Opportunities and Fhallenges Facing Provision of Information Literacy to Multi-Cultural Communities: A case of Tana River County, Kenya.

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Abstract - *The existence of multicultural communities in Kenya has compounded provision of information literacy to diverse groups. Opportunities and challenges exist in equal measure. The people's perceptions, cultural beliefs and practices, religious inclinations and language differences form the basis of the opportunities and challenges. This paper underpins the opportunities and challenges of providing information literacy to nomadic, agricultural and business communities in Tana River County. The objectives of the paper included identification of the different cultural groups, determining of the role of them and identification of the opportunities and challenges. The conclusions include existence of several opportunities and challenges. The multi cultural diversity in Tana River County amplifies information and literacy for development due to the literacy competition for the few existing opportunities. Challenges identified include lack of equity in income and resources, language differences and backward cultural practices. The suggested recommendations include promotion of literacy, translation of information into local languages and aggressive policies on HTPs.*

Key words: Information, literacy, multi-cultural communities, Tana-River, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism is the epitome of ethnic diversity which characterizes most of the world settlements, particularly cities and towns (Kasanga 2013).Multicultural communities are invested with several challenges and widespread opportunities particularly when the multicultural environment is bedded with information literacy. Today, major constitutions in the world have adopted multi cultural existence in their modern political and economical establishments. The emerging multicultural socio economic and political trend goes through serious adaptations, orhtations and acceptance. This is due to the development of the widespread global villagesation propelled by application of modern information communication technologies and frequent rural to urban migration as well as inter-border migrations.

In Kenya, culture has been recognized as part of the foundation of the Kenya nationhood. Kenya is generally a multi ethnic community with over 42 ethnic groups. Several forms of cultural identities exist in the form of religion, literature, communication, libraries, archives, plays and dances. Tana River County is majorly home to three multi ethnic nomadic communities with pockets of several other migrant communities. The migrant communities are mostly traders, civil servants, NGO workers, farmers and religious workers.

Multiculturalism and co existence requires high literacy levels. According to Bokora (2013) literate multicultural communities promote socio-economic and political development with ease. The contention of this paper is how to anchor information literacy as a prompter for cohesive socio- economic and political development in Tana River County, Kenya.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Information literacy in multicultural setting is one of the most challenging endeavors in information science. The challenges are borne out of the different perceptions. Multicultural groups are faced with several demands from the various languages, religions, and cultural groups with different expectations. Governance structures have developed policies and guidelines to guide cohesive co-existence among the various multi-cultural groups and communities. In Kenya, the constitution recognizes culture as a strong pillar for the well being of a nation. This paper tracks the role of information literacy in identifying the opportunities and challenges existing in the multi cultural environments.

The various diverse cultures, have brought multiple opportunities in terms of knowledge base, and investments, they have been sources of serious challenges such as inter-ethnic and clans conflicts and clandestine harmful traditional practices. The paper underlines the existing opportunities and challenges founded on sound information literacy in a multicultural environment since knowledge has become the most important production factor (Masked, 2007; Kefela 2010).

OBJECTIVES

- Identify the different cultural groups existing in Tana River.
- Determine the role of information literacy in multi-cultural communities.
- Identify the opportunities and challenges existing in a multi cultural environment in Kenya.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND LOCALE

This was basically a descriptive case study design which employed qualitative data. It was based in Tana River.

MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

The existence of cultural diversities in the world has given arise to various perceptions prejudices and stereotypes which are gained over the years through daily experiences and socialization (Martin, 2005; Kamuye, 2014). This in essence shows that humankind will be exposed on daily basis to more and unexpected cultural experiences and socialization. The world has over 6000 languages while the migration rate continues grow by day due to increased population pressures and desire for better economic opportunities. This will result into increases multicultural interactions, and socialization and therefore higher stakes based on in particularly for the heterogeneous societies (Rustell, 2009).

There are three dominant ethnic groups in Tana River County. The Pokomo are both nomadic and agriculturalists, the Orma and Waday are predominantly nomadic. Other cultural groups are the migrant communities who are basically business people, farmers, workers in public service, private and NGOs. The total population is 240,075 (National Population and Housing Census 2009; gok 2010). The poverty index is very high since 779 of the population live

below the poverty line. Transition from primary schools to Secondary schools is very low and retention rate at primary school is equally low due to inadequate information literacy and HTPs and resources. This begs the question how can these multicultural communities take the advantage of the multi-culturalism ingredients amidst them to promise IL? What opportunities exist? How can they overcome the challenges in their multicultural environment?

OPPORTUNITIES

Several opportunities exist in multicultural communities in Tana River. It is notable that there has not been deliberate assimilation of other people's culture. Assimilation occurs where smaller ethnic communities assimilate the culture. The major ethnic group in an assimilation model instead of acceptance of the multicultural model (Kottak and Kozaitis, 2008). The three major communities in Tana River County as well as the smaller communities live in a multicultural environment that exhibits their individual diversities and therefore, several opportunities as outlined below.

Multi cultural communities are dynamic and vibrant sources and recipients of information particularly information which promotes their literacy levels. They borrow best practices from each other and adopt them with ease for their socio-economic and political sustainability. This is partly ignited by the fact that they are in unstated competition. Each cultural group desires to outdo each other in their endeavors towards socio-economic and political empowerment and aggrandizement. Through literacy, all cultural groups in Tana River aspire to become self dependent and prosperous. This aspect is a strong pillar for establishing libraries and information centers which can anchor and act as foundation for information literacy among the multicultural groups in Tana River County.

Information literacy in Tana River could be promoted through various levels. One of the probable levels for promoting information literacy is through adult literacy classes spread throughout the six divisions where the various multicultural groups live. This is in spite of the heavy presence of harmful traditional practices (HTPs) which negate against sustainable information literacy.

The development of inter-cultural associations would heavily prompt need for more information literacy classes and programs across the multi cultural communities. Inter cultural associations and forums act as cultural and literacy benchmarks. Its establishment promptly establishes a forum to discuss various challenges in multicultural communities. The discourses in the inter-cultural associations would be promotion of literacy, peace and conflict resolutions, food sustainability, status of the youth and women among many others.

CHALLENGES

Multi cultural communities have their own many challenges despite the existence of overwhelming opportunities. First, the challenge of cultural identity and self sustenance is a real challenge. No one cultural group or community would want to seem to cede their cultural rights to the others. This is the bone of contention in Tana River County. Consequently, they live in fear and suspicion of the other communities. This is in spite of enhanced information literacy on the need to develop as one cohesive group. The existence of HTPs is an impediment to the development of literacy among the multi cultural communities living in Tana River.

Despite being HTPs, the communities view them as the source of their cultural identity and self preservation. On the contrary, they pose serious challenges in their move towards modernism and world literacy levels. The HTPs relegate the girl child and woman to a life of servitude, poverty and dependency while the man is contained in false self efficiency and illiteracy levels in Tana River are as a result of the widespread HTPs. It has hampered the utilization of multi cultural existence as an advantage towards the growth of literacy, knowledge and adoption of modern technologies (Rosenkraz, 2010).

RECOMMENDATION

As an effort to achieve the objectives of this paper, it is recommended that;
- Tana River county is a less endowed county in terms of resources. However, its diverse cultural groups form the basis of its resources and human capital. It is therefore recommended that the county takes up an affirmative action on eradication of Https that act as impediment to promotion of information literacy.
- Literacy materials are provided in languages which are difficult for the lay persons. Literacy materials could be provided in the languages that represent the diverse cultural groups through translations.
- Tana River County has one of the lowest literacy levels in Kenya. Adult literacy classes could assist in increasing literacy levels as well as increasing mobile libraries and boarding schools particularly for the nomadic communities.
- Promotion of information communication technologies (ICTs) as avenues for provision of information literacy to the diverse cultural groups is inevitable. The use of ICTs should underpin the importance of local and indigenous languages to enhance their acceptability and use.

CONCLUSION

The bredding of multiculturalism with IL is a quick panacea for eradication of HTPs and illiteracy in communities. Multicultural diversities provide potential channels to promote IL. This is because multicultural communities easily adapt to new environments and adopt positive cultural traits with ease in an effort to retain a competitive edge. Multicultural communities are highly competitive and easily inclined to new cultures and systems. Tana River is a multicultural community which could easily enable county to overcome the practice of the HTPs through the adoption of IL.

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