

**AN EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY LIBRARY
INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMME: METROPOLITAN
MUNICIPALITY EXPERIENCE**

Kepi Madumo
Executive Director
Community Development
City of Johannesburg
South Africa

Abstract

The evaluation of the City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM) community library infrastructure programme is a pioneer project supporting the institutionalisation of programme evaluations in the municipality. Except for the community satisfaction surveys focusing on the perceptions held by community members about the services provided by EMM conducted annually, evaluation of community library infrastructure programme is the first sizeable formal appraisal of the municipality's development interventions aimed at taking lessons, gauging the worth of the intervention and collecting valuable information necessary to guide the improvement of a development programme. Using a qualitative method of inquiry, the study used two methods of data collection which were document thematic analysis and face to face interviews with library staff, schools, early childhood centres (ECD) and ward councillors. The report presents the findings of the evaluation undertaken on the Community Library Infrastructure Programme, in line with the thematic areas of focus and identifies the challenges observed. The report concludes and highlights the areas of improvement based on the findings made. In the main, the study will benefit librarians, policy makers in local government and academia to understand the importance of performance monitoring and evaluation as management tool to improve performance and achieve development goals geared towards change.

Keywords: *community library, infrastructure programme, performance evaluation, Metropolitan municipality.*

Introduction

According to Maepa (2013,70) performance monitoring and evaluation (PME) is a powerful public management tool that organisations and governments can use to improve the way they conduct their business in order to achieve results. As part of the wider government reforms, and growing pressures and demands for service delivery the South African government established the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) in the Office of the Presidency in 2009. In his foreword, the late Minister of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Mr. Collins Chabane provides the principles and summary of what PME entails.

‘If we are to improve our performance we have to reflect on what we are doing, and what we are achieving against what we set out to achieve and why deviations are occurring or unexpected results occurring. We cannot advance without making mistakes on the way, but we must evaluate and learn from our success, and our mistakes. Without this we cannot improve’ (National Policy Evaluation Framework, 2012/13).

Background and Rationale

There are 45 community libraries across Ekurhuleni Community. Over the past five years (2011-2016), there was a concerted effort to build or refurbish libraries in economically disadvantaged communities with the main purpose of providing access to information, creating a culture of reading and access to services such as photocopying, faxing, internet access etc. The utilisation of libraries across EMM communities differed by socio-economic status and geographic classification of the area. Libraries in townships and historically disadvantaged areas were mainly used for educational and business support services rather than recreational reading or viewing resources. Although libraries in suburbs were also used for educational and business support services, these libraries had higher circulation rates for recreational reading. The Community Library Infrastructure Programme as a unit of analysis was developed in response to the policy priorities of government applicable in local government metropolitan municipalities. In particular, it responds to the policy priority that seeks to improve and broaden access to local public services. It further supports the efforts geared towards realising the national outcome “improved quality of basic education”. In order to achieve these development objectives, EMM invested on a programme that develops community libraries infrastructure aimed at invigorating libraries as centres of wider community learning and development wherein learning based

activities and services are brought closer to the communities. In the main the programme seeks to achieve; a transformed and equitable library information service delivered to all communities, improved library infrastructure and increased staff capacity and an improved culture of reading. In pursuit of these objectives, the programme set out and prioritised the following outputs; refurbishment and expansion of existing libraries, building of new libraries, the appointment of staff to support the operationalization of the library facilities, acquisition of library material, the upgrading of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and the provision of ICT services to the communities it services

Purpose for the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to evaluate the outputs and short-term outcomes, with a focus on effectiveness, efficiency and relevance. To make recommendations for better functioning of the Community Library Infrastructure Programme. Lastly to determine if there were any factors that negatively impacted on the roll out of the Community Library Infrastructure Programme and the achievement of its outputs or outcomes.

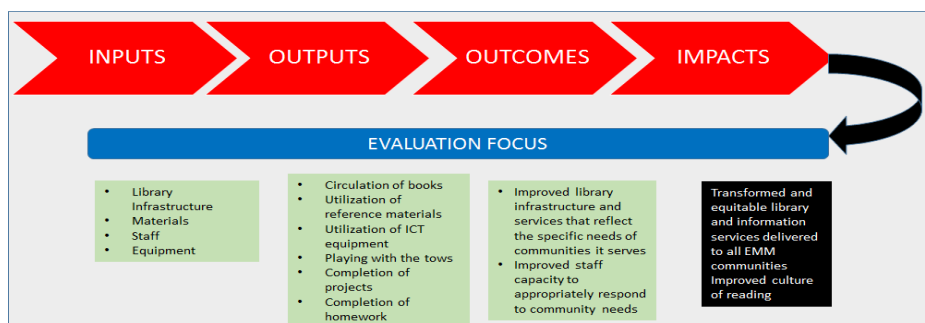
Related literature

The concept of performance monitoring and evaluation (PME) entered the library profession in the nineteenth century (Ward, 1971: 52). Literature points out that the approach used to evaluate public library services focused mainly on surveys based on an analysis of library statistics commissioned by library authorities (De Jager and Nassimbeni, 2005). Though the PME technique used in the 21st century is more refined and the emphasis is more on results or outcome based context (UN Monitoring and Evaluation Handbook, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

The Logic Model assisted with a schematic representation of the interventions that were implemented as part of the Community Library Infrastructure Programme. This model was used as the framework to answer questions about how the programme operated, document the activities undertaken in the delivery of the interventions, whether the interventions planned were undertaken, whether any observable changes were noted and could be attributed to the Community Library Infrastructure Programme.

Figure 1: The Logical Model



Methodology

For the purpose of the evaluation the design supporting the predictive method was the exploratory evaluation method most appropriate for implementation (process) evaluation. It focused on the link between planned programme activities, the outputs and the direct outcomes. The evaluators used the exploratory study design to gain familiarity with the programme, increased understanding of the interventions, and assist with the formulation of better evaluation questions and approaches. This process involved the following methods:

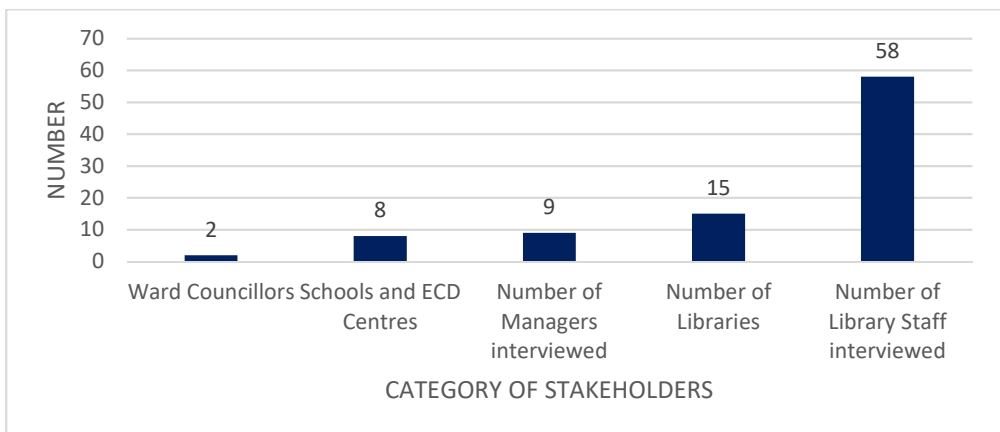
- Review programme documentation. What was already known about Community Library Infrastructure Programme? For example, what activities were successful, with whom, and under what circumstances?
- Review existing data or information. What did the quarterly reporting data say about Community Library Infrastructure Programme
- Sample. This involved the sampling of libraries in accordance with the Community Library Infrastructure Programme activities received, its delivery method, target groups, the duration of the programme and level of activities. To be dealt in details below.
- Interviews with individuals with different viewpoints, or with key informants from the stakeholder group. It involved interviews with a cross-section of people/programme/groups from the target population. This allowed the evaluator to see the activities undertaken and how these activities were perceived through different

lenses, as well as generate information which will allow for more informed conclusions and recommendations

Sampling

A multi-stage sampling approach was used to draw a sample. The primary sampling unit was the library staff, the secondary sampling unit was the infrastructure intervention, and the tertiary sampling unit was regional managers selected for the evaluation. The sampling frame was developed using purposive sampling methodology using set criteria, i.e. the sample was drawn from the libraries where the infrastructure intervention were implemented, the programme, the reach and the activities implemented. Each infrastructure intervention provided were categorized. Once the reference population was mapped a list of criteria was developed to select the sample for the implementation evaluation which included all libraries with infrastructure interventions during the period June 2011 to 2015 across all regions in the metro; all infrastructure interventions during the period June 2011 to March 2015.

Figure 2: Distribution of evaluation participants



Data collection methods

It was imperative to determine the tools required for data collection. Evaluation questions give direction to an evaluation. After the review of documents including, programme documentation, strategic plan, and the quarterly reports a set of questions supporting the evaluation design were developed. The data collection methods utilized during the implementation (process) evaluation were:

- (i) **Document thematic analysis** (sometimes referred to as *desk reviews*). Analysis of documents in order to extract themes/ issues to be evaluated. This included all types of documents such as monthly, quarterly and annual reports, minutes of meetings, intervention materials e.g. training materials, support materials – print, audio-visual etc. and research reports. The analysis included an extraction of general trends in respect of the Community Library Infrastructure Programme
- (ii) **Face-to-face interviews** were conducted with Regional Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture (SRAC) staff, Library Staff within the respective libraries, schools, ECD centres and ward councillors. Face to face interview were advantageous as it facilitated an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee as well as enabled the interviewer to probe on issues that needed further clarification. An important element of data collection was triangulation. Triangulation is a strategy for using diverse datasets to develop timely recommendations for programme evaluation and decision-making. Triangulation is broadly defined as “*synthesis and integration of data from multiple sources through collection, examination, comparison and interpretation*”. By first gathering and then comparing multiple datasets to each other, triangulation helped to counteract threats to validity in each. In this evaluation data sources used for triangulation, were perspectives solicited from different groups e.g. library staff, the regional managers, communities and the review of documents

Evaluation findings

The overall findings of the study reports the general trends observed and recorded during interviews organised in accordance with the OECD criteria, i.e., measuring the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (Chianca, 2008 and Austrian Development Agency, 2009). The key elements reviewed were: Physical Infrastructure such as building, painting, repairs, maintenance, replacement of carpets, shelves; ICT Infrastructure (Fax Machine, Computers, and Photocopiers); Materials and Books (Books, magazines, reference, fiction and non-fiction); Toy library; Mobile library and Staff. The libraries across Ekurhuleni stock books and other resources such as newspapers, magazines, toys, learning materials, study guides etc. The material in libraries is not just filling space, but is circulated widely within the community. The “up-to-datedness” of the books is relative to the users and their varied needs, as well as the categories

they require. Funds were put aside to buy best-sellers for fiction lovers, and African-language books were bought to contribute to the promotion of African languages. The libraries sampled for this evaluation all had a user-centred approach. Other programmes on offer at the different libraries included improved and formalised business information services, government information services, reference services, and education and toy library services. With the information explosion and wide availability of information resources, the EMM libraries could not fulfil all users' needs, as funds were limited. Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality is, however, confident that it caters sufficiently to the majority of library users. Library facilities included buildings, auditoriums and study halls. Wheelchair access was reported to be in 24 libraries around Ekurhuleni.

Infrastructure

Since the July 2011 to June 2016, 10 new libraries were built and 15 libraries were subjected to major refurbishments. The increased number of newly built, expanded and refurbished libraries made libraries more accessible to communities, in that the physical proximity to the library was much closer to the community, the library was quite with available space with good lighting for those who wanted to study.

The newly constructed libraries and those refurbished were designed in a way to support a quality user experience. Major changes to settings have been achieved with libraries refurbished to deliver modern buildings, with flexible spaces. Flexible design included shelving on wheels so that the main public space can be re-configured to support events and activities that would not have been possible with fixed shelving. In a number of the newly constructed or refurbished libraries there has been an increase in public space as a result of extension or re-configuration and reduction of back office and staff rooms. New frontages, layouts, signage have been introduced to make the buildings more accessible and welcoming. Improved layout and signage and zoned areas for different uses and user groups has been a key feature. There has been a significant increase in space for children and teenagers, including an increase in stock availability and dedicated ICT facilities. Zoned areas for children have been integrated into seven of the libraries sampled. The most prevalent changes to library settings has been seen in the design of spaces to support formal and informal learning and rooms to support a broad range of community activities. In designing community libraries authorities have created improved spaces for study, increased ICT for

learning throughout the library and included dedicated learning sites to support studying. Rooms for community activities include small meeting rooms, and hall-like rooms. The external aspect of the community libraries have been designed to make both the building itself and the activities taking place in the library more visible. The **design and layout** of the space itself also influenced the way in which libraries were used by their communities. A few of the community libraries designed its study rooms with a separate entrance from the main library so that it could be accessed outside of library and in some instances outside the opening hours.

Whilst it was impractical to estimate intangible benefits with an acceptable degree of confidence, consideration of the following intangibles underlined their potential significance. In the event that community libraries did not exist there would be astronomical expenditure on government school libraries and this would exclude members of the community that are not school going. Other areas of economic activity attributable to community libraries include the travelling costs incurred by library users visiting libraries; the costs of maintaining Internet accounts and related IT expenditures resulting from exposure to library provided services; and the change in economic activity resulting from the redistribution of funds saved by borrowing from the library in lieu of purchase. Community libraries thus contribute to economic wellbeing in diverse ways and in so doing assist individuals to become more independent. As indicated above, community libraries contributed to economic wellbeing in diverse ways and in so doing make individuals more independent. Although the link to economic wellbeing may seem tenuous for some of the nominated contributions, when viewed through the lens of creating the pre-conditions and capability to achieve greater prosperity and financial security, the linkages gain clarity.

Consistent with the perceptions outlined above, all the Library Managers were found to support the view that community libraries generated value in excess of their annual expenditure. Notwithstanding their strong belief that community libraries were economically beneficial, no library service has yet incorporated a formal estimate of their library's value into their planning processes. It was evident from Library Managers' comments that the lack of a recognised estimating methodology is a barrier to such inclusions and it is hoped that insights gained through this evaluation will encourage library services to incorporate such measures in their formal planning processes. Although the infrastructure of the

delivery of community libraries has been effective and efficient there were some challenges observed during the evaluation. The continuous leaking of roofs resulted in damaged furniture and books. Cracks in the walls and in some instances the walls were so badly damaged that it could collapse. Lighting – in some of the libraries the lighting was very poor making studying for students an almost impossible task. There was inadequate and in some instances no maintenance of libraries. Overall, the physical infrastructure of the libraries were very poorly kept.

Community Library service

The community library offers a wide range of services. These included books and materials for recreational reading; reference books, study materials and guides for homework for learners at primary, secondary and tertiary levels; access to newspapers and magazines documenting the local news; ICT facilities which enables easy access to information, printing of documents and receiving and sending documents electronically. An example commonly cited was the drafting, completing and sending an application for a job with a very short space of time. Study areas – all of the community libraries had set –aside or dedicated study areas. These study areas were equipped with desks, chairs with majority of the libraries having adequate lighting and ventilation for study purposes. Core library services improved across the programme in response to needs of the community. Book stocks have been refreshed in all libraries with some of the community libraries sampled replacing large parts of the stock. Increased and improved information resources are a feature of many of the libraries sampled for the evaluation, with many libraries having developed the information resources in the community libraries in response to user needs. The change in settings and increased ICT facilities has enabled all libraries to provide improved spaces for study for all groups. There was an increase in school children using the library for homework, establishment of reading groups and evidence of new services developed in response to the changing landscape. The investment in the community libraries provided a catalyst for staff to work in a different way and establish mechanisms for engaging communities. For example in three of the sampled libraries the formation of reference group and the friends of the library provided a focus through which community stakeholders shape and influence services delivered within the library building.

The library was valued as a place that was a safe, harmonious, welcoming and inclusive environment was most often quoted as contribution by the library staff. Among the supporting comments, libraries promoted acceptance and understanding of others by acting as neutral meeting places accessible to the whole community. The availability of community library collections was seen to address the disadvantaged by ensuring free and equitable access to collections for all community members; addressed the needs of specific target groups;

contributed to developing, maintaining and improving literacy levels; and included book collections in the indigenous languages that promoted the mother tongue. Library programmes and services were seen as complementing collections and enabling library services to specifically target and contribute to social wellbeing. The examples demonstrating the above contributed to positive community relationships and community harmony through multicultural Story-times and by extending its reach through programmes such as Story-time in the primary schools and early childhood development facilities. Also supported Book Clubs and Reading Groups, thereby created social interaction among people with common interests who may never otherwise met; assisted adults with minimal literacy skills; assisted the community to develop reading and writing skills through the English Literacy programs; encouraged parents to commit to early literacy development for their children through the ECD and born-to-read programmes. Community libraries' were considered important as it is a place to meet, to study with others. Meeting the needs of the aged and members with a disability, who were unable to visit the library, were supported through outreach programmes and setting up depots, supported primary and secondary children's education through providing the support required in doing research for projects and assignments. Through adult education programme, a large majority of the participants learnt how to read including development in English language skills. In terms of activity, therefore, it is clear that libraries have continued to deliver a great and growing range of services through the community library, and that just as important as the services are the setting and the people and processes that have taken place in this programme.

ICT

The reliance on information and communication technologies (ICTs) has dramatically changed the manner in which services were being rendered to the users in the community libraries sampled across Ekurhuleni. For instance, changes were noted by the evaluation in the manner in which library services, such as circulation, interlibrary loan, reference and information services, were rendered. Provision and implementation of ICT by community libraries has led to the access of internet services. This access enabled users to, among other things, apply for jobs online, read newspapers online and access online resources such as dissertations, to enhance their personal growth and advance their professional careers. The presence of computers and printers in community libraries allowed users to type letters, assignments and Curriculum Vitae (CVs) and print them at much reasonable prices. Different types of ICTs facilities were available in community libraries for use by members of the public. Across Ekurhuleni ICTs availability in community libraries for members of the public included computers, computers with Internet, CD-ROMs, audiocassettes, video cassettes, photocopies, faxes and printers.

Web based resources: These are sources that are now available electronically or in digital form. The following were some of the types of library materials available electronically or in digital form in the community libraries: journals, books, reference materials etc. The advantage of these resources was that one could access these from anywhere provided the user had access to the Internet which was provided at the community library. Despite the above the situation with the ICT infrastructure has deteriorated. All libraries sampled raised serious challenges with the ICT, such as response times to ICT queries was reported to be very slow and often different technicians gave different responses to the same issue. The number of computers in all the libraries sampled did not meet the demand. For many, the library was the only place where a person could access the internet. The demand on a limited number of computers resulted in a number of technical problems with the computers.

Books and materials

The key responsibility of the Municipal Library Service is the provision of library material to community libraries across Ekurhuleni. This is done through a centralised system of selection, acquisition and processing of materials that are then distributed to community libraries. The main focus of the acquisition and selection were; review, selection and acquisition of library material. Collection development underpinning these tasks were the necessary and vital activities of budgetary control, record-keeping and the creation and maintenance of the on-line bibliographic database, which reflects all decisions made. Although book selection is covered here, the central system was also responsible for audio-visual material, that is, CDs and DVDs. The selection and acquisition system was distinguished by the selection of books based on reviews of actual books - copies need to be seen and handled to determine if they are suitable for community library purposes and to get a real idea of the contents that cannot be described with 100% accuracy by a review in a journal or a description in a catalogue, no matter how comprehensive. There were a variety of books purchased during the period under review. These included books for Early Childhood Development programmes born to read and books for children. Books were purchased for reading competitions such as the Battle of the Books, spelling Bee and Story Skirmish reading programmes. A number of reference books were purchased – particularly reference books relating to professional work such as legal and medical reference material.

A large percentage of the allocation for books was spent on study material and study guides. The main reason for this was to create access to reference materials and study guides for students living in impoverished areas, i.e. informal settlements and townships. Many of the indigenous books were used for school projects where learners learn about different cultures and languages through reading indigenous materials. Community libraries played a significant role to bring indigenous material to communities. Some of the librarians indicated that

if users go into the library and are confronted with only English and Afrikaans language materials, some may feel that the library does not accurately represent the current cultural reality. The librarians as a collective indicated that the community library should be a place where no ethnic group feels disadvantaged. It should be a public place that promotes interaction among members of a diverse community and a place in which one can access information in the language of one's choice.

The reference and non-fiction material were most widely used by learners in the community. The community library was seen as an extension of the school. Both teachers and learners used the community library for projects, for additional teaching and learning material and learners used the library for the available school based reference material. Primary and the secondary schools users stated that they would not be able to pass and achieve better performance if they did not go to the library and spend time doing projects and doing their homework. Teachers have forged a relationship with the librarians who willingly assist the teachers to package information for projects that can be easily accessed by learners. Both learners and teachers remarked that the availability of these materials made the teaching and learning easier. Despite the limited collection of reference materials for university studies, the materials that were available were extensively utilised for study purposes. A librarian who was at a community library for many years stated that she observed the success of many students who used the library. She said *“if it was not for this library our community would not have had so many students qualifying and becoming successful professionals”*. Improved culture of reading in communities was also strongly linked to community library collections, which addressed free and equitable access to collections for all community members. When considering the above contributions, it was important not to over-emphasise the importance of informational and educational collections at the expense of the more recreational collections such as fiction. The contribution of library collections for *“improved culture of reading”* in communities was highly dependent on the libraries' ability to satisfy users' demand, hence the practice of maintaining diverse collections with recreational and informational components. Indeed, the relative popularity of fiction materials may be interpreted as indicating that such collections were at least of equal importance in contributing to social wellbeing. Library programmes and services were naturally seen as complementing core services and enabling library services to specifically target and contribute to *“Improved culture of reading”*. Once again, the role of programmes were characterised by the diversity of groups targeted as can be seen from the following examples, contributing to an *“Improved culture of reading”* through multicultural Story times. Extending the reach of Story time by taking it off-site. Majority of the Libraries experience of Story time in the ECD facility or at a primary school. This attracted parents of nearby units, including many non-English speaking grandparents and exposing them and their families not only to Story time, but to the community library

generally. The outreach programme implemented through the mobile library services delivered through mobile busses introduced the service to areas known to have no library building in particular informal settlements. The programmes commented on above were only a fraction of the programs provided by community library services across EMM. Programmes that were widely implemented by community libraries were School Holiday programs, competitions such as the strongest link, and talks by visiting authors and community leaders, skills development programmes and computer training programmes. Significant and very common were homework programmes and less prominent were Adult Literacy programmes, the latter clearly dependent on catchment population demographics.

Although great strides were made with respect to availability of materials and books a number of challenges were observed during this evaluation. The system for purchasing books has changed with the central office purchasing books for libraries. Choosing books from the Bibliographic and Technical list was limiting and often did not serve the needs of users. All of the librarians interviewed indicated that the books chosen do not always meet the needs of the community. When working in a community library “*you get to know what your readers like, you get to know what information the school requires for projects etc., and the new system removes the process of personalising the purchases.*” The observation made during this evaluation was libraries were not meeting the expectations of users. Users expected libraries to house collections supporting formal education. The reference books provided to libraries in the past six months were outdated, because of the introduction of the new assessment system by the National Department of Basic Education. All the libraries indicated that they do not have learning material to support the Continuous Assessment and Testing (CAT) System. All libraries complained about damaged books. With the shortage of reference materials many of the reference books are torn, with learners removing critical pages leaving just the front and back covers of the book. All libraries have indigenous material however librarians reported that there was not sufficient interest in indigenous language material and few books were published in these languages. Librarians on the issue of books written in the indigenous language stated “*there was inadequate public interest in books written in indigenous languages*”. Another issue raised was the translation. Books written in a particular indigenous language and sentiment of the book sometimes got lost in translation.

Toy Libraries

A Toy Library is a service that provides access to a collection of play materials including toys, games, puzzles, activities, educational aids and general play equipment. Generally, the service is open to members of the public including families of children with and without special needs, ECD centres, schools and the youth.

The toy libraries enabled children living in the most marginalised and poor homes to access educational toys. Poverty creates an obvious inequality for children in access to books, play equipment and materials. Toys can both stimulate and prolong play, although toys need not be expensive to fulfil this function. In addition, where children were living in unsuitable housing conditions, there may be diminished opportunities, particularly for outdoor play. Through toy lending, toy libraries redressed in some part the imbalance between the supply of play equipment available to children from more affluent homes and those growing up in families affected by poverty. The increased levels of poverty in households particularly children living in informal settlements was a factor in the growth of demand for toy libraries. All the libraries that were sampled had a toy library. In essence the libraries had toys available, however in majority of the libraries the toy library was not functional. The challenges indicated for why the toy library was not functional because staff were not trained to run the toy library. In addition, there was insufficient staff to manage the toy library, there was also insufficient space to display the toys on a permanent basis resulting in many of the toys being locked away in a cupboard. In majority of the libraries located in townships, the consignment of toys was received in the past six months. The evidence observed was the toys were in the original packaging, the toys looked unused, boxes containing games and puzzles were unopened and in some instances libraries were still cataloguing the toys.

Mobile library bus

In an effort to redress this disparity, the municipality has identified community libraries as key agents of development to improve the quality of life of all citizens. In addition the city recognizes the need for all its communities to have improved access to library and information services. It is in this context that initiatives such as the mobile library has been implemented across EMM, particularly in communities where the distance to travel to a library is too far. Ekurhuleni purchased two new mobile buses to deliver the service. It is estimated that Ekurhuleni reaches all 119 informal settlements with little or no access to library information services. The mobile library bus `was very effective in that it provided access to communities that would not have access to books and materials. All informal settlements in Ekurhuleni have access to the mobile library with an average of 20,000 to 30,000 books borrowed annually. The mobile library did not only encourage reading among children but it also encouraged adults in these communities to read.

The challenges identified during the evaluation there was lack of facilities on a mobile library vehicle for its users - facilities which even the smallest library attempts to provide. These facilities include reference materials, tables for readers, and a fairly wide range of representative books on many subjects and in varying degrees of specialisation. There were no study facilities, little in the way

of periodical and audio-visual materials provision and limited provision of community information.

The collections were also much smaller, due to space limitations. Book selection could be as full or comprehensive as even a small static library, as shelf space was restricted. Restricted time - mobile services, was not available for any length of time - and schedules were invariably restrictive. Mobile libraries by their nature move from one place to another and must of necessity provide much less time for public service at any given area than a fixed agency. As well as being in the neighbourhood for a limited time, the mobile library vehicle was not as dependable as a static building. There were some unforeseen challenges for example the mobile bus had a breakdown which resulted in the mobile not going out to the community. The situation inconveniences users in particular by these changes to routes as a result of holidays, rescheduling, breakdowns and maintenance.

Usage

Public libraries provide a universal service open to all, and serve many different groups within the communities, often with differing needs and interests. Libraries provided access to knowledge through books, journals, newspapers and the internet, providing study space as well as more specialist resources. The societal context in which public libraries operate is rapidly changing, presenting them daily with various challenges: in the field of digitization, changing usage patterns, and evolving expectations of users. There was significant variation in responses between libraries in respect of services offered. Technological developments had a profound effect on how people accessed and this continues to provoke significant changes within libraries. Libraries are beginning to promote literacy and inspire engagement with culture. Libraries were also social spaces where people met, learnt from each other and at times provided access other services such as being an interview centre for employment programmes. Many libraries had a longstanding history of local public service and can represent part of an area's heritage and act as physical landmarks for a community.

It is clear from the analysis detailed above that the usage of libraries has increased following the improvements in the infrastructure of the library, the programme and services available. Evaluation participants indicated that a large degree of the increased usage comes from the groups and individuals coming to do homework, projects and studying through distance education. This has been enabled by the infrastructure available and the setting up and supporting library users as groups or on an individual basis. The availability of study space was crucial, and those libraries that have small study areas already seeing the value: *'The study area does a lot, but having a small area is really limiting in that not all learners can be accommodated'*. At least half of the sampled libraries indicated that they engage in outreach activities with the local schools and ECD centres. This

increased reach resulted in increasing the volume of users, and this was commented on by librarian: *‘since the refurbishment and since the new study area in the library, we’ve been able to attract more learners which has directly increased the number of people we can provide support’*. During the visits to the libraries the comments/complaints books were read. The comments/complaints were written by the users. In summary, there were more compliments than complaints documented. For example, community libraries are flexible and impose no time limits, apart from opening and closing hours, on how individuals choose to structure their visits. Majority of the libraries expressed the effectiveness of their services as encouraging reading; promoting digital literacy and providing access to the internet; helping people find information of all kinds, whether specialist knowledge or information about local services.

Many of the community libraries go beyond these activities and provide access to other services on site or are exploring new ways of providing the library service. Some community libraries are locating the service within a wider effort to strengthen the local economy – fostering innovation and enterprise, providing space for companies who want to recruit youth into particular job offerings amongst many other initiatives. Two Chief Librarians suggested that collocation of libraries was an effectiveness criteria because it increased the libraries relevance, while two others considered the impact that libraries can have on the community to be important, such as their contribution to improving literacy and wellbeing. Others felt that their library was providing a good service to the community, and was better able to tailor their service to local needs. Respondents stated that their library: was much better able to acquire stock specific to reader’s needs; had greater ability to act as a community resource; was able to provide a wider range of services; was now a safer environment for children, and was a much more pleasant place now. Despite general increase in user numbers, this has not universally translated into increased book issues, and all the libraries sampled indicated that there was an increase in usage, however this increase was not mirrored by an increase in book loans. Therefore it is evident that current library usage is much broader than borrowing of books for recreational reading

Staff

Perhaps the most basic premise for delivering a great library user experience is knowing what members of the user community want from the library, and being able to articulate their service expectations of the library. Then, using that knowledge, the librarian’s responsibility is to design an experience that delivers on those expectations and exceed them when possible. Much depends on the staff of the library’s ability to identify and develop services that meet user expectations. It is important to acknowledge that many members of staff who participated in this evaluation, whether frontline or management, reported that the changes to the role of staff in libraries was not particularly new to them. There has been a broad trajectory of change in recent years, and the benefits of this

programme was difficult to separate entirely from other changes to the library service. That being said, staff themselves saw differences as a result of the programme, and saw that the programme had involved elements of development to their roles. Staff in the sampled libraries have begun to consider their role differently as a result of the infrastructure investment. This change was varied across the programme, and all libraries experienced challenges in changing the roles for staff. Interviews with frontline staff at different libraries highlight that staff agree with and endorse the need to change to respond to community needs.

In terms of the changes on the individuals and their roles, however, they saw the programme instilling a culture change, where users and the community expect different things from libraries and library staff. This highlights that although community libraries have experienced change differently, the key thing for staff has been very much the changing role within the local area and the effect that this has had on their role and how they are perceived by users and the community more broadly. Staff describe the changes to their role more in terms of how they work with individuals who come into the library and community groups who work with the library than about things like specific skills. In many instances, staff saw these changing roles very positively. There was a view that perceptions were changing amongst users. They saw the library as more friendly, open, changing to meet demand and more attractive to their community. It was also clear that this effected how staff viewed themselves, and wanted to meet that changing demand: *'It's all a higher standard – we have to deliver a first class service. We feel a responsibility to that'*. This change was hard for many staff to deal with though, and it is apparent that some felt like they needed more support and time to make such large changes. This was recognised by management staff across the programme as well: *'Everybody has to raise their game – to meet the demands'*. There was a strong endorsement for an approach that supported the community needs and interests– but there were also some who felt that something was lost from the traditional library service. Of all the stakeholders who took part in this evaluation, it was the staff who raised the most fears. *'It's not just a library anymore'*.

One of the main factors of the programme that has encouraged staff roles to change is the physical layout of the library. Moving away from large counters to remove the 'barriers' between staff and users has increased interaction and has resulted in one of the fundamental changes to the role of library staff. Staff often commented on increased 'floor walking', being 'freed up to do other things' and being more accessible to users. There have also been, in a number of instances, staff brought in to libraries as a result of the programme who have different backgrounds, skill sets and perspectives. Typically these included educational skills, teaching and learning skills, research skills community engagement and volunteering skills. It was evident that the involvement of new skill sets in libraries has impacted on front-line managers and staff as they have learnt from

new colleagues. Observations and feedback from library managers were mixed. The strengths identified in the previous section is reflected through the programmes and support provided at the library. Despite this, there were a number of challenges identified. The main challenge commented on was the low quality of services from staff due to lack of staff training and skills. Library managers indicated that staff need to be better trained to work with underserved populations and find information that meets the day-to-day needs of local people. The library staff need to have knowledge on how to solve daily problems. But for now, *“we have few staff that can do that”*. During the evaluation some of the library managers indicated that the staff were not sufficiently motivated to carry out their roles and responsibilities at the library apart from reaching out to the community to understand their needs and respond appropriately. It was observed that library staff are typical of government employees who would leave for the higher compensation in another library. Library employees are government employees, and as such can't be laid off, are rarely open to undertaking new tasks and see community outreach and working in ECD centers or schools (taking the library to the children) as extra work they don't need to do. They resist change and limit themselves to finding books requested by users and have little or no positive influence in addressing library patrons' needs. Three library managers felt library staff had poor attitudes or were locked into outdated habits. This was observed by the evaluation through the responses provided during the interview and the physical disposition of the respondents (library staff). Although the library staff cited libraries' connection with communities as strength, it was just as often seen as a challenge. For librarians, challenges centered on inadequate levels of community participation, commitment and buy-in. People who live near public libraries don't come to the library. Both the library managers and the librarians themselves indicated that insufficient time is spent on outreach activities. Staff retention – high staff turnover impacts on delivery of services to the community. It seems likely that without a single point of reference provincially, that outlines the service standards expected from community libraries, that growing variation in standards of service will occur over time.

Recommendations

Throughout this report there is a strong evidence of developing practice, and this has been highlight in this report. It has not been straightforward, and not all libraries in the evaluation have lived up to the potential of the programme. Also, more should be done to link new groups and partners using the library to core objectives for the service itself, such as reader development. Other areas for development include internal and external communications, better visions and more training for frontline staff. More specifically the areas detailed below requires improvements:

A more responsive community library services

A local needs assessment should be undertaken periodically by all community libraries (Chianca, 2008). Tools exist to support this process, and a great amount of relevant data would be gathered so more appropriate programmes could be implemented. Any strategy for the future must reflect local need and ensure that services are being delivered fairly. The library service is a 'universal service', which is expected to encourage access. Listening to local communities and understanding their needs is fundamental. All service planned starts with a detailed analysis of need and maintains effective user and community engagement throughout the process, with the process and methodology itself is clear and transparent. Needs assessments must take account of trends and future projections particularly around the most disadvantaged communities and equality analyses should be applied throughout the process.

ICT

The technological landscape is extremely fast changing to the extent that it is barely recognisable compared to 10 years ago. This is one of the challenges to more traditional library service delivery, with people expecting services including library services to be delivered differently and offering more. The introduction of electronic books will become available in community libraries. This signals that people's preference for how they search, access and read information is changing and to survive library services need to change how they provide this information too. Increased digitisation will also mean library services need to change what services they deliver: Although some people have online access at home or on the go, evidence from the geographic profile of communities shows that majority do not have access to the internet at home but use it in public spaces do so by using the facilities provided by their local library. Library services clearly play a critical role in getting more local people online which itself brings many opportunities for the municipality such as being more efficient and attracting new audiences, and open many doors for individual users through for example learning new skills and combating social isolation. Coupled to this increasing demand for digitization is appropriate ICT technical support. Although many ICT services are available to the community libraries, the technical expertise of these personnel needs to match the merging demands.

Building on existing provision

One of the key finding of the evaluation indicates that where there has been investment in re-designing public libraries, with new buildings and large scale renovations, the libraries attract a larger number of users. Of course in tough economic times renovating or developing new buildings to host library services is not always a tenable option as resources and needs vary significantly between different communities. However, where new or refurbished buildings have been completed, this has had significant positive impacts on library usage. It is recommended that even if large scale renovations and constructing new libraries

are prohibitive, getting the community involved in uplifting the physical environment could result in attracting more users.

Looking at communities and users differently

The first change is a shift from customer orientation to customer care. Customer care is about going the extra mile and having the skills to understand and assess the needs of library users. It is about recognising that customers are not all equal in their life experiences and chances; so they should not treat all of customers in a standardized manner, but in a way that meets their individual needs. This challenges some deeply held professional library paradigms around issues such as equality, fairness and neutrality. The second example is a shift from libraries that are based in communities to community based libraries. Many libraries are based in the community, but not all libraries are community based. There should be a positive and dynamic relationship between the library and the people who live in the neighbourhood.

Library services

There is a continued need to develop library services with the community as key partners. This can be done to continue what is working to develop libraries as “Connect Points”, and as access to other services, via libraries. It is also seen as important to address the issue of providing space in libraries for community groups, through the capital programme; expand and review the programme offering to meet the needs of the community; increased outreach to the community by taking the library to the people e.g. ECD centres, primary and secondary schools, clinics etc.

Mobile library services

Mobile library services needs to be re-organised to maximise service delivery time, and to improve use of the bus. This will involve: Re-basing and re-routing, develop criteria for mobile library stops and cutting out very low use stops

Opening hours

The evaluation results confirm that libraries were used by information seekers. Libraries were used for borrowing books, access to reference books, ICT and programmes. The librarians shared their views on the utilization of the library. When asked to give advice, many suggested increasing the library’s quantity and variety of information resources—“more books” was often cited—as well as the number of hours libraries were open. It was evident that users clearly wanted to be able to visit the library, but they want the services to be more convenient. It is recommended that during the assessment of the community needs consideration should be given to opening later in the day as the mornings were not busy and remaining open later in the evening thereby creating increased access.

Conclusion

The evaluation's final conclusion is that public libraries have an important role to play in achieving the outcomes of the community library infrastructure programme. Community libraries need to be transformed "to become much more proactive, interventionist and educative institutions, with a concern for increased literacy, a better performing society and an improved reading culture at their core." The specific strategies for such a transformation were identified as: "the mainstreaming of provision for disadvantaged communities and the establishment of standards of service and their monitoring; the adoption of resourcing strategies which prioritise the needs of disadvantaged communities; a recasting of the role of library staff to encompass a more socially responsive and educative approach; staffing policies and practices which address exclusion, discrimination and prejudice; targeting of communities; the development of community-based approaches to library provision, which incorporate consultation with local communities; ICT and networking developments which actively focus on the needs of disadvantaged communities; a recasting of the image and identity of the public library to ensure increased utilization.

References

- Austrian Development Agency. 2009. Guidelines for project and programme evaluation. Austrian Development Agency, Evaluating Unit. Vienna. Available: <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/dcdndep/47069197.pdf>. [2017, September 15].
- Chianca, T. 2008. The OECD/DAC criteria for International Development Evaluation: an assessment and ideas for improvement. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation*. 5:9, 41-51. Available http://www.ipdet.org/files/Publication-The_OECD-DAC_Criteria_for_International.pdf.
- Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME). 2012. National Policy Evaluation Framework. The Presidency, Republic of South Africa. Available: www.dpme.gov.za. [2017, September 15].
- De Jager, K & Nassimbeni, M. 2005. Towards measuring the performance of public library in South Africa. *South African Journal of library and Information Science*. 71:1. 39-50
- Maepa, L.P. 2014. Performance monitoring and evaluation of metropolitan municipalities in Gauteng province. Ph.D Thesis. University of Pretoria. South Africa.
- UNDP. 2002. Handbook on monitoring and evaluation for results. Available <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/HandBook/ME-Handbook.pdf> [2017, September 01].
- Ward, P. L. 1971. The evaluation of library services. In Redfern, B. Eds. *Studies in library management*. pp 57-83.