

MARKETING LIBRARY SERVICES TO THE RURAL POPULATION IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This paper discusses the strategies a librarian needs to use to market his/her library or information services in rural areas in Africa.

Approach

The discussion is based entirely on the authors' experience in providing library/ information services to the rural population in African states supplemented with literature review.

Findings

It was found that in an effort to provide effective marketing strategies, the information provider will need to understand the kind of environment that characterises the rural areas of Africa. He/she needs to know the demographic features of the population served, the kind of work people do, their information needs and seeking behaviour; and the challenges they experience seeking information.

Study limitations

Since the discussion is based on the authors' experience and analysis of literature from previous studies, the study can not be generalised to reflect the situation on the continent. Rather, it is indicative of the situation in sub-Saharan Africa.

Practical implications

As not much has been researched on marketing of library services to the rural population in Africa, it is hoped that the study will encourage information professionals and scholars to carry out empirical research in this area and in so doing, address the problems that affect provision of information in rural Africa.

Originality/value

It appears from this discussion that the kind of marketing strategies to be adopted in rural Africa will need to take into account the kind of environment that exists: one has to understand the demographic features of the population to come up with appropriate strategies. Without this, the exercise is likely to be futile.

Keywords

Africa, Marketing of Libraries, Marketing Strategies, Rural Libraries

INTRODUCTION

Today information is crucial in every sphere of life. The entire spectrum of Africa's development framework holds information in high esteem. On the international scene, the world recognizes the importance of information as a main ingredient in globalization.

Africa is composed largely of developing nations where the majority of the population live in rural areas. The majority of these rural dwellers are either non-literate or semi-literate. The need to involve them in the national development process cannot be overemphasized. Okiy (2003) correctly holds the view that this can be achieved through the identification of the information needs of rural dwellers and the provision of innovative rural public library services to improve their level of literacy and education and to enhance their ability to use practical information relevant to their daily lives.

What is marketing and what relevance does it have for the rural librarian? Marketing is not about persuading people to buy or use something which they do not really want or need. Marketing does not begin with a product or service and the marketer cannot create demand that does not exist. Marketing is not a magic formula for instantly increasing use of a service or product. The Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as: ‘...the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer needs profitably’.

Baker (1987) suggests that real marketing has four essential features. It:

- i. Starts with the customer
- ii. Takes a long run perspective
- iii. Makes full use of all the [available] resources
- iv. Is innovative.

If no one knows about the library and how it can help the community meet its goals, it will not—and should not—continue to exist. Marketing means creating an awareness of the library’s value” and could indeed be the missing ingredient that is leading to the overall poor performance of rural library services.

Strategy on the other hand is concerned with establishing and sharing long-term direction. Marketing strategy provides answers such as : Which markets to invest in; what can the organization offer that is distinct from what is offered by competitors, how the market place position will change over in next five years, what the competitors will be doing then and what benefits the customers are to expect then. It thus guides the marketing activities.

RURAL LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN AFRICA

On the international scene, the world recognizes the importance of information as a main ingredient in globalization. (Mchombu, 2006).

The provision of public library services in Africa to date has focused more on urban areas and hence more on the urban elite to the neglect of rural non-literate masses. Unfortunately, librarianship in Africa has been modelled on Western patterns, without taking account of the local environment and non-literate masses in rural areas. Thus, African public libraries in general are stocked with literature that is usually foreign, outdated and irrelevant to the information needs and interests of the people expected to read them. These inappropriate types of literature

are also found in rural public libraries. Characterised as they are by ignorance, poverty, and illiteracy, rural inhabitants cannot be adequately served by print-oriented information media that use a language and format that is irrelevant to them. By contrast, the role that the rural public library should play is that of tailoring its services to accommodate the non-literate rural majority of Africans.

Mostert (2001) emphasized this point stating that the problem of information provision in rural areas of Africa necessitates the supply of information, not just in print form but in other forms (oral, visual, electronic) that are appropriate to rural dwellers. Providing a westernised library system to the illiterate rural Africa simply creates a *monument* for the elite. Information is power and appropriate information provision empowers people or even nations to promote informed decision making. It is in this light that he emphasized that:

Rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in any development process. People in rural areas whether literate or not should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligations and to become better informed citizens generally.

Rural information sources are thus still under-developed in Africa. For example, it has been pointed out that the actual sources from which information is disseminated in rural areas include social welfare officers, health and agricultural extension staff, community leaders, village priests and headmasters, travelling petty traders, local government staff, and visitors from the city. Government information centres and the mass media (radio and, in rare cases, television) feature as well. Information exchange also takes place in market places, bars, community/political meetings, churches or mosques and schools. More recently cell-phone penetration has improved information access from mostly relatives living in the city. However, these sources of information transfer are grossly inadequate if the rural areas of Africa are to acquire and utilize the kind of information required for accelerated development.

Above all, the sources of information dissemination outlined above do not include the rural public library. There are very few public libraries in the rural areas of Africa, and they are poorly funded and ill-equipped (in terms of both human and material resources).

INFORMATION NEEDS OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN AFRICA

The rural population in Africa has extensive information needs. Their information requirements have been analysed in the research findings of among others, Okiy (2003). Their areas of information needs include:

- *Primary rural occupations*: for example, agricultural activities such as produce farming, livestock, fishing and poultry farming.
- *Secondary rural occupations*: traditional crafts of pottery, blacksmithing, weaving, carving and local beer brewing.
- *Modern crafts*: tailoring, shoe making, vulcanising and welding; watch, radio and auto-repairs; hair dressing and petty trading.
- *Government information provided as a social service*: for example, agricultural information about new technologies for improving mortality rates in animals; information about better seed types and how to obtain them; information about farm equipment, fertilizers, pesticides, better storage facilities and how to use them.

Generally, the majority of rural Africans require information on issues of health, politics, education, community development, legal, environmental and sustainable development as outlined by Momodu's (2002) information needs analysis and information seeking behaviour of a rural community in Nigeria.

Education information

School children need information to pass examination (study texts and text books), secondary schools available that they can enrol to, scholarships and bursaries, career prospects and counselling. Parents need information on the best schools to which to send their children, opportunities for evening classes for their children, information on higher education and colleges and generally how it affects their children. Neo literates and literates and others types need information on adult education, continuing education, information on training and introduction to new job opportunities as well as information for literacy development.

Agricultural information

Agricultural information needs vary and range from where to purchase fertilizers, how to use them, information on pesticides, herbicides, storage, processing of farm produce, loans, market situations, government assistance, how to hire tractors, meteorological dates, information on fishing, dairy and animal husbandry, etc.

Health Information

Health information needs of rural people revolve on need for information on how to handle the incidence of outbreak of certain epidemics, where to get treatment for different ailments

particularly those that have defied traditional medicine, treating water for domestic use, information on medication, sanitation pre and post-natal care, immunization and child healthcare. In many communities, especially in rural areas, public libraries serve as cultural and community centres. They can also serve as health information hubs and offer a forum for access to health information.

Political

Political information in African context is the type of information necessary for mental liberation to break down apathy and culture of silence. It helps to engender in rural inhabitants effective participation in the process of nation building. Correct and adequate political information to rural dwellers helps raise their political awareness and consciousness in order to align with government policies and programmes. They use political information to conjure in them the appropriate cognitive and affective behaviour necessary for cohesion, growth and progress. They need to know their civic responsibilities, loyalty and patriotism towards the nation. They need to know how to vote, the danger of selling their votes, advantages of opposition parties, danger of tribalism, nepotism and apathy.

Community and Sustainable Development

Community development efforts are predicated on the fact that the government cannot provide all the needs of the people. The people themselves need to do something to help themselves, at least to augment the efforts of the government. There is thus need for provision of information on areas like viable self help products and information for sustainable development. This encompasses information on the environment and sustainable environmental practices, environmental degradation, energy sources, waste disposal etc.

Legal information

Noting the relevance of legal information to rural communities, Otike (1996) laments that very little is often done by government departments, agencies or NGOs to disseminate legal information to the rural public. Governments have tended to concentrate their efforts on the provision of information on agricultural, health, environmental and adult literacy. Very little has been done to provide legal information to rural communities, yet, he attests that

“Economic progress in any country can be achieved only when there is law and order, but law and order can only be effected if both citizens and the govt machinery understand and appreciate law. Experience reviles that in instances where the general public is ignorant of the law, there is a tendency of the law enforcement personnel to take advantage of the situation to exploit the public. While the problem persists equally in

urban areas, it is at rural community where it is felt mostly because of the inaccessibility to legal institutions : where the literacy rate is at its lowest and where the income generated cannot justify enlisting services of legal professionals.”(Otiike, 1996:226)

Rural information services can often be in a position to serve as a hub for dissemination of legal information to communities served, and at cost-effective rates. Legal literacy is thus one core role of a rural information service.

The above information needs require a well-developed system of information transfer in the rural areas. A properly organised rural public library stands out from all other information agencies of government, mass media, agriculture, interpersonal communications, and health extension workers, as a system that can bring together information generated by all these bodies authoritatively.

STRATEGIES TO MARKET RURAL LIBRARY SERVICES

The marketing mix is a set of tools available to the marketing manager to shape nature of the service offered to consumers. The tools can be used to develop both long-term and short term strategies and tactical programs for marketing. (Palmer, 1994).

As mentioned earlier, marketing is not about persuading people to buy or use something which they do not really want or need. Marketing does not begin with a product or service and the marketer cannot create demand that does not exist. Rather, it starts with the customer, takes a long-run perspective, makes use of available resources and is innovative.

Information professionals in rural libraries need to take a careful look at the **6Ps of marketing** to design on a long-run perspective services that can effectively meets the needs of the users. Strategies that information professionals can use to market the rural library services hence include activities that revolve around the 6Ps of marketing: Product/service, Place, Price, Promotion, People and Process

a) PRODUCT / SERVICE

The product/service is the aspect of the marketing mix that deals with the creation, development and management of products (and services). The information industry offers access to information goods and also services. A

good product must satisfy the customer's needs and wants. A library therefore needs to maintain a satisfactory level of products which involves introducing new products, modifying existing products and eliminating products that no longer satisfy customers or yield acceptable profits. (Rowley, 2006). An information professional serving rural communities has a role to provide services that meets the need of the people, and are modeled to reflect their culture and needs. Unfortunately, however, this has not been the case in many rural libraries, as they have been modeled from the Western model.

The information professional serving the rural area must bear in mind that community information services should not solely be based on the provision of printed materials, as many rural users are not used to utilizing printed materials, because so little of it exists in the community.

Mostert (2001) articulates some implications of ill-matched information service provision in rural areas, and reminds us that there were high expectations of public libraries when they were established in Africa, but most of these services fell far short especially with regard to providing services that were capable of reaching all readers. Successful rural libraries are those that have moved away from the western public library model towards active service-oriented systems, based on the needs of the community as a whole. Rural community libraries are agents of development and empowerment for its users.

In short, information professionals have failed to respond to the information needs of their communities because they use inapplicable models of information provision. The adoption of new information delivery approaches will help libraries to provide access to information to the majority of citizens. In the context of serving rural areas, the word library can mean a box of books, a reading room for newspapers, a display of information or posters, . . . and should not necessarily refer to a traditionally arranged, staffed and stocked "western library" . The Western library model also tends to associate *literacy* with *information needs* and provision. This approach underestimates the fact that literates, neo-literates and even illiterates equally require information to raise their educational standards, advance

democracy, participate in decision-making, develop the economy and enhance the quality of life. It is a truism that the urge of the rural people in a developing country for different kinds of information connected to their livelihood is a natural human attribute.

Strategies that can be adopted therefore to market the **information product** in Africa include:

i) Adoption of aural formats in dissemination of information

Oral transmission is cheap and could take the forms of *group discussions, person to person communication, and other forms of learning through drama, poetry, and song.*

The low use of libraries in rural Africa can be attributed to the exclusive use of print as the main mode of transmission of information. Nyana (2009) reported findings from several surveys in Botswana, Kenya, and Tanzania showing the overall percentage of library users below 7.5 percent as of 2003.

The problem of inappropriate collections has also been exacerbated by book donations from the West, whose content is foreign and does not reflect the culture or address the needs of rural African communities. Alemna (1996) notes that African libraries are trying to replace oral culture with reading culture, rather than focusing on providing relevant skills and information necessary for rural communities.

There are alternative models already in Ghana and Mali that closely match the needs of rural communities because they bring in experts and professionals from different fields to provide information to oral consumers in a format that is meaningful to them.

Nyana (2009) describes *Audiotheques rurales du Mali*, a community centre project: In nearly 150 villages, Committees for Oral Knowledge consisting of local dignitaries, traditional healers, extension workers and volunteer audio librarians, administer a service. The national structure is intended both to disseminate information on hygiene, health, farming, environmental protection and other practical matters, and give wider access to traditional knowledge in the forms of local history, stories, songs, medical and agricultural knowledge.

Amadi's concept of the "barefoot librarian" could be another solution to addressing rural information needs. In this model, a professional with training or knowledge of, the oral tradition, and competent in the use of Western technology to enhance oral tradition, would be able to serve both oral and print consumers

ii) Repackaging of Information

The rural librarian can repackage information from print to audio and visual formats that are easily usable to the rural community.

Alemna (1995) suggests repackaging information to meet the oral culture of the African communities. Ideally, the library system should incorporate both oral and print-based modes of information transmission. Print materials should be available for those who can read and these same materials should be translated orally for those who cannot read. Oral transmission can take the form of group discussions, workshops, person-to-person interaction, storytelling, as well as poetry and drama.

iii) Translation of books to local languages

The rural librarian, in consultation with related agencies, can translate core information materials that address the people's information needs directly to a local language familiar with the people. This translation involves simplification of language and technical terms to a consumable product.

Such an approach has been adopted by the Biblionef South Africa where books are translated to local languages and donated to school children in an attempt to foster a reading culture. To date, books have been translated to the 11 official South African languages, with over 340,000 books having been donated.

Another example is the Kitengesa Community Library in Uganda. The library is reported by Dent and Yanotta (2005) to comprise books in both English and Luganda, with majority of books coming from Ugandan publishers, hence

making the collection very relevant to the population. This is a product that serves the needs of the customers.

iv) Use of audio Visual Technologies and Formats

Audio visual media have the advantage of being interactive, providing personified meanings, reaching to semi-literate audiences as well as ability to communicate to large numbers simultaneously. They thus form an excellent information product for rural communities.

An example is given by Mchombu (2006) of the Chiwamba Community Library in Malawi where video shows offering development information, publicized via community notice boards, are shown using a solar powered generator and have become a popular activity at the centre.

By extension, technologies like radio and audio-visual equipment can be used to produce materials that are sustainable and compatible with the oral tradition. Such materials could be used to provide relevant information on agriculture or aquaculture, and related information on marketing and other skills relevant to rural communities where farming or fishing is a way of life.

Use of audio visual technologies also calls for collaboration with local partners. For instance, the Kitengesa Library in Uganda has partnered with a local radio station, where books from the library are read to listeners. (Dent and Yannota, 2005)

b) PLACE

Information must be made available to the people where they are. It must also be availed at the right time and convenient location i.e. where and when users can access it. Rowley (2006) therefore firmly states that distribution of information products must include making sufficient quantities available to satisfy as many customers as possible.

In Africa, most rural libraries are found where users may not be able to access them. Certain models have been proposed and put to use to avail the library where the people are. These strategies can be adopted by a rural librarian as appropriate in the community they serve. They include:

- i) **Biblioneef (Book Ship).** These are informal libraries that have been adopted in South Africa. Here shipping containers form the basic library structure and steel trunks for sites where smaller libraries are needed. Using these, the Biblioneef has been able to supply books to schools, hospitals, farms and communities. (Molefe, 2005)
- ii) **Camel Library :**The project began in 1996 as an innovative attempt to take information to people difficult to serve with static libraries and a mobile book van. The camel library operates on the animal's back rather than the traditional library based in an institutional building or Western-type mobile book van. It is successful in an environment with myriad problems like infrastructural deficiencies, difficult landscape, hostile climatic conditions, diverse cultures and scattered human settlements, and inadequate public information institutions. (Atuti and Ikoja-Odongo, 1999).

The rural librarian therefore can adapt other possible solutions relevant to their settings. This could include *Boda boda* libraries that could use bicycles and motorbikes to deliver information resources to the patrons.

- iii) **Village Reading Rooms :** Botswana Library Association (BLA) started the project of Village Reading Rooms where the initial intention was to provide reading space with relevant sources for neo-literates. The project became very successful, spreading countrywide and rooms are now used by various groups including students of rural communities for reading purposes. The reading rooms are able to reach where traditional community libraries are not available. (Molefe, 2005)
- iv) **Kitengesa Library :** A modified school library is the model for Kitengesa Library. (Dent and Yannota, 2005). This library is situated in a school, but is open to the

rural community nearby. Since schools are traditionally located within the vicinity of the rural people, it serves as a perfect place that is accessible, hence bringing the service to the people.

c) **PRICE**

Price represents the agreed value of an exchange. It may be used as a competitive tool. In the information marketplace, price is not only a concern at the point of use, but needs to be considered throughout the information industry value chain. Information products and services depend on the compilation and representation and packaging of information by a range of intermediaries, including booksellers. (Rowley, 2006) Public sector library and information services have long traditions as free services.

Public libraries which are largely the model for rural libraries in Africa have a history of provision of “free services”. Though they pay for the service in tax, at the time of delivery of service, no money is requested for provision of service. This, to some extent, has portrayed the library services as having no value.

There is need for rural librarians to venture into pricing and charging for services they offer. This may not only promote the use of the services, but avail opportunity for provision of more services. A community library service in Lodwar (Lokiriama Community Library) has long valued this principle. Pupils are charged five shillings per month while adults pay one hundred shillings to use the service. Though the library is designed to serve the semi-urban populace it has realized an increase in numbers and use of service to the point of necessitating expansion of the service.

d) **PROMOTION**

Promotion can also be termed as marketing communication. It relates to all activities used to inform one or more groups of people about an organization and its products. Promotion can be used more generally to increase public awareness of an organization and of new and existing products or alternatively, it can be used to educate consumers about product features, or to maintain public awareness of existing products. It includes advertising, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing. Promotion is one element of the two way communication with customers that forms the basis for customer relationships.

Most people in rural areas have oral tradition and some are illiterate, so there is a need to make tremendous promotional efforts to bring people to rural libraries. Several strategies can be adopted for example:

- In small districts people often live in close proximity to each other. A rural librarian can go from house to house informing people on the role of the library in transforming their lives.
- A rural librarian can attend community meetings. During these *barazas*, the librarian could request the chief or community leader to be given an opportunity to say something about the library, or give a brief educative talk.
- A rural librarian can visit mosques and churches to talk about the importance of the library.
- The librarian can collaborate and partner with local radio stations to create extension services. While the service benefits the people, the library also gets promoted. This is the case for Kitengesa Library cited earlier. In Kenya, proliferation of stations in local languages provide an avenue for provision of such services.
- Provision of value added services: in communities here adults have limited access to education, literacy instruction can be conducted in the library building (if space allows) or librarians can be used to foster the service directly. By promoting the service, they by extension promote the library and its use. Kitengesa Library has also adopted this model.
- Collaboration with Extension Staff : the librarian can work closely with the Health and agricultural extension staff to promote the library service. This could include provision of health and agricultural information in the library too for extended reference after the extension officer has left.
- Use of headmasters/mistresses to foster love for the library to the school children
- Games and cultural activities: The information centre could provide rooms (huts) for games and cultural activities, including the traditional games such as *bao*. Drama, youth and women's clubs could also meet in this rooms. This will provide a service as well as raise awareness of the library. Such is the case with the Chiwamba community library cited earlier.
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e) **PEOPLE**

Most services use people in service delivery, often creating and delivering the product in interaction with the customer. The quality of interaction between the service agent and customer is a major influence of satisfaction. (Rowley, 2006).

Given the services highlighted above, the rural librarian is the central person. To be effective in service delivery, the rural librarian has to be:

- Knowledgeable in print and oral culture of the people he/she is serving so as to make informed decisions about the needs of the rural communities. (Amadi, 1981)
- Be familiar with technology and able to harness it effectively to serve the needs of the local people.
- Have a natural disposition to helping others, and be responsive.
- Able to communicate well both orally and in written.
- Easily works with others e.g. able to collaborate with related information agencies such as non-governmental organizations of relevance, government extension workers, teachers and politicians.
- Able to facilitate and arouse people to action. Community information services are rooted in the community and for most part, should be facilitated by a member of that community.

Malhan and Rao (2005) have this to say of the rural librarian : “ The rural librarian should not see himself as a white-collar worker manning an elitist organization. Rather he should see himself as a sort of "barefoot librarian" who is able to relate well with his rural community and come to be relied upon as a reliable source of information on rural life. More than anything else, this will demonstrate the usefulness of his library to the community and help to cultivate the idea of the library as a permanent extension agency, always there to be consulted in the absence of the any other readily available source.”

f) **PROCESS**

Services are manufactured and consumed live, and because they involve an interaction between two people, it is more difficult to exercise control and ensure consistency. (Rowley, 2006). The service process needs careful design. It may include queuing arrangements, processing customer details and payment as well as elements of the core service delivery.

The library service has therefore to be carefully planned. In adopting the classification scheme for example, the rural librarian should not be bound by the clumsy standard classification schemes such as Library of Congress, or Unicode. Rather, a simple down-to-earth scheme that makes sense to the patrons being used is likely to be of greater use.

Similarly, processes that involve preservation and conservation has to be taken care of well. This is because if the librarian opts to give books to be read at home, the storage facilities under which the items will be kept may subject the resources to much deterioration.

The librarian would still be able to offer services such as Current Awareness and Selective Dissemination of Information, albeit not on the old model. The librarian, for instance, could use word of mouth to let users know new resources available, and for audio visual resources, planning their public shows and informing the users. The librarian could abstract information from newspapers and other periodicals of value and pass it to the community. This could include information on the colleges and what courses they are offering, their intakes, their fees, requirements and job prospects; reputation of the college or polytechnic, job vacancies, community development opportunities, funding etc.

The process model has been lacking much in our rural libraries as libraries lift designs for the urban public library and expect it to work in a different environment. This is the core reason for minimum users of libraries as services and processes revolving therein have not received careful planning and evaluation in their process design to meet the needs of the people.

CHALLENGES LIKELY TO BE FACED

- i) Translation Services : the librarian has to know the local language and be a master of it, or will have to look for additional resources to assist in translation service. This means extra cost.
- i) Shortage of Trained Staff : library and information workers who have the skills and commitment to offer innovative services which can target poor and marginalized communities and create strong literate environments are lacking. Training in rural librarianship is still low or absent in many training institutions in Africa. The graduate level staff may not be willing to be rural librarians while other lucrative jobs are in the city. Rural librarianship calls for great sacrifice and service.
- ii) Books in local languages are scarce to come by as most publishers in Africa concentrate on school and educational publishing. Translation services thus has to be backed from the government as they will involve a huge financial outlay as well as human resources. This is the case for formal translations of books that will involve seeking copyright clearance from the author and publisher.
- iii) Audio visual material : cost of equipment and maintenance could be very expensive, and thus inhibit use.

- iv) Lack of co-operation among agencies involved in library-related work. This could include the extension officers and NGOs. Political will too of the political leaders in the area. When this is lacking it greatly hampers service.
- v) Coverage: rural library services have poor and limited coverage forcing the rural librarian to look for methods to reach the populace in the interior. These additional extension services are likely to be expensive and time consuming.
- vi) Limited skills : the rural librarian requires multiple skills such as strategic planning, community needs assessment, development information and delivery and participatory approaches to community development. The traditional training on librarianship does not orient the rural librarian to these tendencies.

CONCLUSION

As libraries – especially libraries serving rural populations – continue to evolve, librarians must feed their passion and nourish their vision so that they can imagine the future and subsequently find creative solutions to new and existing challenges. This philosophy of passion, vision and imagination provides an environment where a contagious enthusiasm thrives and where endless possibilities are discovered to connect communities with known and anticipated informational needs.

To be an advocate for rural development the librarian in a rural public library should source and collect information for their users in a systematic manner. The librarian must be alert to the local activities of all government agencies, making him one of the first recipients of any current information. He should also review the literature and carry out research to determine changing local information needs. He must constantly raise people’s awareness of library services. The librarian of the rural public library should develop oral-oriented services and become the human medium through whom repackaged and remodelled information can easily reach the rural populace. He should even be on hand to moderate and explain verbally the information in posters, films or video.

In this light, marketing principles for rural libraries will remain the core driver of change of our lowly used rural libraries in Africa.

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