literacy rate and overcome the complexities of the digital environment. The aggressive approach by the public library towards eradicating illiteracy should be enhanced through the design of indigenous grounded literacy programmes which will bring to the fore local languages and culture, help integrate culture and technology, sustain social cohesion tranquility and prosperity for all. Fagerlind and Saha (1987) argue that a literate population is an asset and to stomach illiteracy and under- education is tantamount to tolerating wastage of human talent critical for the realisation of a nation's development goals. Despite socio-economic challenges, it is inspiring to note that as the United Nations Decade (2003-2012) of Literacy Development closes down, public libraries in Zimbabwe have done extremely well to complement the efforts of the formal education sector in sustaining a high literacy rate in Africa through providing access to information and independent learning.

## 9. Recommendations

We adapt the following recommendations from Chisita (2011):

- Partnerships between public libraries and stakeholders in both private and public sectors should be encouraged to generate support for literacy programmes.
- Community engagement should be key priority for public library service planning.
- Amalgamation of City of Harare and Harare City libraries will create synergies that are critical for the sustenance of high literacy rates.
- Story telling should remain key programme for all public libraries.
- Public libraries should provide free access to their services.
- Government through the NLDS should prioritise the development of school libraries.
- Mobile library services for the physical and visually disadvantaged and other vulnerable groups should be enhanced as a complement to conventional services.
- ICT's should be incorporated into the public library service's literacy programme.
- There is need for a public and school library consortium that will coordinate public libraries development and work with National Book Development Council.
- A government ministry dealing specifically with public libraries and related institutions should be set up.

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