

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE IN GHANA: THE ASHANTI REGIONAL LIBRARY IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper assesses the contribution of the public library system in Ghana in general and the Ashanti Regional Library, Kumasi in particular in providing educational, cultural and recreational services to its users. It traces the development of the library since its establishment in 1951. In particular, it looks at how far the library is meeting the information needs of users in the metropolis and the entire region. Data for the study were obtained through personal observation in the library for a period of five months (from June to November, 2009); questionnaires for the Regional Librarian and staff as well as an interview with a former employee of the library and the Metropolitan Director of Education. It was observed that the library is facing serious challenges such as inadequate qualified staff, inadequate book stock and seats for users in the library, lack of photocopying facilities as well as poor funding. Based on the challenges identified, appropriate recommendations are made with the view of bringing about general improvement in the library.

Keywords: PUBLIC LIBRARIES, GHANA LIBRARY BOARD, LIBRARY FACILITIES, INFORMATION PROVISION

Introduction

The role of a public library in the acquisition of knowledge and information dissemination in any nation cannot be over emphasized. The **Unesco Public Library Manifesto** states that the public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups (Unesco, n.d.). Public libraries therefore provide the opportunity for personal enlightenment, encourage the love of learning and also empower people to fulfil their civic duty. They provide facilities for readers to acquire knowledge through books and other information sources. It is largely from public libraries that one can acquire positive reading habits. Also, public libraries can display topical books and journals for the use of their patrons. Public libraries are used for reasons other than borrowing books. Patrons go to read newspapers (both local and foreign), or look for information about the community, local government, or health issues, or use the library as a place to study and do homework, and even as a social gathering place. School children, students, aspiring university students, workers and other professionals in urban areas tend to depend on public libraries in their quest for knowledge (Agyen-Gyasi, 1996). In recent times, public libraries also provide Internet access for users who otherwise would not be able to connect to these services. In addition to access, many public libraries offer training and support to computer users. Once access has been achieved, there still remains a large gap in people's online abilities and skills. It is in the light of the above that most countries make adequate provision for public libraries to provide educational, cultural and recreational roles to its citizenry.

Evans (1964), Osei-Bonsu (1988) and Bukenya (2009) have given background information about the development of libraries in Ghana in general and public libraries in particular. In their view, the main factors that contributed towards the provision of public libraries in Ghana were the impact of missionary activities on the community (which included bringing literacy to the people and setting up of printing presses to ensure the speedy publication of reading materials to sustain literacy) and the introduction of formal education in the Gold

Coast. Others include the pioneering work of Bishop Orfeur Aglionby who was responsible for the early promotion of reading among Ghanaians; the British Council initiative which helped lay the foundation for public library services; the proliferation of literacy societies and improvement clubs in the latter part of the nineteenth century (which provided library facilities of some sort for members) and the awareness of the need for further education and the growing desire for additional knowledge as manifested in the activities of the literary societies. Similarly, in the view of these authors, the provision of training facilities for library personnel in the country; Ghana's healthy economic state (which assured the availability of capital and recurrent funds for library development); the progressive and supportive policy of Kwame Nkrumah (the first post independence leader of Ghana) as well as the enthusiasm and hard work of the library staff and a far-sighted and supportive Ghana Library Board contributed to the development of public libraries in Ghana.

The Act that established the Gold Coast (now Ghana) Library Services Board (Cap 118) was passed by the Legislative Council in December in 1949 but became operational on 1st January 1950. It was one of the first Library Acts in Africa, and many countries took it as a model (Bukenya, 2009). Among the functions stipulated by the Act, the GLB was mandated to establish, maintain, equip, manage and determine the conditions of service for the officers and staff of the public libraries in Ghana. This legislation made the Gold Coast Library Board, the second public corporation in the country after the Cocoa Marketing Board. Consequently, the Accra Central Library was started in 1950. A purpose built library building considered to be one of the most beautiful buildings in Accra at that time was put up and officially opened in 1956 by the then Governor Sir Arden Clarke.

The Ghana Library Board opened the Ashanti Regional Library in Kumasi in 1951 and its permanent Library building was put up in 1954. It is one of ten (10) regional libraries out of the total of sixty-one (61) public or community libraries currently in Ghana. The Ashanti Regional Library popularly referred to as the Ashanti Library is located within the premises of the Centre for National Culture (formerly the Ghana National Cultural Centre) in Kumasi a few metres away from the main lorry station "Kejetia". The Library is intended to provide service to about 90 suburbs in the Kumasi Metropolis as well as the districts within the region. The constraints facing the library include inadequate book stock and reading space to meet the ever increasing schools and student numbers, poor funding, inadequate computers connected to the internet, lack of initiative as major decisions concerning the operations are taken at the headquarters in Accra and low staff morale among others. This paper therefore discusses the contribution of the Ashanti Regional Library in the Kumasi metropolis in general and the region in particular in providing educational, informational, cultural and recreational facilities to its users.

Definition and Functions of a Public Library

A public library is a library which is accessible to the public and is generally funded from public sources (mostly income tax money) and may be operated by the state. Its mission is to facilitate access to works of the imagination for individuals' personal development and to promote reading as a meaningful recreational activity. The **Unesco Public Library Manifesto** (1972) states among other things that a public library should be maintained by public funds, and no direct charge should be made to any one for its services to fulfil its purposes, must be readily accessible, and its doors open for free and equal use by all members of the community regardless of race, colour, nationality, age, sex, religion, language, status or educational attainment. According to Antwi (1989), the public library is described as the "University of the People" because it is uniquely placed to provide a liberal and comprehensive service for education, information, recreation and entertainment.

The primary purpose of a public or community library is to further democracy, equality and social justice, increase access to information, disseminate culture and knowledge, contribute to a meaningful and informative leisure time, and act as a communal institution and a social meeting place. The value of public libraries is, in a way, dependent on how well they perform their role, in other words, how well public library services meet the needs of their communities. Public libraries thus develop services for elderly persons, for immigrants and ethnic minorities, for pre-school children, lifelong learners, persons with disabilities, etc. (Aabø, 2007). In rural areas, the local public library may have, in addition to its main branch, a mobile library service, consisting of one or more buses furnished as a small public library, serving the countryside according to a regular schedule.

Public libraries are distinct from research, school, or other special libraries in that their mandate is to serve the public's information and educational needs generally, as well as offering materials for general entertainment and leisure purposes. In recent times, computer and Internet access is also often offered (Wikipedia, 2009).

In the view of Bukenya (2009), public libraries are established to promote the culture of reading; provide and promote access to information in all formats in support of the educational, cultural, and social development of the public; foster the understanding of the community and national heritage; offer guidance and training in information search and quality rating of information sources; facilitate the development of information, computer literacy skills and stimulate opportunities for imagination and creativity among children and young people as well as facilitating education for lifelong learning. They are sine qua non for a democratic knowledge society.

Objectives of the study

The primary focus of this study is to look at how the Ashanti Regional Library in Kumasi has developed over time since its inception in 1954. The specific objectives are:

- To document the history behind the setting up of the public library system in Ghana in general and the Ashanti regional library in particular;
- To describe the present state of the Ashanti Library with reference to its departmental structure, staff strength, stock and funding issues;
- To determine the extent to which the library has embraced the Information Communication and Technology (ICT);
- To identify the challenges facing the library currently as far as the provision of facilities and service are concerned; and
- To offer suggestions as to how best the library could improve upon its resources and service in the metropolis in particular and the region as a whole.

Study Area

Kumasi was founded in the late 17th century by Osei Tutu I, the Asantehene and King of the Asante state. It is located on latitude 6.40' N and longitude 1.35'W (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, 2006). It is the capital city and administrative centre of the Ashanti Region and the second major commercial centre in Ghana in terms of the volume of trade. Sited at the cross roads of the Trans-Saharan trade routes, its strategic location contributed significantly to the growing wealth of the town (Korboe, 2001). Described as the Garden City of West Africa, Kumasi is situated in the middle belt of Ghana and serves as nodal town to the Western, Central, Volta and the Eastern regions.

It covers an area of approximately 150 square kilometers with an average radius of seven (7) kilometers, has about 90 suburbs and is about 270 kilometers north of the national capital, Accra (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, 2006). The total population of Kumasi in 2000 was

1,170,270 (made up 587,012 males and 583,258 females) showing an increase of over 200% above the 1970 figures (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). According to statistics obtained from the Metropolitan Directorate of Education in Kumasi, as at the end of 2008/2009 academic year, it had a total enrolment of 246, 756 (made up of 84,260 pupils and students in public schools and institutions and 162,496 in private institutions respectively).

The Ashanti Regional Library is located at Bantama in Kumasi. The site of the library is ideal considering the following factors: Firstly, most of the first cycle schools in Kumasi are concentrated within three kilometres distance from the library which makes it easy for school children to get there. Also, it is accessible by means of public and private transportation because it is near the main lorry station “Kejetia” where all public and private transportation in the metropolis converge. Moreover, the location is in the centre of the town, has several thoroughfares and enough space for future expansion.

Methodology

The study is purely descriptive, and is based on personal observation and interviews by the authors with the Regional Librarian and members of staff of the Ashanti Regional Library particularly, the Heads of Department, namely Children, Reference and Lending Departments. Also records on files available at the Library were used. In addition a former employee of the Library as well as the Metropolitan Director of Education were interviewed. The latter’s interview covered the statistics of schools and their enrolment for the 2008/2009 academic year. The observation consisted of occasional visits to the library for a period of six months (i.e. June to November. 2009) and involved the evaluation of the library building, facilities and the environment, the stock and its exploitation by users and recorded activities and happenings. The information obtained was supplemented by secondary sources such as books, journals articles and the Internet. Relevant data extracted from both the observation and the interviews were illustrated in the form of tables.

Historical Account of the Ashanti Regional Library

The Ashanti Regional Library was formally opened in 1954. It was the first regional library to be built in the country by the Ghana Library Board (Evans, 1964: 66). It formed part of the Ghana National Cultural Centre (now Centre for National Culture – Kumasi). The Library is located at Bantama, Kumasi, and shares a piece of land with the National Archives, the Ghana Museum and Monument Board, the Ghana Tourist Board and the National Cultural Centre. The total number of readers in 1954 was 711, of which 206 were Europeans (Ghana Library Board, 1975).

The cost of constructing the Ashanti Library was about £25,000. The Commonwealth Education and Welfare Trust and the Kumasi Town Council made a generous contribution of £15,000 (made up of £10,000 and £5,000 respectively) towards the building of the Library. These donations made the construction of the whole building a reality because before the appeal was launched, the Ghana Library Board had decided to build only part of the Library (Gold Coast Library Board, 1954).

Since the Ashanti Regional Library was the only public library in Ashanti at that time, it enjoyed quite a remarkable number of readership. Mobile library services were provided to the rural communities in the region as well as Brong Ahafo. The building is now considered to be too small for the ever-growing population of Kumasi which by the year 2000 was 1,170,270 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000).

Physical Structure

The Ashanti Regional Library building was carefully planned. The resulting building is very attractive (Evans, 1964). The architects were Messrs Nickson and Borys of London, Lagos

and Accra (Ghana Library Board, 1954). The building was completed and opened as the first Regional Library on June 30th 1954, but before this, it was opened as a Branch Library in July 1951.

The site for the library was ideal. There was plenty of space at the time. The Library was designed with an open verandah which runs the length of the building giving access to all rooms, and providing cross ventilation in all departments. The building is reinforced with concrete columns and beams from the main structural frame with continuous cave beam which supports the reinforced concrete roof slab (Kwei, 1975).

The Children's Library has proved too small for the growing population of children. According to the Regional Librarian, an appeal for funds was launched to solicit funds to build a bigger library befitting the metropolis as far back as 1999. Unfortunately the appeal has not yielded any result and nothing has been done about the size of the building till date.

Current State of the Ashanti Regional Library

The Ghana Library Board (GLB) is an organization within the Public Service of Ghana. It is a semi-autonomous body with a Governing Council. The Ashanti Regional Library is one of the ten regional branches of the GLB with its headquarters in Accra. All major decisions regarding the management of the libraries are centralized in Accra. The Governing Council of GLB is appointed by the President of Ghana in accordance with the constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Such policy decisions are taken by the Governing Board and passed on for implementation by the Director of the Library Board who is the Chief Executive Officer of the organization and also a member of the Governing Council.

The Library has three departments. These are the Reference, Children's and Lending Departments respectively. Each department is headed by a Para Professional and assisted by Library Assistants. The Children's and Reference Departments are solely responsible for the provision of materials for the children and reference services respectively while the Lending Department provides materials in almost all disciplines and is highly patronized by users particularly students. Some users use this place as a study centre especially the remedial and part-time students preparing to enter tertiary institutions. This Department also houses the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facility of the library. Currently, there are five computers connected to the Internet.

The following gives additional information on the current state of the Ashanti regional Library.

Staff

The relevance of human capital in the attainment of corporate goals is exemplified by Drucker's (1973) statement that "a manager achieves results through people." This attests to the fact that the quality of public library services mostly depends upon the quantity and quality of the staff at its disposal. There are thirty-one personnel currently working at the Ashanti Regional Library (Table 1). This is made up of fourteen library staff and seventeen ancillary staff. The library staff are made up of one Professional Librarian who is also the Regional Librarian, three Para professionals, six Library Assistants, and four Junior Library Assistants. The Para-professionals are of the Library officer grade and are in-charge of the three departments of the Library. They have formal training in librarianship at the Diploma level from the University of Ghana, Legon. The Library Assistants on their part have had in-service training courses at the Headquarters in Accra while the Junior Library Assistants have no formal training in librarianship and assist in processing new books. The ancillary staff are made up of one Senior Accounts Officer, one Typist, two Drivers, five Security Personnel, five Cleaners/ Messengers and three Labourers.

Table 1: Categories of Staff at the Ashanti Regional Library

Category of Staff	Qualification	Number	Percentage
Regional Librarian	M.A.(Library Studies)	1	3.2
Para-Professionals	Diploma (Lib Studies)	3	9.7
Library Assistants	SSSCE/GCE O' Level	6	19.4
Jnr. Library Assistant	“ “	4	12.9
Snr. Accounts Officer	“ “	1	3.2
Typist Grade 1	“ “	1	3.2
Drivers	-	2	6.5
Day Security Officer		3	9.7
Night Security Officer	-	2	6.5
Messengers/Cleaners	-	5	16.1
Labourers		3	9.7
Total		31	100

Source: Data from the Ashanti Regional Library, Kumasi, November 2009

The Ashanti Regional Library has inadequate trained staff and this is affecting the delivery of quality service. Out of the staff strength of thirty-one, only one is a Professional Librarian, who is also the Regional Librarian. The Regional Librarian also has oversight responsibility for the district libraries within the region. For the Library to function effectively it must be able to draw on an adequate supply of appropriately trained staff.

Book Stock

The Ashanti Regional Library started in 1954 with a total book stock of 21,000 volumes. Out of this number 10,500 (50.0%) were adult non-fiction, 6,000 (28.6%) were fiction and 4,500 (21.4%) were children's books (Gold Coast Library Board, 1954: 18). There was a healthy rise in the addition to the stock from 1954 onwards. This was a step in the right direction as the number of users grew steadily every year.

Currently, the total book stock of the Library is 15,353. In percentage terms, there is a decline of 26.9% of book stock at the Library compared to the 1954 levels. The Library receives its stock from the GLB Headquarters in Accra.

Table 2: Total Stock of the Ashanti Regional Library

Department	Number of Books	Percentage
Lending	8,999	58.6
Reference	1,480	9.6
Children	4,876	31.8
Total	15,355	100

Source: Data from the Ashanti Regional Library, Kumasi, November 2009.

Over ninety percent of the stock are purchased from overseas publishers mostly in Great Britain. Sometimes the Regional Librarian makes local purchases when the need arises. According to the Regional Librarian, the Ghana Book Trust as well as the British Council occasionally make donations to the Library. The total stock of the library as at 30th November, 2009 is shown in Table 2 above.

It is observed from Table 2 that 58.6% of the total stock of books in the library are in the Lending Department, 31.8% in the Children's Library and 9.6% in the Reference Department respectively. This implies that the book stock at the Ashanti Regional Library are grossly

inadequate and therefore mostly not meeting the information needs of its users. The stock of books in the Library is not keeping pace with the exponential growth in information materials because of inadequate budgetary support. This could be a big disincentive to users who patronize the Library. The *IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Public Library Service* (Gill et. al, 2001) in respect of public library stock provide that "the public library must have adequate resources not just when it is established but also on a continuing basis to enable it to sustain and develop services that meet the needs of the local community". There are few books in the system because the GLB purchases just a handful of books due to the limited funds allocated to it each year. Besides, the few books received are shared among all the Regional and District Libraries.

At the time of this study there were very few children's books left on the shelves for borrowing. This is certainly not a healthy development since it may induce low patronage of the children to the library or lead to pilfering or theft of the few materials currently available at the Library. Majority of the books were in circulation and many were overdue on most of our visits. According to the Regional Librarian, the children were reluctant to return them for fear of not getting others to borrow. Also, most of the books are old and irrelevant and require weeding. Unfortunately, this has not been done because according to the Regional Librarian, there is the fear that weeding would leave the shelves empty.

The Regional Librarian buys few books of interest to the literate population from the meager resources of GH¢300.00 allocated to her. It also lacks local collections which should be of interest to researchers and scholars (both local and foreigners) who may conduct studies on the cultural, historical, political, economic, and other aspects of the Ashanti Kingdom. It must however be noted that the Manhyia Palace has a museum where information on most cultural artifacts and historical aspects of the Asante Kingdom could be obtained.

Seating Capacity

The Ashanti Library has a total seating capacity of 140. Of this number, 100 representing 71.4% are in the Reference Department while the remaining 40 or 28.6% are in the Children's Department (Table 3). There are no seats for users at the Lending Department of the Library because this Department is used purposely for charging and discharging of books.

Table 3: Seating Capacity of the Ashanti Library

Department	Number of Seats	Percentage
Reference	100	71.4
Children	40	28.6
Total	140	100

Source: Data from the Ashanti Regional Library, Kumasi, November 2009

Any material taken from this Department other than borrowing would have to be used at the Reference Department. The seating capacity in the Library is grossly inadequate compared to the total population of Kumasi, let alone the entire region. This supports findings by Ogunshye (1969) that public libraries in West Africa tend to be crowded within few years of their being constructed. The major reason that has accounted for this state of affairs is the small size of the Kibrary. In this regard the Library lacks space to put in more seats for its users. At the time of putting up the building in 1954, the colonial administrators failed to take into consideration, the future rise in population. Unfortunately for more than fifty years after independence, the Ghana Library Board has not been able to put up a new library building to replace the current one because successive governments from 1966 have failed to make the development of public libraries their priority.

The implication is that there is always pressure on the use of seats especially during examination periods for tertiary students and remedial students preparing for the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and allied examinations. This may be attributed to non-residential students in tertiary institutions in Kumasi who use the Library for studies during examination periods. One of the most important reasons why students prefer using the public library as a place of study is that they share rooms in their homes which make them not conducive for learning.

Library Catalogue

A library catalogue provides clear and useful information for library users. It aids resource discovery; assists users to evaluate the object without necessarily having to access the object itself; enables users to check the object availability (to the user); and also enables a location for the object to be determined (Brophy, 2001). The Ashanti Library's collection is organized according to the Dewey Decimal Classification scheme and has both the author and subject catalogues respectively. The Classification and Cataloguing of documents are both handled at the headquarters in Accra, and this has a negative effect on the professional development of the Regional Librarian. This is because she is not exposed to or experience the challenges involved in cataloguing and classifying of library materials.

In spite of the fact that the materials at the regional and district branches of the Ghana Library Board (GLB) are catalogued and classified at the headquarters, the public libraries do not have a Union Catalogue or Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) because the GLB has not yet networked its operations. The absence of a union catalogue makes it difficult for users in the Ashanti Library to know the holdings of the other libraries in the system which consequently affects resource sharing and inter-library lending.

Registered Users

The Ashanti Regional Library has registered users who have the right to borrow materials from the Library. According to records available at the Library, as at the end of November 2009, there were 494 registered users made up of 155 adults and 339 children. Of the adult registered users, only 9 (made up of 7 males and 2 females) are students. In percentage terms, they represent 1.8%, 29.6% and 68.6% for students, adults and children respectively. The number of registered students in the library are disturbing given the poor state of secondary school libraries.

Table 4: Details of Registered Users

Categories	Males	Females	Total
Students	7	2	9
Adults	86	60	146
Children	127	212	339
Total	226	268	494

Source: Data from the Ashanti Regional Library, Kumasi, November 2009

Most school libraries in Ghana are full of out-dated and irrelevant materials which are of little value to the students. They lack basic infrastructure such as purpose built library buildings, furniture and ICT facilities. These school libraries are also managed by disgruntled library clerks who have no interest in librarianship (Alemna, 1991).

Statistics obtained from the Metropolitan Directorate of Education show that there are 54 second cycle schools with a total population of 50,281 students in the Kumasi metropolis alone. This is made up of 33 private Senior Secondary/Commercial schools and 21 public schools (consisting of 18 Senior Secondary, one Technical and two Training Colleges). The

low patronage of the Ashanti Regional Library by second cycle students may be due to poor reading habits among senior secondary school students in the Metropolis. According to Neuman (1996), “public libraries play very important role in improving the reading habits of students. Insufficient use of public libraries therefore appears to be one of the main causes of insufficient reading habits among students”.

It is also observed from Table 4 that females constitute the greatest proportion of the registered users in the Library. They constitute 54.3% while males form 45.7%. This implies that female users patronize the Library more than the male users. In the case of adult users there are more males than females. This is because many female students drop out as they progress along the education ladder. The main reason for this disparity is that in the traditional settings, females are over-burdened with household activities than males. It is further observed from Table 4 that majority of the registered users at the Ashanti Regional Library are children. The book stock and seats in the Children’s Library form only 31.8% and 28.6% respectively of the entire stock and furniture in the Ashanti Library. The implication is that the Library is unable to meet the information needs of a greater proportion of its registered users. This is a serious anomaly that should be addressed if its impact is to be felt. Having rich collections and attracting a sufficient number of users should be the main aim of any public library including the Ashanti Regional Library.

Funding

The Ashanti Regional Library is a state institution and is thus funded by the government of Ghana as contained in the Ordinance which established the Ghana Library Board. Therefore all financial responsibilities regarding the salary of staff as well as building the stock and other related matters are under the direct responsibility of the state. Money plays a crucial role in the administration and development of libraries because the extent and quality of service rendered depends largely on funding available to them. Unfortunately, funding is a major problem facing both the Ghana Library Board and the Ashanti Regional Library.

Information gathered from the Regional Librarian indicates that she is given an imprest of GH¢300.00 which is the equivalent of (\$200.00) per month (i.e. GH¢3,600.00 or \$2400.00 each year) for all administrative and operational expenses including maintenance of vehicles, cost of stationery and other consumables and a further GH ¢250.00 per month or \$166.67 (i.e. GH¢ 3,000.00 or \$2000.00 per annum) for fuelling of official vehicles. Regrettably, the disbursement of this small amount of money is supervised by a Senior Accounts Officer which is a clear case of underutilization of human resources. This is not a healthy development which should be addressed by the Ghana Library Board and for that matter the Ministry of Education as the supervising Ministry.

Information and Communication Technology

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the fusion of computer and communications technologies for the creation, processing, dissemination and transmission of information. The implementation of ICT facilitates change, creativity, improved services, and the non-restrictive flow of information (Al-Qallaf and Al-Azmi, 2002). It is the catalyst that is moving libraries into a new dimension. The Ashanti Library has an Internet café with five computers and located within the Reference Department. According to the Regional Librarian, patrons use the Café for browsing and research, and patronage is very encouraging. However, the Internet café does not have a trained technician and the day-to-day management is in the hands of a library assistant. The five workstations are also inadequate.

The Library does not subscribe to any electronic journals (e-journals) or online resources which could be accessed by its registered users for research purposes. Electronic information sources offer a number of advantages over the traditional print based sources. They could

also be accessed from any remote location by dial-up access thus making the library accessible to distance learners or those with limited time. They open up the possibility of searching multiple files at one time, searches could be printed or saved to be repeated at a later date and are updated more often than printed tools.

Photocopying and Bindery Services

The Ashanti Regional Library has no photocopying machine presently. It is unfortunate that the Library lacks such a facility in this technological age. Photocopying services promote the effective utilization of the library's resources, eliminate or reduce the incidence of book theft and mutilation of materials in the library. Photocopying also enables users to obtain copies of relevant documents in the library particularly reference materials and those on reserve. The Library used to have its own photocopier. According to the Regional Librarian, the photocopier broke down in 2008 and has not yet been repaired or replaced. Users are therefore permitted to take required documents out of the Library to make photocopies. Registered users have to leave their library cards or their institution's identity card as surety against the non return of materials taken out.

The challenge this poses is that users might not take good care of the books once they are taken out of the Library. It may also encourage users to violate the copyright laws regarding the photocopying of library materials as there would be no library staff present to enforce such laws. Also it would take a longer time before the materials could be returned by the users. Again since the materials are taken out of the Library without any close scrutiny by staff, the library staff would have to take their time to properly scrutinize them whenever they are returned by the users to ascertain whether such materials have not been tampered with. In addition, users who are unable to afford photocopying charges could mutilate documents.

Because the public library service is centrally controlled from the headquarters in Accra, some services, including binding of documents are carried out at the headquarters. This practice, apart from the fact that it is slow, also denies users prompt access to the few relevant books they have in the system.

The Way Forward

The current building for the Ashanti Regional Library is too small to serve its purpose. The Ghana Library Board, Ministry of Education and the Kumasi Metropolitan Authority should, as a matter of urgency, put up a multipurpose library structure which is spacious enough to accommodate more users on the undeveloped land in front of the Library. The new purpose built library should have a large reading and discussion areas while the present site serves as the audio visual centre. Alternatively, the Library could be relocated to a new site in any of the emerging suburbs in Kumasi.

Funding is another issue that should be urgently looked at. Since money is the life blood of any business entity, the Library should also embark upon income generating ventures aggressively. Lobbying, advocacy and fundraising skills should be adopted to raise additional funds for resourcing the Library. Donor and partner funding should be sought and sourced through organizations, philanthropists and friends of the Library. Appeals for financial assistance should be made especially to all the Kumasi based organizations, institutions and companies as well as the Otumfour Education Fund which is helping to expand educational facilities and infrastructure in the Asante Kingdom in particular and Ghana in general. Others such as local publishers like Woeli, Asempa, Assemblies Press, and Ghana Universities Press could donate books and other reading materials and magazines they publish. Business houses operating in the city could be requested to provide equipment and furniture.

There is the urgent need to decentralise the activities of the Ghana Library Board and to separate the operations of the regional and district libraries, so that each unit could manage its

own finances. This would help these libraries to acquire the needed materials and equipment such as books, furniture, and computers.

The mobile library service provided by the Ghana Library Board through the Ashanti Regional Library should be expanded to reach out to people in the rural areas. The service was discontinued in 1983. However, it was reintroduced in 2008 and currently being operated on a pilot basis in the Amansie West and the Asante Akim South Districts respectively.

The Regional Librarian and her staff should team up with the Regional and the District Directorate of Education to organize educational campaigns in schools and colleges in the metropolis on the need to patronize the public library. They should also organize Library Week each year during which period the general public could visit the Library. This would make them aware of the resources and challenges facing the Library. Appeal for funds could be launched during the Library Week to raise funds for the purchase of books and other equipment needed for the efficient operation of the Library.

Conclusion

Public libraries are established for the systematic collection development, organization, preservation and dissemination of knowledge and information to the community. The study has so far shown that the Ashanti Regional Library which was the first regional library to be established before independence is currently facing several challenges. The size of the Library, its book stock, the number of the professional staff, furniture and ICT facilities available fall short of what is expected of a regional library. The size of Kumasi and the number of schools, colleges and universities are expanding fast although the size of the Library and the available facilities remain static. This is adversely affecting the role of the Library.

There is no doubt that public libraries in Ghana provided reading materials for both city and rural dwellers immediately after independence. It must be emphasized that the government recognized the provision of library services as an essential element in the national scheme of educational advancement. Consequently, the indigenous government after independence made heavy budgetary allocations to the Ghana Library Board each year so that it could provide effective and efficient library services to its members, including educated rural dwellers, many of whom were teachers. The Government of Ghana, the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Library Board and the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly should re-ignite this educational advancement by coming to the aid of the Ashanti Regional Library by stocking the Library with quality books, computers and ICT facilities to meet the ever increasing needs of its users. These institutions should, as a long term plan, put up a much bigger and multipurpose library to benefit the status of a Regional Library, and the Metropolis.

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