



Using mobile phones to provide information to the community: the perceptions of a rural based academic library

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UP-Carnegie Capstone Conference: March 2019



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Introduction

- Community engagement or Corporate Social Responsibility role of universities
- Academic Libraries have a mandate to engage with the outside community
- Use what communities have already (mobile phones)



Purpose

- This paper investigates the perceptions of an academic library in a rural community on the need to engage with this community by way of providing agricultural information resources using mobile phones.

Objectives

- To find out the community engagement projects the library is involved with and how that has impacted on resources?
- To explore how the library would use mobile phones as a feasible tool for providing agricultural information services to farmers?
- To find out how the library could collaborate with other agencies in the implementation of this outreach programme?



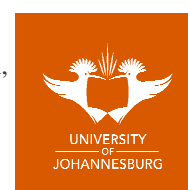
Background

- University of Venda is a rural based university
- Most of the people around survive on subsistence farming
- Dzindi Irrigation Scheme (110 small scale farmers) supported by 1 extension officer.
- Mobile phone penetration rate of 93%, Radio 67% and Computers 9.9% [Stats SA, 2011]
- Major crops farmed are cabbage, maize, spinach, sweet potatoes, mustard, carrot, beetroot and butternuts.



Literature Review

- Outreach services are an obligation of the university[library] to their communities (Schneider, 2001, 2003; Savage, 1999; Cater and Seaman, 2011)
- Agriculture is an information intensive economic activity (40 output critical decisions in one season (Shoham, 2016)
- ¼ of the yield gap and poor adoption of innovations are due to lack of information (Shoham, 2016)
- Mobile phones enable libraries to extend their services to outsiders without overextending themselves (IFLA, 2012)
- Community profiling underpin effective outreach services (Lamptey, Sambo & Hassan, 2016; Wallingford et al , 1996 & Lippincott, 2008)

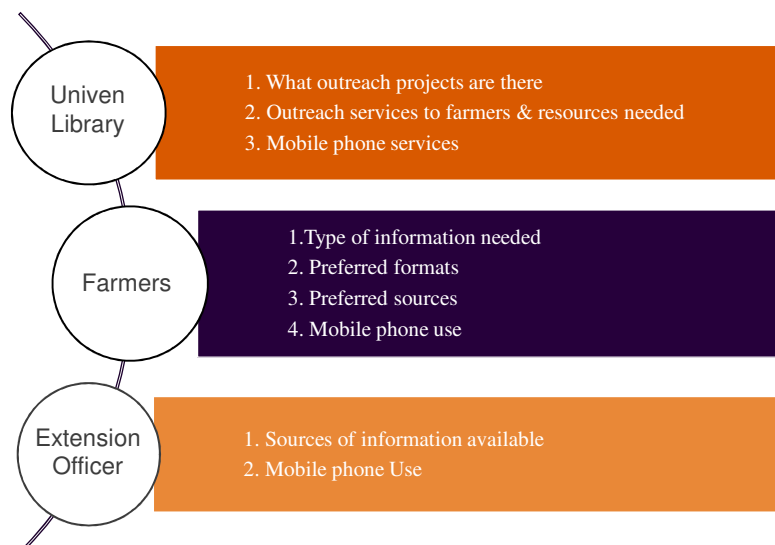


Research methods

- Case study of Dzindi Irrigation Scheme
- Purposive (snowball sampling) (Davies and Hughes, 2014)
 - Sample of 10 farmers.
- Qualitative semi-structures interviews with:
 - Farmers
 - Extension officer
 - Univen Library Director
- Thematic analysis of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006)



Data collection



Findings: Library

1

Library Outreach Programmes and Resources needed

- Community or Public Libraries
- School Libraries
- Resources: Staffing and Training
- IT Support and Budget Issues

2

Format of information provided

- Library collection predominantly print
- E-journals are 95% electronic
- The future is largely electronic

3

Mobile based services/products

- Only the electronic databases
- Lack of capacity from IT has stalled the provision of such products and or services

4

Agric Information through mobile phone & Collaboration

- Mobile phones key to information access
- This has to be combined with creation of more community libraries
- Collaborations are critical for effectiveness and sustainability

9



Findings: Farmers

- Prefer information from the extension officer and the radio
- Oral and print format is most preferred.
- All use mobile phones to access information (calls and sms)
- Mobile phone is critical throughout the agricultural cycle
- Biggest challenge is cost



Findings: Extension Officer

- Is almost solely reliant on the internet for information
- Thinks the University should do more to help him access information
- Uses his mobile phones a lot because of high officer to farmer ratio
- Faces challenges of cost of data and simplifying technical language for farmers



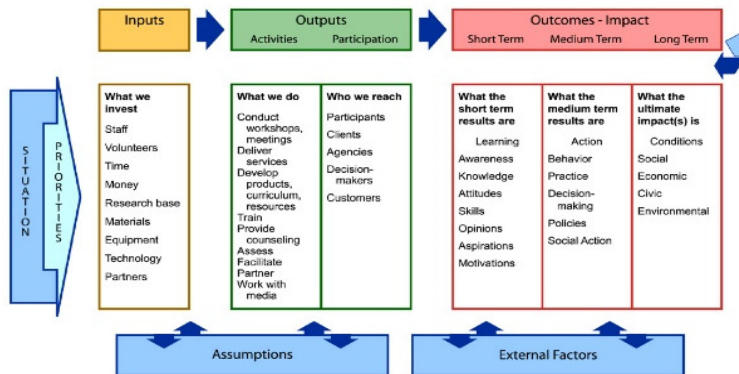
Recommendations

- The Univen Library should engage with the Department of Agriculture to assist extension officers and farmers.
- Sms and other messaging apps are the most viable method to be used for communicating information.
- Language issues should be factored in.
- The library will have to arrange training both for library staff, extension officers and staff from other stakeholder organisations.
- Funding will have to be actively sourced while at the same time ensuring co-ownership of the project by the famers.



Outreach Programme Implementation Framework—Foster (2016)

LOGIC MODEL



Source: University of Wisconsin Extension, Program Development and Evaluation

Foster, P. (2016). Public Libraries & community outreach: programme assessment for serving homeless patrons. Available: https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/180903/Foster_Pamela_Professional_Paper_Final_20160427.pdf?sequence=5



Conclusion

- There is lack of information by small scale farmers around Univen
- The extension officer plays a critical role in information provision and is therefore a key partner.
- Mobile phones are the most used tool for accessing information all year round.
- Univen library sees itself having a critical role play in reaching out to farmers using mobile phones through partnerships with other agencies.



Thank you

