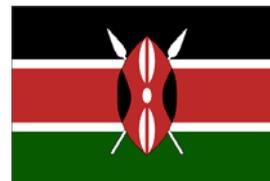


# IFLA/FAIFE World Report: Libraries and Intellectual Freedom



## Kenya

27-03-1999

*"The key to wisdom of the management of our future is carried by information."*

(Introductory report prepared for the Organisation of Economic Corporation and Development, 1971).

### Brief History

The principles of librarianship can be traced back over 25 centuries to the Nineveh library existing in Assyria in the 7th century BC. Libraries existed in Kenya before there were Kenya African librarians. The establishment of libraries in Kenya is very much linked to the coming of British colonial rule. The history of libraries in Kenya can reasonably be examined in three general periods: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.

#### Pre-colonial

There is no record of a library having existed in this period. The only existing one is thought to have been in Kilwa on the East African coast. However, the philosophy of Islam did not encourage reading, as this was thought to be the preserve of a small literate ruling class.

Also the history and culture of the communities of those times were communicated and passed to future generations by oral tradition and the arts. Therefore, libraries would not have played any specific role in the society.

#### Arrival of Europeans and Colonisation

European Missionaries were the first people to set up a library. The CMS Mission set up a small mission library in Frere Town near Mombasa in 1887.

The other early library stemmed from the construction of the Uganda Railway. In 1902, Mr Jeevanjee, who had been the main supplier of materials towards the construction of the railway, decided to invest in the first ever newspaper, the East African Standard. The newspaper company started a news library, which also stocked reference books and manuscripts.

In 1903, a group of Asian philanthropists set up the Mombasa Public Library and Free Reading Room. It was paid for by public subscription. Later on, the library was named the Seif Bin Salim Public Library and Free Reading Room. As a result of the socio-economic and political conditions of the time, materials bought for the library reflected a bias in favour of Indian clientele only.

During the colonial period, the colonial government felt the need for information, which could help in finding out how the colony could be financially self-sufficient. There was a need to use some Africans in governing and so they had to educate them. On one hand they wanted to control the amount of education so that Africans did not have the ability to confront the colonial government. The colonial government did not support creation of public libraries. On the other hand, Africans realised that their development lay in a European type of education and that also needed access to information.

This scenario led to the establishment of two kinds of libraries. First were special libraries to assist in exploiting natural resources of the colony. The Departments of Forestry and Agriculture established libraries in 1905 and 1907 respectively. The Kenya Legislative Council sat for the first time in 1907 and its library was established then.

In 1902 the High Court of Kenya was established in Mombasa. Then known as the Supreme Court, it moved its headquarters to Nairobi in 1905. It had a rich collection of reading materials on law. In 1935 a new building was completed in Nairobi which to date houses a big library that serves the judges of the High Court, magistrates and advocates.

In 1907, veterinary research laboratories were set up in Upper Kabete and provide information in the area of livestock. It moved to its present premise in 1967.

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| <b>Population:</b>                | 27,799,000 (1996)                              |
| <b>GNP per capita:</b>            | \$ 320 (1996)                                  |
| <b>Government / Constitution:</b> | Republic                                       |
| <b>Main languages:</b>            | English and Swahili                            |
| <b>Main religions:</b>            | Christianity - Islam and traditional religions |
| <b>Literacy:</b>                  | 78% (1995)                                     |
| <b>Online:</b>                    | 0,16% (May 1999)                               |

The National Museum Library was set-up in 1910. This was initially established by a society known as the East African Natural History Society, which was involved in the study of flora and fauna and set up the library as part of their activities.

In 1920 the society formed a joint library with the National Museum. This library is rich in material for natural science, prehistory, theology and palaeontology.

The National Public Health Service was established in 1911. Now located at Kenyatta Hospital, it provides centralised services for the diagnosing human illnesses. In 1958, it was moved to the then newly built extension funded by the Wellcome Trust, and came to be known as the Wellcome Trust Library.

In 1914, the Attorney General's Library was established to meet the information needs of the legal staff in the AG's Chambers. It is basically a law collection.

The Kenya National Assembly Library was established in 1910 to meet the information needs of the members of the legislative council as it was then known with the use of lay language in law, Administration and Studies of Parliament and also to store recorded parliamentary proceedings (Hansard).

The Kenya Agricultural Research Institute Library came into being in 1927. It was initially known as East African Agricultural Research Station and was based in Amani, Tanganyika. It took over from an earlier institution ran by Germans and inherited the entire collection left by the Germans. In 19951, it was transferred to Muguga in Kenya to become East African Agricultural Forestry Research Organisation (EAAFRO) and fell under the auspices of the East African High Commission.

An important service known as the East African Literature (EALS) was started in 1967. The Rockefeller Foundation funded EALS by providing one consultant and photocopying services. This service handled requests from articles on Agriculture and continued until 1982 when it collapsed.

After the collapse of East African Community in 1967, most of these institutions together with their libraries collapsed.

In 1979, Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) was officially established by an Act of Parliament. To date it has the best collections (Agriculture) in East Africa.

The current Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Library was established in 1940, then known as the African Broadcasting Services. Its collection comprises books, records, tapes and CDs. It has the richest collection of gramophone records in East Africa.

The Kenya National Archives Library was established in 1946 and was then known as the Chief Native Commissioner's Library. The Medical Training College Library was established in Nairobi in 1962.

A library was set up at the Kenya Institute of Administration at its inception in 1961. Jean's School was one of the earliest institutions to have a library, which were set up in the colonial era, for Africans.

Public subscription libraries emerged later, and were mainly established by philanthropists or groups of people mainly for use by the European and Asian communities. The first among these was the MacMillan Memorial Library, which was started in 1931 from funds provided by Lady MacMillan. This was in memory of her husband, Sir Northrup MacMillan and was for use by the European community only. This library was taken over by the Nairobi City Council in 1962 and is now the headquarters of the Nairobi City Library Service.

The other subscription library was the Desai Memorial Library in Nairobi. This was set up in 1942 by the Indian community in memory of Mr Manilal Ambalal Desai, a member of the Kenya Legislative Council, who had died in 1926. The library's goal was to explicitly and exclusively serve the reading interests of the Indian community.

The Rahimtulla Trust, an Ismailia organisation, constructed a public library building in Nairobi, which was opened in 1953. The Trust set to acquire books that would be representative of all the subjects and to allow readership of all walks of life regardless of creed, colour or religion.

From the foregoing, it is clear that no library had been set up by the 1940s to serve African communities. However as from 1945, many Africans who had gone to fight in the Second World War came back and with them they brought some reading and writing skills. Political agitation and the spirit of nationalism had been awakened, and more Africans were sent to mission schools and, as happened later to independent schools.

In 1945, Mrs Elizabeth Huxley was appointed to inquire into the needs of the East Africans in popular literature and make proposals as to how these needs could be met. Following her report which advised that the government should control the provision of literature to the now considerable African reading public, the East African Literature Bureau was set up in 1948, with Charles Richard as director and George Annexley as the bureau librarian. The library service for Africans was operated through the provision of book boxes and the introduction of a postal lending service to 40 centres. The Bureau also had a publishing division, which was meant to encourage African authorship by publishing indigenous literature. Training of staff to run the centres was also included. The inadequacy of the activities of the Bureau led to the Hockey

Report of 1960 and the setting up of separate national library systems for each of the East African countries.

In 1958, the East African Library Association held a conference at Muguga, Nairobi which resolved that statutory library boards be set up in East Africa. Thereafter, Mr Sidney Hockey, the author of the Hockey Report, was appointed by the British Council as the library organiser for East Africa. While Uganda and Tanzania started their national library services much earlier; the Kenya National Library Service Board Act was passed in Parliament in 1965 and gazetted in 1967.

As it became clearer that Africans may sooner than later be granted self-government, a number of schools and some universities were set up to train a small but highly educated elite amongst the African population who would take over some of the jobs done by the colonialists. These institutions had libraries stocked, staffed and organised according to the Anglo-American tradition. Makerere, the university for East Africans, was founded in 1940; the Royal Technical College, precursor to the University of Nairobi, in 1951.

### **At Independence and after**

While granting independence, the imperial powers still hoped to assert some influence over their former colonies and retain their interests. Britain felt that an informed populace would most likely maintain democratic traditions and would be most open to western influences. For this reason, it supported establishment of libraries and training of librarians.

To most independent African governments, formal education was not seen as being dependent on libraries. Due to centralisation, the governments also wanted to curtail rather than increase access to information. Sadly, this has persisted to the present times. It was then the pressure of international aid that caused the development and expansion of libraries in the years immediately after independence. In the years after independence, this has not been sustained.

In the period after independence, there were libraries in all government departments as well as in the East African community. With time, however, they have been neglected. However, important raw literature is still to be found in government departments especially from government research reports.

Since the Kenya National Library Service started in 1967, it has only managed to set up libraries in all provincial headquarters and in a few districts. This is short of their objective, which was to build libraries in all districts by 1980. The book stock of the existing libraries is also largely outdated. In fact, most of the Kenya National Library Service branches is patronised by students who use the space to do their homework and other assignments.

Immediately after Independence, the British Council assisted the Nairobi City Council to establish library branches in Kaloleni in 1967 and Eastlands in 1968. Also there are departmental libraries at the Water, Law and Architecture departments of the Nairobi City Council but they are not professionally run and are little used. A health library, which was started about 17 years ago at Pumwani Hospital, is at present non-operational. Generally, development of public libraries within the Nairobi City Council has stagnated.

In the government, most of the official information is concentrated within the public service and is managed through various information systems and services such as registries, libraries and documentation centres. Most of these are inactive. In mid-1989, a new division for information handling, the National Documentation and Information Services was established. It has the objective of specifically dealing with matters of acquisition, control and access to all categories of published and unpublished reports, and other generally circulated documents which are produced or received in the public service. Such reports and documents are to include confidential and secret ones.

Another development was the establishment of the District Information and Documentation Centres (DIDC). These are mainly for development information on the districts but are only in a handful of districts. They were an outgrowth of the Rural Planning Department of the Ministry of Planning and National Development. Generally, access to official information is constrained by the Official Secrets Act. It is often invoked to keep information away from those who seek it.

Outside the government and civic circles, the number of libraries and information centres also increased after independence. The Central Bank of Kenya was set up in 1966 after the collapse of the East African Currency Board and opened a library in 1967. It functions as a centre for supporting financial research and its collection is centred on finance, laws, banking and commerce.

The ICIPE Libraries were established in 1973 with one of its headquarters at Ruaraka in Nairobi and the other at its field station at Mbita point in South Nyanza.

ILRAD's library was started in 1977 and supports research programmes conducted by institutions, especially in the area of animal diseases.

UNEP's headquarters and its library were set up in 1973. It has a comprehensive collection on the global state of the environment.

The Kenya Institute of Education established a library in 1964 and it serves as a national curriculum development centre.

The Kenya Bureau of Standards, established in 1975 has an extensive collection on standards. The library also acts as a

national information centre on standards and technical information.

Through educational institutions, especially universities and colleges, libraries have been increased with each new institution, which is established. The most recent and modern library in the universities is the Margaret Thatcher Library at Moi University. Although computerised, it is yet to have a sizeable book stock. Other important libraries are the Jomo Kenyatta Memorial at the University of Nairobi, those at other public and even private universities such as Daystar, Baraton and United States International University (USIU).

The University of Nairobi began as the Gandhi Memorial Library. 1970 saw the onset of rapid growth of this library. In 1981 it received a grant of Kshs. 80m for expansion and development of multi-sited library system with the ten sub-libraries. It offers translation services, Braille or audio. It also offers reference and referral services and international photocopy services all in line with the needs of the users. The Kenyatta University Library was started in 1972 with a constituent collection of University of Nairobi library. By 1985, it had a full-fledged university collection. Today it has over 200,000 volumes of books in education, humanities, biological and physical sciences, economics and commerce and 140 staff member. It offers the following services, reference, CAS, user education, lending, inter-lending, indexing and it disseminates information to the university community. All university libraries have a special collection of university theses, periodicals and newspapers.

Most NGOs, especially those in Nairobi, have libraries or information centres. Examples are the Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI), African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) and Mazingira Institute among others.

Research institutes are amongst the best run and stocked in the country. Examples are the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI) Kenya Industrial Research Institute (KIRDI), International Centre for Insect Physiology and Entomology (ICIPE), International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), International Centre for Research on Agroforestry (ICRAF), Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) and Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) as well as the British Council.

There has been a proliferation of religious institutions; especially those affiliated to the Catholic Church. Most of them have a library or information units to cater for their needs. Some of those with big libraries are Hekima Theological College, Tangaza College, St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Consolata Seminary and Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST).

Also library services are found through cultural centres established by foreign missions. Some of them are the French, German, Italian and American Cultural Centres. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a full-fledged library in Nairobi.

The United Nations has established libraries and documentation centres through its agencies based in Nairobi. These agencies are UNEP, Habitat and UNICEF.

Another important step towards a hopeful future is the conviction, which is gaining more support, that access to information is a basic human right. This has seen the establishment of centres like the Civic Resource and Information Centre (CRIC) and Bakhita Documentation Centre (BDC). The later is an ecumenical initiative with the purpose of collecting and disseminating information on issues of social concern to both the church and society. The All African Conference of Churches (AACC) has also established a library on similar lines.

Professional training of libraries is now available in the country. Kenya Polytechnic, Sigalala Technical Training Institute and School of Professional Studies offer a diploma programme, Moi University has a Bachelors and Masters programme in Library Studies while Kenyatta University offers a Masters of Education in Library Studies for teacher librarians.

Most of the libraries have embraced information technology. Bakhita Documentation Centre is an example of one, which is using computers for information access and retrieval.

## **Future Studies**

The prediction of future trends, especially concerning rapidly developing technologies, is an uncertain business. However, Kenya's libraries of the future may need to undertake the following:

- To provide relevant information to support the local evaluation of new techniques, systems and products, it is necessary to have a local research system. This system is also required to study and solve local and particular problems.
- The majority of the population lives in rural areas. It is estimated that 70% of the libraries, 80% of the book stock and 90% of periodical subscriptions are located in Nairobi. This area contains about 6% of the total population and although the majority of decision-makers are located in the capital, administrators, research workers and practitioners are more widely dispersed. A vital part of the development process therefore is the extension services through which they are reached. The future information systems should incorporate an extension service to reach this majority.
- Indigenous information will need to be gathered. This is knowledge held by local people, gained and transmitted informally, usually by oral tradition.

- There is a move towards centralisation and co-ordination of the Library and information systems. This will help reduce duplication and enhance use of the scarce resources effectively.
- The use of computer-based reference services is likely to dominate the scene. It is the most cost-effective option available even though the technical infrastructure to support such systems is not yet sufficiently developed to allow optimum use of on-line enquiry services.
- There will be need to establish a specialised information handling centre, which will be able to access bibliographic data and then later, as the need arises, repackaged information into formats suitable for local use.
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## **Censorship**

Censorship is the systematic control of any content of communication by means of constitutional, judicial, administrative, financial, or physical measures imposed directly by or with connivance of the ruling power or ruling elite. It may be accompanied by violence or may not.

If a government wish to impose censorship, there are broad categories of information that has to be brought under control; internal and external sources of information.

### **Censorship in Kenya**

To control the internal sources, the government controls the press, the television, the radio, book publishing and education. For the external sources of information, the government controls postal services, telephone, telegram communication, external radio and television, etc. Just for mention, there is Official Secrets Acts and Sedition Acts, which were introduced by the colonial government, mainly to intimidate the writers and the recipients of information. The years of the early 70's was the worst period in the history of censorship in Kenya. It was also the period when many writers and intellectuals fled the country to escape harassment, arrest and possible detention. Many leading writers such as Ng'g' wa Thiong'o, K'mani Geca', M'cere M'go and Ng'g' wa M'ri' sought refuge in various countries in Africa, Europe and America. Some of Ng'g' wa Thiong'o's books such as 'Matigari' were seized by security agents from bookshops and libraries.

Self-censorship is a common thing in Kenya where a writer or a journalist may be faced with a brutal choice in case of disagreements with the views of the censors. In most cases, he will remain silent thus disqualifying himself from his proper work and condemning himself to helplessness or penury, or suppresses and disguises some of his views and ideas that he knows that will not pass the censor.

Theatre groups have to be registered and each play requires a police license before each public gathering. Scripts have also to be vetted before performance is allowed to be staged. Some of the plays that have faced the wrath of the censors include a French translation of 'Can't Pay, Won't Pay' and 'The Swords of K.r'nyaga' by Oby Obyerodhiambo.

The libraries in Kenya which grant access to public are either controlled directly or indirectly by the government or corporation e.g. the Kenya National Library Service, University libraries, those run by ministries, etc. A book can be ordered or removed from the shelves by the censor without the librarian asking why.

Kenya Library Association is the professional body comprising of Kenya librarians. It has not fully addressed itself to the issue of censorship or the Library Bill of Rights like its colleagues in the developed countries. Decisions and policies will affect the need of better access to information and the ability to disseminate information to Kenyan citizens.

## **Conclusion**

Information provision in Kenya has long been relegated to a position of minor importance. It did not even feature as a subject in the government's Development Plans until recently. That it does take a place there now is an important step in the right direction. Information needs to be thought of as an essential service without which a modern country cannot function.