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Emerging Challenges Faced by Information Professionals in Achieving Kenya's Vision 2030

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Abstract

The unveiling of Kenya's Vision 2030 marked an important milestone in Kenya's development but the implementation and its success depends on all the stakeholders' efforts. Vision 2030 recognizes the role of science, technology and innovation in the modern economy in which new knowledge plays a central role in boosting wealth creation, social welfare and international competitiveness. Since information is a key factor in production, its dissemination and storage should be handled by a well trained workforce. Librarians and other information professionals are therefore indispensable in the delivery of Vision 2030. As Kenya strives to achieve the goals of Vision 2030 information professionals are faced with a great challenge of changing technology, infrastructure, limited funding and few qualified information professionals. It should be noted that a well trained body of people tends to imbue each other with confidence which they need to tackle the jobs demanded of them. It is through this that information patrons and the information materials interact as a result of the quality service given by the information staff. In addressing the challenges faced by information professions, this paper attempts to bring out the role of various training programmes vis a vis the market demand, information bodies/associations and their role, current paradigm shift in the field of information, changing technology, and the impact of limited funding on information management, among others. The paper concludes by elaborating on various critical issues that ought to be addressed if information professionals are to be relevant in the realization of Kenya's Vision 2030. Recommendations and conclusion are also highlighted.

Keywords: Information professionals, information services, information communication technology, vision 2030, information overload

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Introduction

Kenya's first vision "a free nation" can be traced back in the colonial era. The vision was attained in 1963 when the British Union Jack was lowered and replaced by the national flag. During the post independence period, Kenya's

political leaders pledged to work for a better Kenya devoid of poverty, ignorance and disease. However, this vision is yet to be fully achieved.

Kenya's current Vision, popularly known as Kenya Vision 2030, is the country's new development blueprint covering the period 2008 to 2030. It aims to transform Kenya

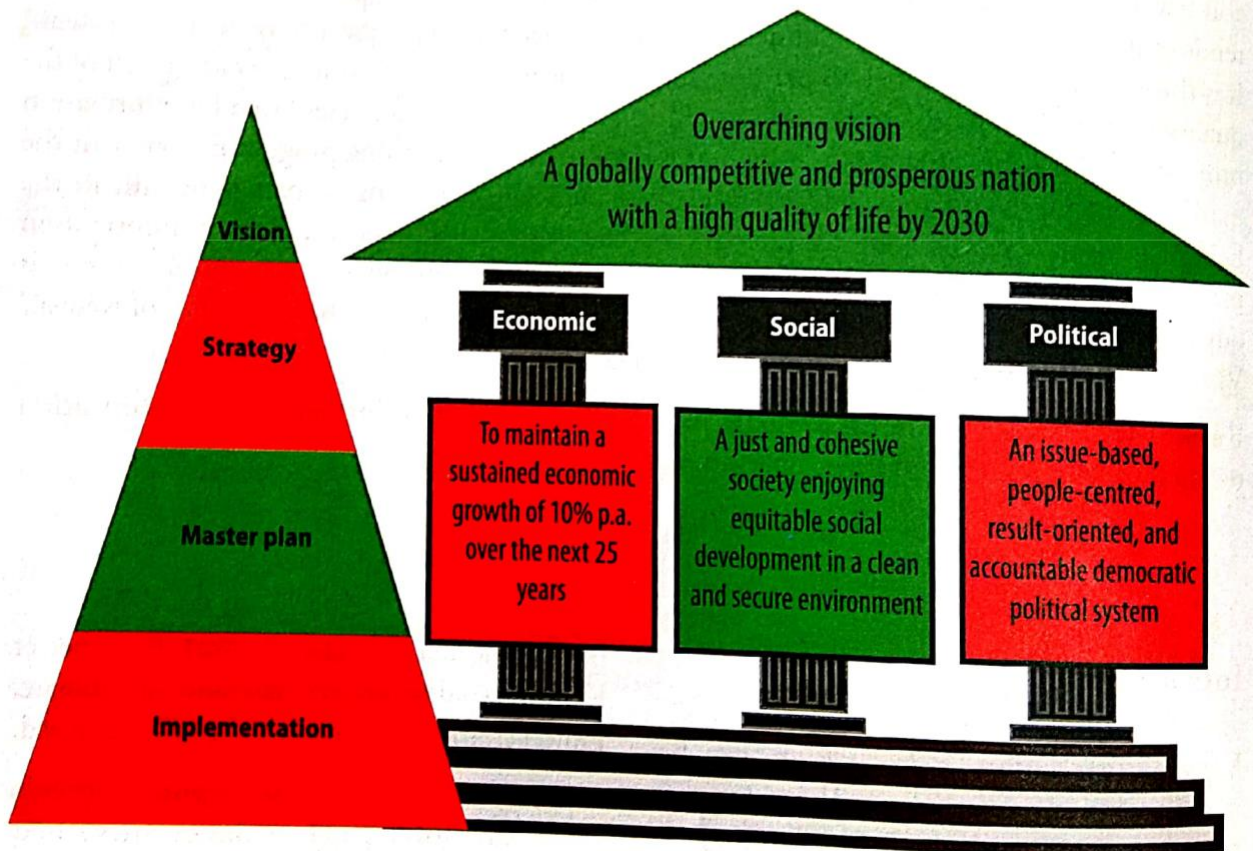
into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing a high quality life to all its citizens by the year 2030. The Vision is based on three "pillars": the economic pillar which aims to move the economy up the value chain, the social pillar which aims to invest in the people of Kenya and finally the political pillar which aims to move Kenyans to the future as one Nation.

The adoption of the vision by Kenya in 2007 came after the successful implementation of the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation, which saw the country's economy back on track with GDP recording an impressive growth from a low of 0.6% in 2002 to 6.1% in 2006 (GoK 2007:3).

An overview of the role of information professionals.

The Kenya Vision 2030 is an economic development plan by the Kenyan Government in several different economic zones in various parts of the country. The Vision aims to make Kenya a globally competitive and prosperous country mainly through science, technology and innovation. Vision 2030 recognises the role of science, technology and innovation in the modern economy in which new knowledge plays a central role in boosting wealth and international competitiveness. According to Kenya's Vision 2030 there are four major elements that allow effective exploitation of knowledge; namely;

- An economic and institutional regime that provides incentives for the efficient use of existing knowledge, the creation of new knowledge, and the flourishing of entrepreneurship



Pillars of Vision 2030: Source Kenya Vision 2030

INFORMATION SCIENCE

- An educated and skilled population that can create, share and use knowledge well
- Dynamic information and communication infrastructure that can facilitate processing, communication, dissemination
- An effective innovative system (i.e. a network of research centres, universities, think tanks, private enterprises and community groups) that can tap into the growing stock of global knowledge, assimilate and adopt it to local needs, while creating new knowledge and technologies as appropriate.
- Maintaining current awareness of emerging technologies
- Assessing and communicating the value of the information organization, including information services, products and policies to senior management, key stakeholders and client groups
- Contributing effectively to senior management on strategies and decisions regarding information applications, tools and technologies and policies for the organization.

The role of information professionals in achieving Kenya's Vision 2030.

For the implementation, achievement and realization of Kenya's Vision 2030 to stay in touch, information professionals are critical. They are to play a major role in provision of proper infrastructure, competent and highly skilled human resources, a supportive Information Communication Technology (ICT) framework, intensification of innovations, adaptation of proper technology and finally packaging and dissemination of information. According to Nwalo (2009), information is at present believed to be a fifth factor of production, which is by no means inferior to land, labour, capital and the entrepreneur.

Information and information professionals should hold the power in transforming Kenya economically, politically and socially towards attaining Kenya's vision 2030.

Even though information can easily be found, it becomes useless if there is no middle person to make sure that information reaches its targeted clients. Thus information professionals act as mediators between the publishers of information and the users by making sure that information is disseminated to the client in the format that the client needs it. Information professionals will play the following responsibilities in ensuring that Kenya attains the Vision 2030 dream:

Information professions are dynamic by virtue of their being service-oriented professions.

The diverse responsibilities of information professionals may include:

- Developing and maintaining a portfolio of cost-effective, client valued information services that are aligned with the strategic directions of the organization and the client groups
- Building a dynamic collection of information resources based on a deep understanding of clients' information needs
- Gathering evidence to support decision about the development of new services and products
- Making presentations to business groups (SMEs, and informal business groups) about business information services in the library and how they can use them
- Providing facilities for the business and economic development groups to hold their meetings in established libraries. This facility can provide opportunities for networking with the groups and increase the involvement of the library
- Attend meetings of the business and economic development groups and the Chamber of Commerce and seek to become members of such groups

- Provide access to equipment such as fax machines, computers, and Internet for the business and economic development groups to communicate and find key information. Public Internet Access Points is a useful way to provide the business community with a presence on the net
- Provide training on how to use computers, Internet, and business information and intelligence. Such training should also cover topics on entrepreneurship, and economic development
- Survey business and economic development information needs in the nation/community as well as information seeking behaviours of the various groups involved in business and economic development
- Set up a specialized business library/information centre for the business and economic development community. This could include not only business information (local and international) but government development plans, and other government information relevant to business and economic development of the country
- Production and distribution of information materials of a practical nature on business and economic development topics to facilitate adoption of innovations and new ideas by the business and economic development groups
- Arrange public lectures, talks, and forums to discuss topics on business and economic development in the library/information centre for various groups engaged in business and economic development
- Provide training to library staff to acquire new skills, change their attitudes, to serve the economic development and business community
- Provide training on researching, recording, storage and dissemination of indigenous knowledge resources
- Provide training on knowledge and information literacy to the business and economic development community to build their capacity to seek and apply new knowledge and business intelligence.

Despite the indispensable role of information professionals in Kenya's realization of Vision 2030, information professionals are met with various emerging challenges that if not addressed, might impact negatively on the attainment of the Vision. The information profession has great challenges of changing technology, increase of information superhighway, lack of infrastructure, limited funding and few qualified information professionals. It should be noted that a well trained body of people tends to imbue each other with confidence which they need to tackle the jobs demanded of them. It is through this that information patrons and the information materials interact, as a result of the quality service given by the information staff.

Information Professions and Training

Library, information education and training in Africa is undergoing rapid change and as a result facing difficult challenges to overcome (Ocholla 2009:88). The education training and development of information professionals can be traced to the 19th century. Ocholla (2000:34) points out that the need for trained manpower in Kenya can be traced to the 1950's when the then Royal Technical College (now University of Nairobi) was established. Since the inception of the information professional training and development, a lot has changed, right from the training, technology and users' information needs and behaviour in light of these changes witnessed in field, information professionals need to invent and adopt innovative ways to survive in this dynamic and competitive environment.

Information professionals for quite some time have experienced a great challenge in their profession, a challenge that if not looked at keenly can render them redundant

(Wawire 2010:149). One major issue that is putting information professionals at stake is lack of a firm information professional body that is meant to address their issues. There is a lack of unity among libraries and librarians across the country despite the fact that many such institutions have come up lately with the expansion of university education. Many universities are now offering degrees in Library and Information Studies. However, there is no library body, association or board that is in place to clearly regulate the quality of programmes being offered. All institutions run and function independently. As a result, the quality of some of the programmes offered in the institutions may be questioned.

The Kenya Library Association (KLA) for instance, is a national professional association whose origin dates as far back as 1956 when the East African Library Association (EALA) was founded in Nairobi-Kenya. KLA was officially registered in 1973 after the dissolution of EALA. However, KLA does not play a significant role in the establishment, development and approval of Information Sciences degree programmes. Coupled with the fact that it is not mandatory for information professionals to join KLA, there is a strong possibility that the graduates coming out of such programmes lack a common vision and approach to information management. The vision of KLA is to *"strive to become a leading professional body for librarians, information specialists, and knowledge managers in Eastern Africa."* There is need to align this vision with Vision 2030 if the library institution has to play its role in the attainment of the objectives of Vision 2030.

The Kenya Library Association ought to play a great role to develop the professionals efficiencies from time to time and this can be done by organizing seminars, workshops, hands-on training and refresher courses in new technologies. They should also make the association a mandatory association for all information professions.

Due to the dynamism of information professionals' duties, they require special knowledge and skills, including techniques of using software and hardware, selection and assessment of resources, use of information systems, ability to search networks and databases as well as problem solving and research skills and the ability to teach users. Information professionals should acquire these skills through proper curriculum (Tahourie 2006:147). Furthermore, the new technologies will enable librarians to network with other professionals like information mediators and systems designers. If information professionals are to enhance their knowledge and skills, they have to adopt new technologies in their functions. Their education programme must therefore develop skills that are dynamic and flexible (Ali1998:99).

In order to achieve the objectives of Vision 2030, it is important to consider effective recruitment, selection, placement, appraisal and development of information professionals to occupy key positions in organizations. Ocholla (2009:89) points out that well-trained information professionals are essential in any country, both in the developed and in the developing world. Information professionals are the engine that controls the running of all the activities performed in the libraries and information centres, hence, they are the pivot around whom the users, information materials, equipment, tools and all the other facilities revolve. Arising out of this, it can be appreciated that the professional staff is perhaps the most important resource of libraries and Information centres. A well trained body of people tends to imbue each other with confidence to help them to tackle the jobs demanded of them. It is through this that information patrons and the information materials interact, as a result of the quality service given by the information professions. Consequently, a sufficient number of qualified information professionals are prerequisite to a satisfactory provision of service,

supported by an equally sufficient number of non-professional staff. Their duties should, however, be distinctive enough to avoid role displacement.

Information communication technology (ICT)

Change is one reality with which individuals, groups and organizations must constantly cope in order to survive. The needs for progressive changes in people's attitudes and behaviours are essential for global acceptance. Nevertheless for Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals, a change is often linked with modern information technologies and management issues. Over the past few decades, the nature of library environment and mode of service has changed drastically. Juma (2005:20) points out that a nation's ability to solve problems and initiate and sustain economic growth depends partly on its capabilities in science, technology and innovation. Makori (2009:88) on the other hand asserts that ICT provides huge opportunities to develop the information roles, market services, access new sources, and reach a much greater user base. It must be recognized that the traditional markets for information skills and services keeps on changing as new skills and services are being developed.

The information environment is already open to new and challenging opportunities that need continuous training for information professionals. Keeping up with the demands of information services is one of the biggest challenges facing information professionals today. Singh (2007:173) notes that in the current technological environment, libraries are passing through a challenging phase, which is posing serious threats to library and information centres and information professionals. The increasing role of ICT systems in information services has been so fast that information professionals are now concerned about their role, which is increasingly becoming dependent

on ICT. Therefore if ICT is not adopted it will most likely pose a threat to the role in the information industry and to the realization of Kenya's Vision 2030. Wawire (2010:152) points out that information professionals should be well informed on new inventions in ICT. The profession parades an array of people from diverse backgrounds such as engineering, communication, computer, electronics and other fields. They can team up with other professionals to develop new technologies. More than ever before, they must make themselves more relevant in this digital age.

The new technological age has provided new opportunities and challenges to information professionals. An example is the development of the Internet and related technologies such as the World Wide Web (WWW). The Internet provides a rich source of information that can be globally accessed easily and quickly. The information professionals' skills have therefore to be upgraded on how to use the Internet in, access management and dissemination of information.

ICTs have become ubiquitous with current and future social and organizational development. The role of these technologies in national development is undeniably significant. As the positive effects of ICT have continually been noted more obviously in developed countries, it has become critically important for developing countries to embrace these technologies. ICT has changed the ways and patterns in which information and other services are dispensed. Nwachukwu (2005:14) supports this by observing that with all the changes in information and the processes of access, storage, transmission and reproduction, librarians and libraries must adapt to new roles and skills to cope with this change.

It is shocking to see that the speed at which ICTs are changing is higher than that at which librarians are adopting it. As we enter in the digital era through the Vision 2030,

most libraries are still operating traditionally in the sense that they still consider a library as a custodian of shelved books while it is an integration of the physical and the virtual materials which need new skills to manage. According to Choy (2008:23), librarianship today demands much more thought and effort on connecting with users and maintaining their engagement in offering services. How can we ensure that all librarians are conversant with technology? There is need to create a mechanism for them to attend short courses tailored to upgrade their skills so as to increase their confidence in offering services. Zhou, (2009:6), observes that a new generation of non-traditional librarians and library staff are now entering the job market with more holistic skills. They are moving library services to new directions, making research libraries more nimble and adaptable to change.

Library managers/directors are the key factors of library development. The library becomes even harder to develop technologically if the top managers of those libraries are not well informed on the ICT changes. In other words, they should be the champions of changes in leading the technological initiatives for better service provision in the library.

Library automation has also become a necessity in this information age. One of the major challenges faced in automating and establishing digitised library projects in African libraries has been the lack of readiness of the university libraries in terms of skills and knowledge to implement the digital and electronic library services. Rosenberg (2006:290) notes that skills in e-resources management, e-services development, full text digitisation and teaching skills are lacking in African university libraries. Despite the importance of digitisation, most libraries in Kenya are yet to adopt it.

Web 2.0 is also becoming the new trend in the innovation of the Internet. Libraries

should start using web 2.0 facilities to share information among themselves and users. The web 2.0 includes Facebook, Wikis, Blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc. The question is how many librarians do use these for the mentioned purpose above? How many libraries have opened accounts or created the web 2.0 with same purpose? We have limited examples of institutions which use this technology in communicating their services in Kenya.

Information professions and the changing trend

As has been seen above, there is a great shift in the skills needed to handle both the information formats that libraries are developing as collections and the multitasking and techno savvy driven library user. As such, for libraries of today to fit the bill, the librarians must possess some of the skills and competencies as outlined below. Competencies are a combination of skills, knowledge, and behaviour patterns vital to organizational success, personal achievement, and career development. These are classified as personal competencies and professional competencies.

Personal Competencies

These are a set of skills, attitudes and values that enable librarians to work effectively, communicate well, and focus on continuing learning throughout their career as they demonstrate the value added nature of their contributions to survive in the new information world order. They include:

- Ability to create and maintain an environment of mutual respect and trust.
- Visionary, foresight: Ability to see the big picture and visualize how to develop the library to meet future plans
- Partnerships and alliance creation both internally with Faculty, IT, Users and

externally with other libraries and institutions

- Exhibition of strong interest in lifelong learning and personal career planning
- Ability to share knowledge and commit to service excellence through use of good modelling structures
- Ability to face up to challenges and see new opportunities both inside and outside the library
- Ability to have effective communication skills; be a team player and show dynamic leadership qualities
- Organizational and systematic planning and prioritizing skills with ability to focus on what is critical to the library
- Recognition of the value of professional networking and solidarity.

Professional Competencies

Professional competencies relate to the practitioner's knowledge of information resources, access, technology and management, and the ability to use this knowledge as a basis for providing the highest quality information sources. There are four major competencies each augmented with specific skills:

- **Managing information organizations:** - They manage information organizations ranging in size from one employee to several hundred employees. These organizations may be in any environment from corporate, education, public, government to non-profit.
- **Managing information resources:** - Information professionals have expertise in total management of information resources, including identifying, selecting, evaluating, securing and providing access to pertinent information resources. They recognize the importance of people as a key information resource.

- **Managing information services:** - Information professionals manage the entire life cycle of information services from the concept stage through the design, development, testing, marketing, packaging, delivery and divestment of these offerings.
- **Applying information tools and technologies:** - Information professionals harness the current and appropriate technology tools to deliver the best services, provide the most relevant and accessible resources, develop and deliver teaching tools to maximize client's use of information; and capitalize on the library and information environment.

Information Overload

The ever increasing amount of information available adds another twist in information management and information professions. Globally, information work has not only increased tremendously in terms of products and services, but also in terms of global players and distribution channels. Information products and services are now available in masses. In addition, the products and services are available from multiple sources. Production and service capabilities that were available from limited sources in advanced countries are frequently found in countries that were considered developing and incapable of sophisticated work. Information overload has been defined at both personal and organizational levels.

Information overload at the personal level

According to Wilson (2001:20) information overload at a personal level is where the flow of information associated with work tasks is greater than can be managed effectively, and a perception that overload in this sense creates a degree of stress for which his or her coping strategies are ineffective.

Information overload at the organizational Level

This is a situation in which the extent of perceived individual information overload is sufficiently widespread within the organization so as to reduce the overall effectiveness of management operations (Wilson, 2001:23).

With the current electronic publishing being preferred by most publishers, librarians are likely to face a huge challenge of managing, selecting and disseminating information. Oshilalu (2011:31) affirms that electronic publishing has led to information overload and explosion. Based on this, librarians are now charged with the task of ensuring that the right information gets to the needed hand at the right time at the right place. However, Tenopir (2003:12) argues that not all that is published electronically is credible for inclusion into library collection. Information professionals are hence faced with the challenge of linking the right set of information with the right set of users at the right point in time. Librarians are therefore expected to link up the huge information explosion with their users and vice versa. They (information professionals) are also expected to teach their users the techniques to use in assessing and accessing various information resources. This can only be possible if information professionals have acquired the necessary skills required. Information professionals in the present age require fast and effective information and information materials within the shortest point in time. This is because currently and on a daily basis, loads and lots of information rolls out via various components of modern technology.

The Kenya's vision 2030 hopes to advance in its technological advancement and hence librarians are expected to embrace the new information technology lest they find themselves redundant and irrelevant to information seekers. This is because with the information revolution as a sequence of rapid developments in new information technologies it suddenly

makes it possible to store large quantities of data inexpensively in a very small space, to process them extremely quickly and to transmit them throughout the world (Edwards and Snyder, 1999:8).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Achieving Kenya's Vision 2030 may not be an easy task. A lot of effort ought to be put in place to ensure its overall success. This may include among provision of adequate funds, qualified staff members with the relevant skills, proper infrastructure, etc. The changing nature of the current information environment calls for new skills and competencies on the part of information professionals. Information professionals should change their perception and views of the new technological changes. They should desist from being adamant to the changing needs of information users. They should be ready to change from the traditional librarian practices to the present user centred services. As agents of change, they must play a key role in the current knowledge society. Information professions need to unite and put strict measures on their services. It would also be important for all library programmes being offered by various universities to be vetted by a registered board or association to establish minimum standards and firm policies. Otherwise, Kenya might end up having very many information professionals who are not feet for the market.

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