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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTAG	: Arts and Culture Task Group
DAC	: Department of Arts and Culture
DoE	: Department of Education
EBL	: Evidence-based librarianship
ECD	: Early Childhood Development
ICTs	: Information and Communication Technologies
IFLA	: International Federation of Library Associations
IK	: Indigenous Knowledge
KZN	: KwaZulu-Natal
LIASA	: Library and Information Association of South Africa
LIS	: Library and Information Services
LIWO	: Library and Information Workers Organization
MDGs	: Millennium Development Goals
MLU	: Mobile Library Unit
NCLIS	: National Council for Library and Information Services
NEPI	: National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	: Non-government organisations
NLSA	: National Library of South Africa
PaCLISA	: Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa
PICC	: Print Industries Cluster Council
PLS	: Provincial Public Library and Information Service
RDP	: Reconstruction and Development Programme
RSA	: Republic of South Africa

SAILIS	: South Africa Institute of Librarianship and Information Science
SALA	: South African Library Association
SALB	: South African Library for the Blind
SDGs	: Sustainable Development Goals
SNE	: Special Needs Education
WSIS	: World Summit on the Information Society

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### *1.1. Introduction*

This thesis will investigate information inequality in general and information poverty more specifically, with particular attention paid to the relationship between public libraries and information inequality and poverty in semi-rural and rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. Because information inequality and poverty are issues of social justice and are linked to socioeconomic concerns, this study investigates the concepts from a constructivist approach and uses a framework based on critical theories. The study will begin by presenting an explanation of information inequality and poverty, in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) specifically, as well as a history of South African libraries to provide contextual background and further the reader's understanding of information inequality and poverty in South Africa. It will explain the theoretical framework and methodologies used to analyse information inequality and poverty in KZN, including a discussion of how libraries might determine a community's information needs, and the presentation of a new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty. Ultimately, this research will culminate in a compendium of recommendations that public libraries in KZN and other developing areas can use to help alleviate information inequality and poverty in their communities.

A thorough review of the relevant literature was conducted to determine the research questions and objectives of this study. This review revealed that literature on certain aspects of the information and knowledge era can be found but that research is lacking in the areas of information inequality and poverty and, more specifically, the role that libraries can play in

alleviating the problems. Thus this study aims to fill a gap in information science literature regarding the treatment of information inequality and poverty, specifically in developing areas of the world. It will present a new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty which provides a pragmatic framework for libraries wishing to assist in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in their communities.

This chapter introduces the reader to the topic, context, background, and focus of this thesis. First, contextual information about South Africa is provided as well as reasoning for choosing it as the setting of this research. Next, an explanation of the problems of information inequality and poverty is provided and the purpose, objectives, and limitations of the study are presented. The research question and sub-questions are then introduced and the contribution of this study to the field of information science is explained. This chapter also provides an overview of the theoretical framework of this study as well as an introduction to the methodology used to investigate the problem. The current research and its limitations are presented and the division of the remaining chapters is outlined at the conclusion of the chapter.

## ***1.2. Background***

Over the last several decades, information has formed the basis of a new global era and information and knowledge societies have begun to develop. Although often confused with one another and used interchangeably, the *information and knowledge era* and *information and knowledge societies* have their own definitions and characteristics. The information and knowledge era is one in which information is a form of capital and handled like a commodity. In addition, information and communication technologies have grown in importance and offer the

most efficient way to access information and knowledge that can be used in individual and community development.

Castells (2000) characterises this era as one that:

- Has seen increased dependence on technology for economic growth;
- Is focused more on creation and processing of information as opposed to production of material goods;
- Has shifted from hierarchical, assembly line-type production to a more horizontal, team-based approach; and
- Is increasingly global and multinational in scope.

Warschauer (2003) adds to these the tendency towards increased economic stratification both within and among countries. The economic gap between the richest and poorest countries in the world is growing as are gaps within individual countries (Warschauer, 2003); this growing inequality is due in large part to the increasing dependence on information and the technology and skills to create, access, and utilise it effectively. This information and knowledge gap thus produces groups of people among and within nations who are often referred to as information rich or information poor (Britz, 2004).

Within the information and knowledge era, information and knowledge societies are developing, some much faster than others. In this way, whole communities and countries can be labeled information poor, as some are in South Africa. Several criterion of information and knowledge societies include adequate information and communications technology infrastructure and support, the economic and political capabilities to beneficially exploit information, and the freedom and skills to access and use knowledge in individual or community development. South

Africa is not yet fully an information and knowledge society because of the information inequality and poverty that still exists there.

A more detailed explanation of the terms information inequality and poverty is given in Chapter 2 but a brief introduction to them is given here for the sake of clarity. Yu (2011:661) defines *information inequality* as “multifaceted disparity between individuals, communities or nations in mobilising society’s information resources for the benefit of their lives and development, which may take the form of information divide, digital divide, knowledge gap, etc.” Britz (2004) defines information poverty as a lack of the skills, infrastructure, or resources to access, interpret, and apply information appropriately and goes on to state: “One of the biggest challenges facing the world today is that of information poverty which, if not addressed, can have a negative effect on the economic, cultural and socio-political development” of much of the world (Britz, 2004:192). This thesis will use both this term and *information inequality* with the following distinction. *Information inequality* includes important sociocultural issues as well as economic and infrastructural ones. It can be viewed as an umbrella term that encompasses information poverty and its complement information wealth but using Yu’s (2011) definition, it can also include discussion of the digital divide, knowledge gap, and what Britz (2013) now refers to as *knowledge poverty*. It is important to note that while the terms information poverty and information poor are used in the literature and throughout this thesis, they are not meant to indicate a complete absence of all information. Traditionally in many African societies, the communication, transfer, and storage of information have been oral as opposed to written or electronic. While some societies, especially those that are more rural, still depend on these oral methods, transfer and storage of information has evolved over time and with the growth of ICTs in the information and knowledge era. Taken a step further, ICTs can actually help in the



protection of indigenous knowledge as they can be utilised to record, store, and transfer this knowledge as older generations pass on. Oral communication and indigenous knowledge remain important throughout the world but should be balanced with understanding and use of ICTs in order to most effectively address information inequality and poverty.

This study focused on the role of public libraries in the development and alleviation of information inequality and poverty. Several main themes emerged from this research to explain how the development of public libraries in South Africa has contributed to the state of information inequality and poverty that currently exists. First, libraries in South Africa have been modeled on European ideals and models which do not necessarily meet the needs of the majority of the population. Second, the lack of investment of funding and resources to public libraries serving the majority of the population greatly diminished any potential benefit they could provide during the apartheid era and left a legacy that continues to be felt in South Africa today. Likewise, the lack of library development in rural areas has excluded thousands of potential users and denied the country any possible benefit from library use by this group of citizens. Fourth, library development suffered from a lack of centralised leadership and organisation that resulted in less effective and efficient libraries. Finally, library development was based on race with Whites being the primary beneficiaries of the most funding, the best resources, and the most valuable services and those of other races receiving few, if any, of the benefits of libraries. Each of these themes play a role in the development and entrenchment of information inequality and poverty in South Africa into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and a more detailed discussion of these is included in section 3.5.

This study was undertaken because the presence of information inequality and poverty effects one's ability to live a meaningful and dignified life and public libraries can play a role in

alleviating these effects. In information and knowledge societies, people must have access to sufficient information to experience life beyond mere existence, one that each of us deserves: one that is free from the fears that accompany abject poverty and subsistence living to one in which safety, food and housing security, and purpose are the norm and in which their goals for self- and community-improvement seem within reach. In this way, information inequality and poverty become moral concerns which should be addressed in order for all people to have the opportunity to reach their full potential. But access to information alone is not enough; there are other socioeconomic factors that play important roles in using information to effectively improve one's life. These are summed up by several main approaches to information inequality and poverty.

First, in the connectivity approach, people must have physical access to information, especially digitally (Britz, 2004). This means a country must have the information and communication technology (ICT) and infrastructure needed to offer its citizens access to information. In South Africa, there has been enormous growth in the numbers of internet users. According to *Internet World Stats* (Minimarts Marketing Group, 2015), in 2000, there were 2.4 million internet users in South Africa. By 2013, that number had risen to over 23 million (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2015). Despite this growth, internet penetration is still only at 48.9% (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2015).<sup>1</sup> This approach sees ICT access as closely connected to economic means (Thompson, 2007; Britz, 2013); while it is true that people in economic poverty may have higher instances of information poverty, the two facets are not automatically linked (Chatman, 1996; Thompson, 2007). It is also important to note that while ICT development is of vital importance

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<sup>1</sup> More data regarding the information access, ICT, libraries, schools, etc. in South Africa are included in section 1.3 to provide context for this study.

in access to information, there is no one simple solution to its provision (Farrell and Isaacs, 2007:29). Two decades ago, it was thought that the so-called “digital divide” could be filled simply by getting more computers to more people. While access to ICTs can help improve economic situations in an “enabling environment” where it is used to meet a community’s specific needs (Warah, 2004:74), it is clear that technology is only one part of the larger issue of information inequality and poverty. Other factors such as skills, attitudes, and education also contribute to the divide and must be addressed as well (Britz, 2004, 2013).

Second, in the content approach to information inequality and poverty, citizens must have access to information appropriate to their lives and needs (Britz, 2004). Each community has its own unique information needs and these must be met in ways that make sense to the community members. The information must be delivered to citizens in a way that they can understand and effectively utilise. For instance, according to the 2010 *IFLA World Report* for South Africa (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010), there is little information available on the internet covering local content and offered in indigenous languages. For some communities, internet access is not a viable option and so information must be delivered in alternative ways, such as in pamphlet, oral, or audiovisual formats.

Based on a constructivist lens, the human or hermeneutical/understanding approach to information inequality and poverty is focused on the fact that people must have the knowledge and skills to seek out and utilise information efficiently and effectively (Britz, 2013). These skills can also encompass production of information for others. Without the proper skills, people will not be able to take full advantage of the information they may have available. In addition, the attitude of a community towards information and ways to obtain and use it is also important. Community members must understand the value of information in their lives; this is linked to

education in general and information literacy in particular (Britz, 2004). Leaders and decision makers must also understand the value of information and libraries to deliver it in ways that make sense to the people. When libraries are undervalued, they are neither built nor supported as they should be to support community development. For instance, South Africa only has 34% of the public libraries it actually needs and that another 2 762 should be built to meet community need, according to a report by Cornerstone Economic Research (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:25). By investing in libraries and information, South African leaders can work to foster a climate that values information, education, and literacy.

These are only three popular approaches to information inequality and poverty; others will be described in Chapter 2. No matter through which lens they are viewed, information inequality and poverty are clearly issues of social justice. Access to high-quality, relevant, and appropriate information is needed for formal or informal education, expression, communication, and decision-making. The fact that millions of people around the world live in information inequality and poverty is one that should not be ignored. Warah (2004:74), who has explored the urban poor in Nairobi, Kenya, suggests that “access to basic human rights is increasingly being linked to access to information...” All citizens should be concerned about the lack of access to information but libraries should take a distinct interest in this issue as an institution that can most widely and efficiently support and serve the information needs of the community and its members.

### ***1.3. Study setting***

In this section, the reasons for choosing KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa as a study setting is explained. Some statistical information will be presented to provide context and a greater

understanding of the challenges to developing an information and knowledge society in South Africa. The challenges of providing library and information services (LIS) in South Africa will be mentioned.

### ***1.3.1. South Africa***

South Africa provides an interesting case in the discussion of information inequality and poverty for several reasons. First, South Africa's history of apartheid places it at a disadvantage with regards to information access for the majority of its citizens. The apartheid system caused lasting inequities and strained relationships that are still experienced today and that affect education, literacy, library usage, information access, and thus information inequality and poverty within the country. South Africa adeptly illustrates Britz's (2004:192) point that "the divide between the information rich and the information poor is not only a divide between societies and countries. It occurs also between individuals who might share the same culture and physical space." South Africa exhibits qualities of both developed and developing countries at once and because of this there exists a wide continuum of information infrastructure, needs, access, skills, and creation. Large gaps exist between areas and groups of people in opportunity, income, service delivery, safety, education, and more, including in access to information. Urban and rural areas have different information needs and levels of information access, and these likewise can differ from township or informal settlement areas. For instance, access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and internet is mostly available in large urban areas throughout South Africa, but often not at all in more remote areas (Farrell and Isaacs, 2007:11). Some rural areas struggle with consistent supply of electricity, so it is not surprising that they lack access to internet and ICT as well. This research will focus on semi-rural to rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal because these areas have specific information needs and gaps that present the library and

information science profession with a unique opportunity to help alleviate the problems of information inequality and poverty.

First, some pertinent contextual information about South Africa is presented to help in understanding the importance of addressing information inequality and poverty there:

- In 2013, South Africa ranked 118 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Report, which is considered “Medium Human Development” (Malik, 2014:161).
- There are 11 official languages in South Africa, including English, Afrikaans, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho, isiNdebele, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and Sesotho sa Leboa.
- According to the 2010 *IFLA World Report* for South Africa (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010), there is little information available on the internet covering local content and offered in local languages.
- The population of South Africa is approximately 49 million (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010; Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2015).
- According to *Internet World Stats* (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2015), in 2000, there were 2.4 million internet users in South Africa. By 2013, that number had risen to over 23 million (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2015). This is an increase of almost 90% since 2000.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The *IFLA World Report* of 2010 lists internet users at 5.3 million, internet growth at 120.8% since the 2007 *IFLA World Report*, and internet penetration at 10.8% (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010). If these numbers are accurate, use of the internet in South Africa has grown 77% in the last four years. These numbers indicate enormous growth in internet usage in South Africa, despite internet penetration remaining at less than 50%.

- *Internet World Stats* (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2015) reports internet penetration in South Africa is at 48.9%.<sup>3</sup>
- According to *CIA World Factbook* figures in 2009, mobile use in South Africa was ten times higher than that of main telephone lines (2008 estimate). Currently, mobile use is up to 17 times higher than main line use (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).
- The National Library of South Africa (NLSA) and the South African Library for the Blind (SALB) are South Africa's two national libraries. The NLSA has two branches, one in Pretoria and another in Cape Town.
- In 2010, there were an estimated 7 384 publicly funded libraries in South Africa, including:
  - 366 community libraries within the six metropolitan areas;
  - 1 386 community libraries affiliated to the nine provincial library services;
  - 210 higher education libraries;
  - 5 310 school libraries<sup>4</sup>; and
  - 112 special and government departmental libraries (Burger, 2012:93).
- A survey commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture in 2007 found that there were only three libraries per million people in South Africa, which, by comparison, was better than some other African countries but worse than most of the world's developed countries (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:25).

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<sup>3</sup> Internet penetration was less than 10% of the South African population (2008 estimate), according to the *CIA World Factbook* in 2009. This resource no longer reports internet penetration but the *IFLA World Report* set it at 10.8% in 2010 (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010). *Internet World Stats* is now reporting that internet penetration is up to 48.9%, which is an average annual increase of almost 10%, if these numbers are accurate (Miniwatts Marketing Group, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> There are conflicting numbers of school libraries as reported in the literature. The number listed above was chosen for this research because it was reported by South Africa Yearbook which is referred to as "the official authoritative reference work on the Republic of South Africa" (Vermeulen, 2015). No figure was listed for school libraries in the *IFLA World Report* 2010 but in the *World Report* for 2007, the number was given as 9 416 (Bothma, 2007:348).

- A report by Cornerstone Economic Research states that South Africa only has 34% of the public libraries it actually needs and that another 2 762 should be built (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:25). In addition, it noted the uneven distribution of libraries across the nine provinces (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:25).
- There are some municipalities that have no libraries at all which, according to the *LIS Transformation Charter* (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:55), affects over two million people.
- In 2013, there were 25 720 ordinary schools (not early childhood or special needs schools) in South Africa (Department of Basic Education, 2015:3).
- In 2007, only 7% of schools were reported to have libraries (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010).
- The 2007 infoDev *Survey of ICT and Education in Africa* reported 25 582 public schools in South Africa (2006 statistics), of which only 6 651 (22.6%) had computers, and of those, only an estimated 2 500 had access to internet (Farrell and Isaacs, 2007:20).
- According to the 2010 *IFLA World Report* (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010), approximately 21-40% of public libraries in South Africa offer internet access to users.
- In 2007, illiteracy was at 24% for South Africans over the age of 15 (Isaacs, 2007:4) but is now reported as down to 7% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).<sup>5</sup>
- According to the 2007 *National Survey into the Reading and Book Reading Behaviour of Adult South Africans*, half of South African households had no books (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:93).

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<sup>5</sup> The *LIS Transformation Charter* (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:92-3) cites the 2011 Census and asserts that 18.1% of South Africans are functionally illiterate. The *IFLA World Report 2010* asserts a literacy rate of 88% in 2009 (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010).



- Unemployment is at 24.9% in South Africa (2013 estimate) but is up to 51.5% for youth ages 15-24 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). The *CIA World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013) reports that 31.3% of the population currently lives below the poverty line.<sup>6</sup>
- South Africa remains the top nation in the world with people living with HIV/AIDS and second in the world for HIV/AIDS deaths (2012 estimates) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

These statistics begin to illustrate the context and challenges presented in South Africa, especially in the education, cultural, and LIS sectors. Public libraries must play an increased role in combating information inequality and poverty in South Africa. The alleviation of information inequality and poverty provides many challenges to librarians and other information providers especially when faced with limited budgets, little support, illiteracy, and lack of understanding and/or valuing the purpose of libraries. Lack of access to ICT complicates this matter even further. In the evolution to information and knowledge societies, information needs, use, and access have changed. Each community has its own unique information needs and its citizens will have varying levels of information-seeking skills. Of course, communities will also have various levels of access to resources and types of resources available to them. Because information technology has permeated every aspect of librarianship and the needs of the labour market have changed so drastically, the library profession has had to evolve as well (Mutula, 2013). It is my contention that a trained information professional should be able to determine a community's information needs and skills, the availability of resources, and most effective ways to deliver

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<sup>6</sup> The 2000 estimate of those living below the poverty line was at 50% according to the *CIA World Factbook* in 2009 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009).

desired resources and services. With these factors determined, this librarian could then assist the community in establishing a structure and climate in which their needs could be met. Some developing communities and librarians are already creating useful collaborations and initiatives to address information inequality and poverty and redefine the community's relationship with libraries and information. In this study, the various information needs of semi-rural and rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and the various strategies already in use to meet these needs are investigated with the goal of providing a compendium of best practices for libraries to help alleviate information inequality and poverty within developing communities.

### ***1.3.2. KwaZulu-Natal***

The province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) is one of the smallest but most populous of South Africa's provinces, with a population that continues to grow (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:20). KZN province sits along the Indian Ocean to the east and the Drakensberg Mountain range to the west. There are eleven district municipalities in KZN, including uThungulu. uThungulu includes the local municipality of uMhlathuze in which this research took place. Both libraries selected for the case studies, eNseleni and Felixton, are located in uMhlathuze municipality and will be described in more depth in Chapter 6. In addition to being uThungulu's municipal seat, Richards Bay is also one of KZN's most bustling cities with Durban being another. Durban is a major tourism centre boasting beautiful beaches and other attractions, while Richards Bay is a major port for the export of coal (Government of South Africa, 2015c). Aluminum and forestry are other main economic endeavors in KZN, and crops grown include sugar cane, mangoes, bananas, pineapple, and other tropical fruits (Government of South Africa, 2015c). The majority of people in KZN speak Zulu but many also speak English and/or Afrikaans (Brand South Africa, 2015). KZN is characterised by an epic history of struggle from

which a dynamic people flourished amongst diverse natural splendor.<sup>7</sup> For a greater contextual understanding of KZN, the following statistics are provided:

- Roughly the size of Portugal at 94,361 square kilometers, in 2011 KZN boasted a population of over 10 million people (Brand South Africa, 2015).
- 50% of KZN residents live in poverty (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:21).
- 9% of KZN residents live in informal dwellings and 22% in traditional dwellings (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:21).
- 61.2% of rural households have no electricity (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:21).
- Only 35.2% of residents have a tap within their dwelling and 52.3% have no flushing or chemical toilet (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:21).
- The KZN Department of Education (DoE) predicts that the number of orphans and child-headed households will continue to increase due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:21).

This information is important to understand KwaZulu-Natal and its residents. Poverty, HIV/AIDS, and other socioeconomic situations greatly affect children's development, education, experiences, and opportunities. In KZN and throughout South Africa, public libraries and

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<sup>7</sup> For more information about KwaZulu-Natal, see *Tourism KwaZulu-Natal* at <http://www.zulu.org.za/> and the *KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government* at <http://www.kznonline.gov.za/>

schools experience the effects of these issues on a daily basis in their communities. The next two sections will provide an introduction to public libraries and schools in KZN.

### ***1.3.2.1. Public libraries in KwaZulu-Natal***

This study is focused on public libraries and how they can help to alleviate information inequality and poverty in South Africa. Libraries were the institutions chosen to research because the researcher is a librarian who strongly believes in the power of libraries to support positive development among communities. Even though I am an academic librarian, public libraries were chosen for this research because of their accessibility and mission to serve all members in a community. Not all citizens can use a university library but at least ideally, all should have free access to public libraries. In this regard, public libraries are uniquely positioned to assist in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in South African communities. While libraries should not be expected to singlehandedly expunge information inequality and poverty from South Africa, they have not played as large a part in the effort as they could. This is at least in part because community members and leaders may not have a full understanding of what libraries do and what potential they hold in the encouragement of literacy, information access, and civic participation. I argue that inclusion of and partnerships with public libraries offer a more holistic approach to the alleviation of information inequality and poverty which will prove more efficient and effective than the unilateral efforts in the past.

There are roughly 170 public libraries in KwaZulu-Natal (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2014a). Libraries, archives, and museums in South Africa fall under the auspices of the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) which has a branch in each of the nine provinces. The National Archives and Library Services Program supports the national DAC's Strategic Goals 3

and 5. Goal 3 concerning Access to Information states, “Enhance access by citizens and public institutions to accurate, reliable and timely information in their language of choice through the provision of archives, libraries and language services” (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:23). Goal 5 concerns the development, protection and preservation of arts, culture and heritage (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:23) and is focused on the enhancement of “the capacity of the sector through equitable and sustainable development, and the protection and preservation of arts, culture and heritage through policy development, legislative promulgation and implementation.”

Under the auspices of the national DAC, the KZN DAC oversees the KZN Provincial Public Library and Information Service (KZN PLS), which is based in Pietermaritzburg and consists of four regional depots: Northern Region, Eastern Region, Western Region, and Southern Region (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2014a). A collaboration between the library service and local authorities, the system of public libraries serves communities’ information, recreational, and educational needs (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2014a).

One of the KZN DAC’s strategic goals is “The provision of public library and information services, resources and support to municipalities and the promotion of library development and usage” (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2014b). In order to achieve this goal, the KZN DAC pledges to:

- Improve public library access in all communities by building, upgrading, equipment and automating public libraries;
- Develop and sustain a reading culture by acquiring and processing appropriate library material in all forms;

- Ensure the equitable provision of access to information by all communities; and
- Improve service delivery through promotion, training and professional support”

(KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2014b).

Success in achieving these four goals has been mixed. For example, according to Ms. Carol Slater, Senior Manager of the KZN Public Library and Information Service, KZN has built 16 new libraries in rural areas since 1994, “beautiful, high quality buildings that cost between ZAR 16 million and ZAR 20 million each” (Carol Slater, 2011, personal communication). Ms. Slater indicated that they prioritised building the libraries in the bigger townships first and then in semi-rural and rural areas mainly because building libraries in areas that have larger populations and a higher concentration of schools ensures more library usage (Carol Slater, 2011, personal communication). This approach has had mixed results for those in rural areas of KZN and access to LIS is still limited. In addition, development of a reading culture among the majority of South Africans has proven difficult, mainly due to the fact that they were discouraged or prohibited from reading during the oppressive apartheid era. This research showed that in KZN, the lack of a reading or book culture is apparent especially among older community members but as Dick (2012) points out, there have always been readers in South Africa however “hidden” they may have been. While the development of a reading culture does not rest solely on public libraries, the KZN DAC has made the library’s role and support in this goal clear by pledging to acquire and process appropriate materials (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2014b). As this thesis will explain further in subsequent chapters, the partnership between libraries, schools, and other stakeholders to improve literacy and reading culture in KZN is important in KZN’s evolution to a knowledge society. Finally, the apartheid era has had lasting effects too on the equitable provision of access to information as well as library service delivery and professional

development for library staff. While important if South Africa wants to participate in information and knowledge societies, achievement of the KZN strategic goals regarding libraries remains challenging. But as Mutula (2014:2) editorialises, “The inextricable link between information, its management, the knowledge economy, information literacy, and education/training therefore makes the role of librarians as information professionals in the current digital era one that is almost indispensable.” It is imperative that KZN continue to strive to achieve these goals for the good of the community. These topics will be explored in more depth throughout this thesis. Because of the importance of schools in library usage, the next section provides a broad overview of schools in KZN.

#### ***1.3.2.2. Schools in KwaZulu-Natal***

Improving education for all South African learners has been a major focus of the government in the last twenty years. Attendance at school is compulsory in South Africa for children aged 7 – 15 years or through the completion of Grade 9, whichever comes first (Department of Basic Education, 2013:6). Continuance of one’s education beyond Grade 9 is not mandated by South African law but is encouraged by the government and no person who wishes to continue their education to Grade 12 is denied admission (Department of Basic Education, 2013:6). In its *Annual Report for Ordinary Schools 2010 and 2011*, the Department of Basic Education (2012:19) notes that the highest number of learners each year between 2006 and 2011 are enrolled in Grade 1. This number decreases until Grade 9, when it increases slightly, only to decrease again beginning at Grade 10 and present the lowest number of learners enrolled in Grade 12 (Department of Basic Education, 2012:19).

According to *Education Statistics in South Africa* (Department of Basic Education, 2015:4), in 2013, KwaZulu-Natal had the largest number of schools of all provinces in South Africa at 6 156 ordinary (independent and public) schools (24% of the national total) serving over 2.8 million learners in preschool through grade 12. In 2012, there were 72 Special Needs Education (SNE) schools and 122 Early Childhood Development (ECD) schools in KZN (Department of Basic Education, 2014). The KZN Department of Education (DoE) states that their vision is to “transform the uneven social and economic situation through education and by empowering the citizens with skills, knowledge and values” (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:20). In turn, it is expected that learners will make a positive difference to the economic and social well-being of KZN in the future (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, 2013:20). The KZN Department of Education (2013:20) lists the factors that affect the educational success of learners as “large class sizes, high poverty rates, low levels of literacy, weak school-family relationships and high learner numbers walking long distances to schools.”

In 2011, the National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) Report was released which provided a more in-depth look at schools across the country. At that time, there were 5 931 “ordinary” schools in KZN (Department of Basic Education, 2011:18). Of that number:

- 4 351 had electricity; 1 580 had no electricity (greatest of all provinces); 410 had unreliable electricity sources (greatest of all provinces);
- 5 302 had a reliable water supply (highest of all provinces); 629 had no water supply; 1 182 had an unreliable water supply (highest of all provinces);
- 160 had no ablution facility (second highest of all provinces);
- 5 509 supported cell phone use (highest of all provinces);



- 2 611 had telephone systems (highest of all provinces);
- 320 had internet available;
- 152 (3%) had no communication system (highest of all provinces);
- 992 (17%) had computer centers (second highest of all provinces); 320 (5%) had stocked computer centers; 4 939 (83%) were without computer centers (second highest of all provinces); and
- 1 199 (20%) had libraries; 363 (6%) had stocked libraries (numbers vary among other provinces from 2% in Limpopo to 26% in Western Cape); 4 732 (80%) had no libraries (numbers vary among provinces from 41% in Gauteng to 93% in Limpopo) (Department of Basic Education, 2011:18).

Because of a lack of school libraries, the role of public libraries in the lives of KZN community members is very important. Public libraries can partner with local schools to identify information needs and gaps in information provision. Together, they can work to provide the information, resources, and services that will help to meet community needs and alleviate information inequality and poverty. Now that a brief introduction to information, libraries, and education in KwaZulu-Natal has been provided, the statement of the problem will be presented.

#### ***1.4. Statement of the problem***

Through this study, I seek to gain a better understanding of information inequality and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and subsequently to investigate how public libraries in the province can help alleviate this form of inequality and poverty.

### ***1.5. Purpose and objectives***

This study sought to elucidate strategies for public libraries to support the alleviation of information inequality and poverty within their communities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

This study sought to address the following objectives:

- Investigate information inequality and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa;
- Explore public libraries in KwaZulu-Natal and their relationship to information inequality and poverty in their communities; and
- Elucidate strategies for KwaZulu-Natal public libraries to utilise in order to alleviate information inequality and poverty in their communities.

### ***1.6. Research questions***

In order to fully examine the main problem of this study, the following research questions were investigated:

1. How do information inequality and poverty manifest in KZN?
2. How has public library development impacted the current state of information inequality and poverty in KZN?
3. What is the role of public libraries in alleviating information inequality and poverty in KZN?

Based on the assumption that information inequality and poverty can be alleviated by public libraries, the following additional questions were researched:

4. How are community members using libraries? What are the challenges to using libraries?
5. What are KZN library users' information needs? How do they address these needs?

These questions will guide this investigation into information inequality and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and will help inform the goal of this research, which is to provide a compendium of strategies or best practices that libraries might use to help alleviate information inequality and poverty in their communities. A brief review of the existing literature that informed this study will now be presented.

### ***1.7. Literature review***

A thorough literature review of the relevant research in this area was conducted and the findings will be presented in this section. Interdisciplinary research has increased with the growth of the concepts of the information and knowledge society and information as “a strategic resource,” and with the explosion of ICTs (Yu, 2011:661). The sources used in this research have been invaluable in providing necessary data and context regarding South African libraries, information and knowledge societies, and information inequality and poverty. While the literature focused primarily on information poverty and libraries remains deficient, a valuable base has been built. The literature was found to fall mainly into one (or more) of seven major areas: (1) Libraries and librarians in Africa and South Africa; (2) information and knowledge societies and LIS; (3) Information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the digital divide; (4) Information inequality and information poverty; (5) Social justice and information access; (6) Library initiatives related to information inequality and poverty in developing areas; and (7) Reports, surveys, etc. Presented here is a brief explanation of each of the major themes relevant to the

topic of information inequality and poverty and a sampling of the available literature. A brief discussion of the limitations of the existing research will conclude this section.

### ***1.7.1. Literature on libraries and librarians in Africa and South Africa***

Many documents can be found that describe the history of libraries and librarians in South Africa, their evolution, their challenges, and their place in the development of the people. Among the seminal materials are: the *Report of Mr. Milton J. Ferguson on the Libraries in the Union of South Africa Rhodesia and Kenya Colony* (1929), Oppenheim's *Books for the Bantu* (1940), Friis' *The Public Library in South Africa* (1962), Bengé's *Cultural Crisis and Libraries in the Third World* (1979), Amadi's *African Libraries: Western Tradition and Colonial Brainwashing* (1981), Zaaïman's *The Use of Libraries for the Development of South Africa* report (1985), Olden's *Libraries in Africa: Pioneers, Policies, Problems* (1995), and Kalley's *Apartheid in South African Libraries* (2000). Borland (1942), Rooke (1949), Immelman (1970), Schauder (1978), Aitchison (1991), Walker (1994, 2004), Rochester (1996, 1999), Cobley (1997), Stilwell (1997, 2007), Kalley (2000), Armstrong (2000), Sturges (2001), Arko-Cobbah (2008) are also remarkable primary and secondary documents offering valuable historical perspectives into South African libraries and LIS. Cobley (1997) explains how libraries were used by the state to control Blacks after a literate Black elite emerged and threatened the minority-run government in the early twentieth century. The place of librarians in the apartheid system is also discussed by Schauder (1978). John (1979) offered an effective example of librarians expanding services to meet specific community needs in his discussion of the role of libraries in oral-traditional societies. The evolution of South African libraries and library services is a dynamic area of research at present and often explores a particular type of library (Mostert and Vermeulen, 1998; Le Roux and Hendrikz, 2006; Hart, 2010; Stranger-Johannessen, 2014), improving services to

specific groups (Underwood and Jacobs, 2007; Hart, 2012; Hart and Nassimbeni, 2013; Jain and Saraf, 2013; Jiyane et al., 2013), or expansion of the traditional notion of librarianship (Onwubiko, 1996; Eldredge, 2000; Doherty, 2008; Durrani, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Mutula, 2013; Shaffer, 2014). Still others focus on public libraries and how librarians can affect information and knowledge society needs (Nassimbeni, 1998; Powell, 2002; Davis, 2005; Hart, 2007; Raju and Raju, 2010; Abubakar, 2012; Elbert et al., 2012). Sturges and Neill (2004) have written one of the most comprehensive monographs on the topic of libraries in Africa in which they discuss the struggle for information in Africa and both conventional and informal ways to fill this void. Lor (2013) describes the phenomenon of burning library buildings in South Africa against a background of apartheid history and library burnings around the globe. One of the most exciting documents produced recently is the *LIS Transformation Charter* whose Technical Team was assigned “to define the challenges facing the sector and to provide a clear framework of principles and mechanisms for effecting the changes needed for it to contribute to the elimination of illiteracy and inequality, and the building of an informed and reading nation” (DAC and NCLIS, 2014:5). The literature in this area provides rich historical context as well as exciting new explorations into LIS in South Africa.

### ***1.7.2. Literature on information and knowledge societies and library and information services (LIS)***

Literature on information and knowledge societies throughout the world is vast, wide, and interdisciplinary. Robin Mansell (2010) provides a useful overview of this literature of the last sixty years and offers a critical analysis of the one predominant model of the information society and argues that alternative models must be considered in order to address the growing social dynamics in this era and not just the economic ones. The literature investigating information and

knowledge societies with regards to LIS specifically has grown rapidly over the last few decades. The information society is also referred to as the knowledge economy (Norris, 2001:6), information economy (Warschauer, 2003), internet age (Norris, 2001:5), and knowledge society (Udombana, 2005; Lor and Britz, 2007; Westlund and Kobayashi, 2013), to name a few. The term “information and knowledge societies” will most often be used throughout this thesis.

Other literature includes the work of Manuel Castells (2010a, 2010b, 2010c), which is well-known and respected in this area. Frank Webster’s monograph (2006) gives a comprehensive definition of the information society and explains major theories used to explore it, including Bell, Castells, Habermas, and more. South Africa participated in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), created by a United Nations resolution and convened in 2003 and 2005 to discuss building a strong foundation for an information society for all; the group continues to meet to evaluate outcomes and adjust goals.<sup>8</sup> Van Audenhove (2003) provides a detailed discussion regarding African policymaking in the information society. Others have been focused on theoretical frameworks and LIS methodologies in the information society, such as Sandstrom and Sandstrom (1995), Budd (2003), Swanson (2004), Richardson (2009), Bossaller, Adkins, and Thompson (2010), Jaeger (2010), Ignatow et al. (2012), and Britz et al. (2013). This literature became a valuable foundation on which this research was built.

### ***1.7.3. Literature on information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the digital divide***

Many articles and books have been written about the so-called digital divide and how inequities in access to technology affect developing nations, including those in Africa. Some are well-

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on the WSIS and to access reports, see <http://www.itu.int/wsis/index.html>.

developed pieces that have gone beyond the initial idea of the digital divide and have evolved into hearty explanations of how poverty is influenced by more than just access (or lack thereof) to computers and internet. The monographs of Norris (2001), Warschauer (2003), and Van Dijk (2005) focus mainly on explaining and redefining the so-called digital divide phenomenon. Other publications are reports focusing on the state of ICT development and usage in Africa, such as *Understanding What is Happening in ICT in South Africa* (Gillwald et al., 2012) and those produced by *InfoDev* (Farrell and Isaacs, 2007). Still others provide studies for examining digital inequality (Kvasny, 2002; Kvasny and Keil, 2002; Ramaswamy, 2012) or bridging the digital divide (Le Roux and Evans, 2011; Opesade, 2011; Sedoyeka, 2012) and in using ICTs to address existing inequalities (The Broadband Commission for Digital Development, 2013). In most of this literature, there is little or no mention of libraries and the role they may play in using ICTs in community development. This indicates a disconnect between the importance placed on ICT for development and the services that libraries might provide.

#### ***1.7.4. Literature on information inequality and poverty***

More has been written about the nature of information, access to information, and information and knowledge societies in Africa than information inequality or poverty specifically. Most works that have addressed information poverty have offered explanations to information professionals and described how this phenomenon affects citizens of Africa and other developing areas but stop short of in-depth analyses of the relationship between information inequality and poverty, libraries, and LIS professionals. They do not describe best practices for librarians and information professionals to combat information inequality and poverty in their communities. Britz (2004), Britz and Lor (2006), and Haider and Bawden (2007) have offered valuable explanations of information poverty and the responsibility of libraries to address it, specifically

in Africa. In her studies of impoverished, aging, and incarcerated populations, Chatman (1996, 1999) framed her work in conceptions of insiders and outsiders. Finding the application of theories from other disciplines to information inequality and poverty lacking, she created a theory of information poverty, which will be explored in the next chapter of this thesis. While in graduate school, Lumiérs and Schimmel (2004) also discussed information poverty and attempted to create a tool to measure levels of information poverty which saw adequate success. Still others study information and digital inequality in specific areas of the world such as Warah (2004), Kiplang'at and Ocholla (2005), Hoq (2012), Chen and Li (2013), Ravi and Vivek (2013), and Dent and Goodman (2015). Liangzhi Yu (2006, 2010, 2011) explores information poverty, explains several clusters of information inequality research, and calls on LIS to begin conducting more integrative research on information inequality and poverty to redress the gaps in current research. This research study will build on this foundation and add to the literature regarding information inequality and libraries, specifically and pragmatically, especially with the presentation of a new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty, which is presented in detail in Chapter 4.

#### ***1.7.5. Literature on social justice and information access***

Some literature has been written about information inequality and poverty as a social justice issue (Britz, 2004), with focus on information inequality contributing to social exclusion and economic poverty. Sometimes these articles focus on access to ICT and how increased access to ICT relates to a decrease in information inequality and poverty (Pigato, 2001; Udombana, 2005; Sears and Crandall; 2010). A growing body of work explores information and information access in the development of people and communities (Mchombu, 2004; Wakelin and Simelane, 2009; Mansoor and Kamba, 2010; Elbert et al., 2012; Mansell and Tremblay, 2013; Mutula, 2014).



Some researchers focus specifically on information use for development of rural communities, such as Aboyade (1984), Mchombu (1992), Kamba (2009), Westlund and Kobayashi (2013). Hart (2007) advocates an investigation into social capital and how public libraries may use research in this area to contribute to the development of South Africa and promote social inclusion amongst its people. Hussey (2010), Ignatow et al. (2012), and Westlund and Kobayashi (2013) have also researched social capital and libraries. This is an exciting area of focus that offers a valuable framework for this research.

#### ***1.7.6. Literature on library initiatives related to information access and inequality in developing areas***

Some articles describe specialised initiatives, projects, and partnerships that library and information professionals have created to address issues in their communities. Some initiatives include alternative library models, literacy projects, school partnerships, and assessment strategies. For example, Herselman (2003) describes several programs designed to encourage ICT development and use in rural South Africa. Hart (2004) reminds us of the importance of public libraries partnering with schools in South Africa in order to best serve the needs of the growing population of young learners utilising public libraries. Aitchison (2006) and Machet and Wessels (2006) describe Family Literacy Project initiatives piloted as outreach tools to increase engagement of communities with libraries. Their point of libraries in South Africa becoming agents of positive change to survive is an important one. Williams (2006) describes Biblionef South Africa, a book donation and storage organisation which serves disadvantaged communities in South Africa. Le Roux and Hendrikz (2006) and Hart (2010) explore dual-use libraries in rural South Africa and their effectiveness in offering community services. Literature describing initiatives in other areas of the developing world was also considered (Mchombu, 1992; Cecchini

and Scott, 2003; Franklin, 2007; Etebu, 2009; Hoq, 2012; Lehnhard, 2012; Sedoyeka, 2012). For instance, Ashraf and Malik (2011) present an assessment of the success of *Gonokendra*, a model of community-based libraries in rural Bangladesh. Ravi and Vivek (2013) discuss the utility and importance of public libraries partnering with non-government organisations (NGOs), community members and organisations, and private companies in India. Likewise, Abubakar (2013) relates research into public libraries partnering with poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. The respective successes and challenges of these initiatives, projects, and partnerships are addressed in this thesis when they have a focus on addressing information inequality and poverty in their communities. Some of these alternatives, such as dual-use and community libraries, will be discussed in greater detail in section 8.4.6.

#### ***1.7.7. Reports and surveys***

Of great value were the reports, surveys, legislation, white papers, and other documents, often government-created or -commissioned, that provided practical and statistical context to this research. These documents were often found online and covered various relevant areas including libraries, education, literacy, policy, or the state of South Africa more generally.<sup>9</sup> Some seminal reports include the 1992 *National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI)* report on South African LIS; the report and bibliography on *Public Libraries in Africa* compiled by Issak (2000); the *Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa (PaCLISA)* (Van Helden and Lor, 2002) report which provided useful information regarding the number and distribution of libraries, members, books, and circulation of materials in South African public and community libraries; and the recent *LIS Transformation Charter* (DAC and NCLIS, 2014). South Africa's

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<sup>9</sup> It is important to point out that document analysis extended well beyond fieldwork which took place in 2011 and 2012. Document analysis took place until 2015 and thus includes reports through 2014.

renewed focus on standards, benchmarks, and monitoring and evaluation is apparent in some more current publications, despite their occasional inconsistencies in form and substance in these early stages of the new democracy. For example, the *South Africa Yearbook*, produced annually, is “the official authoritative reference work on the Republic of South Africa” (Government Communication and Information System, 2015) and offers information on the people, education, culture, economy, and development of South Africa. *Statistics South Africa* is a national government department regulated by the Statistics Act (Act No. 6 of 1999) which allows for production and dissemination of statistical information unfettered by political interference. The *IFLA World Report* is produced annually and provides information on its members’ library and information services. In addition, national and provincial government agencies including the Departments of Basic Education, Arts and Culture, and Social Development, produce annual and other reports which provide a basic context and quantitative background of South African institutions and programs, many of which were analysed for this research.

This section provided a brief sampling of the current literature on these topics. This and other literature will be referred to as appropriate throughout the rest of this thesis. The body of existing literature provides a valuable background to this study and informs the findings and recommendations but certain limitations are apparent.

#### ***1.7.8. Limitations of the existing research***

In reviewing the literature, there was found to be a lack of research regarding the relationship between libraries and information inequality and poverty as well as insufficient practical suggestions of actions libraries can take in their communities to alleviate information poverty. One challenge is finding accurate and consistent statistics regarding LIS in South Africa and

KwaZulu-Natal in particular. As more research is completed on information use for development and the links to economic poverty that may occur from the lack of information, its access, and effective utilisation, it will become more important to use well-conducted research and dependable statistics as the basis for developing practical methods to combat information inequality and poverty in specific communities. More of this evidence-based library research is needed in developing communities and this thesis contributes to this growing body of work. As Farrell and Isaacs (2007:30) point out, while descriptive work published about initiatives and projects is worthwhile, “there is a paucity of data from well-designed evaluation and research studies-particularly in Africa.” Well-planned qualitative and quantitative research studies must be completed in the area of libraries and information inequality and poverty in an effort to assist in the development of impoverished and transitional communities around the world. This study will provide methods with which public libraries can aid in alleviation of information inequality and poverty in their communities, but it also aims to contribute more broadly to the growing body of work focused on the information era. Now that a review of the existing literature and its limitations has been presented, the next section will introduce the theoretical framework of the study.

### ***1.8. Introduction to the theoretical framework of the study***

Some useful contextual background about South Africa in general and KwaZulu-Natal specifically has been provided, as has a brief literature review. It is against this backdrop that this research into information inequality and poverty was conducted. This section will present a brief overview of the research theory used to frame this study.

In order to conduct the proposed investigation of information inequality and poverty, a thorough understanding of its context is necessary. The information needs, uses, and skills of the people must be explored and the value that they place on information determined. It is imperative to understand the viewpoint of community members and their relationship to the local public library. With its focus on socially constructed meaning (Merriam, 2009), a constructivist paradigm best aligns with the focus of this research and the researcher's worldview. Also called interpretivism, this perspective places importance on participants' own views and interpretations and calls upon the researcher to interpret participant contributions while keeping in mind his or her own background and experiences (Cresswell, 2009:8).

This study is also informed by a critical theory and development perspectives. Drawing upon an exploration of power dynamics, critical theorists seek not only to observe and record their findings but also use them to affect change in the community (Merriam, 2009). The emancipatory focus of critical theory is well-suited to the investigation of information inequality and poverty and to the researcher's personal and professional values. The researcher and this study has been deeply influenced by the work of Hudson (2012). Hudson (2012) argues though that despite our best intentions to fight dispossession and poverty in the world, library and information science (LIS) researchers are using Western, colonial frameworks when exploring information and knowledge in developing countries and the role they can play in development. Even the terms we use such as "development," "developing countries," "information inequality," and "information poverty" are wrought with challenges due to the Western lens through which they are defined. Against the backdrop of the dominant colonial framework, information and knowledge from developing countries as well as the methods through which they are learned, created, and shared are seen as inferior, backwards, and less valuable in development. The

current narratives tell us that in order to overcome information inequality and poverty, countries must adhere to the dominant frameworks of the current information and knowledge era, which are based primarily on the access and use of ICTs but Hudson (2012) argues that these narratives must be questioned. As Thompson (2007) explains, it is imperative for researchers to understand the various lenses through which they can examine information inequality and poverty in order for the understanding of these phenomena to continue to develop and evolve. Most research in the areas of information inequality and poverty have thus far fallen into line with existing dominant frameworks that focus mainly on information technology as the answer to these issues but Hudson (2012) encourages us to use critical development theories more. I agree with Hudson's (2012) allegations that our dependence on dominant, colonial frameworks is exclusionary, undermines the true value of indigenous communities, knowledge, and ways of knowing and invalidates their existence, preservation, distribution, and value. Because of this, I am committed to exploring critical and other lenses through which to examine information inequality and poverty in information and knowledge societies throughout this research.

Unfortunately this important perspective was discovered after this study was well underway and I was unable to amend the course of this research to fully explore this framework as I would have liked. I use this perspective and remark on it throughout the thesis but ultimately chose to work primarily within existing frameworks and utilise the familiar terminology of "information poverty and inequality," "information and knowledge societies," and the like with the caveat that I understand it may do some injustice to the people that it was designed to serve. While we may not like it, the fact is that becoming information and knowledge societies may mean adherence to dominant, market-driven definitions of development for the time being. My hope though is that by using Hudson's (2012) argument and other critical development perspectives as guiding

principles, ultimately my own findings will contribute positively to the body of research and not only serve to perpetuate dangerous myths. I will attempt to meet this goal by:

- Honoring the importance of indigenous knowledge (Holmner, 2011) and seek to understand its value autonomously and outside of the dominant frameworks;
- Acknowledging that we may have lost more valuable (indigenous) knowledge than new knowledge was generated in information and knowledge societies (Hudson, 2012);
- Exercising critical self-awareness and -analysis with critical perspectives in mind throughout the remainder of the research and writing process;
- Intentionally exploring alternatives to Western LIS definitions, methods, services, structures, and staffing which are usually considered the norm, especially incorporating non-Western frameworks, research, and ideas whenever possible; and
- Committing to engaging in critical exploration beyond this thesis and incorporating it into my future research, writing, teaching, and librarianship as well as in my interactions with stakeholders and other LIS professionals.

Hudson's (2012) work and that of Bourdieu, Freire, Durrani, and Nussbaum all inform the theoretical framework of this study which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4. The next section of this chapter will describe the current research in broad areas related to libraries and information inequality and poverty.

### ***1.9. Introduction to the research design and methodology of the study***

Because an in-depth understanding of information inequality and poverty from semi-rural KZN community members' perspectives is vital to this study, I chose to utilise mainly qualitative methods for this thesis research but will supplement with quantitative data as well. There are

many differences between qualitative and quantitative research and the characteristics of qualitative research suit this research project most effectively. For example, while quantitative research can show important numerical data and measurements concerning how many times an individual visits a library or the literacy rate of a given community, it will not explain *why* the data are this way or from where such tendencies have arisen like qualitative methods can. As Shenton and Dixon (2004:1-2) explain, “Understanding is gained from patterns and episodes within the data itself, rather than the frequency with which the data falls into categories imposed by the investigator at the outset of the study.” In addition, while quantitative research can shed light on human characteristics, qualitative research focuses on the human experience. Given (2006) refers to the work of Palys in her description of qualitative research as a human-centered approach in which careful attention is paid to how individuals themselves explain their world and their reality. “In this context, knowledge (at both an individual and cultural level) is socially constructed and inextricably linked to individuals’ backgrounds, personal histories, cultural place, and other contextual elements that define the human condition. Where quantitative methods (in attempting to maintain objectivity and reduce bias) strive to eliminate these elements of contexts so that they will not ‘contaminate’ the variables under study, qualitative researchers embrace these elements, and examine the issues under study in light of these points of context” (Given, 2006:379). Last, qualitative research uses inductive reasoning as opposed to deductive as quantitative research does. These characteristics illustrate why qualitative research was most effective for this research study. In this research, two case studies of semi-rural public libraries in KwaZulu-Natal were conducted and used to gain information that can be applied, albeit cautiously, to the larger library community.



Three main methods of qualitative research were used to gain the information necessary to complete this research: observations, interviews, and document analysis. Through direct observation within the libraries, I was able to witness first-hand how community members seek out information, what types of information they seek, and to what extent their needs are being met. The barriers to gaining information successfully and efficiently were also observed. The qualitative method of observation informed me of the context of the library in each community and the relationship participants have with the library and information especially when it proved difficult for them to intentionally elucidate these factors on their own. The Observation Guide can be found in Appendix E. Interviews were conducted with relevant parties to gain an in-depth understanding of themes and trends. For instance, by interviewing librarians, a better understanding of the challenges of providing library and information services in KZN public libraries was gained. In addition, their processes and initiatives for reaching out to community members in attempts to meet their needs were investigated. By interviewing library users, I learned about their information needs, motivations for seeking out library services, and their usage patterns of library services. One library system administrator was also interviewed to gain a more comprehensive perspective on libraries in KZN. Given (2006) points out that a researcher can conduct interviews until the point of saturation of certain themes, at which point the data become transferrable (usually after 15-18 interviews). This research is focused on 22 interviews of library users, librarians, staff, and one administrator interview. Interview Guides can be found in Appendices C and D. Finally, I was able to access and analyse government and library documents online in order to obtain valuable historical context in library development and use, facilities, and information access to inform my understanding of information inequality and poverty in KZN. Most of these documents were annual reports produced over the last ten years

and while my fieldwork took place in 2011 and 2012, document analysis continued into 2015 in order to identify patterns in library use, to explore how libraries in KZN changed over time, and to investigate investments in libraries and their improvement. It is my contention that the value of libraries in a community are, at least in part, illustrated by the investment of funding or other resources government or community leaders make in them. Thus, I wanted to explore official documents and reports over time to investigate this aspect more thoroughly. The documents included quantitative data such as circulation, visitor, and membership statistics as well as qualitative information in narrative form. These documents allowed me to gain a more holistic understanding of the development and goals of libraries in KZN and investigate any roles they played in the exacerbation or alleviation of information inequality and poverty in their communities.

Because triangulation increases the validity of findings, a quantitative survey was administered to supplement the qualitative research explained above. These quantitative data were gathered through questionnaires. A questionnaire was distributed to each library user interviewed in the case study settings to gather data about their information needs, information seeking habits, and regular information sources. In addition, valuable demographic data were also collected through this process. Qualitative methods supplemented by quantitative questionnaires best suited this study and complemented the critical, constructivist theoretical framework. Chapter 5 will describe the researcher as well as the research design and methodologies in more depth.

#### ***1.10. Significance of the study and its contribution to library and information science***

The significance of this study is in its addition to the literature regarding information inequality and poverty as well as in its compendium of recommendations informing public libraries how

they might help alleviate information inequality and poverty in their communities. By assessing library and information services (LIS) in a community, determining community needs, exploring initiatives already in use, and building a climate that fosters positive relationships to information seeking, use, and creation, a librarian would be able to assist community members in their efforts at self-improvement and community development. It is important to remember that these methods will vary depending on community needs, interests, developmental and literacy levels, resources, community participation, etc. Through this study, a compendium of strategies and best practices will be provided that librarians can then adjust to best fit their particular situations, within KZN, South Africa, and in other developing areas.

This study will contribute to information science in the areas of information inequality and poverty as well as information for development. These are important areas in which to research because as information professionals, we have an obligation to contribute to the social welfare of our communities. By providing adequate access to relevant information and by teaching people the skills to access and utilise this information effectively, we are providing an imperative service, especially to those in developing communities around the world. The value of this study is in the delineation of practical methods that librarians can utilise to improve the condition of communities in semi-rural and rural areas of South Africa. This research may be used as the basis to inform future information policy documents in South Africa, in particular to the role of public libraries. These strategies may also be adapted and used in libraries in other developing communities, both inside and outside of South Africa. In addition, this research will benefit the larger profession in the area of evidence-based librarianship (EBL). “EBL employs the best available evidence based upon library science research to arrive at sound decisions about solving

practical problems in librarianship” (Eldredge, 2000:290). The pragmatic focus of this research will place it into this growing body of important literature in information science.

### ***1.11. Limitations of this study***

Every study poses challenges and limitations that are not under the control of the researcher. While the researcher can anticipate some of these limitations and plan accordingly in advance, many are unforeseen and thus the researcher must deal with them in the field or in any stage of the research process. At times there is no way to address or “solve” the challenges that arise. The major limitations of the study should be stated in the research report for those who may want to replicate the study and to avoid misinterpretation of the findings (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). This section will describe the challenges and limitations of this study as well as biases of the researcher.

First, I acknowledge that because I am not from South Africa, I cannot fully understand the culture of the people I was studying, which contributes to the limitations of the study. On the other hand, being from the US allowed me a valuable outsider perspective into South African libraries. Avoiding culture bias was mitigated by my previous knowledge about South Africa and its history, my acknowledgement of my own culture and the potential biases it may cause, and by moving towards understanding KZN culture and libraries as much as is possible. In addition, I am not an experienced qualitative researcher and so time was taken before and throughout the research process to study monographs and other literature on the methods, as well as conferring with experienced qualitative LIS researchers. Because of the skill involved, it took some time, practice, and modifications for the researcher to become more comfortable and adept at interviewing library users.

Being from the United States, my biggest practical challenges in conducting this study were accessibility and cost. These were largely overcome by receiving grant funding to travel from the United States to South Africa twice to conduct fieldwork, once in 2011 and again in 2012.

Because a minimal amount of time was available to be spent at each site, I had little opportunity to build the trusting relationships that are important to this type of research and so I took this into account when analysing their library use and answers to interview questions. In order to address the lack of embeddedness in the community, I made the best use of my key informants that I could. Despite this, it would have been ideal to spend more time in KZN with the people and in the libraries. Not only would my perspective deepened but it also would have been beneficial to increase the number of participants included, especially non-users. This was the original intent of this research but it unfortunately proved impossible, mainly due to time and language barriers.

Because I am unable to speak any of the official or other languages of South Africa, I was limited in the choice of participants to interview to only English speakers. Selection of the sample was based in part on convenience so generalisations will be made cautiously and carefully (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). Other challenges included narrowing down case study sites and finding the locations of the libraries in semi-rural to rural areas.

The challenges listed above indicate some of the researcher bias present in this study. Cultural difference, inexperience, and lack of time were among the biggest limitations and contributors to researcher bias but others should be mentioned here as well. For instance, I have a strong social justice inclination and background which led to the research being focused on libraries as tools for development and equity. Also in this capacity I recognise the power that South Africa's apartheid history has on its present circumstances and its legacy for the future. Despite this, I was hesitant to focus too much on racial issues mainly because of my outsider status as a White

citizen of the United States. While I acknowledge the major impact racial prejudice has played in the unequal development of libraries and the fostering of information inequality and poverty in South Africa (see Chapter 3), it was not the main focus of this research. I contend that to have concentrated primarily on this aspect, I would have needed more time in the communities to establish the credibility and trust necessary to explore this sensitive issue in-depth. How South Africa's racial history has affected the development of information inequality and poverty could be an important focus of future study. To further mitigate the biases mentioned here, I was supported by experienced scholars and librarians who read my work, posed challenging questions, and sparked critical self-reflection in me throughout the entire research and writing process (Yin, 2009) and as a result, I grew as a qualitative researcher. While researcher bias is often seen as a limitation, it has been argued that because of the constructivist nature of qualitative research, the perspectives and backgrounds are inherently part of the study. As long as these perspectives and biases are acknowledged, reflected upon, and challenged, the researcher can work to create a valid, reliable, and replicable qualitative study (Gorman and Clayton, 2009).

### ***1.12. Structure of the thesis***

The chapters of this thesis are divided as follows:

Chapter 1 introduced the reader to the topic of this thesis, the problem and sub-problems, and background on the topic. The theoretical background and methodology were introduced and a brief summary of current research was included. The goals of this research and its value to the library profession was explained.

Following this introduction, the reader will gain a more in-depth understanding of information inequality and poverty in Chapter 2. What is information inequality and poverty and how do they manifest in South Africa? What are the dimensions of information inequality and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal and how do they affect the people of this province? What are some of the approaches used to frame these issues?

After gaining a thorough understanding of information inequality and poverty and its manifestations in South Africa, the reader will benefit from a discussion of public libraries in South Africa including an historical perspective as presented in Chapter 3. This chapter is designed to provide the reader with a valuable contextual understanding of how the development of South African public libraries have played a role in information inequality and poverty there.

The theoretical framework used for this study will be explained in Chapter 4. This research is based mainly on constructivist methods and critical lenses. To this end, the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, Martha Nussbaum, and Shiraz Durrani is explained. In addition, a new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty based on this critical theoretical framework will be presented.

Chapter 5 will present the research design of this study. Qualitative research methodologies are discussed and a rationale for choosing to conduct two case studies is provided. The choice of constructivist, critical paradigms is explained as is the use of a quantitative survey to supplement the design. Case and participant selection is explained and methods of data collection, recording, and storage are provided. More detailed descriptions of the case study settings are presented in this chapter. Data collection, recording, and analysis information is also included, as is a

discussion on validity, reliability, and generalisability. Finally, ethical considerations of the study are included.

Case studies were completed in two public libraries in uMhlathuze municipality of KwaZulu-Natal province and the findings of this research will be presented in Chapter 6. The results of the interviews, questionnaires, surveys, and document analysis will be presented along with the case study findings and collated under five main themes based on the main research questions.

Chapter 7 will provide interpretation and discussion of the research findings in three primary analytic categories. An explanation of the steps to apply the new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty will be provided and analysis of the study findings will be presented as a demonstration of this application. Recommendations for libraries wishing to alleviate information inequality and poverty will be offered to conclude this chapter.

Final conclusions for addressing the problem will be presented in Chapter 8, along with suggestions of topics for future research.



## Chapter 2

### Defining Information Inequality and Poverty

#### *2.1. Introduction*

Information inequality and poverty are complex and multi-faceted phenomena that affect millions of people throughout the world. This study explored these concepts within the context of information and knowledge societies to better understand their nature and how libraries might work to alleviate them in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and other developing communities.

Over the last few decades, information has become the basis of the global economy. It is a form of capital, a commodity of which ownership and access is imperative to living a life of fulfillment and dignity (UNESCO, 2005). This research is not only focused on information but the broader, deeper concept of knowledge is also incorporated. The differences between information and knowledge will be discussed in this chapter and the layered manifestations of information inequality and poverty will be explored. For instance, individuals and communities are said to be information poor when they lack the abilities to access information and knowledge considered vital to survival and growth. But information inequality and poverty are more than just the lack of physical or technological access to information. Also important in the discussion are the skills people need to find, share, create, and effectively utilise information and knowledge. In addition, the relevance of information and knowledge and its presentation to those in developing communities must be clear and meaningful. In information and knowledge societies, the success of an individual or community can hinge upon attaining needed information and knowledge and as this dependence upon information grows, so does the gap between those who have this ability and those who do not. Because millions of global citizens do

not have the access or skills to locate and use relevant information to better their conditions, the number of those living in information inequality and poverty continues to grow. This information inequality and poverty that will be explored in this thesis. In order to accomplish this, first the concepts of the information society and knowledge societies will be explored in this chapter and their characteristics explained. The differences between information and knowledge will be defined. Information inequality will be discussed in more depth and a definition and explanation of information poverty provided. Causes and characteristics of information inequality and poverty will be investigated so that a complete understanding will be attained before moving to Chapter 3's discussion of public libraries in South Africa and the ways in which information inequality and poverty and these libraries are connected.

## ***2.2. Understanding the information and knowledge era and information and knowledge societies***

There have always been people in the world who have suffered due to a lack of information and knowledge. They may not have realised it or called it information inequality or poverty but lacking relevant, useful information and knowledge for problem-solving, education, employment or other goal-attainment has always been present. What makes information inequality and poverty in this era more distinctive and worth studying? What makes them problems of vital importance to address?

While some have argued that the sheer volume of information now being produced has increased, I am of the opinion that it is more that the accessibility of information has increased, especially digitally, and that the dominant ways to access and use that information have been significantly altered with the increase in ICTs around the world. In this view, I am influenced by

Hudson's (2012) critical exploration of the discourse LIS uses to discuss information and knowledge in the current era and will depend on it as a guiding framework. Hudson (2012) is skeptical that the amount of information in the world has increased; instead, he uses critical development theories to explore how we speak about information and knowledge, which uncovers important lessons regarding access to information, how we evaluate it, and the value we place upon different types. I agree with Webster (2006:9) that the "character of information" has changed and has "transformed how we live." In addition, there are deep cultural, social, political, and moral layers to information; it is not only just "information" now but "knowledge" that is important in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Hudson (2012) warns against adhering to the dominant Western paradigm unilaterally. Viewed through that perspective alone, the value and validity of indigenous ways of knowing and communicating are undermined in the information and knowledge era. Taken a step further, this paradigm assigns more value to technology in knowledge access, production, and transmission, thus effectively forcing more traditional societies into a state of information inequality and poverty that may or may not be appropriate. With Hudson's (2012) critical perspective in mind, I will continue the thesis with an explanation of the common (dominant) terminology used in information and knowledge era and society research. In doing so, I hope to provide some clarity to discussions which often confuse or interchangeably use these terms and explain how I have chosen to use the terms in this thesis.

The terms *information era* and *information society* have been used most often to describe the current state of the world since the explosion of information technology caused the society based on industry to transition to one based on information and knowledge (Zaaiman, 1985; Nassimbeni, 1998; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2005, 2014; Mansell, 2010;

Pantserev, 2010; Lesame, 2013). During the course of this research, I found that often the terms were used interchangeably. This can be both confusing and misleading, especially in the common practice of using *information society* to refer to the *information era* because, as will be shown, not all societies in this era have achieved information society status. It is clear now that while all societies are situated within the current information era, not all societies can be considered information societies. Thankfully, the use of these terms is changing now in at least two ways. First, the two terms are becoming less synonymous with one another. *Information era* now more clearly refers to the time frame in which we currently live, the characteristics of which will be described in more detail later in this chapter. *Information society* (or *societies*) refers to specific countries, communities, or other aggregates of people living together, specifically with reference to the fulfillment of the “qualifications” required of such a society, which will also be explained further later in this thesis. Second, these terms are more often adding or exchanging the term *knowledge* for *information*. As research in these areas has evolved, it has wisely begun to incorporate existing distinctions between *information* and *knowledge* into the work and definitions.

The difference between *information* and *knowledge* is important in this context, as is the choice to use the plural form of *society*. “Knowledge requires interpretation by human beings” (Mansell, 2013:5); it occurs when information is organised, structured, or patterned and when meaning is otherwise imposed upon it by humans. The plural form of *society* is used because, as UNESCO (2005) argues, it would be impossible to narrow down these diverse dimensions into a singular overarching society. Information and knowledge societies in the information and knowledge era have an increased focus on human rights, preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity, freedom of expression and education, knowledge-sharing, awareness of global issues, and

community participation than those of the past (UNESCO, 2005). Knowledge can be used to fight poverty and injustice as long as citizens are equipped with the capacities to use it critically (UNESCO, 2005) but also only when systems of power are critically investigated and disrupted in favor of more equitable, inclusive models. These themes will be investigated further throughout this thesis.

This thesis will use the term *information and knowledge era* to describe the current era in which we live. It will use the term *information and knowledge society* (or *societies*) to refer to those societies that have fulfilled the requirements of an information and knowledge society explained later in this chapter. In order to gain a fuller understanding of these terms, more explanation is now provided first of the information and knowledge era and then of information and knowledge societies.

### ***2.2.1. The information and knowledge era***

The information and knowledge era has also been referred to as the *information economy* (Warschauer, 2003; Swanson, 2004), the *knowledge economy* (Norris, 2001), the *internet age* (Norris, 2001), the *network society* (Castells, 2010; Webster, 2006), and even the *third industrial revolution* (Warschauer, 2003; UNESCO, 2005). This era has also recently been referred to as the *Age of Intelligence*, especially in conversations regarding the Internet of Things (Shaffer, 2014)<sup>10</sup>.

To trace the full evolution of the information and knowledge era is beyond the scope of this thesis but a brief synopsis will be given here to provide related background helpful to

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<sup>10</sup> According to Shaffer (2014:145), in the Age of Intelligence, "...information comes from diverse sources and is mediated by both human and machine to create insights (intelligence) previously unforeseeable." A culture of innovation should be fostered in libraries to increase their influence in their communities.

understanding information inequality and poverty.<sup>11</sup> “The information and knowledge society has been brought about by the transformation and evolution of previous societies and the use of tools for development (e.g. the Stone Age, Bronze Age, the Industrial Revolution)” (Jiyane et al., 2013:1-2).<sup>12</sup> The world economy that was once driven by industry and production has evolved into one, with the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICTs), in which information is treated as a commodity, as a form of capital (UNESCO, 2005). While people have always needed information, it is often said that the current era differs because the creation of information is faster and easier for many and thus there is more information through which to navigate (UNESCO, 2005). Lesame (2013:76) points to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Tunis in 2005 as “the end of the Industrial Era and the beginning of the Information Age.” Essentially, information has replaced production as the defining character of the industrial society (Lesame, 2013:76). In this era, information technology is often needed for access to the most current information, so communities must have the infrastructure to support ICTs and global citizens need the skills to use them. Access to information or the lack thereof will, in large part, determine a community’s or individual’s participation in political, social, and economic processes. This helps determine a community’s information and knowledge society status in the information and knowledge era. Many wealthier, developed nations have been able to harness the power of information to their advantage, often to the detriment of developing countries. Because of this trend, a gap between those who could participate in the information and knowledge era and those who could not continued to grow and the resulting inequality of information continues to have devastating global effects.

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<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the information society, see Webster (2006).

<sup>12</sup> The reader will notice that in the work of other researchers, *information society* or *information and knowledge society* may still be used to refer to the information era. Some quotes included in this thesis will reflect that.

Webster (2006) summarises approaches to the information and knowledge era into five main groups: technological, economic, occupational, spatial, and cultural. Nassimbeni (1998), too, stresses several qualities of the information and knowledge era which overlap with the approaches set out by Webster (2006). First, in the information and knowledge era, new technological innovations since the late 1970s have allowed the creation of new types of information and at a vastly increased volume than ever before (Webster, 2006). ICTs and information networks take on an expanded role in the production, dissemination, and distribution of valuable information. In addition, ICTs have been increasingly integrated into every sphere of public and private life, which has brought radical changes into people's lives. Second, in the information and knowledge era, existing information and the creation of new information take on increased importance and value. As stated earlier, information in this era is a commodity which can be owned, bought, and sold and is the basis of power in industrialised nations (UNESCO, 2005). The increase in the economic value of information marked an important global shift and is having lasting effects, as this thesis will show. Related to the economic approach, the occupational approach, on which Daniel Bell's (1973) work is focused,<sup>13</sup> is described by Webster (2006) as the shift from manufacturing jobs and manual labor to information-based jobs. The ability to manipulate information is an important job skill in the information and knowledge era (Webster, 2006) and this era can be characterised by the need for increased skills to allow people to benefit from their access to and use of a massively expanding store of information, both on and off the job (Nassimbeni, 1998). As Van Dijk (2014) explains, the increase in the use of digital media has affected not only physical access to these media but also requires skills that, if not attained, leave entire (usually impoverished or developing) areas of the world behind.

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<sup>13</sup> See Daniel Bell's seminal work *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (1973).

Information can be accessed quickly if one has the right technology to do so but only if they also have the skills to find, manipulate, and use the information; while an intermediary such as a librarian can assist in information location, it is becoming increasingly important for people to be empowered to use digital media autonomously. Webster (2006) also describes the spatial conception of the information and knowledge era in which networks and flows of information are seen as evolving and changing with the technological advances of this era. Last explained by Webster (2006) is the cultural approach to the information and knowledge era. This approach is focused on the penetration of new media and information into every area of our lives to the point that our culture can be said to have been forever changed. These five categories are laid out by Webster (2006) and Nassimbeni (1998) as main approaches to the information and knowledge era but Webster (2006) is skeptical of each and whether the notion that this era as defined exists at all. He prefers instead to focus on the “informatisation” of life, that is, the contextualisation of information within historical eras and with respect to socioeconomic and cultural patterns of development (Webster, 2006:135).

The first two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) held in Geneva and Tunis in 2003 and 2005, respectively, helped to increase visibility and understanding of this era and laid important groundwork on investigating the challenges of the information and knowledge era. WSIS (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2005:9) was originally convened with a vision “...to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the



purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations<sup>14</sup> and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>15</sup> Participants took as their challenge “to harness the potential of information and communication technology” to promote the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of eradication of poverty, availability of universal primary education, equality of genders, improvement of health including the eradication of HIV/AIDS, development of peaceful global partnerships, etc. (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2005:9).<sup>16</sup> This charge has been reaffirmed in subsequent WSIS documents (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2005, 2014) but has evolved in the last ten years, as will be described in the following section.

### ***2.2.2. Information and knowledge societies***

Information and knowledge societies have been defined in various ways but most focus on the centrality of information and knowledge in “quality of life, as well as prospects for social change and economic development” (Jain and Saraf, 2013:50). Lesame (2013:75) offers a broad definition similar to that of Padayachie (2010) that an information society is one “that is able to transform itself by living, working, and playing through the exploitation of ICT.” Webster (2006:21) has argued that because of the lack of consensus on its definition and characteristics, the term information society is “too inexact to be acceptable as a definitive term.” The terms *knowledge society* and *knowledge societies* have most recently been used to describe the societies within this era (Mansell and Wehn, 1998; UNESCO, 2005; Webster, 2006; Lor and Britz, 2007; Holmner and Britz, 2011; Mansell, 2013; Westlund and Kobayashi, 2013;

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<sup>14</sup> For more information about the Charter of the United Nations including the full text of the document, see <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/index.shtml>.

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights including the full text of the document, see <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the Millennium Development Goals, see <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2014).<sup>17</sup> In its 2005 report *Towards Knowledge Societies*, UNESCO made a strong case for using the term “knowledge societies” in the current era. “The idea of the information society is based on technological breakthroughs. The concept of knowledge societies encompasses much broader social, ethical and political dimensions” (UNESCO, 2005:17) and is predicated upon the acknowledgement of needs and contexts which may vary by community and the importance of collective action in the establishment of alternative models of knowledge creation, use, and sharing (Mansell, 2013). The World Summit on the Information Society (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2014:12) has also begun to update its terminology from *information society* to *knowledge societies*:

The evolution of the information society over the past 10 years is contributing towards, inter alia, the development of knowledge societies around the world that are based on principles of freedom of expression, quality education for all, universal and non-discriminatory access to information and knowledge, and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity and cultural heritage.

Within this context, the term *information and knowledge society* also evolved (Al-Hawamdeh and Hart, 2001; Mcharazo and Koopman, 2007; Holmner, 2008; Ocholla, 2009; Holmner, 2011; Jiyane et al., 2013). Holmner (2011) proposed the following definition of an information and knowledge society (IKS):

A society that is reliant upon a sophisticated physical and ICT infrastructure for the improvement of everyday living and working conditions. A society that values the

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<sup>17</sup> The term “knowledge society” was first used in 1969 by Peter Drucker (UNESCO 2005). Subsequently, the term was used regularly, gained popularity in the 1990s, and is intimately tied to (and confused with) the concept of the information and knowledge era.

importance of information as a key to economic wealth and prosperity and where there is an increase in information-related activities, as well as an enhancement of human intellectual capability. The information and knowledge society ensures the freedom of information through the use of information and communication technologies. In such a society, modern information and communication technologies are utilised to achieve the interaction and exchange of information between their local knowledge system (tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge) and the global knowledge system (explicit knowledge) to create usable, relevant contextualised content and knowledge. This interaction and exchange of data, information and knowledge will, in turn, ensure the respect of other people's beliefs, values, norms and religions due to the increase, and availability, of information regarding these aspects.

Holmner (2011) goes on to describe seven criteria of an IKS which include:

- Physical infrastructure (especially in transportation, such as roads, warehouses, etc.),
- ICT infrastructure (computers, servers, internet providers, etc.),
- Social criterion (information causes growth in human capabilities and development),
- Economic criterion (human development can lead to improved economic conditions),
- Political criterion (freedom of information increases political participation),
- Knowledge criterion (the exchange of data, information, and knowledge, especially between localised knowledge and global knowledge<sup>18</sup>), and

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<sup>18</sup> Localised knowledge refers to indigenous, traditional knowledge that is specific to a particular culture and is often tacit but can be explicit (Holmner, 2011). Global knowledge exists outside one's familiar localised knowledge system and is usually explicit in format, often digital (Holmner, 2011).

- Cultural criterion (information and knowledge exchange leads to increased cultural awareness, understanding, and respect).

Holmner (2011) also identified indicators for each criterion and connects each one with a Millennium Development Goal (MDG). WSIS (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2014) recognises the vast improvements in societies over the last ten years but is clear that more work must be done to achieve equitable universal information and knowledge societies that support the new Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>19</sup> Jiyane et al. (2013:10) used these criteria to determine that while South Africa does meet some of them, it falls short on others, and so “is still in the process of becoming an information and knowledge society.” Lesame (2013:73, 77, 86) contends that “the chronic digital divide in South Africa,” especially between urban- and rural-dwellers, in which most citizens do not have access to internet and computers that will improve their lives, impedes its progress to becoming a fully-fledged IKS. Some researchers have proffered suggestions on how a developing country might get closer to becoming an IKS. For instance, Sedoyeka (2012:62) suggests that governments can play a role by setting equitable information policies, adopting ICTs to “get closer to citizens”, and by increasing investments in libraries. Holmner’s (2011) focus on harnessing indigenous knowledge to achieve MDGs is one example of how she proposes developing countries more easily reach IKS status. Information inequality and poverty are consistent with the absence of one or more of these criteria in the IKS. As additional layers and connections are uncovered in this era, the

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<sup>19</sup> The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and were first discussed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (also referred to as Rio+20). On 2 August 2015, participating countries decided upon 17 goals from ending poverty to fighting climate change to achieving gender equality for women and girls. For more information, see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>.

terminology continues to evolve in attempt to express the most accurate representation of the complex nature of the times in which we live.

In her 2013 article about the futures of information and knowledge societies, London School of Economics and Political Science professor Robin Mansell argued that current information and knowledge societies are governed by dominant, market-led models that do not favor the majority of global citizens. She maintained that a period of destabilisation of the status quo is often enough to encourage authority figures to reconsider current policies and methodologies, learn from past mistakes, and focus on realigning priorities to favor knowledge society goals of social justice, inclusion, and equality (Mansell, 2013). Unfortunately this was not understood or practiced by decision makers and leaders after the 2008 global economic downturn, and Mansell (2013) maintains that an opportunity was missed to address persistent imbalances in current information, communication, and education systems. The exploitation of such an opportunity could have had a disruptive effect on information inequality and poverty and encouraged a participatory investigation into more equitable and sustainable methods of governing information and knowledge societies. Because “pinning hope for a better future on the (yet to be acquired) capabilities of the already disadvantaged” is unfair and unrealistic, Mansell (2013:18) advocates for a bottom-up, collective approach balanced by creative, visionary leadership dedicated to collective action that will equitably benefit a wide variety of stakeholders and destabilise the governance of current information and knowledge societies favoring the dominant, exclusive status quo of those in authority.

We have moved into a time when knowledge and its layers of diversity, moral issues, and social justice implications outweigh the simpler, one-dimensional facets of information. Webster (2006:31) challenges researchers: “...while acknowledging an explosion in information, insist

that we never abandon questions of its meaning and purpose.”<sup>20</sup> The relationship between the information and knowledge era and information and knowledge societies is summed up best in the UNESCO (2005:19) report: “The rise of a global information [and knowledge era] spawned by the new technology revolution must not overshadow the fact that it is valuable only as a means to achieve genuine [information and] knowledge societies.” This thesis offers an exploration of the (often unintended) outcomes of the rise of the information and knowledge era, the ways in which South Africa fulfills (or does not fulfill) the requirements of information and knowledge societies, and in particular, how libraries there might address the information inequality and poverty that exists as a result. Since explanations of the information and knowledge era and information and knowledge societies have been provided, a description of information inequality will now be presented and followed by an explanation of information poverty.

### ***2.3. Information inequality defined***

The evolution to the information and knowledge era, the growth of a global knowledge economy, and an increase of ICT development and usage has fostered great divides between and amongst individuals and groups (Britz and Blignaut, 2001). The terms information poverty, digital divide, and information inequality have at times been (incorrectly) interchangeably utilised to describe these divides and discrepancies in information and ICT provision. While this research began as an investigation into information poverty, one of the findings supported a change in terminology. The seminal work of LIS researcher Elfreda A. Chatman (1996, 1999) on information poverty and the subsequent exploration of her work by Kim M. Thompson (2006, 2007) have revealed

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<sup>20</sup> While Webster (2006) presents an intriguing critical look at the current theories of the information society, delving into them any deeper is, unfortunately, out of the scope of this thesis.

that while information poverty research began based on an assumption of its close relation to economic poverty, Chatman has shown that information poverty is much less dependent on economic poverty than originally thought (Chatman, 1996; Thompson, 2006). While information poverty was initially explored through the lenses of poverty paradigms, Thompson (2006) asserts that these views are too narrow and exclude imperative sociocultural frameworks, as presented by Chatman.<sup>21</sup> The focus on economic poverty has led information poverty research to concentrate mainly on ICT and infrastructural explorations and explanations. While ICT and infrastructure access and use play important roles in the explanation and alleviation of information poverty, they are not the only factors. Thompson (2006) encourages information poverty researchers to widen their analyses to include the sociocultural factors that Chatman explored. Thompson (2006) even advocates for ending the use of the term “information poverty” because of its easy association with an economic definition. For this reason, this research study evolved to include an exploration into information inequality in addition to its original focus on information poverty. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Yu (2011:661) defines *information inequality* as “multifaceted disparity between individuals, communities or nations in mobilising society’s information resources for the benefit of their lives and development, which may take the form of information divide, digital divide, knowledge gap, etc.” Information inequality will be used in this thesis as an umbrella term that includes information poverty. Now that a brief explanation of information inequality has been presented, the remainder of this chapter will focus on information poverty, including its definition, causes, and characteristics.

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<sup>21</sup> In her 2006 dissertation, Thompson offers an analysis of two main poverty paradigms through which information poverty has been framed, the structural/economic approach and the cultural/behavioral approach. She offers a valuable look into the development of these approaches and their application to the study information poverty.

#### ***2.4. Information poverty defined***

In much of the research on information poverty, the focus has been on ICT and the infrastructure, tools, and training that will enable people to access the information they need to live fulfilling lives. These factors require the ability for an individual, community, or nation to afford them. If they cannot, they could be said to live in a state of information poverty, confirming a relationship between economic poverty and information poverty. While this is one aspect of information inequality and poverty, it is important to remember that, “... poverty cannot be defined only in terms of economic and social deprivation” (Ashraf and Malik, 2011:154) but that a lack of information or knowledge also affects millions of people every day. It is a complex and multi-faceted sociocultural issue and while connected to it, information poverty is not equivalent to economic poverty (Chatman, 1996) and information poverty does not automatically and only affect those living in economic poverty. It is not only about a lack of information or ICT but also about accessing, utilising, creating, understanding, and valuing the significance of information. Against the backdrop of the last section’s explanation of information inequality, a closer look at varying definitions of information poverty will help to illustrate why it remains an issue of vital importance in information and knowledge societies.

The term “information poverty” was first used in the 1950’s to describe a state in which one lacks the information essential to basic life and development (Britz, 2004). The information gap has been included by some in discussions of the so-called “North-South divide” (Mchombu, 1982; Britz and Blignaut, 2001), which refers to geographic patterns that emerge in socioeconomic development; the Northern, more affluent nations had access to and benefitted from information and the Southern, less affluent nations, on the whole, did not. The reference to the North-South divide in regards to information inequality has lessened in recent years since



researchers like Britz (2004), Britz and Lor (2006), and Jain and Sharaf (2013) have pointed out that these discrepancies occur not only between nations but also within a single nation or region.

A leading scholar on information poverty, Britz (2004a, 2004b, 2013) argues that because it affects millions of people around the world, the alleviation of information poverty should be a top moral and ethical concern. This social justice dimension is important to the sociocultural and political examination of information poverty. Britz and Blignaut (2001) give a useful analysis of late-20<sup>th</sup> century attempts to define information poverty, which can be categorised into one or more of the following groups:

- Information poverty is a lack of understanding and appreciation of the value of information; it is an attitude of disregard of information and thus a failure to commit resources to its use, generation, or support;
- Similarly, information poverty is a state of not knowing what options exist in the information era;
- Information poverty is the lack of ICT and technological infrastructure and/or the inaccessibility of computers, software, stable internet, etc.;
- Information poverty is the lack of information literacy skills, the skills needed to access, understand, evaluate, use, and create valuable information; and
- Information poverty is the lack of access to information which can be due to any of the factors listed above.

The fact is that all of these factors play a role in defining information poverty. Britz's (2004:194) definition of information poverty is "that situation in which individuals and communities, within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient

access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately. It is further characterised by a lack of essential information and a poorly developed information infrastructure.” In 2013, Britz (2013:73) expanded the term to information and *knowledge* poverty to emphasise “the importance of understanding and the ability to assign meaning to information.”

Britz is one of the few researchers to attempt a formal definition of information poverty.

Thompson (2007) is correct in stating that there is no one definition on which all researchers agree but that the need for a common definition is great. She is also clear in stating that this definition must not rely solely upon the aspect of ICT and information infrastructure (Thompson, 2007). She boldly (and correctly) speculates that information poverty may not be a poverty of information at all, “...but a poverty of power, with information simply used as the next façade so that power can remain in the hands of the powerful by placing blame for powerlessness on the behavior of the powerless” (Thompson, 2007:13). Indeed, when viewed through a lens of critical theory, information poverty is, at its core, a concept based on Western economic and cultural measures that when applied to people outside of the West may determine them illiterate, helpless, or backwards (Hudson, 2012). At its worst, the concept of information poverty reflects the maintenance of power structures in information and knowledge societies: the minority who have access to and control over information and the technology to harness it are able to keep the majority who do not in a state of dispossession and dependence. Mansell (2013) lends support to this when she argues that disruption of the status quo (the dependence on technology for development and alleviation of information inequality and poverty) is especially difficult when those who are profiting from it are guiding the direction of knowledge societies.

While technology is an important factor in the definition of information poverty, it is not the only factor. Thompson focuses much of her 2007 thesis on Chatman’s work which added an

important human dimension to its understanding. To Chatman (1996:197), “An impoverished information world is one in which a person is unwilling or unable to solve a critical worry or concern.” Chatman (1996) based her definition in part on the concept of insider/outsider theory of sociology. Studying janitors, incarcerated women, and women in retirement communities, Chatman observed members of these groups as “insiders” who distrusted “outside” information and often censored their own information needs for fear of being ostracised by their small world group. “More than a simple lack of information access, Chatman’s definition of information poverty incorporates a sense of individual perception within a framework of shared social norms” (Thompson, 2007:51). Chatman (1996) found that information poverty is not only focused on the actual information available to people that was important but their perceptions, understanding, and valuing of that information as meeting their needs that took precedent. This framework can be applied to discussions of localised or indigenous knowledge and global knowledge. As Holmner (2011:140) describes, indigenous knowledge is unique to a particular community and often tacit or existing “in the mind of the local people” but at times, it can also be explicit. By contrast, global knowledge is broader and exists, explicitly and often digitally, outside of a specific culture (Hudson, 2012). As a global society whose measures of value are based largely on dominant Western ideals, we are quick to judge localised knowledge as less than or backwards and global knowledge as that which is dependable and more valuable, especially when fixed in a tangible medium. This is problematic because in devaluing indigenous knowledge we devalue the peoples from whom it came. Instead of seeing the intrinsic value of indigenous knowledge, we dismiss it and in the process, may lose it forever. What is important in this discussion of defining information poverty is the understanding that the concept is based on Western ideals and standards which may not accurately portray the capabilities and knowledge

of the people to which it is applied. The discussion of information poverty will continue throughout this thesis with this caveat in mind.

While Thompson (2007) and others have been skeptical about defining information poverty as solely a lack of access to ICT and infrastructure, it is clear that it must remain among the factors involved. As important as physical access is in defining information poverty, so are the more user-centered factors such as information behaviors and attitudes (Thompson, 2007). Thus, the working understanding of information poverty used for this thesis includes a combination of the economic, technological, infrastructural, and sociocultural factors as well as the power dynamics explained above. As will be shown throughout the rest of this chapter, these factors, as well as the causes and characteristics of information inequality and poverty all overlap to produce a complex, interconnected phenomenon in information and knowledge societies. In this thesis, the concept will be referred to as “information inequality and poverty” to reflect this complexity and its sociopolitical layers instead of relying upon “information poverty” alone.

### ***2.5. The causes of information inequality and poverty***

In the discussing the causes of information inequality and poverty, one must recall that these concepts are constructions based on Western dominant ideals and measures. Thus one of the main causes is the definition itself: if we define information inequality and poverty purely according to Western standards of success that place high value on technology, production, the printed word, formal education, and the like, then we automatically place large segments of the global population into information poverty. This is not to say that information inequality and poverty are not real, tangible concerns in information and knowledge societies, just that those in LIS must be critical in their explorations and understandings of these multi-layered concepts.

With that in mind, this section will go on to explain other causes of information inequality and poverty as laid out in the literature.

Britz (and Lor, 2006; 2013) detailed three main causes of information poverty. First is the lack of connectivity to information, specifically the lack of access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and internet. The second cause is the lack in the availability of quality information. The last cause of information poverty is the inability to benefit from information. Each of these causes will now be discussed in more detail.

### ***2.5.1. Lack of connectivity***

One prominent factor influencing a state of information inequality and poverty is physical access to information. This dimension usually centers on discussions of access to digital information via information and communication technologies (ICT) but the importance of non-digital information (books, newspapers, audiovisual, oral, etc.) must not be forgotten, especially in developing countries. More on non-digital resources will be included later in this thesis but here it is important to note the developmental role that ICTs play in information and knowledge societies. The World Summit on the Information Society (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2014:24) is clear that the power of ICTs must be harnessed because of its potential in:

Enhancing access, especially of vulnerable populations, to information and knowledge, education, health care and other public services; provision of ICT infrastructure; creating enabling environments; building confidence and security in the use of ICTs, information and knowledge creation, sharing, acquisition and preservation purposes.

Digital access is predicated upon a solid infrastructure, which includes access to ICT, specifically computers, internet, and networks. While those who are connected can enjoy the explosion of information produced and made available online, those who are not continue to fall further behind (Britz and Lor, 2006). Lack of access to ICT exacerbates the gap between those who have information and those who do not, a phenomenon often referred to as the digital divide. The unfortunate irony in information and knowledge societies is that while ICTs have the ability to break down political, economic, and social barriers, they can also exacerbate these barriers and increase the so-called digital divide (Norris, 2000; Warah, 2004). Van Dijk and Hacker (2003:315-316) describe the main elements of the “digital divide” as:

- Lack of “mental access,” i.e. low or no interest in new technologies, technology anxiety, etc.;
- Lack of “material access” to ICT, internet, computers, etc.;
- Lack of “skills access,” or the insufficient skills or understanding to use new technologies; and
- Lack of “usage access,” or opportunities to use new technologies.

In many areas around the world, this digital gap is widening drastically and there are major disadvantages for those living in digital poverty. In 2000, only 4% of the world’s population was online (Norris, 2000:2). All of the internet users in Sub-Saharan Africa totaled less than 1%; Sweden alone had more users (Norris, 2000:2). In South Africa in 2005, only 3% of households had access to the internet, a number that increased to approximately 10% by 2011 (OECD, 2013). Pippa Norris (2000) editorialised that the internet has the potential to greatly improve access to information for developing countries because it is relatively inexpensive. Indeed, she suggested it could “level the playing field and reduce traditional disadvantages of the developing

world” (Norris, 2000:1). Warah (2004), too, posits that ICTs are the tools for economic and political empowerment that could close the divide between rich and poor. The problem, as Norris (2000) points out, is that developing countries do not have the access to the internet that would allow them to take advantage of it as developed countries do; often the infrastructure is not in place to support ICT effectively. In fact, Lesame (2012:74) contends that “South Africa is backtracking, rather than improving, with regard to ICT infrastructure development.” She goes on to explain that South Africa is not leveraging its promising potential in the areas of political and regulatory environments and conditions for innovation; indeed, “South Africa is no longer the African leader in ICT infrastructure and access, when compared to countries such as Nigeria” (Lesame, 2013:74). In order to build an improved infrastructure, investments of time, energy, planning, and funding must be made and it is clear that this is more difficult in developing countries. Sedoyeka (2012:62) reminds us of the important role that governments “should play in bridging the digital divide.” In his study of the obstacles to bridging the digital divide in Tanzania, Sedoyeka (2012) found that economic disparities between rural and urban dwellers were the biggest challenges, along with peoples’ habitus (attitude)<sup>22</sup> towards ICT and a lack of technical access to ICT. It has been argued that in these developing countries access to the basic necessities such as food, clean water, health care, and safe housing are often seen as more immediate problems than access to information (Warah, 2004). Warah (2004:76) considers this approach “short-sighted” and dangerous because it could cause even further marginalisation of communities that are already quickly falling behind in development. In 1999, UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan said, “People lack many things: jobs, shelter, food, health care and drinkable water. Today, being cut off from basic telecommunications services is a hardship almost as acute

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<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu’s concept of habitus will be explained fully in Chapter 4.

as these other deprivations, and may indeed reduce the chances of finding remedies to them” (quoted in Norris, 2000:5). It is as true in developing South African communities like those in KwaZulu-Natal as it is in the urban slums of Nairobi in which Warah (2004) researched, that when investing in projects to upgrade these areas, ICT infrastructure must be on the table. The lack of infrastructure and access to ICT also discourages people from the creation of information, which contributes to their state of information poverty and deters their participation in the information era where the ability and skills to produce information is vital to growth. In his seminal three-volume work on *The Information Age*, Castells (2010abc) argues that it is not information that makes this era unique but the necessity of network access. Preferring the term network society to information society, Castells (2010) posits that information has always been important to societies through time and that it is the rise of networks that is the definitive factor in this new society. During the late-1990s into the 2000s, the focus was mainly on the impact of ICTs and the digital divide but it is important to remember that access to ICT and the digital divide is only one aspect of a broader information or knowledge divide. We must not use the ideas of information inequality and digital divide interchangeably; access to internet and computers alone will not solve the greater issues of information inequality and poverty around the world. These phenomena are more complex than this, as this thesis will continue to illustrate.

### ***2.5.2. Lack of quality information***

Another factor influencing information inequality and poverty is the type and quality of the information created, available, and distributed (Britz and Lor, 2006). The information available must benefit the society and in order to do so, must match the needs of a particular individual or community. The information that is required to meet basic needs in life and to grow and develop communities is termed *essential information* by Britz (2004:194) and can include information



concerning health care, food and agriculture, housing, employment, etc. “Without access to information pertaining to needed resources, it is impossible to satisfy basic needs” (Britz and Lor, 2006:105). Beyond essential information that is needed to just survive is that information which can be used to live a full, meaningful, and dignified life. Pienaar (1995:15) points to Donohue’s investigations into different types of information and describes two types of *community information*. The first is survival information which is related to health, housing, employment, legal and political rights, and economic opportunities. The second is citizen action information which encompasses that information a person would need to participate in political, social, economic and other community processes. Determining information needs of a person or community is a challenging topic. Is anyone besides the individual or community qualified to determine their information needs? An attempt to answer this question will come in subsequent chapters with an exploration into using Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach to the discussion of determining information needs. Either way, the information available must be of the quality that is authentic and meaningful to the individual or community. Finally, the information must be presented in a format which the individual can understand and utilise. This means that information must be available in local languages. This is difficult in South Africa, for instance, when purchasing books written in some of the eleven official languages is cost-prohibitive and in some cases impossible due to lack of items being published in those languages. Local content is often missing online as well and this often deters people from using the internet for information (Sedoyeka, 2012:62, 67). Thus information should be relevant to the local population, perhaps produced by them, and presented in formats other than print; many individuals and communities would benefit from information being delivered in-person, in audio, or in video format instead. This is not only because of a potential language barrier but also

because of the high rate of illiteracy in many semi-rural and rural areas of South Africa and other developing countries.

### ***2.5.3. Inability to benefit from information***

For the last three decades, the debate about the growing information divide has centered on access to ICT but focus has begun to move towards the roles information and digital literacies play in one's ability to benefit from information. While ICT is important in the discussion of information inequality and poverty, it has overshadowed the third cause of information poverty given by Britz and Lor (2006): the inability to derive benefit from information. Britz and Lor (2006:110) assert that "[i]nformation only has value when a recipient has a need for it and the ability to process it. Otherwise information is a useless resource." The ability to benefit from information is tied to an individual's information literacy skills. Information literacy is "the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand" (National Forum on Information Literacy, 2015). An individual must be able to discern when a need is present that information could be used to fill; they need to then be able to search for information, evaluate their findings, assign meaning to their findings, and use information legally and ethically to address their initial need. "...[I]nformation literacy skills are a precondition for the implementation and successful exercise of the right of access to information" (Britz and Lor, 2010:18). Unfortunately, many people in the current era, especially those of developing countries, do not have the knowledge or skills to find, use, or benefit from relevant information (Jain and Saraf, 2013:51). Especially amongst the poor, information literacy skills are "essential in solving their basic problems" (Jain and Saraf, 2013:48). Information literacy skills are closely aligned with educational literacy rates. There is a connection between these skills and literacy,

which can be especially challenging in rural areas, where illiteracy rates are highest. Since many developing countries have high rates of illiteracy, it would follow that the information literacy skills of the nation would be poor as well. This fact has led Britz and Lor (2006:110) to assert “that a lack of education lies at the heart of information poverty,” and Pantserev (2010:50) to agree, “That’s why the precondition for African States on their way to the global information society is the rising of the educational level of ordinary African people.” Unfortunately, libraries and the role they could play in teaching digital and information literacy skills often get lost in discussions of solutions. For example, Lesame’s (2013:85) article about South Africa’s information society fails to mention libraries at all, even when detailing the ideas of how to tackle the shortage of digital literacy skills, which libraries can be fully equipped to teach. Throughout this research, it was clear that libraries are taken for granted and their developmental roles misunderstood, overlooked, or unappreciated.

In this way, information inequality and poverty is exacerbated by an individual’s or community’s attitude towards the utility and relevance of libraries, the internet and other information resources. Using the concept of “habitus” put forth by Bourdieu, Sedoyeka (2012) found that the attitude (or habitus) of individuals and communities towards the value of information plays a large role in their use of the internet and other information resources and thus their ability to benefit from them. Age and the fear of being seen as computer illiterate also played a role in people’s use of the internet in Sedoyeka’s (2012) Tanzanian study. More on habitus and its role in information inequality and poverty is included in Chapter 4’s discussion of the use of Bourdieu to frame this study.

The main causes of information inequality and poverty were explained in this section.

Unfortunately a large part of the world does not have the infrastructure or ICTs available to

allow physical access to digital information for its citizens; does not have access to relevant, utilitarian information; and its people may not possess the skills to exploit the information that is available. Thus, it has been noted that a large part of the world lives in a state of information inequality and poverty according to dominant definitions and measures. I would argue that if more value was placed on indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, our understanding of information inequality and poverty may change to include more critical investigations of power dynamics in information and knowledge societies. The following section describes the characteristics of information inequality and poverty through a critical lens.

## ***2.6. Characteristics of information inequality and poverty***

This section describes several characteristics that are important in understanding information inequality and poverty. Although complex, information inequality and poverty discussions are often oversimplified. Globally they warrant wide attention and yet deserve deeper contextual understanding. Information inequality and poverty are tied to discussions of democracy and economics and have social justice implications which will be described in more detail below.

### ***2.6.1. Information inequality and poverty are complex and multi-faceted***

As the information and knowledge era progresses, it is clear that issues of information inequality and poverty are not as straightforward as once was thought. After several decades of research in this area, agreed-upon general understandings of information inequality and poverty exist but approaches to understanding and addressing it vary widely and few patterns are seen even within a particular discipline (Thompson, 2006; Britz, 2013). At times, the rapid development of ICT has overshadowed the complexities of information inequality and poverty and the issue was relegated to arguments over a digital divide. While discussion of ICT and the resulting digital

divide is necessary in understanding information inequality and poverty, it is not the only issue of importance. Issues of culture, language, tradition, education and skills, power, and access all contribute to information inequality and poverty (Britz, 2004; Hudson, 2012). Thus to alleviate information inequality and poverty, one must address all of the issues that contribute to it in a particular community or country. Information inequality and poverty may manifest uniquely in different communities. One must gain a thorough understanding of a community's information needs, resources, usage patterns, and skills as they attempt to address issues of information inequality and poverty. These issues as they pertain to semi-rural and rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa will be explained in Chapter 7.

### ***2.6.2. Information inequality and poverty are relative, global, and contextual***

Information inequality and poverty are global phenomena and can also differ from one context to another (Britz, 2004; Britz, 2013). Information inequality and poverty are relative terms and can affect individuals or communities at varying degrees (Britz, 2013). As described earlier in this chapter, information inequality and poverty are at times characterised by a North-South divide but this pattern is changing and there is great variety in levels of information wealth and poverty among nations of the world. Britz (2004) and Jain and Sharaf (2013) point out that information poverty is not only a phenomenon that occurs between different countries but within a single country among various communities as well. Geographic context matters, as does economic, political, and other contexts. For instance, indigenous knowledge, practices, values, and language all play a large role in information access and use, especially when much information is provided in English or via electronic access (Britz, 2013). The difference in physical infrastructure and access to ICT and information between and within nations is stark. In addition, an individual's or a community's approach or attitude towards information and the value placed on it also differs

and helps to determine the level of information inequality and poverty and efforts to alleviate them (Britz, 2004). Chatman's (1996) small world approach to information poverty frames this idea in terms of the social norms of a community determining where and how far a group member or "insider" can go to seek out useful information. Chatman (1996) argues that the pressure on insiders to only trust information from within the small world and, likewise, distrust information from "outsiders" is intense. The social norms of a particular small world can severely limit one's comfort in seeking information outside of one's small world and in divulging one's particular information need, which may or may not conform to the norms of that world (Chatman, 1996; Thompson, 2007). Likewise, the importance (or lack thereof) placed on indigenous knowledge can influence levels of information inequality and poverty as well as how we discuss them and try to address them. Global knowledge as described by Holmner (2011) should not be automatically considered more valuable, trustworthy, or beneficial to the detriment of localised knowledge.

As each community can have specific and unique information needs to meet, so too the methods for alleviation of information inequality and poverty may also vary greatly. As Britz (2013) points out, just because a community has ICT infrastructure in place, does not necessarily mean that they have access to relevant information in useful formats to best address their specific community needs. Investigation into the contextual nature of information work can be traced back at least to the early 1980s when Mchombu (1982) insisted that library and information services must be consistent with community needs in order to achieve maximum relevancy. In order to provide appropriate services, those who work in LIS must recognise that the work will be very different in developing countries as compared to developed countries and that services must be developed with a focus on poverty as opposed to affluence (Mchombu, 1982). A more

in-depth discussion of ways to alleviate information inequality and poverty, with specific reference to public libraries' roles, will be discussed in subsequent chapters and summarised in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

### ***2.6.3. Information inequality and poverty discourage participation in a democratic society***

The relationship between public libraries and democracy has been widely covered in the literature (De la Pena McCook, 2001; Kranich, 2001; Schement, 2001; Webster, 2006). These researchers base their arguments on the long-standing belief that public libraries and the resources and services they offer to citizens positively influence the growth of an informed citizenry and thus, a healthy democracy. Additionally, it is often assumed that ICT is the tool that allows citizens to participate in the democratic process (Schement, 2001). In theory, libraries should ensure that citizens are able to achieve equal and equitable access to information. Schement (2001) explains that libraries must ensure equality of access to their services and resources to all citizens but that they must also create programs and initiatives that encourage equity, especially those targeted to marginalised populations, such as English as a second language or adult literacy programs.

It is widely accepted that informed citizens are better able to participate in the political, economic, and social processes that drive their communities and that “one of the greatest weapons of dictatorships is their ability to control information” (Kendzior, 2013). Ignatow et al. (2012) cast some doubt on the positive effect that public libraries supposedly have on the formation and support of a democratic system. They argue that because of the lack of formal, scholarly research, the democratising effect of public libraries has not been proven (Ignatow et

al., 2012) although I believe enough research has shown that the role that libraries play is significant.

Democracy in South Africa is only in its second decade and continues to be a work in progress. At the White House Conference on Library and Information Services held in 1980, one conclusion was that “A free and open society depends upon the ability of its citizens to make fully informed decisions about choices that affect their lives and communities” (Nassimbeni, 1986:58). This statement holds true today in the United States and South Africa alike and South Africa now enshrines access to information as a right protected under the Constitution (Government of South Africa, 2015). While advances have been made in South Africa in closing the information, knowledge, and digital gaps (Nassimbeni, 1986; International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2014), there is still more to be done and libraries can play an active role in this challenge.

#### ***2.6.4. Information inequality and poverty are connected to economic poverty***

Information and knowledge societies are characterised by global capitalism and the explosion of ICTs was a catalytic force in its development (Britz, 2004). Because of their economic capability to access information, some countries have been able to benefit from this while others who lack those means are increasingly left behind. Britz (2004, 2013) argues that information-poor nations will become ever more dependent upon the information-rich for access. Access to and utilisation of information and knowledge are necessary components in freeing oneself from economic poverty on an individual level as well. In information and knowledge societies, one’s worth is not only measured by economic standards but also by the amount of information one generates, utilises, and disseminates (Warah, 2004). There is a degradation, alienation, and shame that



accompany the marginalising affect this lack of access has on an individual or community. If one does not possess the information or the ways and means to gain and use that information, it will be much more difficult for them to get out of the cycle of economic poverty. In the early 1980s, Mchombu (1982) was calling for a critical re-evaluation of LIS to better address the unique needs of those living in economic poverty. In order to provide relevant resources and services to assist in the alleviation of this poverty, Mchombu (1982) challenged LIS workers to adjust their attitudes and develop theories based on their own practice with impoverished communities. When working within the framework of poverty, LIS practitioners must pay attention to limited resources, cost-benefit analysis, sustainability, cooperation, and positive attitude in order to provide the most relevant library and information service possible (Mchombu, 1982). I would add that a critical reflection on power relationships is also in order. As stated earlier in this chapter, Chatman (1996) discouraged an overemphasis of the relationship between economic poverty and information poverty. With this warning in mind, it is still safe to deduce that economic poverty exacerbates information inequality and poverty and that increased relevant information and knowledge in usable formats and languages can indeed help to alleviate economic poverty.

#### ***2.6.5. Information inequality and poverty are social justice issues***

Information inequality and poverty are not only economic occurrences but have tangible bearings on the cultural, political, and social spheres of society as well (Britz, 2004, 2013). There is an important social justice aspect to information inequality and poverty. As Norris (2000) points out, millions of people are being left out of information and knowledge societies because they are lacking access to information. Because the location, creation, use, and manipulation of information are often required in this era to progress and succeed in almost all spheres of life, it

is a matter of social justice that these millions of people obtain the access and skills necessary to participate. In her research of poverty among Nairobi's urban poor, Rasna Warah (2004) observed the link between access to information and access to human rights because people who had the knowledge, information, and skills were able to access and understand the services, programs and options available to help "mitigate risk and improve [their] livelihoods" (Warah, 2004:74). In South Africa, access to information is enshrined in Section 32 of the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2) of the Constitution. It states: "(1) Everyone has the right of access to – (a) any information held by the state; and (b) any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights." In order to take full advantage of the other rights provided by the Constitution, including the rights to equality (Section 9), human dignity (Section 10), freedom and security (Section 12), health care, food, water, and social security (Section 27), education (Section 29), and more, access to information is necessary (Government of South Africa, 2015). "Access to information should therefore be regarded as an *instrumental and basic human right* because any vision of the successful implementation and protection of our civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights without the right of access to information pertaining to these rights, would be futile" (emphasis in original; Britz and Lor, 2010:17). This thesis is built upon Britz's (2004) proposal that the problems of information inequality and poverty must be solved by creating initiatives based on a moral, or social justice, perspective. In turn, fairer and more equitable information and knowledge societies will be created.

#### ***2.6.6. Assessment of information inequality and poverty is challenging but necessary***

An important issue in the future research on information inequality and poverty is how to assess and evaluate it quantitatively and qualitatively. As Britz (2013) points out, assessment of information inequality and poverty levels, perceptions, and effects is challenging. Webster

(2006), too, argued that existing quantitative and qualitative approaches to the information and knowledge societies made it difficult to determine significant measurements of systemic societal change. Britz (2013) points out several reasons for the difficulty in measuring the effects of information inequality and poverty: these concepts are complex and multi-layered, as will be any measurement indicators; information and knowledge too, are multifaceted concepts and it is difficult to determine and measure peoples' perceptions of them; and statistics can be easily manipulated and thus, misleading (Britz, 2013). Assessment of libraries may not be as challenging as that of information inequality and poverty but it is still an important factor in determining the role libraries play in their alleviation. Some services that can be measurable indicators of a library's contribution to the alleviation of information inequality and poverty might include: the number of freely accessible computers in a library compared to the number of community members who would, without them, be unable to access ICTs; the percentage of community members using the library, the computers, and other services; targeted circulation statistics; and percentages of new users to the library in response to outreach efforts. Library literature is rife with discussions and ideas about how to best assess services, collections, and more; it is clear too that these assessments often fall short of desired outcomes to illustrate the library's value in community development (De Jager and Nassimbeni, 2012). In Africa, and South Africa in particular, it has been noted that assessments of libraries or consultations with community members about libraries have been non-existent (Amadi, 1981; Sturges and Neill, 1990; Nyana, 2009; De Jager and Nassimbeni, 2012). Often quantitative assessments of library collections, circulation of materials, illiteracy, and the like are not adequate in making a strong case for increasing funding to libraries and so more qualitative and comprehensive ways to

assess information inequality and poverty in communities and libraries' developmental roles in them must be created.

Kim Thompson (2007:110) stresses the importance of a national or international standard to evaluate information inequality and poverty. She advocates for the creation of a standardised instrument to assess levels of information poverty because "It is currently difficult to establish that a person, group, or sub-culture is information-poor when there is no such instrument to support that assessment" (Thompson, 2007:110). To this end, Britz (2013) has proposed some quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitative measures such as those given by the World Bank and the United Nations include internet penetration, number of cell phones and telephones, literacy rate, and more (Britz, 2013). It is important to remember though that these figures are highly contextual and can only tell part of the story of information inequality and poverty. Surveys and interviews can provide both quantitative and qualitative data (De Jager and Nassimbeni, 2012). Qualitative measures can help to supplement quantitative measures and can include information-related behaviors such as how people value and react to their information needs, how they determine their needs, knowing how and from where to obtain information, and how to evaluate, create, and share information (Britz, 2013). While urgently advocating for a demonstration to politicians and other decision-makers its value in South Africa, De Jager and Nassimbeni (2012) propose guidelines for qualitatively assessing the public library including gathering evidence of impactful services and programs, demonstrating the completion of objectives or missions, or collecting reports and stories of how libraries have made a difference in the lives of community members. In order to have maximum effect, data should be gathered both before and after new services or programmes are rolled out in order to demonstrate positive impact to stakeholders (De Jager and Nassimbeni, 2012).

This section described the definition and characteristics of information inequality and poverty in order to illustrate its complexity and multiple layers. The next section of this chapter will explore several broad approaches used to research this phenomenon.

## ***2.7. Approaches to information inequality and poverty***

There have been several studies that have summarised various approaches to information inequality and poverty (Britz, 2004; Britz, 2013; Thompson, 2006). This section will provide brief explanations of each to illustrate the multitude of ways that discussions of information inequality and poverty can be framed. The approaches Britz (2004; 2013) describes are aligned with the causes of information inequality and poverty and include an information technology approach, a content/access approach, and a hermeneutical/understanding approach. His own approach is included here as well (Britz, 2013). Thompson (2006) also describes an IT approach (the infrastructural approach), as well as Childers' and Post's (1975, in Thompson, 2006) tripartite culture of poverty model, and Chatman's small world approach, before explaining her own information access model. In this section, these models will be briefly described before concluding this chapter.

### ***2.7.1. Information technology/Infrastructural approach***

This approach is focused on access to ICTs and the infrastructure and other tools necessary to enable that access. In her 2007 thesis, Thompson explores the increased usage of the terms "information poor" and "information poverty" in scholarly articles in the 1970s. She noticed a common theme among this research: while these researchers began to discuss the sociocultural implications of information inequality and poverty, they were using strictly economic approaches to do so (Thompson, 2007). This literature "approaches information poverty as an inherently

economic phenomenon” as it is focused primarily on the resources to access information (ICT and infrastructure) and training to utilise it (Thompson, 207:89). Likewise, Britz (2013) points out, this approach is based on the assumption that access costs money and is therefore difficult or impossible for some. In addition, this lack of access then causes and exacerbates a digital divide. As stated earlier, the irony encompassed in this approach is that while access to digital technologies can greatly increase one’s access to information and opportunities, it can also serve to exclude millions of people who lack the capabilities or resources to access and utilise it (Britz, 2013). Because so much information needed for socioeconomic growth is only available online, people who lack the ability to access or use that information are at a large disadvantage (Britz, 2013). Those using this approach focus on the importance of ICTs in alleviating information inequality and poverty.

### ***2.7.2. Content/Access approach***

This approach is focused on the content of information available to people, including its reliability, relevance, and format in which it is presented. As Britz (2013) argues, information needed for socioeconomic development can be scarce, difficult to access, irrelevant, untrustworthy, or unreliable to many people, especially those in developing areas. Researchers using this framework focus on the content of the information available to people and their ability to access the information they need for development.

### ***2.7.3. Hermeneutical/Understanding approach***

This is a more human-centered approach in that it is focused on the ability of people to find, understand, use, and apply the information they need. As Britz (2013) points out, it is based on a constructivist theory of knowledge and has as its center the need for adequate education and

training in information literacy skills. People must be enabled with the skills to know what their information needs are, to find information efficiently, utilise information correctly, and understand its meaning as it applies to their lives and needs, in essence, to turn information into knowledge (Britz, 2013). Those following this approach often focus on information literacy skills and education as keys to alleviation of information inequality and poverty.

#### **2.7.4. Britz's approach**

In his 2013 update to his 2004 *Journal of Information Science* article, Britz (2013) explains his own approach to information inequality and poverty which combines the main elements of the approaches listed above. His approach maintains that information and knowledge poverty:

- Is a phenomenon that can affect anyone and is thus a global issue;
- Encompasses an economic dimension but also socioeconomic elements;
- Is an “instrumental” form of poverty, meaning that access to information can not only effect one’s quality of life but that it is actually necessary to survival;
- Is difficult to measure both quantitatively and qualitatively;
- Centers on the availability and accessibility of quality, relevant information; but
- Is also focused on a person’s skills to access, understand, use, and assign meaning to information and is in this way, related to education and the value one puts on information and knowledge as means to improve the quality of their life (Britz, 2013).

Britz’s work is a valuable starting point for understanding information inequality and poverty.

The next section will present two additional approaches as examined by Kim M. Thompson in her 2007 doctoral thesis.

### ***2.7.5. Childers' and Post's tripartite culture of poverty model***

In their 1975 study entitled *The Information-Poor in America*, LIS researchers Childers and Post reviewed over 700 documents related to the information needs and use patterns of disadvantaged groups in the United States, including Native Americans, Latinos, Blacks, migrants, the aged, and the poor. This work explains information inequality and poverty as manifestations of three main factors (Thompson, 2006):

- The information poor have low information processing skills that might include low literacy or communication skills, physical disabilities or other barriers that prevent them from acquiring useful information behaviors.
- The information poor are part of a limited subculture which often rejects or is rejected by mainstream culture, lacks sociocultural power and valuable information channels, and are thus at a disadvantage regarding information access and literacy. Important considerations in this are how information flows within and amongst groups, how interactions take part within social networks, and how groups members learn new information (Thompson, 2006).
- Information poverty is connected in part to an attitude or belief of individuals. While it is not clear whether these attitudes cause a state of information poverty or are caused by a state of information poverty, what is clear to Childers and Post (and Thompson, 2006) is that lack of trust, confidence, and motivation along with feelings of alienation or inferiority affect one's information access and utilisation.

In addition to their third point concerning attitudes of individuals, it should be noted that one facet includes if and how much people value information. This is a great challenge in the



information and knowledge era, especially for those on the margins. Many people in developing communities are more focused on feeding their families, finding clean water, and securing safe housing, and in that world, new information, the internet, ICTs, and libraries are not seen as priorities. The work of Childers and Post sheds light on why this might be and how a culture of poverty can continue to compound a group's information inequality and poverty over time. In addition, this approach is included here because of its focus on the role of power relationships and individual perception in information inequality and poverty. This approach offers a less popular but very important critical perspective of these concepts.

#### ***2.7.6. Chatman's small world approach***

Elfreda A. Chatman devised several information theories based upon the small world approaches of sociology. Small world models focus on enclosed circles of individuals and the connections and barriers presented by these social networks. From inside their small worlds, individuals can find it much more difficult to access information and the information they do access is filtered through the small world boundary (Thompson, 2007). A small world is similar to a subculture wherein individuals tend to assimilate to the norms of the group and stay within that group, at times avoiding the larger world (Thompson, 2007). While not inherently positive or negative, a small world contributes to the predictability and social norms of that group (Thompson, 2007). As Thompson (2007) explains, Chatman used a small world approach when creating her own theory of information poverty, which was focused largely on small world group dynamics and members' behaviors within that group, including their own perceptions of their information needs. According to Chatman (1996), members of small worlds define their own information needs and levels of information wealth or poverty; membership within the small world will largely determine where and how information is sought and thus maintains a large influence over

the information poverty of the group (Chatman, 1996; Thompson, 2007). Often members see a lack of information available that is relevant or helpful to them, they do not trust information from outside their world, and they actively minimise their information needs for fear of being ostracised from the group (Lingel and Boyd, 2013). Upon further exploration, Chatman developed two other theories to help complement her theory of information poverty. Along with her theory of information poverty, Chatman's theory of life in the round and her theory of normative behavior will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.

#### ***2.7.7. Thompson's information access model***

In her 2007 thesis, Thompson explains and evaluates three of the broad approaches to information inequality and poverty listed above: the infrastructural approach, Childers' and Post's tripartite model and Chatman's small world approach. As she explores the benefits and limitations of each, Thompson (2007) asks the questions she deems unanswered by them. She then encourages use of a more holistic model that takes the three approaches all into consideration. To do so would allow an examination of information inequality and poverty or better yet, information access,<sup>23</sup> from the perspectives of infrastructure, social networks, and small world groups. While it is not an original LIS theory, Thompson's approach steps closer to a comprehensive model for examining all aspects of information inequality and poverty. I recognise the value of building on existing theory and built on those examined by Thompson as well as others borrowed from fields outside of LIS to develop my own integrative approach to information inequality and poverty, which will be presented in detail in Chapter 4.

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<sup>23</sup> Thompson (2007) posits that it is information access that should be studied and not information poverty because of the tendency to automatically link the latter to economic poverty, which may or may not be accurate in various cases.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

Information inequality and poverty are challenging and multidimensional issues affecting millions of people worldwide. These phenomena have reached epic proportions in the information and knowledge era, especially among and within developing communities and countries. Living in a state of information inequality and poverty makes it difficult if not impossible for individuals and communities to meaningfully participate in political, economic, and social processes and activities. The gap between the information-rich and information-poor is growing and it is a moral imperative for the world to address this growing disparity. To illustrate this complex phenomenon, this chapter explained information and knowledge societies and defined information inequality and poverty. The causes and characteristics of information inequality and poverty were presented and the main approaches in their examination were explored. I would like to reiterate the importance of using multiple lenses in this study, including that of critical development theory, as encouraged by Hudson (2012), to explore not only the phenomena of information inequality and poverty in information and knowledge societies but also the concepts themselves, how they are defined, the standards used to measure them, and how those of us in LIS can work to deconstruct existing dominant frameworks and replace them with more critical, inclusive, and equitable ones. We know that libraries are uniquely situated and equipped to affect levels of information inequality and poverty within their communities by allowing access to information technology and other resources, training users in information and digital literacy, serving as experts in specific information fields, and more (Jain and Saraf, 2013:51). This study is predicated upon the belief that because of this, libraries and librarians have a moral obligation to alleviate information inequality and poverty. In order to illustrate the effects that library development can have on information inequality and poverty, an examination

of the history of public libraries in South Africa is presented in the next chapter and will contextualize the role that they have played in the exacerbation of information inequality and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Development of South African Public Libraries and their Role in Information**

#### **Inequality and Poverty**

##### ***3.1. Introduction***

Chapter 2 explained the information and knowledge era, information and knowledge societies, information inequality, and information poverty. It also described several main approaches that frame research of information inequality and poverty. As librarian Dave Hudson (2012) of the University of Guelph encourages, in this chapter I consider the historical circumstances behind the dispossession of the South African majority in an attempt to uncover how public library development there fortified a state of information inequality and poverty. The first part of this chapter will contain an historical overview of the development of public libraries in South Africa from their origins into the post-apartheid era. A general overview of South African libraries is given here to provide the context necessary for a full understanding of the role they played in the growth of information inequality and poverty; an explanation of the development of libraries in KwaZulu-Natal more specifically will be dealt with in Chapter 6. The second part of this chapter will delineate six themes that emerged from this investigation of public library development and its impact on information inequality and poverty in South Africa.

##### ***3.2. Library beginnings in South Africa***

In 1761, the ground was laid for the first modern public library in Cape Town, South Africa, upon the death of well-educated bibliophile Joachim Nicolas von Dessin (Immelman, 1972:16). Von Dessin had a private library of some 3,800 volumes which was donated to the Dutch Reformed Church for use by the “general public” (Immelman, 1972:16; Lor, 1997:236). The

“general public” to whom Von Dessin referred was the Cape colonisers of fellow Germans, Dutch, and other Europeans. Despite an impressive collection, this first library was used very little (Friis, 1962:70; Kalley, 2000:9). In 1820, the Dessinian collection would go on to form the nucleus of the South African Public Library, which was established by Lord Charles Somerset in 1818 (Dick, 2007:14) and officially opened in 1822 (Lor, 1997). Lord Somerset was an aristocrat and Governor of the Cape Colony whose aim for the South African Public Library was to help educate and maintain a certain level of knowledge and culture for the colonists (Friis, 1962:70). Somerset envisioned a library that “shall be open to the public, and lay the foundation of a system, which shall place the means of knowledge within the reach of the Youth of this remote corner of the Globe and bring within their reach... ‘Home Education’” (Lor, 1997:237; Satgoor, 2015:98). Some recognised the educational value of libraries from early on in South Africa. Dick (2007:14-16) writes that missionaries in the early 1800s were focused on increasing literacy levels of the people, taught reading and writing in mission stations, and some even offered people books and other study materials. One missionary, Johannes van der Kamp, suggested setting up a library at his school near Port Elizabeth. The London-based Religious Tract Society offered reading materials and programming via their mission stations, one which would later become a library for Black mineworkers in Johannesburg in the 1930s (Dick, 2007:16). In the Transvaal, the Staats-Bibliotheek der Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (the State Library of the South African republic) was constituted on 21 September 1887 (Satgoor, 2015:98).<sup>24</sup> While these early libraries laid the foundation for a public library system in South Africa, they were largely intended for European settlers, not for the indigenous people already inhabiting the area.

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<sup>24</sup> From 1893 until 1964, the library in the Transvaal served a dual role, as both a public library and national library (Satgoor, 2015:98). Thus, South Africa had two national libraries until 1 November 1999 when they were combined to form two branches of the new National Library of South Africa (Satgoor, 2015:98).

From their inception, libraries in South Africa had trouble maintaining consistent funding. Public and governmental support for public libraries in South Africa has been difficult to come by and thus, funding has been inadequate. For some time, the South African Public Library was free and funded by a tax on wine (Satgoor, 2015:98) but by 1829, it became a subscription library due to lack of funding (Immelman, 1972:19; Lor, 1997:237). For many years, libraries existed on the subscriptions of members. Members had to pay an annual fee in order to use the facilities and check out books. Dick (2007:14-15) does point out that a few subscription libraries opened non-subscribers' rooms, such as Queenstown library, established in 1859, that offered magazines and newspapers for non-subscribers. Despite this, the system of subscription libraries usually excluded poor South Africans who were often people of color and/or those who lived in rural areas. In practice, subscription libraries did not serve any rural South African, Black or White, very effectively (Walker, 1994:62).

Several individuals and numerous secular self-help and social organisations that were created in the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century also encouraged library use, literacy, and the growth of a reading culture in South Africa (Cobley, 1997; Dick, 2007). For example, Cobley (1997:63-64) relates the efforts of Black businessman A.W.G. Champion, who, after being denied membership in Durban's library in 1926, realised that it would be up to committed individuals to fight and raise money for the creation of libraries for Blacks since sharing library facilities with Whites was unthinkable in the growing era of segregationist South Africa. Opened in 1924, the Bantu<sup>25</sup> Men's Social Centre located in Johannesburg offered a small library to Blacks (Cobley, 1997:64) and would become a depot of the Carnegie Non-European Library in 1932 (Cobley, 1997:65;

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<sup>25</sup> Bantu is a term that was used at the time to describe Black South Africans. It is currently regarded as a derogatory term and no longer used.

Dick, 2007:2). Women's organisations, such as the South African Women's Federation, the Afrikaans Women's Christian Society, and the Victoria League, also had an impact on the growth of libraries and the reading culture at this time by partnering with teachers and the Department of Education and then with the Union Defence Force during World War II to provide books to soldiers and increase their literacy levels (Dick, 2007:17-18). A smaller number of organisations founded and run by mission-educated African women encouraged reading as well as other forms of self-improvement, especially for African women who lived in rural areas (Dick, 2007:17). Another individual, Dr. A.B. Xuma operated a library service for "Non-European" South Africans from a room of his home in the 1930s (Cobley, 1997:64). Dick (2007:16) points out that noted author Sol Plaatje was a member of a society based in Kimberly through which he was able to combine the society's interest in promoting Black readership with his own interest in libraries.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, most of the efforts by individuals and societies floundered due to lack of stock and funding (Cobley, 1997).

Funding and other support to aid in stability of library services in South Africa would eventually come from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which has provided financial assistance for library research and development. These efforts were sparked by the reports of S.A. Pitt and Milton J. Ferguson, who visited South Africa on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation of New York's British Dominion program in 1928. Pitt was the City Librarian of Glasgow and Ferguson, the State Librarian of California. The two were charged with surveying the library situation in South Africa (Walker, 1994:60) and published separate reports in the following year. Both Pitt and Ferguson described less than stellar library services and buildings in their reports (Lor, 1997). They expressed strong feelings against subscription libraries in South Africa and

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<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed description of the cultural contexts of library development in South Africa, see Dick (2007).



criticised them as inefficient and unsuitable (Walker, 1994). Pitt and Ferguson “regarded library provision as a necessity to promote racial uplift, foster interracial understanding, and maintain social order” (Cobley, 1997:64). Despite this, there is a clear racial bias in the reports which reflect the attitudes of the time period (Kalley, 2000) and race was clearly an issue that inhibited the evolution of libraries in South Africa (Lor, 1997). While there was a growing understanding of the value of libraries in the development of the South Africa citizenry, prevailing attitudes at the time dictated that library facilities, materials, and other provisions must be separated by race, geographic location, and socioeconomic status. These attitudes were also expressed at an important South African library conference convened in November of 1928 at Bloemfontein, where Pitt and Ferguson ended their travels (Lor, 1997).

According to Walker (1994), the main concerns of those in attendance at the Bloemfontein Conference included the expansion of a reading culture, especially among children; the acknowledgement that library services are an extension of the educational system; the provision of adequate library services to the “Non-European” population; and creation of a coordinated library service to avoid costly and inefficient library service provision (Walker, 1994:60). Several important developments came out of this conference including the creation of the South African Library Association (SALA) in 1930 and the journal *South African Libraries*. In addition, the conference addressed the need to restructure library services in South Africa, to develop professional library training, to create a South African national bibliography, and to uniformly catalogue materials (Walker, 1994:60-61). Many library issues were addressed and not unlike other areas of South African life at the time, the issue of race permeated discussions of library services in the reports of Pitt and Ferguson and at the Bloemfontein conference. As Ferguson (1929:17) wrote about the conference in his report, “The most heated debate arose, let

it be said, over the question involving service to the natives” (Walker, 1994:60). In addressing services and collections for “Non-European” children, he advocated that they be built similarly to those for European children, but that “the books be kept separate from those supplied to European children” (Ferguson, 1929:20; Lor, 1997:238). This was the prevalent attitude of Whites to other racial groups in South Africa at the time and was the same attitude that would instigate apartheid legislation such as the Bantu Education Act (Lor, 1997:238). So while the creation of libraries in South Africa was a positive advancement in that any available books could have a radical impact on Black consciousness and intellectualism (Cobley, 1997:67), the provision of high-quality, equitable, and properly funded libraries and services for all South Africans would remain distant.

Immelman (1972:30) describes the Bloemfontein Conference as “the dividing line between the former stagnant state of affairs in the library field in South Africa and the beginnings of the modern period of progress.” Over the next decade, the seeds that were planted in 1928’s Bloemfontein Conference began to grow, albeit unevenly. In 1930, the Carnegie Corporation established a fund for the creation of the first library service to “Non-European” South Africans to be based at the Germiston Public Library in the Transvaal (Walker, 1994:64). Carnegie’s Non-European Library Committee, who administered the funding, was chaired by M.M. Sterling. Based on the public county library system in the United States, the Germiston Library served as a central depot from which books and other services were administered to some 78 branches by 1938 (Cobley, 1997:65). Of these, 28 served Africans; some in schools, some in rural areas, some in townships, and one in the afore-mentioned Bantu Men’s Social Centre (Walker, 1994:64; Cobley, 1997:65). The library at the Bantu Men’s Social Centre was not as highly used for several reasons. First, most Africans could not afford the deposit which would allow them to

borrow books; unemployment was high and the fee was more than the average African made in a day's work (Cobley, 1997:65). In addition, people were uninterested in the initial stock of available books; after learning about this, the membership was consulted and attempts were made to add as many of the books they suggested as possible (Cobley, 1997:65). Still the selection of books remained small and did not encourage reading. This lack of a reading culture was also behind the meagre use of the library at the Bantu Men's Social Centre (Cobley, 1997:65-66). In 1937, Carnegie's Non-European Library Committee appointed writer Herbert Dhlomo the first Non-European Librarian-Organiser in hopes of improving the library situation for Blacks in South Africa (Cobley, 1997:66; Walker, 1994:64). Dhlomo's accounts of the educational opportunities provided by the Carnegie Non-European Library Service were positive at first but the "all-White" Carnegie Committee complained in their 1938 annual report that,

At present we are all appalled at the rioting, fighting, drunkenness and other uncivilized behavior rampant in our locations. It is true that a few municipalities have adopted the principle of encouraging Non-Europeans to use their leisure time in a healthy fashion... but many municipalities do not yet seem to have grasped the significance of the library as a social force. Encourage natives to read good books and develop the habit of reading...and it is quite possible that fighting, drinking, rioting and immorality will cease to exist in the locations (quoted in Cobley, 1997:67).

Ultimately, Dhlomo and the Carnegie Non-European Library disagreeably parted ways and the position was downgraded in job duties, benefits, pay, and power (Cobley, 1997:68). While the Carnegie Non-European Library did demonstrate the desire among Africans for libraries and reading materials, it was also clear that the Committee believed control of the libraries should

remain in their hands so that they may be used as instruments “for socialization and social control” (Cobley, 1997:67). One committee member, Ray Phillips, again expressed the importance of supplying “good” reading materials to “Non-Europeans” in order to influence their judgment and decision-making; a process in which “the influence and example of literary-minded Europeans should be invaluable” (quoted in Cobley, 1997:69). This racialised approach to library purpose, control, and provisioning would continue during this period and throughout the apartheid era.

The Carnegie Corporation continued to offer support where the South African government was lacking and there were various other reading rooms, libraries, and library services focused on the Black population at that time (Cobley, 1997; Walker, 1994). As Lor (1997) points out, prevailing racial attitudes in South Africa at the time can be seen in public library development. Even the Carnegie Corporation accepted the prevalent racist attitudes and awarded separate funding to support separate libraries for Whites and Blacks and the grants to support “Non-European” libraries were markedly smaller than the others (Lor, 1997:240). In 1937, an Interdepartmental Committee was appointed to investigate libraries, their organisation, services, funding, support, and personnel (Immelman, 1972:30-31). The focus of the committee was to suggest improvements in these areas in order to increase the educational functioning of public libraries in South Africa (Immelman, 1972:30-31). The Committee determined that “...in library development the Union of South Africa lags behind the rest of the civilized world,” and that “to remedy this state of affairs a strong lead must be given by the Government of the country, and the active cooperation of municipal and other local authorities secured” (Immelman, 1972:31).

New standards for professional librarians, training, salaries, library services, and the erection of new library buildings were recommended by the 1937 Interdepartmental Committee (Immelman,

1972). In addition, it advocated for the establishment of a free library service in South Africa (Immelman, 1972). At that time, there were only seven free public libraries (Walker, 1994:64). Despite the good intentions of the committee, the outbreak of World War II would prove too big an obstacle to overcome and library improvements were mostly put on hold. But in 1939, the Johannesburg Public Library assumed control of the Bantu Men's Social Centre library, which was a positive development in library services for Blacks because it would be staffed, receive materials from the municipality, and become a free service to Blacks in Johannesburg (Cobley, 1997). The following year, the first library specifically for Africans, Winifred Holtby Memorial Library, was built in Western Native Township (Cobley, 1997). Also between 1944 and 1951, each of the (at that time, four) provinces began offering free public library services (Walker, 1994; Friis, 1962) that were based on partnerships between municipal and provincial governments (Lor, 1997). Most of these free library services were only for Whites (Lor, 1997). In order to address the lack of government leadership and support for public libraries, the 1937 Interdepartmental Committee recommended restructuring the public library system in South Africa. Throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s, each of the provinces made strides toward a more organised system of a provincial headquarters and smaller regional systems within (Immelman, 1972). The Interdepartmental Committee suggested that each province handle rural library services in its areas instead of the state managing them (Immelman, 1972; Walker, 1994). A Librarian-Organiser could manage rural and school library services collaboratively (Walker, 1994). Despite these improvements, library services to underserved populations, such as rural, poor, or Black South Africans, would remain challenging issues facing public libraries. Cobley (1997) supplies convincing data of the inequality of provisions in libraries for Europeans and those for Non-Europeans that are presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Comparison of Book Stock in Non-European and European Libraries, 1938 and 1944**

<b>Year:</b>	<b>1938</b>	<b>1944</b>
<b>Non-European Book Stock</b>	0	18 850
<b>European Book Stock</b>	185 084	336 652

**Source: Cobley (1997:74)**

Between 1938 and 1944, books for Whites and Blacks were purchased at a rate of ten to one (Cobley, 1997:74-75). As Cobley (1997) adeptly observes, the importance of this era in the provision of libraries in South Africa is the acknowledgement of the need for library services for Blacks but also in the recognition that the library services allowed to Blacks were seen by the White-dominated state as another method of social and political control. The inequity of library facilities, funding, and provisions contributed to information inequality and poverty at this time and continued throughout the apartheid era, which is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

### ***3.3. Libraries in apartheid South Africa***

When the National Party came into power in 1948, it began formally legislating the long-practiced separation of races in South Africa. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was just one of the many laws passed that would prove to have lasting effects in South Africa by controlling where people were allowed to live, work, and travel. Prior to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, library provisions to “Non-Europeans” were subjected to fierce scrutiny by the Eiselen Commission on Native Education (Cobley, 1997:75); the passage of the Act formalised strict regulations regarding reading materials by the different ethnic groups (Cobley, 1997:76). Because of this Act, the destruction of many Black school libraries and community libraries along with the

deliberate under-funding and under-resourcing of Black schools contributed to “entrenching an inferior education for Black South Africans” (Satgoor, 2015:98). Then in 1956, the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act nationally regulated the access to libraries according to race and effectively controlled and policed library provisions to Blacks (Cobley, 1997:76). In 1967, the national government created the National Library Advisory Council to oversee library development and services. After becoming the National Advisory Council for Libraries and Information in 1974, the group was disbanded when in 1987 the government saw no need for a national LIS policy (Walker, 1993; Fourie, 2007). Throughout the apartheid era, libraries and their services continued to be separate for the races and the development of those for South Africans of color lagged behind those for Whites (Lor, 1997; Witbooi, 2007). By 1951, only eleven municipalities across South Africa provided “Non-European” libraries (Cobley, 1997:75). Physical accessibility of libraries was prohibitive; geographic and financial barriers were not easily overcome (Witbooi, 2007). In 1974, historically White libraries Johannesburg Public Library and the Natal Society Library in Pietermaritzburg began to allow Blacks, and Satgoor (2015:98) notes that others soon followed but the inequalities in access and resource provisions were far from over. Even when all races had library facilities they could utilise, the provision of materials and status of accommodations for Blacks were markedly inferior to those for Whites (Witbooi, 2007). Lor (2013:360) describes the phenomenon of burning libraries throughout the apartheid era and beyond, much of the time because they were “seen as symbols of the oppressive regime.” From 1960-1988, there were twenty reports of library burnings in South Africa (Dick, 2007:2; Lor, 2013:360). Like jobs, education, living conditions, and other institutions, libraries for Blacks were separate and unequal, which continued to exacerbate the growth of information inequality and poverty in South Africa.

Lor (1997) describes two important events that occurred in the library sphere in 1962. The first was a national conference developed in part by SALA and focused on library development, in much the same way as the Bloemfontein Conference. This was a positive step forward and culminated in recommendations regarding changes in the structure of and cooperation among libraries, among other things. If this conference in 1962 was a step forward, the second event was a step back: at their annual conference that year, SALA voted to restrict its membership to Whites and to establish separate associations for other racial groups (Lor, 1997). Lor (1997) gives a brief explanation of the library profession at the time which would have led to the decision to segregate the association. In part, librarians felt the intimidation that was prevalent during this era and feared the retaliation that may have occurred if they spoke out against the apartheid system as it manifested in segregation of libraries and censorship of information (Lor, 1997). In addition, some saw outright activism as “unprofessional” and held that librarianship was a profession that should be politically neutral. SALA’s members were understandably concerned about repercussions of not falling into line with National Party apartheid rule but this decision would prove to have lasting negative effects not only on SALA and South African libraries and librarianship, but on information access and equality in general. “SALA’s submissiveness fatally undermined the professionalism and moral authority of its member librarians and the library profession in South Africa in general” (Lor, 1997:243).

In 1980, SALA was disbanded and replaced by the South Africa Institute of Librarianship and Information Science (SAILIS). SAILIS was not racially segregated but its focus was on professionalisation of librarianship. Because of this, many Black South Africans were effectively barred from the organisation when they failed to meet the educational and professional qualifications for membership (Lor, 1997). Lor (1997) explains that throughout the 1980s,



SAILIS and South African librarianship became more dedicated to librarianship as information science, to developing professional standards, and to growing technological advances. “But the profession’s growing technical sophistication was not matched by intellectual and moral strength. Instead, librarians retreated into the safety of the politically neutral library...” (Lor, 1997:246). This faction of librarians was slowly coming to terms with the fact that social and political change was coming that would affect their profession (Lor, 1997).

Also in the 1980s was the emergence of resource centers as alternatives “to the traditional public library, which was perceived as not rendering a relevant service in areas with active community and political lives” (Witbooi, 2007:63). Resource centers most often served as meeting places for local people and civic organizations but also offered some books, periodicals, and newspapers, as well as audiovisual and printing equipment. After some time, these resource centers were subsumed by public libraries with the most useful factors of each combined into one service (Witbooi, 2007).

An important report, commissioned by SAILIS and written by Professor R. B. Zaaïman in 1988, examined the role of libraries in South African development. While he suggested new services and modalities of delivery for libraries, Zaaïman did so while reinforcing the apartheid status quo regarding Black South Africans. Although he warned librarians against a paternalistic approach, he also referred to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs when defending providing appropriate services to “a community whose needs are mainly at the lower levels of Maslow’s hierarchy...” (quoted in Lor, 1997:248; Zaaïman, 1988:22-23). In addition, Zaaïman reaffirmed the idea that libraries should be apolitical because they would “lose their legitimacy” if they were seen as biased or offering propagandistic materials (quoted in Lor, 1997:245; Zaaïman, 1988:244). At this time, new libraries were being provided for Black South Africans but these libraries, too, were status

quo. There were more of them but they were still separate and unequal (Lor, 1997). All South Africans were being served with libraries which were based on Western models and Zaaïman recognised that this would not suffice for long and recommended a cooperative approach to library development in South Africa (Lor, 1997). Libraries must be “Africanised,” although Zaaïman predicted it would be difficult for White librarians to adjust to this change (Lor, 1997:250; Zaaïman, 1988:232). As Lor (1997:250-251) explains, “...we must give the report credit for having stretched the boundaries of the old paradigm to the limit, in the process creating both an awareness of the need for change and a certain dissatisfaction that is very necessary for the paradigm that is now upon us.” Unfortunately, the Zaaïman report reflected the library profession at the time and stopped short of advocating for real and immediate change in libraries for Black South Africans. Satgoor (2015:99) adeptly notes that apartheid’s legacy negatively impacted the library profession through its race-based higher education institutions, separate LIS training, and varying quality of LIS education.

It was not long before a growing liberal group of librarians called for an end to library apartheid and advocated a more radical reconceptualisation of the profession, its methods, and its services (Lor, 1997). It was from this movement that in 1990, the Library and Information Workers Organization (LIWO) was founded. LIWO was a library association in South Africa that was created as more progressive alternative to SAILIS. Dedicated to the democratic movement, LIWO challenged apartheid-era concepts and practices in libraries. Its members sought to “challenge neo-apartheid and the new orthodoxy; provide a home for those library and information workers wanting to compensate for the cowardice of their profession in the past; and play a role in the debate about the future of South Africa, alongside like-minded democrats

seeking a just and humane social order” (Lor, 1997:253). To this end, LIWO played a role in another important report generated at the time.

In 1992, the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) produced a Library and Information Services report that examined the role of libraries as educational institutions. This report explained the South African approach to librarianship as one influenced by Anglo-American ideals of elitism, high technology, and professional neutrality (Lor, 1997). The continued focus on neutrality could lead some in the library profession in South Africa to look the other way and remain silent on the pressing political and social issues of the day but the NEPI report presented three alternatives that aligned more appropriately with the needs of South Africans (Lor, 1997:254):

1. The structuralist or radical approach: Non-elitist, community-centered, developmental, service-oriented and based on ideas of community librarianship and resource centers for development;
2. African librarianship: Similar to the structuralist approach with attention paid to poverty, illiteracy, and limited funding; and
3. The cultural life approach: Emphasises the needs of library workers, such as empowerment, professional development, and inclusion.

These approaches provided options that would better serve a new democratic South Africa. They supported the ideals of free access to information, the educational importance of libraries, and the creation of a hierarchical structure and centralized policy development (Lor, 1997). The focus of the NEPI report was on the value of a national system of LIS that when adequately funded could cost-effectively support improved education for South Africans (Fourie, 2007;

Walker, 1994). As Lor (1997) cautioned, there was an opportunity to build upon the recommendations of the NEPI report that could have been positive for libraries and, thus, community development, which would be lost if not seized straight away.

The structure of the national library system was complicated during this era. While the provision of public libraries was the responsibility of local authorities, both municipal and provincial authorities were involved in governance and funding (Witbooi, 2007). There were two main types of libraries in this structure: non-affiliated and affiliated. Ten non-affiliated libraries were located in larger city centers and were separate from provincial library services; they received funding from municipal rates (taxes) and other revenues (Witbooi, 2007). Affiliated libraries on the other hand, were managed by (1) local authorities that were responsible for human resources and salaries and (2) provincial authorities that awarded grants, provided materials, and assisted with professional development and infrastructure (Witbooi, 2007). The lack of standardised library administration is a recurring theme and contributes to the unequal provision and management of libraries, thus worsening the state of information equality and poverty based on race, geographic location, and socioeconomic factors.

### ***3.4. Libraries in post-apartheid South Africa***

In post-apartheid South Africa, libraries and their role, functions, and services had to evolve to meet changing user needs. In order to redress the inequalities of LIS in the apartheid era which were based on race, geography, and socioeconomic status, the Bill of Rights in the new Constitution of South Africa expressly states the right of access to information for all citizens. This era saw the creation of the National Library of South Africa and the National Library of the

Blind in 1998<sup>27</sup>, changes in the structure of the management of the library system, and attempts to redress the inequalities previously supported by libraries in apartheid South Africa. In July of 1997, the Library and Information Science Association of South Africa (LIASA) was created as a result of the unification of previous LIS professional organisations in South Africa, including SAILIS but not LIWO. LIASA provides professional development, support, guidance, structure, an annual conference, and special interest groups to its members.<sup>28</sup> The transition of South African libraries at this time was influenced in part by investigations into their structure, management, goals, strengths, and challenges.

Several important reports illustrated the concerns of LIS in South Africa at this time. One survey conducted in 1995 by the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) listed the main concerns as the structure of the library system as well as the governance and funding of libraries (Witbooi, 2007:64). ACTAG proposed that national funding support library literacy projects including adult education and promotion of a reading culture, as well as focus on development of poor youth (Witbooi, 2007:64). The addition of study spaces in libraries or the creation of learning centers was proposed to support the growing number of students using libraries for schoolwork (Witbooi, 2007:64). In the early 2000s, the Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa (PaCLISA) was undertaken. The goal of this survey was to compile a complete list of all public and community libraries in South Africa. Information gathered included the location and characteristics of the library including the size and composition of the collections, as well as membership information, circulation statistics, and a comparison to other international libraries (Van Helden and Lor, 2002). The PaCLISA inventory process was not without its shortcomings;

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<sup>27</sup> Discussions of the National Library of South Africa and the National Library of the Blind are outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>28</sup> More information on LIASA can be found in Walker (2007) and at the LIASA website <http://www.liasa.org.za/>.

throughout the two year endeavor, library system restructuring, low survey response rates, and lack of funding posed challenges that were difficult to overcome (Van Helden and Lor, 2002; Witbooi, 2007). Despite this, the PaCLISA (Van Helden and Lor, 2002) report's findings were important to understanding South African libraries and clarifying possible paths to improvement. These findings included (Van Helden and Lor, 2002; Witbooi, 2007):

- PaCLISA was the first inventory attempted of South African libraries; regular updates would be required to keep the information current. If undertaken, this inventory could be used in planning and assessment of libraries.
- Data collection and reporting of library information was inconsistent in types of data available and collected as well as in measurement methods used. Standardisation of these factors would be required moving forward.
- No standardised LIS terminology existed; a consistent lexicon is necessary for a cohesive library community.
- The library system was inconsistent and varied widely amongst provinces and municipalities. An inventory of libraries that is consistent and current would be imperative to streamlining and improving library administration in South Africa.
- Public libraries in South Africa were serving less than 10% of the population, mainly the educated, urban middle class.

Another report that focused on the funding of libraries demonstrated the challenges faced in assessing post-apartheid South African libraries. The 2005 Print Industries Cluster Council (PICC) report indicated that what provinces counted as public libraries varied greatly and at times included community libraries, depots, prison libraries, and more (Witbooi, 2007). In addition, the PICC report illustrated the great transitions in South African libraries post-1994.

These included closures of some libraries, merging of others, concerns about equitable access to libraries as well as questions of funding, administration, structure, and staffing (Witbooi, 2007).

In addition, library destruction continued in this era. Building on the work of Van Onselen (2013), Lor (2013:361) found that between 2005 and 2012, 18 libraries were damaged or destroyed due to service delivery protests. Also noted was the prevalence of theft of library materials (Lor, 2013). It is clear from these challenges that inequality and unrest did not end immediately when the formal system of apartheid did and libraries were not exempt from danger and destruction. While each of the nine provinces all have established provincial library systems, it is clear that the legacy of racial discrimination has left an indelible mark on South African libraries that is still being redressed today (Satgoor, 2015:99).

Satgoor (2015) describes several 21<sup>st</sup> century initiatives and changes that aim to address inequities among the races and improve library and information services for the majority of the South African population. These include the following:

- Library oversight now falls under several government departments, including:
  - The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), which manages the nine Provincial Library Services and six Metropolitan Services as well as the National Library of South Africa.
  - The Department of Basic Education, which oversees school library funding. Satgoor (2015:101) noted that in 2015 only 8% of almost 25 000 South African schools had fully functioning libraries.
  - The Department of Higher Education and Training, which provides for academic libraries at the 23 universities and 50 technical and vocational education and training institutions.

- The National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS): Established in 2001, NCLIS was created to advise the Ministers of Arts and Culture, Basic Education, and Higher Education and Training on issues regarding LIS in order to research technological and information development throughout South Africa. Essentially, NCLIS coordinates and develops South African LIS (Satgoor, 2015:101).
- *The Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter*: A project of NCLIS, the *LIS Transformation Charter* was completed in 2014 and “provides a clear and coherent plan for LIS in alignment with the National Development Plan so that the vision of an informed and reading nation becomes a reality” (Satgoor, 2015:101; DAC and NCLIS, 2014:7).
- The South African National Development Plan (NDP) 2030: Launched in 2012, the NDP “aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030 through uniting South Africans, unleashing the energies of its citizens, growing an inclusive economy, building capabilities, and enhancing the capability of the state and leaders working together to solve complex problems (Satgoor, 2015:99). There is an important opportunity here for libraries to get involved with the NDP and exercise their developmental skills to the public, policymakers, and funders.

The next section will provide further context into current library administrative and funding structures, as well as offer information on technology and outreach in South African libraries, with specific attention paid to those in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province.



### ***3.4.1. South African library system structure***

This section will briefly explain the current structure of the library system in South Africa. As previously mentioned, the Constitution of the new South Africa established the National Library of South Africa, the National Library of the Blind, and for school libraries to be coordinated by the Department of Education. Higher education institutions (HEIs) include universities, colleges, and technical schools; their libraries are administered by their institutions and the Department of Education at the federal level. There are also a number of special libraries and archives in South Africa that include those at private companies, legal firms, non-profit agencies, and government entities; these libraries are governed by their respective administrations.<sup>29</sup>

Prior to 1994, the oversight and administration of libraries were the responsibilities of the provinces. In post-apartheid South Africa, the provision of public libraries, archives, and museums is administered at the federal level by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and each of the nine provinces has its own DAC branch.<sup>30</sup> As set forth in the South African Constitution, provincial governments are responsible for the creation and daily management of public libraries (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:24) or ensuring that the municipality has the funding and other resources for which to do so (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:87). In reality, the management and financing of libraries is not clear and provinces and municipalities divide these responsibilities in a variety of ways (Fourie, 2007). Thus funding, materials, services, and infrastructure are inconsistent and often inequitable among the country's public libraries. An intentional effort to "provincialise" community and public

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<sup>29</sup> More information on the legislation supporting LIS in South Africa and concerning special libraries, school libraries, HEI libraries, the National Library and more can be found in Bothma et al. (2007).

<sup>30</sup> An explanation of the development of archives and museums in South Africa is beyond the scope of this thesis. More information can be found in the DAC Annual Reports.

libraries, or bring them under provincial control, began in 2011. Meant to “address the imbalances of the past,” this provincial library and museum infrastructure will gradually bring all existing libraries and museums under the control of the provincial government (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:12). All new libraries automatically come under the direct management of the provincial government with Mbazwana Library the first example of this (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:17). Mbazwana is a multi-million rand complex that boasts a toy collection, ICT access and instruction, and a 100-seat auditorium that can be used by the public (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:87). This library also serves as a new regional depot. Library depots are centralised libraries which are usually bigger and located in areas from which services and supplies can be delivered to branch locations. Mbazwana depot serves more than ten libraries in three districts and aims to increase access to library services, materials, and ICT. It also supports matric students, people seeking employment, and literacy for all. It is important to note that individual KZN libraries do not purchase any books, technology, or furniture for their own libraries, nor do they hire their own staff. KZN libraries are supplied materials and staff by the central depot located in Pinetown. For collection development, each library is allowed a certain number of new books in each category when they visit the depot four times a year. They can also then exchange their stock with the stock of other libraries if they desire different materials (Sandra van Niekerk, 2011, personal communication). The depot system was meant to centralise and simplify library procedures but it has not always proven an effective way to ensure the libraries are able to offer the most relevant resources to meet local community needs.

The KZN DAC first received funding for provincialisation in 2011-2012 and a plan was approved to phase-in libraries of all ten districts over time (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts

and Culture, 2013:24-25). To implement the provincialisation strategy, the KZN DAC funded 220 libraries according to their 2012-2013 Annual Report (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:12). Between 2010 and 2013, the KZN DAC built six new libraries, including Mbazwana, at an estimated cost of R98 million (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:91). A more comprehensive discussion of funding in South African libraries follows.

### ***3.4.2. Funding for South African libraries***

Funding of libraries is always a challenge in developed and developing countries alike, especially when their participation in the development of the nation's people is unknown or undervalued. The South African government and local provinces have committed increasing amounts of funding for library development since the apartheid era ended. For example, in 2005, the government allocated R1 billion over three years to public libraries which was to be used to "upgrade, improve and expand" LIS (Witbooi, 2007:67) based on research and the development of a funding model created by KPMG Services and Jacaranda Intellectual Property Business Consultants (KPMG Services, 2006). The first phase of the project was an exploration into the needs of LIS and the findings were no surprise. Areas of greatest need included ICT infrastructure, staff development, library materials, technical services, and physical infrastructure; also confirmed was the confusion surrounding the responsibility for oversight and funding of libraries (Witbooi, 2007:67).

In addition, the DAC provides a Community Library Conditional Grant Program which allocates funding for the development of library infrastructure, materials, and services.

In 2012-2013, the KZN DAC:

- Used Community Library Conditional Grant Program funding to support school curricula and the purchase of tertiary textbooks for distance learners (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:17) and
- Purchased over 113 000 new library materials for the 173 KZN libraries (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:17, 25).

In addition, a new “study library” was planned for Nkungumathe and was the first of its kind. This is a cost-effective library which will provide study space and materials tailored for tertiary students studying via correspondence. All study libraries provide internet access and materials most appropriate for the community learners (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:90).

In 2013-2014, the Community Library Conditional Grant Program:

- Provided for the creation of 16 new libraries and the upgrade of 55 existing libraries across South Africa (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:40) and
- Of these libraries, one new library was constructed in KZN and three were upgraded (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:48).

Over R1 million has been allocated for this program for the development of libraries around the country in 2014-2015, which is an increase from the previous year (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:40).

In 2013-2014, the DAC applied for and received a country grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which funded a pilot project of 27 libraries that aimed to “to strengthen the provision of access to information, technologies and relevant training in selected public libraries...” (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:40). Also in 2013-2014, the DAC received a

conditional grant of R597 786 000 from the National Treasury (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:46) that was earmarked “To transform urban and rural community library infrastructure, facilities and services (primarily targeting previously disadvantaged communities) through a recapitalised programme at provincial level in support of local government and national initiatives” (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:227). This funding was transferred to the provinces for use and according to the DAC’s 2013-2014 Annual Report (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:227), KZN utilised the funding to:

- Purchase over 19 000 additional library materials (2 000 over the expected output),
- Provide five libraries with internet access (on target),
- Convert 32 libraries to a new automated library system called SLIMS (six over the target),
- Build one new library (expected output was two),
- Upgrade three libraries (expected output was two),
- Appoint five additional community library staff members (below the expected output of nine),
- Maintain or renew contracts for 98 existing library staff members (above the expected 94),
- Provide eight staff members attendance at LIASA annual conference (above the expected five),
- Provide additional capacity-building training to 349 staff (above the expected 280),
- Offer 50 library awareness programs (over the expected 48), and
- Achieve 142 monitoring visits by the province to municipalities (above the expected 120).

Overall, R63 million of this National Treasury funding was spent by the KZN DAC for improvements to library infrastructure, facilities and services in 2013-2014 (South Africa Department of Arts and Culture, 2014:227). Additional funding for libraries can come from the provinces but municipalities often find it difficult to support library services because their budgets are already tight. The confusion between the provinces and municipalities about oversight and funding of library services only adds to the challenge of providing adequate funding and support to provide high-quality, relevant services to communities in an attempt to alleviate information inequality and poverty. Other funding has come from corporate partnerships and even private citizens. For example, in 2006, IT entrepreneur and Durbanville native Mark Shuttleworth donated R12 million to upgrade two Durbanville libraries (Witbooi, 2006, 2007:69). In 2008, mobile service providers Vodacom provided R3.1 million to develop the state-of-the-art Jabavu Library in Soweto with about half of the funding going to IT equipment and the other half to the children's area (Erasmus, 2008).<sup>31</sup> The future of South African library funding may be in the increase of these private and corporate partnerships but the federal government must still recognise and act upon the importance of libraries in the development and success of the country's people.

### ***3.4.3. Information technology and public libraries in KwaZulu-Natal***

In information and knowledge societies, access to ICTs, infrastructure, and internet is imperative. Provision of these services to the people in a democratic South Africa has become a key function of public libraries. While the national and provincial governments have provided increased financial support for these services, forward movement is slow and access to technology via

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<sup>31</sup> I visited Jabavu Library in 2009.

public libraries is far from ubiquitous. In most cases, the DAC provides funding for internet cafés which are situated within public libraries. Each café is provided with several computers, internet access, and a staff member (also known as a “Cyber Cadet”) skilled in computer and technology use. The Cyber Cadet manages the café and assists users in skill development, software use, and internet access.<sup>32</sup> The majority of the users of the internet cafés are learners completing schoolwork, emailing, or using social media but there are adults who use the facilities as well, especially to look for work, apply for jobs, and create curriculum vitas (CVs) and résumés.

According to the KZN DAC’s Annual Report (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:17), in 2012-2013:

- E-book access was rolled out to KZN libraries,
- Seven libraries received new digital services for their patrons who are blind,
- 62 new internet cafés were established in rural KZN libraries (which include internet access, ICT infrastructure, computers, etc., and Cyber Cadets), and
- The transition to a new automated library system (called SLIMS) began with a goal of 151 of KZN libraries automated by 2015.

In information and knowledge societies, the importance of ICT in libraries is only going to increase and the knowledge gap in developing countries will continue to grow unless vigorously addressed. Thus it is imperative for libraries to receive the resources and support necessary to provide high-quality, reliable, free, and ubiquitous access and training for South African citizens

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<sup>32</sup> A Cyber Cadet is a staff member who assists with computers, skills instruction, software use, and internet access at public libraries. Cyber Cadets are often new university graduates who have a background in computers and are seen as a good investment because of the assistance they can give the public in finding job opportunities and in creating the documents necessary (resumes or curriculum vita) to apply to open positions.

to become involved, qualified, and competitive members of information and knowledge societies.

#### ***3.4.4. Outreach and programming in KwaZulu-Natal public libraries***

Similar to those around the world, libraries in South Africa continuously create and attempt new ideas and initiatives to reach out to their surrounding communities. Through partnerships and programming, libraries support education, development, and economic growth in South Africa. In an attempt to illustrate the developmental power of libraries, the KZN DAC reported how libraries play an integral part in achieving many of their desired outcomes. For example, libraries support “Outcome 1: Improved Quality of Basic Education” by increasing access to ICTs and the internet as well as providing other educational materials in various formats and by developing skills of patrons to most effectively utilise ICTs for improvement of their lives (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:34). Libraries were also important in the second outcome, which addresses rural development, in their deployment of four mobile library trucks and 22 mobile library units<sup>33</sup> designed to make “a direct contribution to the vibrancy and development of rural communities” (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:17, 34, 90). Mobile library trucks and smaller mobile library units (also known as MLUs or “wheelie wagons”) have been utilised in South Africa to provide underserved communities with reading and study materials where no formal library services previously existed. The four trucks cost the KZN DAC approximately R4 million each and are custom made to include 5 000 books, audiovisual materials, toys, and three internet-accessible computers (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:88). Each truck is also equipped with photocopying capabilities and a

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<sup>33</sup> Photographs can be found on pages 327-328 of this thesis.



generator (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:88). Each wheelie wagon is equipped with 1 500 books and is staffed by a community member funded by a stipend provided by the Community Library Conditional Grant (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:90). Unfortunately utilisation of these mobile units is limited due to the expense and the inability to find reliable volunteers or employees to keep a tight schedule running the mobile units.

The KZN DAC sees the building and upgrading of libraries as contributing to Outcome 8 which focuses on building sustainable human settlements and improving the quality of household life (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:36). In KZN, the DAC provides some support for reading and writing clubs, literacy initiatives, and National Library Week programming (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:17, 87). In 2012-2013, 14 educational toy collections were created in KZN libraries with the goal of increasing literacy for children (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:25, 37). In addition, the provision of health information was a focus and gaming equipment was provided to several libraries in an effort to encourage “social cohesion” among young people (KwaZulu-Natal Department of Arts and Culture, 2013:25) and to promote positive use of free time. Because of the lack of libraries in most schools, public libraries in KZN and throughout South Africa often take on the roles of school libraries and learners are amongst the highest number of public library users. Although fewer in number, adults use public libraries as well, to find employment, create resumes or CVs, to keep up with current events, and to continue learning and growing.

This section provided information on the administrative and funding structures of libraries in the post-apartheid era. In addition, the state of technology and outreach in South Africa libraries was briefly described, with particular attention paid to the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The next

section will summarise the challenges facing libraries within the context of information inequality and poverty in this era and review the major themes in South African library development throughout its history.

#### ***3.4.5. Challenges facing South African libraries in the democratic era***

As the era of legal apartheid came to an end, South Africa began a difficult evolution to democracy and the challenges that were posed by an unstable government and underdeveloped citizenry. Unfortunately, some opportunities for libraries to participate in the development of this young democracy were lost. For example, the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) scarcely mentioned the participation of libraries (Lor, 1997). In areas where illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty numbers were high, libraries were either non-existent or seriously lacking (Witbooi, 2007). Libraries faced many challenges in attempting to find their place in the development and growth of the new South Africa and were relegated low priority. Because of this, most libraries still lack suitable resources, staffing, facilities, and funding (Witbooi, 2007:67). The concept of the public library itself is sometimes challenged and its relevance questioned. Libraries are at times associated with White colonisers and not seen as relevant to the many of the Black majority. In addition, the role that libraries could play in education and literacy is undervalued. Because of the reputation libraries built as supporters of apartheid policies, they can be distrusted and stigmatised (Lor, 1997). ICT and infrastructure have not been developed in many areas and the digital divide has grown. Finally, assessment of library services has always been challenging. In South Africa, this task is exacerbated by lack of uniformity in data collection, lack of centralised direction of assessment planning, and lack of training of library staff in LIS assessment best practices. These challenges still exist in South African libraries today and contribute to information inequality and poverty of many of its people.

### ***3.5. Themes characterising South African library development***

The first half of this chapter traced the development of public libraries in South Africa. This section of the chapter will delineate themes that emerged to explain how the development of public libraries in South Africa has contributed to the current state of information inequality and poverty. First, libraries in South Africa have been modeled on European ideals which do not meet the needs of the majority of the population. This Eurocentric focus has led to confusion about the purpose of public libraries in South Africa. Their value, relevance, and potential contribution to community development have been greatly underestimated, which also contributes to their lack of support by citizens and the government. Also exacerbating library development in South Africa was the fact that libraries for some time were subscription services, thus available only to those who could afford the membership fees. The lack of financial investment in public libraries has greatly diminished any potential benefits for South African people. Likewise, the dearth of library development in rural areas of South Africa has resulted in fewer and poorly equipped libraries and excluded thousands of potential users. Another challenge for library development in South Africa has been the lack of leadership and coordinated efforts to produce a unified national system. This disorganisation has resulted in inefficient and ineffective libraries. Finally, library development varied for people of different races, with Whites as the primary beneficiaries of the best services and resources and people of other groups receiving lesser, if any, of the benefits of libraries. The apartheid system would eventually legally entrench inequities along racial lines and would affect the development of South Africans of color to this day. These themes of library development in South Africa have contributed to the state of information inequality and poverty in the country into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Each of these themes will now be discussed in greater detail.

### ***3.5.1. Theme 1: South African library development was based on a Eurocentric model***

The libraries of South Africa have been based on a European model which was brought by their British and Dutch colonisers (Witbooi, 2006) and “South African librarianship can best be described as being Anglo-American in inspiration” (Lor, 1997:242). This model places high value on printed books and reading a classic canon of Western literature, especially for recreation and leisure. This type of library was brought to South Africa, where the oral tradition is valued and there is a lack of a reading culture. Sylvia Nyana (2009) provides a useful discussion of the tendency for libraries based on Western models to easily dismiss the importance of the oral tradition and indigenous knowledge (IK) of many African communities. Existing African communities were not consulted on the creation, development, or provisions of libraries (Sturges and Neill, 2004). Mchombu (1991) explains that at that time, it was thought that the needs of African communities differed little from those in Anglo-American communities and that the Western model of libraries and librarianship could be transported to Africa, unmodified, and serve the people as effectively as it did for its originators. It was thought that the onus was on African people to learn and adapt to the Western model if they were to use or benefit from libraries at all (Mchombu, 1991). Later, little thought or importance was given to the library and information needs of African peoples in South Africa and facilities were intentionally inferior in attempt to keep Africans oppressed. European-based libraries were built, funded, and stocked along racial, geographic, and socioeconomic lines and thus services for the various races differed widely (Witbooi, 2007). Libraries for “Non-Europeans” were sparse and inadequately stocked. Materials often lacked relevance and utility and were not written in local languages. While the creation of libraries in South Africa was a positive endeavor, they were originally modeled to serve the European colonisers, not indigenous peoples. The materials,

staff, services, and goals continue to fall short of those needed and envisioned by local communities (Nyana, 2009). In order for libraries to adequately serve all people, they need to evolve and change to meet different needs. Unfortunately, this has not occurred as effectively as it should to serve historically marginalised populations.

There was confusion about the function and purpose of the public library as well. Libraries were often seen as recreational institutions and not agents for gaining information valuable for development. Despite Friis' (1962:2) assertion in his study of public libraries for Europeans in South Africa that there was "substantial" agreement that libraries existed to educate and "civilize" the people, Zaaiman expressed in his 1987 study of libraries for development that people were still not convinced of the public library's role in information provision. Friis (1962) presents an in-depth discussion of the purpose and objectives of public libraries for the European population in South Africa but of course, these differed for the Black population. Even if the library did provide information, it did not necessarily follow that the library would be seen as an agent of the development of society. In this way, public libraries in South Africa have fought an uphill battle in proving their relevance and value to society. This outlook only exacerbated the lack of investment in and poor growth of libraries for developing communities. As Raju and Raju (2010:6) state, "Public libraries have to move away from the traditional Eurocentric format and provide a service that will address the needs of this country."

### ***3.5.2. Theme 2: Economic issues in South African library development***

The poor state of South African libraries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was due in large part to the subscription system. Libraries failed to serve the general public because few people were willing or able to pay the fees. The South African government remained hesitant to provide full financial

support to a public library system. This was largely due to race, according to Ferguson (1929) and Walker (1994). It benefitted the state to keep the subscription library system that Black, East Indian and other “Non-White” South Africans could often not afford (Walker, 1994:62). The system of subscription libraries in South Africa would prove to be a barrier in the evolution of libraries as tools in development of all people. Inequitable funding, access, and provisions to libraries in South Africa continued throughout the apartheid era, which only exacerbated information inequality and poverty. Even after apartheid was legally dismantled, its effects continue and funding for libraries, especially those in rural or underdeveloped areas, has failed to catch up with the needs of the people. While the democratic government has increased financial support for libraries and has attempted to redress inequities of the past, private and corporate partnerships must continue to be cultivated for libraries to become the tool for development the people of South Africa need.

### ***3.5.3. Theme 3: Library development in rural South Africa***

The failure of South African libraries to serve the general public adequately was most obvious in rural areas. Libraries were often located far away from rural homes and so residents have to travel far to get to the nearest library which is usually located in a more urban area. In 1928, Pitt and Ferguson recommended the extension of library services into rural areas and in 1937 the Interdepartmental Committee reported that “The failure of the present library system...to meet the needs of the people is most apparent in the rural areas” (quoted in Immelman, 1972:32). Curiously, Immelman (1972:33) reported that “Library Service for the rural areas throughout the country has been provided.” Perhaps it seemed to him at that time that services had improved but in actuality library services to rural areas were and are inadequate at best. People in urban informal settlements are at least near infrastructure, electricity, and telephone lines to support

ICT development initiatives (Warah, 2004) but this is not the case for many rural areas. Services to rural South African residents have improved but libraries are few in number and collaboration with schools is low. The fact remains that despite South Africa's development over the last twenty years, public libraries have not reached many in the rural areas (Raju and Raju, 2010). This is perhaps the factor most dangerous to curtailing the growth of information equality and poverty.

#### ***3.5.4. Theme 4: South African library system reorganisation***

Libraries in South Africa suffered due to the lack of centralised organisation and leadership. Ferguson (1929) recognised the need for a coordinated library system in South Africa to avoid wasting resources and time. A clear, more structured system would benefit libraries by providing organisation, guidance and leadership. Advocacy, a dependable source of funding, and consistent operations and policies were also suggested to develop a healthy library system in South Africa (Ferguson, 1929). In addition, the national government needed to value libraries and prioritise them as educational tools for development. The 1937 Interdepartmental Committee also recommended restructuring the library system in South Africa and in the 1940s and 1950s, each province had taken actions to develop Provincial Library Boards, appoint Provincial Library Organisers, and create provincial ordinances regarding library development (Immelman, 1972). Each province was further subdivided into library regions depending on the size of the province (Immelman, 1972). As Immelman (1972) further describes, management of subscription libraries was taken over by municipalities and standards for libraries and their services were developed; to meet these provincial standards, municipalities sometimes had to erect new libraries. Today the administrative structure of libraries in South Africa remains multifarious but attempts are being

made to address the inefficiencies and lack of leadership in this area that, in the end, only adds to the growth of information inequality and poverty amongst the people.

### ***3.5.5. Theme 5: Racial issues in South African library and information services (LIS) development***

In 1928, Pitt and Ferguson addressed racial issues in libraries but less with the purpose to change the discriminatory system as to report on it. While they recognised race as one of the main reasons for the lack of library development in South Africa, they still advocated for separate services and resources for the Blacks. "...[S]o far as the native is able to use books, they ought to be made available to him; though no sane person would advocate the circulation of the same books to all..." (Ferguson, 1929:12; Lor, 1997:237). Even as the Carnegie Corporation of New York funded library development in South Africa, these libraries were separate among the races. Because the library profession did not fight against apartheid in libraries and the library association, they came to be regarded as tools of the establishment. In doing so, libraries marginalised themselves from the majority of potential users (Lor, 1997).

Even when libraries for the Black population were opened, there were few and those were inadequately stocked. Materials in libraries for Blacks lacked relevance and utility and rarely met local needs. Many items were not written in local languages or dialects and were often outdated. In addition, libraries have not done enough to encourage a reading culture among Blacks in South Africa. The development of libraries along racial lines had lasting effects on their utility to the majority of the South African population. This, as well as the other themes presented in this section, increased and embedded information inequality and poverty in South Africa.



### **3.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, an historical overview of the development of public libraries in South Africa was presented from their beginnings, through the apartheid era, and into the current democratic era. The current administrative and funding structures of South African libraries were also discussed and the state of technology and outreach was introduced. This discussion was included to provide the context necessary to gain a full understanding of how libraries in South Africa played a role in the growth of information inequality and poverty, with particular attention paid to the dispossession of the majority of the country's population. Based on the evolution of public libraries in South Africa, six main themes characterising their development were summarised. Despite some improvements in the structure, funding, and services provided by libraries, information inequality and poverty in South Africa continue. Because of racial, political, geographic, and socioeconomic issues contextualising their development, libraries in South Africa face a legacy that will take time to overcome. By taking on a proactive role, libraries can support the alleviation of information inequality and poverty and encourage the development of the South African majority. The following chapter will begin to set the stage for a discussion of how libraries in KwaZulu-Natal might do this by explaining the research design and theoretical framework of this research study.

## Chapter 4

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

#### *4.1. Introduction*

This study explores how public librarians in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa can help address information inequality and poverty in their communities with the intention of alleviating information poverty. Chapter 2 defined information inequality and poverty and presented several approaches to the issues. Chapter 3 further encouraged understanding of information inequality and poverty by presenting a history of public libraries in South Africa and how this development has contributed to its growth. Against this background, this chapter will describe the theoretical framework utilised in this study.

In qualitative research, the theoretical framework is vital in the interpretation and understanding of data collected during the study. As a primary goal of qualitative research is the development of approaches, models, and theories that will further add to the existing research, the theoretical framework assists in making sense of the data within a larger context (Gorman and Clayton, 2005:74) and orienting it within a larger field (Creswell, 2009:62). A theoretical framework is also important in helping to predict or explain phenomena (Gorman and Clayton, 2005:74-75), as well as in providing organisation and structure and delineating patterns and causal relationships (Connaway and Powell, 2010:48).

Through the course of this study, several theories were found as ones that would accomplish the goals of providing structure, context, and explanation to the collected data. These include theories offered by Pierre Bourdieu, Paolo Freire, Shiraz Durrani, and Martha Nussbaum. These

theories provided a critical lens through which to examine information inequality and poverty in KZN and on which a new approach was built. Critical theories were chosen to frame this study because of their focus on social justice and the empowerment of populations in South Africa historically marginalised by race, class, and gender (Creswell, 2009:62). The critical theoretical framework and how it added to the understanding of information inequality and poverty will be explained in more detail in this chapter.

The final section of this chapter will present an approach developed from this study to help libraries explore information inequality and poverty and investigate strategies to address it within their own communities. This study merged the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu, Freire, and Nussbaum with the research findings in order to develop a new integrative approach to information inequality. The goal of the development of this approach is to provide libraries, especially in rural and developing areas, with a framework to guide the investigation of information inequality and poverty in their communities and how they might play an integral role in its alleviation.

#### ***4.2. Theoretical underpinning of the study***

The theoretical framework for this study drew upon critical theory, sometimes referred to as critical literacy or critical pedagogy (Swanson, 2004). The work of social theorists Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, and Martha Nussbaum provided the primary framework for this critical theory-based study. Their work was complemented by additional approaches to information inequality and poverty as described in Chapter 2, especially those focused on critical explorations of development, as suggested by Hudson (2012). These also included the information technology/infrastructural approach, the content/access approach, the

hermeneutical/understanding approach, Chatman's small world approach, Thompson's Information Access Approach, as well as the approaches of Britz and Childers and Post. While these complementary approaches were described in Chapter 2, the theories of Bourdieu, Freire, and Nussbaum that framed this research study will be described in more detail in the rest of this chapter.

Bourdieu's theory of social development and how it can be applied to research in library and information science (LIS) will be explained. The chapter will also describe Freire's critical pedagogy and why it was incorporated to address the part people may play to alleviate their own information inequality and poverty. Both Bourdieu and Freire focus, in large part, on how formal education confirms existing social hierarchies and reproduces the dominant culture at the expense of the dominated (Burawoy and von Holdt, 2012). While attempting to tackle the same problem, Bourdieu and Freire are at odds with how to remedy the existing structure of domination. Even though these theorists focus on educational institutions, their theories can be effectively applied to LIS to examine how libraries participate in the reproduction of dominant and unequal social systems. The work of Kenyan information scientist Shiraz Durrani (2008) will also be drawn upon in this research, especially regarding the politicisation of information and the myth of library neutrality. Durrani will set the context for exploring the politics of information and will explore how library neutrality can harm development and perpetuate information inequality and poverty. Finally, Nussbaum's capabilities approach was chosen to frame the discussion of information needs in developing communities. First designed by Amartya Sen, this approach to human development has been expanded by Nussbaum to connect it to social justice and provide a list of capacities that are essential for humans live lives of decency and dignity. This chapter provides an application of this approach to information

inequality and poverty with specific attention paid to Nussbaum's ten capabilities for functional ability. The following sections provide more detailed information about each of the theories chosen to frame this study.

#### ***4.2.1. Pierre Bourdieu and a framework for exploring libraries and information inequality and poverty***

The social theories of Pierre Bourdieu, a French philosopher who lived 1930-2002, have been used by researchers in many fields including history, international relations, politics, business, education, as well as library and information science. His work focused on understanding how individuals and groups create their worldviews with particular attention paid to the role of symbolic power and cultural capital in the creation of dominance and social hierarchies.

Bourdieu's work will be used here as a critical framework to analyse how public libraries in South Africa, as institutions of cultural production, may unknowingly perpetuate information inequality and poverty. This understanding will provide a lens through which libraries can reflect upon their role in the disruption of existing narratives of information inequality and poverty in favor of more equitable and inclusive systems.

For Bourdieu, power is the most important factor in cultural production and is the basis of all social relationships (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu is clear in that as a social institution with symbolic power, a library's role in cultural production is "inevitable and inherent" (Budd, 2003:22).

Power, or symbolic power as Bourdieu refers to it, does not necessarily refer to domination but instead to efforts to influence, persuade, or direct (Budd, 2003). By serving their surrounding community with specific types of products and services, libraries are not only participating in the community's culture but also helping to construct the goals and desires of the community (Budd,

2003). Communities are filled with symbolic power through their shared purpose, context, and events. As community institutions, Budd (2003:23) explains, libraries are not only passively responding to community whims but also actively contributing to building culture within their communities in two ways: (1) individuals visit the library for the expressed purpose of “consuming the products of culture,” and (2) libraries make intentional decisions about which cultural products to provide to the community. In these ways, the library is exercising its own symbolic power to influence an individual or community, although it may not realise it (Budd, 2003). Because the use of symbolic power is so deeply entrenched in librarianship (in collection development, service delivery, information literacy, reader’s advisory, classification<sup>34</sup>, etc.), often librarians are unaware of their role in cultural production (Budd, 2003). It is only through reflection and critical inquiry that librarians can become proactive, thoughtful, and responsible participants for the good of their communities. This “intentional reflective analysis” as Budd (2003:23) describes it, is called *praxis* by Habermas, Bourdieu, Freire, and others. Praxis will be explored in more depth in section 4.2.2. As social institutions, libraries inherently encompass symbolic power and the ability to produce culture through its use of this symbolic power within a community.

Individuals achieve symbolic power through attaining economic and/or cultural capital (Hussey, 2010). Individuals’ positions in society are based on their access to, use, and ownership of this capital and power and this, in turn, influences their decisions and actions (Hussey, 2010).

Individuals and groups compete with one another to gain the capital and power that will help them to get ahead. In doing so, a social structure based on symbolic power and cultural capital is created which enables some members of society to maintain power over others (Hussey, 2010).

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<sup>34</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of classification as symbolic power, see Budd (2003).

Bourdieu refers to this as the *process of cultural socialisation* which creates a hierarchy that, at its core, is competitive and reinforces social distinctions and classes (Swartz, 1997). Hussey (2010) argues that the dominant class is reluctant to give up its power and will go so far as to change the rules to maintain and perpetuate the status quo, which works to its benefit.

In addition to illustrating the importance of cultural capital and symbolic power, Bourdieu's main contributions include the ideas of field and habitus. A field, or field of production, is a social space where individuals are differentiated by their cultural capital and habitus. For example, "The library itself, along with the other forces, constitute what Bourdieu refers to as a field of cultural production," (Budd, 2003:23). The field is where external factors come into play with an individual's actions and practices (Budd, 2003). One's habitus, or disposition or set of dispositions, is based on the conditions and resources available to one's position and develops after existing in a social position within a field long enough (Yu, 2011). One's habitus will determine one's preferences and actions within a field and symbolic power is an important part of the habitus. As Budd (2003) explains, habitus does not represent the way things should be but the way things are and why. Habitus is simultaneously a product of history, a determinant of future actions, and explanation of rationale(s) behind actions (Budd, 2003). Budd (2003:28) posits a "library habitus" that might describe "a set of practices, or dispositions to practice, that identify librarians and by which librarians identify themselves," but a "library user habitus" might also be created and used to describe a set of practices or dispositions that are common to library users and by which library users would describe themselves. All too often, librarians (and library users) are unaware of their habitus and are not critically reflective of their actions and meanings behind them. When they are unaware of their role and impact within their community, librarians vastly underestimate and misunderstand their power within that community. Through

praxis, libraries and individuals can disrupt the production of social inequalities in which they take part, most often unknowingly.

To summarise, our economic and cultural capital (symbolic power) establishes and reinforces our attitudes and dispositions (habitus) in this case, towards LIS (the field). We participate in this process without resistance and usually, without recognising that we are reproducing status quo inequalities and systems of domination (Hussey, 2010; Swartz, 1997). Burawoy (2012) refers to this as misrecognition. As Hussey (2010) maintains, people at all class levels are complicit in creating and maintaining the unequal, competitive power structures of a hierarchical society but systems of social stratification, such as formal education, are primarily responsible for perpetuating this hierarchy of domination (Swartz, 1997; Burawoy, 2012). Libraries, too, are complicit in creating and maintaining these social hierarchies by passively providing “neutral” services and products that do not meet the real needs of the community. By not being aware of relevant information needs, usage patterns, and desires of the community, libraries miss the opportunity to harness their true power to affect change and decrease information inequality and poverty among the people. Libraries possess great potential for revolutionary change. They can disrupt the misrecognition of their role in the process of unequal cultural socialisation through actively reflecting upon their actions, policies, services, users and communities. Through praxis, librarians can recognise and question their internalised habitus, realise and appreciate their own symbolic power, and put this power into more relevant use to increase information equality and social justice in their communities.



#### ***4.2.2. Applying Paulo Freire's pedagogy to information inequality and poverty***

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a leading educator and philosopher whose seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was first translated from the Spanish to English in 1970 and continues to shape education and other spheres today. Focused on development of critical pedagogy, which seeks “to use education to empower students to overcome racial, class, or gender barriers that exist in society” (Swanson, 2004:66), Freire is included here to stress the importance of critical praxis and community empowerment in overcoming information inequality and poverty. This framework acknowledges the role of the individual in the creation of their own knowledge by including them in a dialog with the aim of creating socially just change in their worlds. Some of the basic tenets of Freire's critical pedagogical approach include the following:

- Education is not neutral but inherently political and often supports existing power structures; while educators do not have to give up their values and beliefs, they must recognize their biases and how they may impact their teaching (Swanson, 2004).
- Students should see the world as an ever-evolving place and understand themselves to be active participants in the world. The antithesis to the traditional banking system of education, this perspective formed the foundation of Freire's problem-based approach to education (Swanson, 2004).
- Instructors must help students to understand the active role they play in the world, in the creation of their own knowledge and understanding of the world, and in their power to affect change in the world (Swanson, 2004).

- Praxis, or the process of acting upon reflection, is imperative to an educational system which is active, evolving, and dynamic (Swanson, 2004).

While Bourdieu and Freire were focused on educational systems, the same frameworks can be applied to libraries. As critical pedagogy asserts that education is not value-free, neither are libraries, technology, or information. As Swanson (2004:72) points out, “‘Information’ is a social construct created with specific purposes.” Information is inextricably tied to its creator and thus the biases and values of the creator influence the information and how it is presented. In this way, much of the information we receive on a regular basis will serve to confirm and perpetuate the status quo power structures in place in a given society (Swanson, 2004).

Like Bourdieu, Freire was concerned that education played a role in perpetuating the dominant culture (Freire, 2000; Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012) but Burawoy (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012:104) posits that Freire would see Bourdieu’s model as “the perfection of domination.” Bourdieu’s solution to the perpetuation of inequality, which is referred to as rational pedagogy (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012), was to increase educational access for dominated classes thus extending to them the dominant culture (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012). Bourdieu would later recant this as an unreachable ideal unless the entire class system was recreated (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012). Contrary to Bourdieu, Freire suggests that the dominated culture could play an important role in its own emancipation. Freire derided the traditional banking model of education as one in which educators deposit information into their students in a prohibitive one-way relationship. His alternative to this model was critical pedagogy, or a problem-centered dialogue in which educators and students work collaboratively in order to collectively teach one another, both in and outside of the formal classroom (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012). Burawoy (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012:112) used the term *emancipatory action* to describe the

participation of the dominated in the redefinition and recreation of education put forth by Freire. In essence, critical pedagogy allows learners to critically examine existing power structures and hierarchies in order to reflect upon and perhaps change their position and activity within these often oppressive structures (Swanson, 2004). People must, as Swanson (2004:70) writes, “...recognize that they can impact the world around them, and that socio-economic realities are not predetermined, but instead can be changed.”

The idea of praxis is fundamental to the Freirean approach and to critical pedagogy. Budd defines praxis “...as the critical, rational, interpretive, epistemic, and ethical work of a discipline or profession” (Budd, 2003:20). As Swanson (2004) suggests, learners and instructors alike must recognise their power to reflect and act upon information and not just see information as set, static, unbiased, or immutable. On the contrary, people must learn to think critically about information, its creator(s), the context in which it was created, the values it possesses, and their own relationship to the information. The same can be said for libraries: praxis is the process of examining, questioning, and evaluating information and its creator, and then acting upon the findings to change circumstances. Budd (2003:20) goes on to state that “Praxis refers to action that carries social and ethical implications and is not reducible to technical performance of tasks.” Despite the library profession’s penchant for practical actionable suggestions and disdain for theory, it is important for critical reflection and theory to better inform action. Praxis is powerful and is the goal of critical pedagogy and theory.

According to Burawoy (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012), Bourdieu would contend that Freire’s model of problem-centered dialogue would be unsuccessful because intellectuals, as members of the dominant culture, will not break from their own habitus and would thus be unable to transform the habitus of the dominated. Those who enjoy a large amount of cultural capital

benefit from an increased chance of receiving a formal education and remain pedagogically privileged (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012). Burawoy and Von Holdt (2012) further contend that even if given the chance of a formal education, the dominated will retain that status because the educational system only reinforces the current social stratification. The same could be said of many South African libraries.

As previously mentioned, both Bourdieu and Freire sought to explain how systems of education reproduced unequal hierarchies in society. Bourdieu maintained that education was a prime example of symbolic domination (Burawoy and Von Holdt, 2012) and that intellectuals are specialists of cultural production and creators of symbolic power (Swartz, 1997). Libraries are also institutions of education run by intellectuals, and thus, the pedagogical frameworks put forth by Bourdieu and Freire can be extended to libraries and librarians in order to examine how libraries produce, maintain, and reproduce the status quo. As cultural capital, and thus symbolic power, is created by schools (Hussey, 2010), it is also created by libraries. Because libraries are producers, preservers, facilitators, and disseminators of culture and cultural norms, it stands to reason that they reinforce and reproduce existing social structure, hierarchies, inequalities, and a culture of domination of some by others (Hussey, 2010). Further explanation of how libraries might work with dominated cultures in order to address information inequality and poverty and thus improve lives and communities will be discussed later in this thesis. The next section will describe the myth of library neutrality and how it serves to maintain information inequality and poverty.

#### ***4.2.3. Shiraz Durrani and the myth of library neutrality***

Kenyan information scientist and librarian Shiraz Durrani explores the myth of neutrality in information and libraries, as Freire did in education. The myth of library neutrality only perpetuates existing social hierarchies as explored by Bourdieu but the use of critical theory can expose the political implications and consequences in LIS (Bossaller et al., 2010). Durrani's (2008) approach is included here for this reason and to provide a valuable African perspective on the politics of information and libraries.

Despite the obvious political positioning of the Library Bill of Rights,<sup>35</sup> it has long been the aim of libraries and librarians to remain neutral, value-free actors in one's pursuit of information, especially in developed countries (Budd, 2003). As Friere pointed out, education and educators are not free from biases. As in education, libraries are not value-free and librarians are not neutral parties. Durrani (2008) argues that library and information workers cannot be neutral because information and knowledge are not neutral. On the contrary, information and knowledge are full of value, bias, and meaning. Information and knowledge are inherently political and to divorce a librarian from their values or biases is unrealistic and unreasonable. In fact, this can be alienating and dangerous for the community that the library is supposed to serve. Bossaller et al. (2010:35) agree that information science is "laden with values" and should be used as "a tool for social progress, and a tool which must be thoughtfully employed for the good of society." Durrani's exposure of library neutrality as a myth is far from universally accepted among librarians despite how it perpetuates information inequality and poverty and systems of domination. His work informed the current study by bringing to light the ways in which

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<sup>35</sup> For more information about the Library Bill of Rights and its full text, see <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill>.

librarians have hidden behind the concept of neutrality when faced with challenging political and cultural issues. In apartheid-era South Africa for instance, many librarians took cowardly neutral stances that proved to have lasting effects on librarians of color as well as the majority population at large. I was encouraged by Durrani's work to critically explore and reflect upon my own biases throughout this research process. This idea of libraries as subjective, active participants in the creation of culture and unequal social hierarchies frames this research into the role of libraries in perpetuating or disrupting information inequality and poverty. Inherent in the discussion of libraries providing value-laden information to their clients is one of the determination of individual and community information needs. The next section explores information needs in more depth and explains the use of Martha Nussbaum's capacities approach in framing this aspect of the research study.

#### ***4.2.4. Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach and exploring information needs***

The determination of the information needs of an individual or community is an important facet in the discussion of information inequality and poverty. There are types of information that all people must have access to in order to survive and lead healthy, safe, and productive lives but not all information is equally valuable to all people. So how do we determine what information is essential? Who makes these decisions? What information will cause an individual or community to suffer a state of impoverishment if it is unavailable, inaccessible, or unusable? For these answers, the findings of several researchers will be discussed and a critical framework provided by Martha Nussbaum will be explained.

Chapter 2 introduced the work of Childers and Post (1975, in Thompson, 2006, 2007) who investigated the information needs of disadvantaged communities in the United States. Through

a massive documentary analysis, they determined the following eleven areas of information need (Thompson, 2006:29-30):

1. Health
2. Home and family (e.g. relationships, housekeeping, parenting, etc.)
3. Consumer affairs (e.g. shopping, budgeting, etc.)
4. Housing (e.g. home financing, landlord problems, availability of housing, etc.)
5. Employment
6. Welfare programs
7. Law
8. Political processes
9. Transportation
10. Education
11. Recreation

A second report on this topic was produced by the American Library Association in 1976<sup>36</sup> and presents the following list of thirteen information needs (Thompson, 2006: 30):

1. Aging
2. Children (e.g. childcare, development, adoption, etc.)
3. Community (e.g. busing, crime, libraries, zoning, etc.)
4. Education
5. Family (e.g. divorce, marriage, single parenting, etc.)
6. Free time (e.g. hobbies, sports, recreation, vacationing, etc.)

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<sup>36</sup> This 1976 report is entitled *Information for Everyday Survival: What You Need and Where to Get It* and is authored by Gotsick, Moore, Cotner, and Flanery.

7. Health
8. Home (e.g. buying and selling, renting, moving, cooking, etc.)
9. Jobs
10. Law and government (e.g. civil rights, Constitution, voting, etc.)
11. Money management (e.g. banking, budgeting, taxes, etc.)
12. Self and others (e.g. race, identity, sex, language, etc.)
13. Transportation

Thompson (2006) explains the challenges these reports presented. First, the ALA report never mentions the Childers and Post report and to further muddy the waters, it does not explain the methodology for determining the thirteen categories of information needs. In addition, neither study presents a method to measure information inequality and poverty or a model to determine the information needs of specific communities. This research does provide a useful context to the work of philosopher Martha Nussbaum who, while not researching in LIS, provides a similar list of human needs, or Central Capabilities, but also explains how meeting these needs makes a life fully human and why this issue is a matter of human dignity.

Based on Nobel Prize winning economist and philosopher Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, Martha Nussbaum has laid out ten capabilities for human functioning that can help to delineate vital or essential information from more frivolous information. Nussbaum begins by defining two levels, or thresholds as she refers to them, of humanity. These are two conceptions of humanity; the first is what makes a being human and the second includes the capabilities a human needs to thrive. So while the first concerns just the bare minimum for life itself, the second makes the life truly human. The qualities of this second threshold are those which will be used to determine what information is essential to living a life of dignity, a life to which all



humans are entitled. Nussbaum's (Nussbaum, 2011:33-34) ten Central Capabilities required for human dignity are:

1. Life: The ability to live the normal length of a human life and not dying prematurely.
2. Bodily health: The ability to be healthy, adequately nourished and sheltered, to have opportunities for sexual satisfaction and to have choice in reproductive matters, and to be able to move when one chooses.
3. Bodily integrity: The ability to avoid unnecessary pain whenever possible.
4. Sense, imagination, and thought: The ability to use one's senses, imagination and reason. To be informed and educated. To be able to experience enriching activities, religion, spirituality with the guarantee of freedom and religion and expression.
5. Emotions: To be able to experience love, affection, gratitude, loss, and grief for things or people outside of oneself.
6. Practical reason: To have the ability to plan one's life, including being able to seek paid employment and participate in the political sphere.
7. Affiliation: To have the ability for compassion, empathy, friendship; to be able to experience justice, freedom of assembly and political speech.
8. Other species: To be able to appreciate nature, animals, and plants.
9. Play: To have the ability for play, relaxation, and recreation.
10. Control over one's environment: The ability to live one's own life and no one else's without interference, especially regarding marriage, reproduction, speech, association, and employment.

While Nussbaum's list includes some similar categories to that of the earlier reports on information needs, Nussbaum is clearly more focused on quality of life and the rights to

freedom, justice, and autonomy. The earlier reports are much more focused on pragmatic information useful in daily living but Nussbaum gets at the right of all humans to go beyond sustainability to living a dignified, enriched, autonomous life. Nussbaum's work is used in this study to guide the understanding of information inequality and poverty by providing a framework for understanding human needs and how information is the conduit through which humans can go beyond meeting basic needs to living the dignified life to which they are entitled. Based on the reports of Childers and Post (1975, in Thompson, 2006) and the American Library Association (Gotsick et al., 1976, in Thompson, 2006), as well as the work of Nussbaum, I devised a list of information essential for living a truly human life. This includes information on:

1. Health and healthy living, including information about physical health, aging, sex and reproductive health, contraception and abortion, and nutrition;
2. Education and information to otherwise enrich one's life intellectually;
3. Emotional and mental well-being, including cultivating healthy relationships;
4. Religion and spirituality, including the pursuit of a compassionate and empathetic life;
5. Family and home life, including parenting, housing, and transportation;
6. Employment and financial management, including budgeting, banking, job searching, professional development, and welfare programs;
7. Law, politics, and civic engagement, including information about government, legal and social justice issues;
8. The natural world including conservation and sustainable living;
9. Recreation and leisurely pursuits for enrichment;
10. Living an independent, free, reasonable, and autonomous life, including the freedom to access information to investigate opportunities, make plans, set and achieve goals.

Combining earlier LIS-focused reports and the work of Martha Nussbaum, the list above specifies the types of information necessary for one to live a fully human and dignified life. It has been developed as a guide for libraries looking to play a greater role in the development and empowerment of their particular communities. Chapter 6 will present this list in the context of a larger integrative approach to information inequality and poverty which incorporates the theoretical approaches of Bourdieu, Friere, and Nussbaum, as well as the work of Durrani, while also drawing on the recent work of Liangzhi Yu.

#### ***4.3. An integrative approach to information inequality and poverty***

The theories of Bourdieu, Friere, and Nussbaum offer useful frameworks when analysing information inequality and poverty and in exploring ideas of how to address them. Liangzhi Yu (2011) provides a convenient summary of the existing theories of information inequality and poverty but suggests that a new “integrative” theory is what is necessary to fully understand and address information inequality. Yu (2011) advocated for this innovative LIS theory to be based on Bourdieu’s theory of social development. In the attempt to answer this call, I devised a new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty based on Bourdieu’s work and blended with that of Friere, Nussbaum, and Durrani as described earlier in this chapter. This section will describe this approach.

Before describing the new approach, an explanation of “integrative” is necessary. In her article examining information inequality and poverty, Yu (2011) described the need for an integrative theory to close divisions and bridge existing gaps in the research. Because of the interdisciplinary and complex nature of information inequality and poverty, positions and theories intersect and connect. Single theories alone are limited in their explanations and do not

adequately explain or solve the issues of information inequality and poverty. Thus, Yu (2011) argues for the need to integrate research surrounding these topics. I consider this approach integrative because it combines the critical theories of several researchers including Bourdieu, Friere, and Nussbaum. It also advocates for the integration of all stakeholders including community, library, government, business, and more. While what is posited here is an approach based on the work of others and not the original theory that Yu (2011) encouraged, I believe it is a step towards further understanding the importance of integration in examining information inequality and poverty. This approach will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Based on Bourdieu's theory of social development, this integrative approach to information inequality and poverty utilises his ideas of field, habitus, and social capital to explain information inequality and poverty. In this approach, the individual is situated within a field and conditions within the field form the individual's habitus. When looking specifically at libraries and information, an individual's field will be their placement within the LIS social space. This field will include factors such as the number and location of libraries in an individual's community, the exposure of the individual to the available libraries, and the value placed on information and libraries in that community. The individual's habitus or disposition towards libraries and information is based on their position within the field and the opportunities and resources available to them in that field. I suggest that some of the conditions that form this habitus towards libraries and information include:

- The existence, number, and location of libraries within the community;
- The condition of the library facilities and the provision of useful, comfortable space;

- The availability of current, relevant resources in the formats that are useful to the individual;
- The availability of ICT and the infrastructure to support that ICT;
- The placement of qualified, accessible staff;
- The relationship between the library and schools and the community at large, including individuals of all generations;
- The level of government investment in libraries and information;
- The value placed on information in general and libraries in particular to assist in growing individual and community knowledge and evolution towards goals;
- The history of the community in which an individual resides and the socioeconomic and demographic makeup of that community; and
- The exposure of an individual to libraries and the power that information can hold.

The above conditions in the library and information field will govern an individual's library and information habitus, or their disposition towards libraries and information. In turn, an individual's library and information habitus will determine their library and information preferences and actions. In other words, an individual's preferences towards libraries and information and their actions regarding libraries and information are governed by their LIS habitus. Some of the preferences and actions referred to include the following:

- Library and information use;
- The value placed on libraries and information;
- Information-seeking behaviors;
- Information literacy skills;

- Digital literacy skills; and
- Information creation.

The above preferences and actions regarding LIS are governed by an individual's habitus which is determined by an individual's placement within the LIS field. If an individual has experienced a limited, small, or negative LIS field, it follows that their attitudes and disposition towards libraries and information (their LIS habitus) will be limited, small, or negative. In communities where LIS services are wrought with inequalities, it stands to reason that one's LIS field will be inadequate and thus their LIS habitus inadequate as well. In this way, one's habitus can lead them to see constrained LIS possibilities as preferences and structural LIS inequalities as differences (Yu, 2011). In effect, one's negative or restricted LIS habitus can lead them to unconsciously reproduce existing inequalities in LIS. Libraries and librarians can assist in breaking this cycle but must also explore their own often unconscious participation in the perpetuation of information inequality and poverty in their communities.

How do libraries analyse their roles in perpetuation or alleviation of information inequality and poverty? One way is to use critical reflection practices as described by Doherty (2008). Doherty builds on the work of Freire, Marx, and Budd and calls for a praxis of librarianship which refers to a "process of applying theory through practice to develop more informed theory and practice, specifically as it relates to social change" (Doherty, 2008:109). Critical reflection is the most important piece of the praxis of librarianship and is something that is missing in many libraries. If libraries can critically reflect upon their practices, they will be better positioned to make any necessary changes or improvements. The work of Freire is included in the integrative approach because of its focus on praxis but also as a framework in which community members participate

in the disruption of the cycle of information inequality and poverty in which many libraries unknowingly perpetuate.

As described earlier, Freire's work focused on the participation of the oppressed in the disruption of traditional, hierarchical cycle of power and inequality. In LIS, that means that libraries must involve their communities in every facet of their operations. For instance, libraries should ask communities about collection development and what types of resources they would like to see in the library. This would include language and format of resources as well. Community members could be included in brainstorming new service or programming ideas, the planning of these initiatives, and the execution and assessment of the final product. This would guarantee the relevance of the program or service to the community and it may also increase the attendance and utilisation by the community. Community members can be involved in strategic planning or assessment processes as committee members or liaisons to their communities. Simply through library-focused surveys can the community participate and be actively engaged in their local libraries and libraries should strive for their citizens to feel included and to take part-ownership of the library and its resources. Freire's focus on the oppressed and their participation in overcoming their oppression could be a very useful critical tool in planning, evaluation, and daily operations, use and success of public libraries in KZN.

Another way to encourage participation by the community in alleviating information inequality and poverty is by analysing community information needs and how effectively they are being met. Nussbaum's Central Capabilities approach provides a useful tool for this practice and is an integral part of the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty. By using this framework, libraries can examine existing resources and services according to their specific community's needs. What is needed is not only information about the ten capabilities but

information for citizens to pursue these capabilities within their own lives and by their own definitions. For instance, by using the list based on Nussbaum's capabilities, a library could determine that while their community has adequate nutrition and access to nourishment, they may not have knowledge to prevent disease or unexpected pregnancies. This realisation may encourage the library to offer more resources or programming on these topics in order to increase awareness and overall health of the community. Incorporating Nussbaum into the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty provides libraries with a framework to prioritise the needs of their communities.

The work of Bourdieu, Friere, Nussbaum, and Durrani were brought together in this integrative approach to information inequality and poverty which libraries can utilise to investigate and understand how information inequality and poverty manifest in their communities. In addition, the approach frames the investigation of the library's role in perpetuating information inequality and poverty and encourages critical reflection in exploring strategies to alleviate these issues. This chapter introduced the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty and its theoretical underpinnings. Chapter 7 will detail the practical steps in applying this approach.

#### ***4.4. Conclusion***

This chapter presented the theoretical framework of this study. While some complementary approaches exist in the area of information inequality and poverty, the work of Bourdieu, Freire, Durrani, and Nussbaum was chosen to frame this research. In this chapter, the work of these theorists as it pertains to this study was presented and an explanation was provided as to why these theories were chosen to guide this research on information inequality and poverty. In addition, this framework and the recent work of Yu (2011) led to the creation of an integrative



approach of information inequality and poverty, which was described in the last section of this chapter. The next chapter will present the research methodology utilised in this study.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Research Design**

#### ***5.1. Introduction***

Chapter 4 provided the theoretical framework of this study and presented a new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty. The research design utilised in this study will be explained in this chapter. First, several research paradigms will be presented and the choice of a constructivist and critical approach will be explained. Next the mixed methods case study design will be described and case study and participant selection will be presented. The methods of data collection, recording, storage, and analysis will also be provided and a discussion of reliability, validity, and generalisability will be included. Explanation of data analysis methods and ethical considerations will end this chapter.

#### ***5.2. Research paradigms***

Research paradigms can also be described as the philosophical worldviews or assumptions on which a study is built. Creswell (2009:6) describes a worldview as “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds.” The research paradigm of a study should align with the topic of the research but also with the background and worldviews of the researcher. These worldviews help inform the choice of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches (Creswell, 2009). There are many types of research paradigms and worldviews described in the literature. Merriam (2009) draws upon research by Carr and Kemmis when describing three main forms of research: positivist, interpretive, and critical. Creswell (2009) also focuses on the interpretivist approach, which he refers to as constructivist, and the critical approach, which he refers to as the advocacy/participatory paradigm. Creswell

(2009) explains the postpositivist approach as well. Descriptions of these research paradigms and the rationale for choosing to incorporate constructivist and critical approaches follows.

### ***5.2.1. Positivist and post-positivist approaches***

A researcher using a positivist approach believes in the existence of universal truths. These truths are observable and consistent and can be found and measured (Merriam, 2009:8). Positivist researchers often rely upon the scientific method to prove rigid, universal laws. The view of libraries as neutral spaces and librarians as impartial gatekeepers of information is one example of a positivist outlook of libraries. Greenwood and Levin (2005) are particularly critical of the positivist approach in social science research. Because factors such as race, gender, and class shape the research process and life in general, qualitative research cannot be seen from a purely positivist perspective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Greenwood and Levin (2005:53) argue that social scientists should not need to “sever all relations with the observed” in order to conduct scientifically sound research. At times, qualitative research is criticised for its lack of traditionally scientific rigor but as Denzin and Lincoln (2005:34) explain, qualitative research “reconceptualizes science as a collaborative, communicative, communitarian, context-centered, moral project.”

Post-positivism developed from positivism and is more yielding than its predecessor.

Researchers who utilise this approach maintain that while truths may be empirically tested using scientific experiments, knowledge is relative and not necessarily absolute (Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (2009:7) further explains that “we cannot be ‘positive’ about our claims of knowledge when studying the behavior and actions of humans.” While a post-positivist approach to this

study was considered, it was not as closely aligned with my worldviews as the next two paradigms, constructivism and critical research.

### ***5.2.2. Interpretivist/Constructivist approach***

Interpretivist or constructivist researchers maintain that there are no universal, observable truths. In this approach, reality is a social construction and thus there can be various interpretations of reality (Merriam, 2009). According to Creswell (2009:8), “the goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied.” It is imperative in this research to investigate ways in which people construct their own meanings and how their own experiences inform these meanings. A researcher using this approach must work to interpret the meanings others hold but will likewise seek to understand how his or her own experiences shape the research being undertaken (Creswell, 2009). Crotty (in Creswell, 2009:8-9) identified three assumptions that inform constructivist research:

- “Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views.”
- “Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives – we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, as interpretation shaped by the researcher’s own experiences and background.”

- “The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field.”

The constructivist paradigm was chosen for this study because it most closely aligns with my worldview but also the topic under investigation. I believe meaning is socially constructed by each person and is dependent upon various factors, such as one’s family and upbringing, gender identity, race, geographic location, life experiences, religious beliefs, and more. It is the qualitative researcher’s responsibility to investigate the context in which the phenomenon is taking place and attempt to understand the meaning that participants are creating of the phenomenon in that context. In this case, the focus of the research is on two public libraries of uMhlathuze municipality in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and the semi-rural to rural dwellers who use these libraries. The experiences of rural dwellers in this province may vary from those in other provinces, and most certainly from those in other countries or those South Africans living in urban areas. Using the constructivist paradigm, it is imperative to acknowledge this perspective and the meaning that participants place on the phenomenon in light of the context.

### ***5.2.3. Critical research***

Critical research takes constructivism even further by critically investigating society with the aim of changing and improving it, not just observing and recording it. As Merriam (2009:35) points out, “...power dynamics are at the heart of critical research.” Researchers utilising critical inquiry seek to investigate power relationships and uncover how they create and/or reinforce marginalisation, oppression, and inequality among groups. This study drew upon critical theory

and it is a significant part of my worldview. As explained, constructivist and critical paradigms informed the research design chosen for this study, which is explained in the next section.

### ***5.3. Research methodologies***

Three main research methodologies are described in the literature: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008; Cresswell, 2009; Gorman and Clayton, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Goodman, 2011). This section of the chapter will discuss the use of these methods in libraries and information organisations and will explain the choice to use a qualitative case study design supplemented by a quantitative questionnaire in this study.

#### ***5.3.1. Qualitative research***

As demand for assessment and accountability increases, libraries and information organisations struggle to prove the worth of their services and advocate for necessary resources. Many libraries have found value in assessing their collections and services quantitatively but numbers can only tell stakeholders so much. Libraries should also be concerned about relating the meaning behind the numbers (Gorman and Clayton, 2009). This can be accomplished by using qualitative methods instead of or in addition to quantitative measures. Qualitative research is focused on the experiences of those being studied, the value and meaning of their experiences, and the context in which they occur. It brings the subject's everyday life into concern and attempts to provide rich description from their own point of view (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:12). Participants are observed and interviewed within their natural setting and events are explored as they occur (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005:10) point out, qualitative researchers place emphasis on the "socially constructed nature of reality" and the important relationship between the researcher and the subjects. In a qualitative approach, the researcher is

active, involved, and adaptive in their methods (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). The researcher must be reflective and honest about their own values and biases in order “to discover and understand meaning of experience” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008:13). Using inductive reasoning, the qualitative researcher develops ideas from intensive observations in the setting being explored, through in-depth interviews with participants, document analysis, and at times, from participation in the phenomenon being studied.

Because of the importance of the researcher in qualitative research, it is necessary for me to not only describe my role in the research but also explore and express my own background and biases. I am a citizen of the United States and I have lived in Wisconsin my entire life. My undergraduate education is in history and women’s studies; I have worked in academic libraries since 2003 and received my Master’s degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2006. My interest in South Africa began as a youth growing up in the 1980s and early 1990s when I intently followed the news of the apartheid regime and the worldwide efforts to fight it through boycott, divestment, and protests. I saw that people my age were fighting and dying in South Africa for the freedom and education that I took for granted each day. I continue to harbour a deep curiosity and desire to understand not only the basis of the apartheid system but also its legacy. After becoming a librarian, I focused my interests on LIS in South Africa and was familiar with the work of Dr. Johannes Britz in information poverty. Dr. Britz and I met in 2009 when I was exploring options for my doctoral research which I knew I wanted focused on South African libraries; we decided on a working topic (which would become this thesis) and he offered to serve as my advisor. Also in 2009 I was admitted as a doctoral student at the University of Pretoria and visited South Africa for the first time in October with delegation of librarians through a People to People cultural exchange

program. While no formal fieldwork was completed in 2009, this trip laid the groundwork for my doctoral research because I was able to visit University of Pretoria and toured numerous libraries throughout South Africa, including the Jabavu Library and Rosa Parks Library in Soweto, UNISA Library, Stellenbosch, the National Library of South Africa in Pretoria, and several others. The literature review also began in 2009 and the document analysis in 2010, with formal fieldwork being conducted in 2011 and supplemented in 2012. Document analysis continued through 2015. My role in this research was that of primary data collection, analysis, and interpretation tool, as dictated by qualitative methodology. In this capacity, I acted as a non-participant observer except when conducting interviews with available participants. As reflection on researcher bias is integral to rigorous qualitative research, discussion of my biases was included in section 1.11, Limitations.

Qualitative research is useful in libraries because it helps to determine how we can enhance user experience, which is a goal for most libraries (Goodman, 2011) and a goal for this particular study. It also can provide useful data on issues that are not easily quantified, such as user satisfaction or information needs, that latter of which is another important focus of this study. Qualitative research can also offer “new answers to old problems, or at least different perspectives derived from potentially richer data” (Gorman and Clayton, 2009:14). This research study explores a variety of potential solutions to the problem of information inequality and poverty in semi-rural and rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa. Gorman and Clayton (2009:14) offer five ways in which qualitative research methods can be useful for libraries and information organisations in particular:

- Qualitative methods are attuned to growing complexity in an information environment that requires flexibility and variability in data analysis;



- They facilitate the use of triangulation to enrich research findings;
- They are responsive to the need for libraries to fulfill their service imperative;
- They are suited to the non-quantitative background of many information professionals;  
and
- They fit the social nature of libraries.

Qualitative research suited this study on information inequality and poverty best. It is a complex topic and flexibility and adaptability was necessary, especially in the fieldwork, which occurred in 2011 and 2012. Information inequality and poverty and their alleviation are topics that require investigation into cultural and sociopolitical contexts and relationships, which would not be fully explained by using strictly quantitative methods. Time was spent in libraries and a qualitative design fit my own social nature and that of the public libraries. In addition, I had little experience in quantitative design, making qualitative methods much more accessible and attractive. A mixed methods qualitative case study design particularly suits this study and will be explained in more depth later in this chapter. First, an explanation of the inclusion of a quantitative questionnaire is provided in the next section.

### ***5.3.2. Inclusion of a quantitative questionnaire***

While predominantly qualitative methods were chosen for this research, the study was supplemented by a quantitative questionnaire. With its emphasis on current conditions, cause-and-effect, and measurement, the quantitative questionnaire supplemented the qualitative focus on exploration, participant perspective, and deep description (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). Each participant from both case studies completed a questionnaire prior to their interview. This

questionnaire served dual purposes. First, it gave me vital demographic information about the participants including age, gender identity, and racial affiliation which would prove useful in this constructivist and critical study. Secondly, it asked participants about their library usage patterns, the resources they most often use, and their information needs. In this way, the questionnaire strengthened the qualitative data by adding measurable demographic and quantitative data to the research. See Appendix A (Demographic Data Sheet) for a copy of the questionnaire questions.

#### ***5.4. Traditions (strategies) of inquiry***

According to Creswell (2009:11), “Strategies of inquiry are types of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs or models that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design.” Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) prefer the term *traditions* to *strategies* because they relate the latter term to quantitative research. This study will utilise the term *traditions* except when quoting the work of other authors. There are several traditions usually associated with qualitative research including case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and narrative research (Creswell, 2009). The chosen tradition(s) of inquiry of a study should align with its research paradigm(s). As mentioned above, constructivist and critical research paradigms most closely coincide with my worldview and with the focus of the research topic. Because the traditions of inquiry closely follow and align with the research problem, intent, and scope, the decision was made to use case study methods to answer the research questions posed by this study. Two qualitative case studies were conducted for this research. This section describes the qualitative case study as a tradition of inquiry and explains why this method was chosen for this study as well as the case selection process.

#### **5.4.1. Case study methods**

Case studies are used in qualitative research when an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon is desired, especially when its context is a key part of its meaning. Case studies include thick description of setting, participants, activities, as well as analysis to uncover themes, patterns, and issues (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). They are highly customisable and can yield a variety of qualitative and quantitative data with the use of questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and observation (Goodman, 2011:15). A two-part definition is proffered by Yin (2009:18):

- “A case study is an empirical inquiry that
  - Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when
  - The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.
- The case study inquiry
  - Copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
  - Relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
  - Benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.”

According to Yin (2009:2), “...case studies are the preferred method when (a) ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over the events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context.”<sup>37</sup> This research adequately met these criteria.

A design in which multiple cases are explored is preferred to a single case study design for several reasons. According to Yin (2009), findings from multiple case studies are considered more robust and persuasive than those from single case studies. Multiple cases can be thought of as multiple experiments in that they follow a replication design, of which there are two varieties (Yin, 2009). In literal replication, a researcher would expect to achieve similar findings for predictable reasons in multiple case studies; subsequent cases should replicate the design and procedures of the first in order to confirm the findings (Yin, 2009). In theoretical replication, one would expect to achieve contrasting results to the original case but for predictable reasons (Yin, 2009). Two case studies using literal replication logic were conducted for this research project; the second case was chosen because it was predicted to show similar results to the first. Case selection is explained in more depth in the next section.

#### ***5.4.2. Case selection***

In qualitative research studies, small samples are purposefully chosen (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). This allows for the researcher to delve deeply into each case in the sample and provide rich description and context to the study. As mentioned in the last section, two libraries were chosen as case studies for this research. While a small sample was planned, the choice of two cases was also because the time and resources involved in conducting a multiple case study that

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<sup>37</sup> For a comprehensive explanation of case study research, see the latest edition of Robert K. Yin’s *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*.

included three or more libraries proved prohibitive. I am based in the United States and had three weeks to spend on fieldwork in South Africa in July-July of 2011 and October of 2012. Much of this time was spent identifying libraries to incorporate into the study, which was impossible to do virtually in advance. Two libraries were selected for this research study using replication logic, meaning that the cases were, in part, selected based on the prediction of similar results (Yin, 2009).

Several other criteria were used to identify the libraries for this case study. Both libraries had to be located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), in semi-rural areas and needed to serve some surrounding rural populations. KZN was chosen because of its higher number of semi-rural and rural public libraries. Libraries in semi-rural areas were chosen because of their relatively small size and their accessibility as compared to libraries in more remote areas. The libraries had to be located in a stationary structure, as opposed to a mobile structure, such as a “wheelie wagon.”<sup>38</sup> At least one librarian had to be employed by the library in addition to any supporting staff.

To narrow down which libraries might meet these criteria, Dr. Dennis Ocholla, faculty member at University of Zululand, and Leonie Wood, librarian at Richards Bay library in uMhlathuze municipality, were consulted. Dr. Ocholla and Mrs. Wood acted as key informants in this study and provided suggestions and access to sites, people, and information that was timesaving and helpful. As gatekeepers, they enjoy a level of stature and respect that when used on my behalf, allowed me access that under other circumstances, would have taken me much longer and much more effort gaining. Starting at Richards Bay Library was simple and straightforward. Mrs.

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<sup>38</sup> A wheelie wagon or mobile library unit (MLU) is a small cart on wheels that is filled with books and other resources and kept in the community. One community member is in charge of the cart and brings it out for community use during weekly set hours. More on wheelie wagons is included in the last chapter of this thesis.

Wood provided a list of names and contact information for all of the public libraries in KZN. She suggested several libraries that were located in semi-rural areas and where she speculated there would be enough English-speaking users for me to interview. After narrowing down the selection to a few libraries, the staff contact was emailed with a request for permission to conduct the research in their library. After site visits, two public libraries, eNseleni and Felixton, were chosen based on their satisfaction of the above criteria and the permission granted by the head librarian.

### ***5.5. Case study setting All of 5.5 moved here from Chapter 6***

The case studies in uMhlathuze libraries were conducted in eNseleni Library and in Felixton Library. From a base in Richards Bay, I traveled to eNseleni and Felixton Libraries and spent approximately four days at each observing and interviewing users. In each setting, the librarian in charge was extremely helpful in encouraging library users to be interviewed. Each interviewee completed a questionnaire (see Appendix A) prior to being interviewed. The following sections will describe uMhlathuze municipality and the two case study sites as well as provide basic demographic information of participants.

#### ***5.5.1. uMhlathuze municipality***

The two libraries studied in this research were located in the communities of eNseleni (also referred to as Nseleni or Enseleni) and Felixton. Both eNseleni and Felixton are semi-rural communities incorporated into the city of uMhlathuze, in the southeastern province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). A description of KZN was provided in Chapter 1 and because specific information about eNseleni and Felixton was difficult to come by, a broader description of uMhlathuze is

now presented to provide a general understanding of the area in which the libraries are located. Specific information about eNseleni and Felixton is provided when possible.

The city of uMhlathuze is located along the eastern coast of South Africa in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The largest towns in uMhlathuze are Richards Bay, along the coast, and Empangeni, which is approximately a 30-40 minute drive inland. eNseleni is located about halfway between these two towns and Felixton a bit farther southwest. uMhlathuze assumed city status in 2000 and in addition to Richards Bay, Empangeni, eNseleni, and Felixton, it includes four other towns and numerous rural and traditional areas (uMhlathuze Municipality, 2015). uMhlathuze is rich in Zulu heritage and while it is not as popular a tourist destination as another city in KZN, Durban, it does provide a centralised base from which to explore the diverse culture, rich history, and beautiful natural surroundings of Zululand. The area includes wetlands, lakes, and rivers as well as 45 kilometers of coastline, of which nearly 80% remains in its natural state (uMhlathuze Municipality, 2015). Most of uMhlathuze is dedicated to agriculture (Empangeni) and industry (Richards Bay), but the University of Zululand is also located here. As a deep water port, Richards Bay is South Africa's largest port (City of uMhlathuze, 2010). Iron ore and zircon are among the minerals mined here and exports include aluminum, coal, granite, paper pulp, and wood chips. The more rural and traditional township areas represent the diversity of how the population of uMhlathuze lives, with many welcoming the 21<sup>st</sup> century conveniences as well as embracing the traditions and customs of the past (City of uMhlathuze, 2010). According to Statistics South Africa, in 2011 the population of uMhlathuze was 334 459 and the unemployment rate was 31%. The average household size was 3.5 persons and isiZulu was the

primary language spoken by 78.7% of the population. Figures 1-9 below provide more information about uMhlathuze municipality.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 1: Age of uMhlathuze residents, 2011

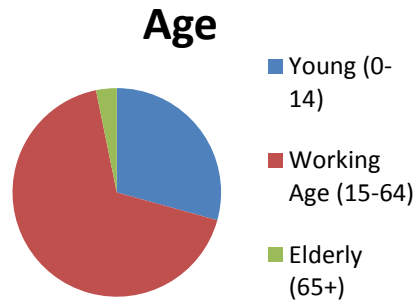


Figure 2: Race of uMhlathuze residents, 2011

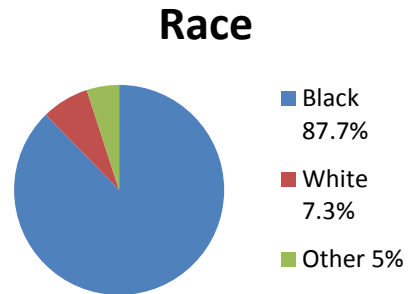


Figure 3: Sex of uMhlathuze residents, 2011

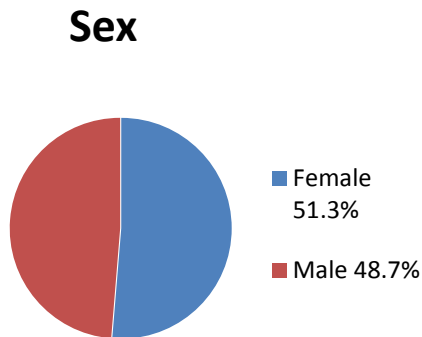
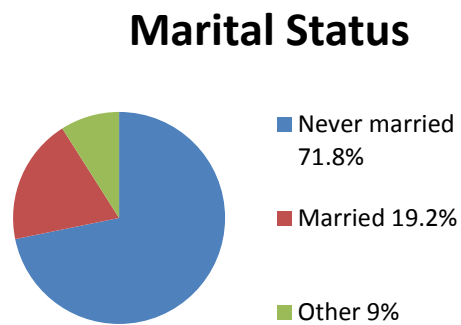


Figure 4: Marital status of uMhlathuze residents, 2011



<sup>39</sup> This statistical information in this section is from Statistics South Africa available at [http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/?page\\_id=993&id=umhlathuze-municipality](http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=993&id=umhlathuze-municipality)



Figure 5: Schooling in uMhlathuze, 2011

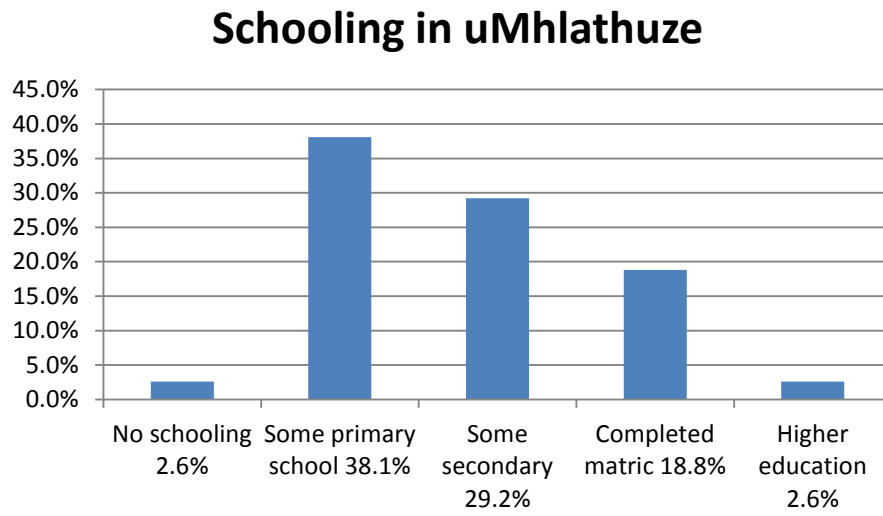
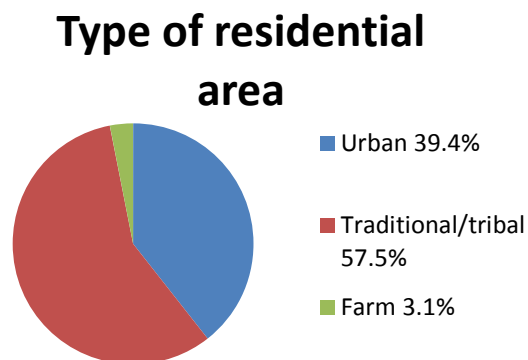
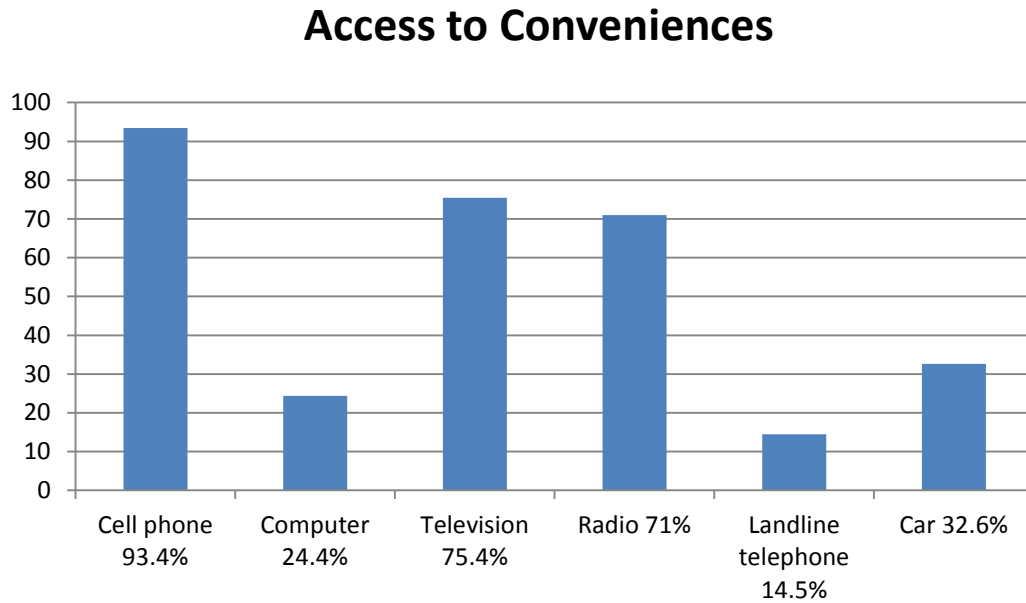


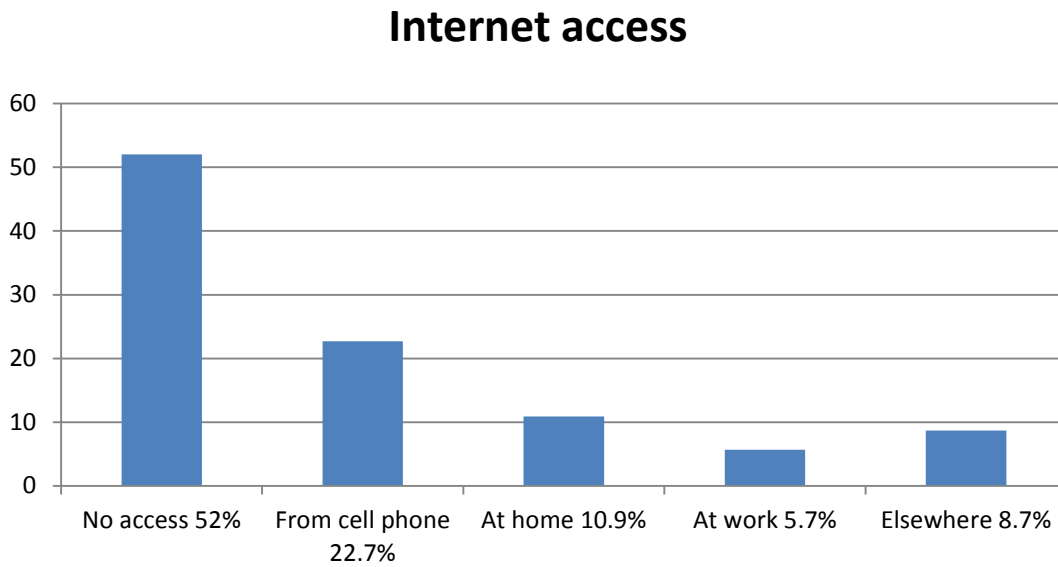
Figure 6: Types of residential areas in uMhlathuze, 2011



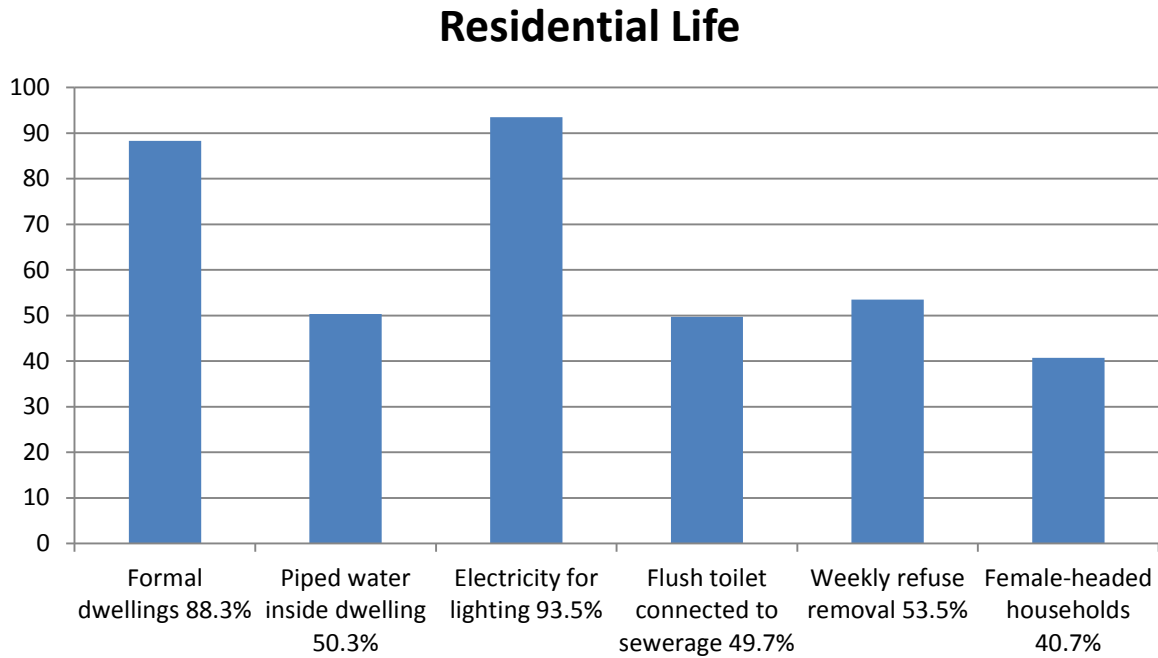
**Figure 7: Access of uMhlathuze Residents to Modern Conveniences, 2011**



**Figure 8: Internet access of uMhlathuze residents, 2011**



**Figure 9: Residential life in uMhlathuze, 2011**



The data above were included to provide a fuller understanding of the people, culture, and lifestyles of the municipality of uMhlathuze, which includes eNseleni and Felixton. This is important in the investigation of information inequality and poverty because it increases understanding of library use and information needs of the communities and how libraries there can help to meet these needs. The next section will go into more detail about eNseleni and its library.

### **5.5.2. Case study 1: eNseleni Library**

#### **5.5.2.1. Context**

eNseleni, or Nseleni, is a township about 17 kilometers northwest of Richards Bay. According to the *Dictionary of Southern African Place Names*, the name is derived from the Zulu meaning “place of the honey badger” but is also similar to the Zulu word *insele*, which is a type of

antelope that is found in the area (Raper et al., 2014). When I entered the community of eNseleni, there were many people out and about, walking, visiting, doing business, etc. There was quite a bit of traffic on the main street coming into eNseleni. Off this main road one turns into the parking lot of the city buildings which includes the library, municipal building, and fire station. There is tall security fencing surrounding the buildings and a guard posted at the locked gate. One must be cleared through the security guard before entering the lot, where parking is tight.

The library building opens into a large lobby. The library is to the right, there are two community rooms to the left, and restrooms straight ahead. One enters the library into a big open room with a main circulation desk immediately off to the right. Six computers sit beyond the desk for staff use. In 2011, the staff of eNseleni Library consisted of head librarian Cynthia (Gugu) Ngema, one Cyber Cadet, and three other support staff members. While Ms. Ngema was often found at the circulation desk, she and other staff also have offices located behind the desk. The Reference collection and study guides are shelved in the middle of the library where there are approximately 25 desks and six tables. The collection of tertiary books<sup>40</sup> and the rest of main collection sits around perimeter of the library. The collection also included about 50 DVDs and 25 CDs. In fiscal year 2012-2013, eNseleni reported a circulation of 7 048, as well as 72 300 visitors, and 1 187 active members (City of uMhlathuze, 2013). There are more tables and desks in the tertiary collection area. A photocopier is available to patrons for a fee and security mirrors hang throughout the library. The public-use computers in the library are not available until 12:30 pm and are shut down until that time when a Cyber Cadet is there to monitor their use.

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<sup>40</sup> While books intended for use at university level are not usually referred to as “tertiary books” in the literature, I use it here because that is how the participants referred to these textbooks and other materials needed for study at university. This usage can be seen in the tables listing the quotes from participants.

**Figure 10: eNseleni Library Entrance, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

**Figure 11: Interior of eNseleni Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

**Figure 12: Patrons Using eNseleni Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

**Figure 13: Exhibit at eNseleni Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011



**Figure 14: Signage at eNseleni Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

**Figure 15: Meeting Room at eNseleni Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

Observations at eNseleni Library were made over approximately four days between June 27 and July 8, 2011. During most observations, there were several teenagers looking at magazines and talking quietly and a few adults studying and checking out books. Younger children, too, came in to look at books, sit and read them, and check them out. Patrons seemed very comfortable asking for help at the circulation desk and checking out books. There were books, magazines, and newspapers on tables, as an indication of the library's use. In one instance, a child came into library to return books and tried to persuade his friend to come in as well but even after library staff talked with the child, she still did not enter the library from the lobby.

This library is a safe and comfortable building overall with a high ceiling, carpeting, natural light, and pleasant temperatures and noise levels. It can be loud in the lobby when people are coming and going from meetings but closing the door to the library seems to take care of most of this disturbance. There are windows all around the library with vertical blinds, as well as ceiling fans and good lighting. Community newspapers and handouts are available on the circulation desk. Graffiti and writing are on the tables but overall the furniture is in good repair; it is functional and comfortable. Posters are hung on the walls: multiplication tables, Dewey decimal system, as well as others encouraging reading, promoting good health, featuring African history, and teaching proper computer posture. Other signage is "homemade" but descriptive and included information about collection areas, library membership, etc. One wall had a Drug Free display with posters, books, and other information. Other signs included: "No Smoking," "Silence Please," and "Cell Phones Off."

All members receive laminated library cards. At that time, the computerised library system was shared by all networked libraries in the municipality but Felixton and barcode scanners, computers, and support are provided by the municipality. During one observation, the system



was running slow but Ms. Ngema explained that someone at the municipal level was working on it. In the meantime, patrons were waiting some 15 minutes for their books to be checked out but they were patient and polite. The library staff answered only a small amount of questions during observations there:

**Table 2: Questions at eNseleni Library During Observation**

Topic	Number of Users Requesting
How to use the copier	3
Help finding a book	2
Make change	1
Other questions	5

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

At one point, three adults came into the library looking for a meeting taking place in the community room. Ms. Ngema indicated the importance of having the community meeting room in the same building as the library; she knew it brought people into the library who would not normally come. Because people were in the building for a community meeting, they were more likely to see the library and enter.

At 12:20 pm the Cyber Cadet arrived and began to boot computers up. This is all it took for six patrons to walk over to him to get on the list to use them; more people head into the library around this time and by 12:30 pm, there were close to thirty people in the library. Patrons range in age from child to adult but most of them are young adult (high school and college aged). At 12:30 pm, the computers are logged on and full, and there is a waiting list to use them. The Cyber Cadet gives users a time limit to ensure everyone will get a chance to use them. Some patrons are playing games, while others are checking email or searching for information on the

internet. The noise level goes up a bit with more people in the library and using or waiting for computers. At one point, Gugu rang a bell vigorously when the patrons got too loud to signal to them to quiet down. At 12:50 pm, a patron’s “Andy Griffith” ringtone resulted in his expulsion from the computers and the library.

Overall, eNseleni Library is a comfortable, lively place. It offers users access to computers and other information resources, a quiet place to study and read, as well as a knowledgeable staff ready to assist with addressing any additional information needs. While this section offered a description of the setting of the first case study, section 6.2.2.2. will detail the demographic information gathered from questionnaires at eNseleni.

In addition to observations, this research consulted uMhlathuze Annual Reports which contain figures for membership, visits, and circulation at all public libraries<sup>41</sup>. Those numbers for eNseleni Library are included in the tables below:

**Table 3: eNseleni Membership, 2007-2013**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>eNseleni Membership</b>
2007-2008	3 226
2008-2009	4 094
2009-2010	3 398
2010-2011	2 268
2012-2013	1 187

**Source:** City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013

<sup>41</sup> While circulation, visitor, and member data were included in the 2006-2007 report, they are presented in a bar graph without specific figures. After analysing the graph in more depth, it was determined that the figures reported are unreliable and so are not included in this study. Statistics for the 2011-2012 fiscal year were not included in the Annual Report; they seem to have been mistakenly left out (see page 95 of the 2011-2012 Report).

**Table 4: eNseleni Visits, 2007-2013**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>eNseleni Visits</b>
2007-2008	98 450
2008-2009	184 976
2009-2010	102 568
2010-2011	85 044
2012-2013	72 300

**Source:** City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013

**Table 5: eNseleni Circulation, 2007-2013**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>eNseleni Circulation</b>
2007-2008	8 980
2008-2009	11 247
2009-2010	9 544
2010-2011	5 860
2012-2013	7 048

**Source:** City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013

#### ***5.5.2.2. Demographic data of eNseleni participants***

At eNseleni Library, fifteen interviews were conducted of which seven participants (46.6%) were female and eight (53.3%) were male. All participants were Black and ranged in age from 13 to 31 years old, making the average age 22 years. All indicated they could read and write more than

their names. Fourteen (93.3%) responded they were not married and one participant did not answer. Six of the participants (40%) indicated they had one or more children; nine (60%) indicated they had no children. To the question concerning the highest level of schooling achieved, two participants (13.3%) indicated they had achieved some secondary, four (26.6%) completed secondary, three (20%) had some tertiary level education, five (33.3%) completed tertiary level education, and one did not answer. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. Data collected from the questionnaire and interviews conducted at both eNseleni and Felixton Libraries regarding participants' information needs, access, and sources consulted will be presented in the next section, after an introduction to Felixton has been provided.

An important part of the discussion of library use and user needs is gaining an understanding of where residents currently get information on a regular basis. To this end, participants from eNseleni and Felixton libraries were asked about their access to media in the form of television, radio, and internet. The table below illustrates the access eNseleni participants have to television, radio, and internet.

**Table 6: eNseleni Community Access to Television, Radio, and Internet, 2011**

<b>Media</b>	<b>eNseleni Access</b>
Television	100%
Radio	93.3%
Internet	66.7%

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

Interview participants were also asked to identify their regular reading materials. The following figure shows eNseleni responses:

**Table 7: Regular Reading Materials of eNseleni Library Users, 2011**

Reading Materials	eNseleni Users
Magazines	66.7%
Newspapers	73.3%
Novels	53.3%
Textbooks	53.3%
Other	26.7%
Doesn't read on a regular basis	0

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

The next section will provide more detailed information about Felixton and its library.

### **5.5.3. Case study 2: Felixton Library**

#### **5.5.3.1. Context**

Felixton is a semi-rural village in KZN eight kilometers south of Empangeni and is surrounded by lush sugar cane fields. According to the *Dictionary of Southern African Place Names* (Raper et al., 2014), Felixton was settled in 1907 and named for either Viscount Herbert John Gladstone, whose nickname was Felix, or Felix Piccione, a local pioneer. It is difficult to know the exact population because “a lot of the residents rent out their bedrooms” (Van Niekerk, 2011, personal communication). Felixton is a “gated” community and only residents are allowed inside. When initial observations were made in 2011, Felixton Library employed a degreed librarian, two

junior library assistants who did not have library degrees, and one Cyber Cadet. Felixton reported a 2012-2013 circulation of 3 065, 6 390 visitors, and 393 active members (City of uMhlathuze, 2013).

Sugar cane and paper production are the main industries in Felixton and play major parts in its history. Tongaat Hulett was a sugar mill in Felixton that employed many local people and the village was originally developed to house employees from the sugar mill and Mondi Packaging (now Mpact) (Felixton College, n.d.). According to library assistant Sandra van Niekerk (2012, personal communication), the factory owned homes for their workers, managed the utilities, collected taxes, etc. They wanted to start a small library, a request that the government approved. The library at that time was only open twice a week and was run by volunteers. Around the year 2000, the company sold the homes, water, sewage, electric, etc. to uMhlathuze municipality because it no longer had interest in running the village. The company decided to donate the library to the municipality and so the municipality kept the library open and began to pay its employees. While the uMhlathuze city council looked for more funding for libraries in 2006-2007, Felixton village was established and the old community hall there was allocated for a new library. Until the renovation of the community hall was complete, Felixton Library operated out of a small room at the Felixton Club (City of uMhlathuze, 2009:30). Renovations were made to the dilapidated building and new shelves, computers, and books were purchased. Felixton Library moved to its new location in the renovated community hall on the third of September 2008 and officially opened in October.

I drove into the community of Felixton surrounded by sugar cane fields and saw cane remnants everywhere, in the road, on the side of the road, etc. The village was surrounded by a security fence and had two access points; one must be a Felixton resident in order to enter into the

residential part of the village. As a non-resident, I had to go around the outside to access the library. The library itself exhibited the Dutch influence and was very pretty. Outside of the library was a play area with swings and other equipment for children and a cement slab on which kids could play football and basketball games. The library was very bright with modern furniture that was in good repair. There was a circulation desk but at the time the observations were conducted in 2011, the library had no automated circulation system and the staff at Felixton shared one computer among them. Because all of the member and circulation records were managed by hand, the collection of statistics was an arduous and faulty process. When Felixton was brought onto the KZN automated library system during the 2012-2013 fiscal year, these statistics would be much easier to collect. The downside to automation though, according to Ms. Van Niekerk (2012, personal communication), was that the staff would lose valuable control over the extension of due dates and charging of fines. The staff at Felixton Library knew their users; they understood that it is difficult for some community members to get to the library more than once every few months in order to return materials by the due date. Before automation, the staff were able to have more control over extending due dates and charging late fees if they knew the patron was a valuable and trustworthy library user. They knew they would get the item back and were able to make accommodations as they saw fit. The automated library system would remove this capability and Ms. Van Niekerk (2012, personal communication) was afraid this new system would deter community members from checking out library materials.

There was a security guard posted at the door of the Felixton Library. A flat-screen television hung on the wall in the quaint children's area near the circulation desk; this area also had small tables and chairs for children to use. There was an area of newspapers and magazines and of course, books. There was also a small selection of audiovisual materials. Materials were offered

in English, Afrikaans, and Zulu languages. The library provided traditional services but also offered a separate computer lab and Cyber Cadet assistance. The computer lab was located at the back of the large room and was enclosed in glass walls; the door can be locked if necessary. This area housed 5-7 computers and many desks and tables for quiet study. Just beyond the computer lab was a health care clinic. Ms. Van Niekerk (2012, personal communication) noted that the library was busiest on the days when this clinic was open because those visiting the clinic might also stop by the library. At one point during the observation at Felixton, I spent some time in the waiting area and attempted to interview people who did not regularly use the library to find out the reasons why they did not visit the library more. Unfortunately most of the people did not speak English. Felixton Library served several surrounding rural areas, one of which was Inwe. The people living in Inwe and other rural areas around Felixton had to walk a long way or pay for transport to the library which was usually too expensive for them. Ms. Van Niekerk (2011, personal communication) noted that the walk for schoolchildren to the library from their homes through tall sugar cane fields had become more dangerous recently as those fields became hotspots for muggings and other crimes. The children were sure to walk in groups and never after dark.



**Figure 16: Sugar Cane Upon Entering Felixton, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

**Figure 17: Felixton Library Entrance, 2011**



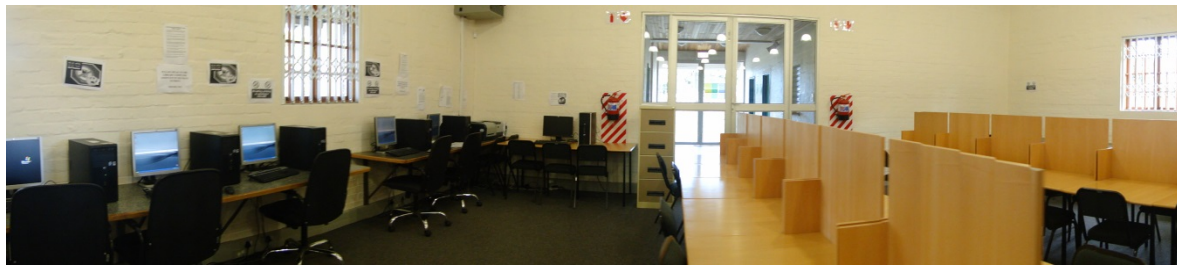
Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

**Figure 18: Circulation Desk at Felixton Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

**Figure 19: Computer Lab in Felixton Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011



**Figure 20: Learners at Felixton Library, 2011**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2011

One thing that stood out in Felixton Library as compared to eNseleni was the diversity of races. During observation periods, the majority of the patrons were Black but there were people of Indian and European descent as well. When asked if this is representative of the community as a whole, Sandra van Niekerk (2011, personal communication), who is Afrikaans, indicated that the village is about half Afrikaans and half Black. There were also some people of Indian descent but Ms. Van Niekerk (2011, personal communication) was clear that they lived separately for the most part. The Afrikaans people lived on one side of the village and Black Africans on the other side. The area of the village that included the library lay within an electrified fence area and in that area, there were Afrikaans, Black, and Indian people living together. So although people used the library, remnants of apartheid in the village were still apparent.

Overall, Felixton Library was a bright, comfortable space in which to read, study, and access computers and internet. Because it was so new to the community and because of the unique qualities of the community itself, Felixton was an interesting case study.

In addition to observations, this research consulted uMhlathuze Annual Reports which contain figures for membership, visits, and circulation at all public libraries.<sup>42</sup> Those numbers for Felixton Library are included in the tables below:

**Table 8: Felixton Library Membership, 2007-2013**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Felixton Membership</b>
2007-2008	228
2008-2009	379
2009-2010	450
2010-2011	547
2012-2013	393

**Source:** City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013

**Table 9: Felixton Library Visits, 2007-2013**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Felixton Visits</b>
2007-2008	1 000
2008-2009	3 896
2009-2010	9 000

<sup>42</sup> While circulation, visitor, and member data were included in the 2006-2007 report, they are presented in a bar graph without specific figures. After analyzing the graph in more depth, it was determined that the figures reported are unreliable and so are not included in this study. Statistics for the 2011-2012 fiscal year were not included in the Annual Report; they seem to have been mistakenly left out (see page 95 of the 2011-2012 Report).

2010-2011	9 000
2012-2013	6 390

**Source:** City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013

**Table 10: Felixton Library Circulation, 2007-2013**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Felixton Circulation</b>
2007-2008	3 015
2008-2009	6 108
2009-2010	5 000
2010-2011	7 492
2012-2013	3 065

**Source:** City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013

While this section offered a description of the setting of the second case study, the next section will detail the demographic information gathered on the interview participants at Felixton.

#### ***5.5.3.2. Demographic data of Felixton participants***

Seven interviews were conducted at the Felixton Library of which three participants (42.9%) were female and four (57.1%) were male. All participants were Black and ranged in age from 18 to 50 years old, making the average age 33 years. All indicated they could read and write more than their names. Four (57.1%) responded they were not married, two (28.6%) were married, and one participant did not answer. Six of the participants (85.7%) indicated they had one or more children. To the question concerning the highest level of schooling achieved, one (14.3%)

indicated having achieved some secondary, one (14.3%) completed secondary, and five (71.4%) completed tertiary level education.

Participants from Felixton Library were asked about their access to media in the form of television, radio, and internet and their responses are included in the table below:

**Table 11: Felixton Community Access to Television, Radio, and Internet, 2011**

<b>Media</b>	<b>Felixton Access</b>
Television	100%
Radio	100%
Internet	85.7%

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

Felixton interview participants were also asked to identify their regular reading materials. The following figure illustrates their responses:

**Table 12: Regular Reading Materials of Felixton Library Users, 2011**

<b>Reading Materials</b>	<b>Felixton Users</b>
Magazines	71.4%
Newspapers	71.4%
Novels	28.6%
Textbooks	28.6%
Other	0
Doesn't read on a regular basis	14.3%

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

### **5.6. Participant selection**

In qualitative research, selecting participants is just as important as selecting cases and settings. Instead of random sampling methods utilised in quantitative research, most qualitative researchers use some form of purposive or purposeful sampling (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Gorman and Clayton (2009:128) define purposive sampling as one in which the researcher includes “representatives from within the population being studied who have a range of characteristics relevant to the research project.” Researchers must choose a population of participants from which they have the most to learn (Merriam, 2009). Because the qualitative researcher is focused on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the research topic, samples produced are usually small. This study was designed to interview participants until saturation, or at least 20-30 participants in total. Participants were chosen from community members who visited the library on the days that I was there and who were willing to be interviewed and complete the questionnaire. In all cases, the librarian in charge assisted in asking the library users if they would be willing to participate in the study and almost all agreed. To meet the needs of this study, all participants must have met the following criteria:

- They were using the library at the time I was onsite,
- They were able to speak and understand English,<sup>43</sup>
- They were 12 years of age or older,
- They were able to give consent to the process and sign a form indicating as such, and

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<sup>43</sup> Participants were encouraged to ask for clarification of any questions on the questionnaire that they did not understand. A few did ask for explanation and in one case, the questions were read to the participant and I recorded the answers for the participant.

- They were willing to spend approximately 30 minutes being interviewed and completing a pencil-and-paper questionnaire about their library usage and information needs.

Two libraries were chosen as cases for this study, Felixton and eNseleni, and 22 participants in total were interviewed. Of these 22 participants:

- All were African (Black).
- 12 (54.5%) were male and 10 (45.5%) were female.
- Their ages ranged from 13 to 50 years. The average age was 25.8 years.
- 18 (81.8%) participants indicated they were single (not married), while 2 (9.1%) said they were married, and 2 (9.1%) did not provide an answer.
- 12 (54.5%) indicated they had children and 10 (45.5%) answered that they had no children.
- 11 (50%) said they were employed and 11 (50%) said they were unemployed.
- 10 (45.5%) completed higher education, 3 (13.6%) indicated they went on for some higher education, 5 (22.7%) completed secondary school, 3 (13.6%) indicated they had some secondary education, and 1 (4.5%) did not answer.
- 12 (54.5%) indicated they were in excellent health, 9 (40.9%) in good health, and 1 (4.5%) in fair health.

This brief overview of the participants was presented to provide an overall view of the sample used in this study. It indicates the representativeness of the communities in which the research was conducted. A more in-depth discussion of results and analysis will be presented in Chapter



6. The next section in this chapter will explain the methods of data collection and recording utilised in this study.

### ***5.7. Data collection methods***

According to Gorman and Clayton (2009:182), “...fieldwork is the disciplined study of a particular social world where the fieldworker learns from participants themselves, seeing the world through the eyes of the inhabitants.” Qualitative fieldwork involves collection of data through sustained observation and engagement and documentation of these activities (Gorman and Clayton, 2009). Four main methods of data collection were utilised in this study: observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. This section will describe the methods of data collection used in this study as well as the methods for recording the data gathered.

#### ***5.7.1. Observation***

Observation from within the setting being studied is essential in qualitative research. From spending time in the location, watching the interactions between subjects, and taking note of the physical layout and contents of the space, the researcher is able to experience the setting with all of the senses. It provides “useful insights into unconscious behaviour and how this might relate to self-perceptions of those involved in the event” and uncovers “patterns of behaviour that both reflect otherwise hidden attitudes or views and unconsciously affect participants” (Gorman and Clayton, 2009:40). While making observations, the researcher should aim to take thorough and meticulous notes, not leaving anything out even if the meaning or importance is unclear at the time. As the observation notes are later read and re-read, the researcher may end up making connections and interpretations that were not seen during the initial observation.

Observation for this project was straightforward and unobtrusive. After interviewing the head librarian at each library, I was given a tour and then spent time in quiet observation of patrons in the library at that time. Some of these patrons were later interviewed as well but others were not because of time, language, or other constraints. Unstructured observations in each library were completed without being a distraction or drawing undue attention and thus examination of patrons during their natural library usage was successful. I developed an Observation Guide (see Appendix E) in advance which steered my observations in the case study libraries. I was not a participant observer and had little interaction with library users unless they were interviewed. This unobtrusive observation was best suited to the research questions, the libraries which were chosen as cases, and the library users being observed (Gorman and Clayton, 2009). While as much information as possible about the sites was recorded during observation, I created the following Observation Guide to gather information in the following more specific areas (see Appendix E):

- Users of the libraries:
  - The gender and approximate age of users were noted.
  - Was the user by themselves or in a group?
  - What conversations were users having?
- Actions of the users in the libraries:
  - Were they using computers or making photocopies?
  - Were they looking at newspapers, books, or other materials?
  - Did any of them ask a librarian for assistance?

- Did they check out any materials?
- The physical space, layout, and contents of the library:
  - Size and construct of the building.
  - Were there computers in the library? How many?
  - What is the layout of the library? Are there areas assigned to differing purposes such as a children's area or study areas?
  - How many staff are employed at the library? How many were available to patrons during observations?
  - The size and quality (currency, relevance, language, etc.) of the collections.
  - The condition of the furniture and materials, etc.

During the observation process, it is imperative for a researcher to continuously check and challenge their own preconceived notions and biases to ensure they are not only observing what they assume to be true. The main research questions should always be kept in mind and breaks taken when necessary. In addition, researchers must record their observations carefully by taking detailed notes, taking photographs, drawing diagrams, etc. The next section will discuss the quantitative questionnaires in more detail.

### ***5.7.2. Questionnaires***

Collecting data using more than one method can help in diversifying analysis (Goodman, 2011:10) so a quantitative measure was utilised in this study in the form of a questionnaire administered to each library user interviewed. It consisted of 28 questions that covered

demographic information as well as perceptions of information needs and use. Demographic data such as age, marital status, gender, education, employment, etc. were collected to ensure a representative sample of the communities but also to discover any patterns of library use or information needs amongst various groups. The questionnaire was administered via paper and pen before the oral interview began and if the participant had any questions about the questionnaire, they were encouraged to ask. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A (Demographic Data Sheet).

### **5.7.3. Interviews**

In this research study, data were also collected through semistructured interviews of library users at the two sites as well as librarians, library staff, and administrators. The interview “centers on the meanings that life experiences hold for the individuals being interviewed” (Warren and Karner, 2010:127). It is comprised of a set of predetermined questions that are asked of a group of selected informants, usually one on one but sometimes in focus groups (Warren and Karner, 2010). While an interview is being conducted, the researcher usually takes notes and audiotapes the interview if possible. Interviews range from highly structured to casual and conversational. Warren and Karner (2010) advise to ask the easiest questions first and leave the more difficult or disturbing questions for the end of the interview. Throughout the interview, the goal is to develop rapport with the participant in order to receive the most candid and honest answers to research questions thus revealing rich personal narratives (Warren and Karner, 2010).

The semi-structured interviews conducted for this research included a relatively short number of open-ended questions that were designed to elicit descriptive responses. At the outset of each interview, I introduced myself and gave a brief description of my intentions, the purpose of the

study, and the logistics of the interview. Confidentiality was discussed with the participant and the Consent Form was signed by the participant. Special attention was paid to ensuring the space in which interviews occurred was private and comfortable for the participant. After the questionnaire was completed, permission to record the interviews was requested and once received, the interview began. Flexibility was maintained throughout each interview and follow-up questions were asked when necessary. “As qualitative researchers, we are active partners in the elicitation of the narrative” (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003 in Warren and Karner, 2010:158) so we must be actively engaged in the interview we are conducting. Active listening and attention to non-verbal messages were diligently practiced during the interviews. Eye contact was used as well as continual verbal and non-verbal cues of encouragement (Warren and Karner, 2010). During any point in the interview that a participant did not fully understand the question asked, I was able to repeat or re-phrase the question to increase comprehension. The interview guides for this research project are attached in Appendices C and D.

#### ***5.7.4. Document analysis***

An analysis of uMhlathuze municipality’s Annual Reports from 2003-2013 was conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the recent history of libraries in uMhlathuze and to discern goals, government investment, and patterns of use. It should be noted the document analysis extended beyond the fieldwork into 2015. Individual library data were not clearly and comprehensively available until fiscal year 2007-2008. Circulation, collection, and usage data from 2003-2007 are included where possible but were found to not be reliable enough to be included in the final analysis. Library statistics included in the 2005-2006 report are different than those included in reports for other years and do not include circulation, visitors, or members and so are not included in the analysis. Statistics for the 2011-2012 fiscal year were not included

in the Annual Report; they seem to have been mistakenly left out (see page 95 of the 2011-2012 Report).<sup>44</sup> The last Annual Report available for use in this study was for 2012-2013.

In 2003-2004, there were six public libraries in uMhlathuze: Richards Bay, Empangeni, eSikhaleni,<sup>45</sup> Brackenham, Enseleni, and Ngwelezane. Felixton Library was added in 2008. The uMhlathuze Annual Reports for 2010-2011, 2011-2012, and 2012-2013 are all fairly similar. Analysis of these documents provided valuable data regarding circulation, visitors, and members, as well as historical context and are included in more detail in Chapter 6.

### ***5.8. Data collection procedures***

This section will briefly describe the procedures followed in the process of data collection. The recording of observations, recording and transcription of interviews, and record keeping and storage will be discussed.

#### ***5.8.1. Recording observations***

In qualitative research it is important to record detailed notes while making observations in the field. The goal of field notes is to “collect information from a social setting that will contribute to understanding the behavior and interactions of study participants (Gorman and Clayton,

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<sup>44</sup> All uMhlathuze Annual Reports were found on the city’s website:

[http://www.umhlathuze.gov.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=273](http://www.umhlathuze.gov.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=26&Itemid=273) . The 2003-2004 library information can be found on page 17 of the report. The 2004-2005 library information can be found on page 18 of the report. The 2006-2007 library information can be found on pages 10-11 of the report. The 2007-2008 library information can be found on page 12 of the report. Library information for 2008-2009 can be found on pages 30-31 of the report. The 2009-2010 library information can be found on pages 92-93 of the report. Library information for 2010-2011 can be found on page 58, for 2011-2012 on pages 94-95, and for 2012-2013 on page 91.

<sup>45</sup> eSikhaleni is the original name of this township although for many years, it has been referred to as eSikhawini. Many areas in South Africa are changing names from what they were during apartheid back to their original names and this is the case with eSikhaleni. The uMhlathuze Annual Reports from 2003-2005 refer to the area as eSikhawini but from 2006 on, the area and library is referred to as eSikhaleni. In 2012, the district of uThungulu (of which uMhlathuze is a part) made the formal decision to change the name back to its original. This thesis will use the town’s original name, eSikhaleni.

2009:184). These should ideally be “thickly descriptive and fully narrative” (Warren and Karner, 2010:118) and be recorded during the field experience or as soon thereafter as possible to ensure as comprehensive a description as possible. Some of the details recorded would include the sights, sounds, smells, and other details depending on the research being conducted. In addition, the researcher records thoughts, ideas, and opinions about the events taking place during the observation. Warren and Karner (2010) point out that field notes reveal as much about the writer as they do the subjects. Each researcher comes from a particular background and their perspective can reveal itself through field notes. In this way, field notes can be both observational and analytical (Gorman and Clayton, 2009). Not only is the researcher recording physical observations but also their reflections on the observations, such as any themes or patterns that emerge, any ethical questions that may arise, or any changes that should be made to methodology (Gorman and Clayton, 2009).

Field notes in this research were recorded by hand in a journal during observation in the libraries. Focus was on the topics and questions listed in the last section but as much detail was recorded during observations as possible. Once observation was complete, I looked over fieldwork notes each day and added any additional thoughts, feelings, or observations. These handwritten notes were then transcribed with a laptop and were read and re-read throughout the research process in case of discovery of new interpretations or connections (Warren and Karner, 2010). Digital photographs were also taken of each library and its surrounding town. These photographs were downloaded to my laptop at the end of each workday.

### ***5.8.2. Recording and transcribing interviews***

Each interview conducted for this research study was recorded with each participant's permission by a handheld digital voice recorder. In addition, I took careful notes while each interview was being conducted in order to increase reliability of the information and my memory of each event. Upon return from South Africa, the work of transcribing each interview began. Transcribing interviews is a necessary yet challenging endeavor. In this case I did not depend on software or another person to transcribe the interviews conducted. There is value in the researcher new to qualitative methodology to meet this task alone. I had memory of the setting, the participant, and the tone of the interview (Warren and Karner, 2010). Because of the accent of the South African people interviewed, software programs or other people may have been unsuccessful at effective transcription. By doing the transcription myself, I was reminded of the content of each interview but was also able to make new connections and interpretations of themes that emerged (Gorman and Clayton, 2009:199). Overall, interviewing library users was imperative to gain necessary information for this study and when paired with administering a questionnaire to each interviewee, some enlightening patterns emerged. An analysis of the information derived from these methods will be presented in Chapter 6 but the next section of this chapter will discuss record keeping and storage in more depth.

### ***5.8.3. Record keeping and storage***

Record keeping is extremely important to maintain organisation of data and confidentiality of participants. In order to accomplish this, I kept an orderly Excel database of interviews, participant information, codes, and quantitative information compiled from the questionnaires. This file and the transcriptions of interviews were kept only on my laptop and backup hard drive.



All paper files including the field journal, field notes, and any other printed materials were kept organised and confidential in my home office. Not only do the measures described here ensure the confidentiality of participants and security of data collected but structuring record keeping and storage in this way maintained what Yin (2009:122) calls a “chain of evidence” which increases the reliability and validity of the research.

## ***5.9. Validity, reliability, and generalisability***

### ***5.9.1. Validity***

As Merriam (2009) points out, although they may never capture an objective truth of a situation because of the ever-changing nature of “reality,” qualitative researchers can take steps to increase the validity of their work. Also referred to in qualitative research as credibility, “Validity refers to the extent to which something actually measures what it is intended to measure” (Gorman and Clayton, 2009:25). There are several common ways in which this can be accomplished; explained below are the methods utilised in this study to increase the validity of its findings.

- Thick description: Providing rich, detailed description of context, observations, methods, etc., is one way the qualitative researcher attempts to convince the reader of the validity of the research methodology (Warren and Karner, 2010). This thesis provides rich narrative throughout but primarily in Chapter 6 when describing the case study settings.
- Triangulation (Merriam, 2009): By using multiple methods and data sources, a researcher adds to the validity of a study. In addition to an analysis of relevant literature, four methods were used in this study so that similar findings were confirmed in multiple ways: observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. By interviewing and

observing participants, I was able to ensure that what participants were saying coincided with their actions in the libraries. Data were collected at two different libraries in two different municipalities over three weeks in June-July of 2011 and October of 2012. At the libraries, interviews were conducted with a variety of library users who differed in sex, age, and other characteristics, to investigate similarities and differences in responses and each participant first completed a questionnaire providing demographic and other information used in analysis. To further enhance the validity of the research, interviews were also conducted with professional librarians and library staff at the two sites as well as with a librarian at another larger library nearby and a provincial library administrator. This was done to increase the credibility of the data gathered from library users (Gorman and Clayton, 2009). In addition, document analysis of annual reports was conducted to add more confirmation of previously collected data. By using multiple data collection methods and sources, I was able to triangulate findings in effort to strengthen them.

- “Adequate engagement in data collection” (Merriam, 2009:219): Using this method of validation, the researcher collects data via interviews, observations, etc. until saturation has occurred and no new information is revealed. The amount of time and number of interviews it takes to reach this point varies by study; this study reached an initial saturation point after 20 interviews, a thorough literature review, and document analysis. While more interviews would make the study stronger, limited access made this impossible. Despite this, the interviews and observations revealed similarities from the start.

- Looking for variation: Inclusion of data which may lie outside the expected findings and the presentation of alternative explanations illustrates a researcher's dedication to establishing validity in a study (Gorman and Clayton, 2009; Merriam, 2009).
- Researcher's position: It is imperative for a researcher to critically reflect upon their own biases, backgrounds, and beliefs which may sway their attitudes toward the phenomenon being studied. Good researchers include their own perspectives, worldviews, and assumptions in the process of constructing validity (Merriam, 2009; Warren and Karner, 2010).
- Peer examination: Peer examination or review is a valuable method to ensure validity and clarity (Merriam, 2009). This thesis was read and reviewed by two peers before final submission. Because the examiners had varying degrees of knowledge about the topic, the feedback and questions received from them was invaluable to validating data, methodology, case study structure, etc.

### ***5.9.2. Reliability***

Reliability is difficult to measure in qualitative studies. Because qualitative research is often focused on examining the human condition, human behavior, or a subject's perspective on reality, it is challenging if not impossible to replicate a study exactly in order to conform to traditional (quantitative) definitions of reliability. Likewise, the main instrument of data collection in qualitative studies, the researcher, is difficult to prove reliable by more traditional (quantitative) definitions. According to Gorman and Clayton (2009:24), "When something produces consistent results it can be called reliable;" this understanding of reliability is also known as repeatability. Acknowledging that replication of exact results are impossible among

separate qualitative research studies, Merriam's (2009:221) discussion of reliability is focused on "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" in a particular study. This is the understanding of reliability, perhaps more accurately referred to as dependability or consistency, which this study utilises. I took several precautions though to increase reliability in this study, including triangulation, peer examination, and examining my own position, which were explained above (Merriam, 2009). In addition, Gorman and Clayton (2009:56-57) offer the following ways to ensure reliability in qualitative research:

- Consistent note taking: Taking notes during observation and/or directly thereafter can help ensure the researcher records observations, conversations, and other interactions accurately and reliably. I took notes during observation and interviews as well as recorded reflections after these interactions into one notebook to ensure I would not have to rely on memory alone.
- Immersion in the context: The qualitative researcher must be immersed in the study environment over an appropriate period of time and at various times throughout the day. I was able to visit the case study libraries on various days of the week, at different times of the day. Complete immersion was impossible due to lack of time in South Africa but the library staff and users were extremely helpful in making the most of my time there.
- Exposure to multiple situations: The qualitative researcher should observe various situations instead of limiting their exposure to only one or two pieces of the phenomenon under investigation. Exposure to multiple situations allows the researcher to broaden their understanding of the observational data. In addition to making observations in the two case study libraries, I ensured I was exposed to other libraries in KZN and throughout

South Africa. While fieldwork wasn't conducted in these other libraries, it was useful for background knowledge and comparison. I was also able to speak with numerous librarians, administrators, and library users throughout the research process, and formally interviewed members of each group.

- Drawing upon other research: A thorough literature review lends credibility to qualitative research by checking researcher bias and providing additional evidence. The literature review for this study is included in Chapter 1.

This study adheres to the recommendations made by Gorman and Clayton (2009) and Merriam (2009) to ensure validity and reliability. A discussion of generalisability follows.

### ***5.9.3. Generalisability***

Also referred to as transferability in qualitative studies, generalisability is “the ability to draw defensible general conclusions from the evidence one has obtained” (Gorman and Clayton, 2009:81). The ability to generalise findings is an important factor in quantitative methodology but qualitative research focuses more on the ability to generalise or transfer social processes to the larger population instead of the reproduction of statistical patterns and their application in society (Warren and Karner, 2010). By choosing settings in which to research that are not unlike most settings in the researcher's area of study, the findings can most likely be transferred to fit other similar settings.

Warren and Karner (2010) point to representation in generalisation of qualitative research as one concern that has developed in the last few decades. It is important for the qualitative researcher to offer true and full representations of places and people in field notes, interview transcripts and final thesis reports. The ways in which the researcher represents events and people in these

documents will not be entirely objective and for qualitative researchers, this is not necessarily the goal. Instead, staying true to the full presentation and critical analysis of social relationships and patterns observed and representing them in thick description is a major goal (Warren and Karner, 2010).

At times, qualitative research methods have been criticised for the difficulty seen in generalising results. It is important to remember that the goal of qualitative case study research is to apply what Yin (2009) calls *analytic generalisation*, or the expansion and application of theories more broadly. A “process of reflective action” is encouraged by Greenwood and Levin (2005:55) and they describe a two-step process for applying generalisations from one context to another. First, a researcher must understand the local context of a case. Second, a researcher must investigate and reflect upon the context of the new setting onto which the generalisations are to be applied to determine whether or not those generalisations will fit into the new setting (Greenwood and Levin, 2005:55). This process of confirming generalisability coincides with critical research and was used as a guide in this study.

Methods for ensuring validity, reliability, and generalisability were discussed in this section. The next section will describe data analysis methods before concluding the chapter with ethical considerations.

### **5.10. Data analysis**

Qualitative data analysis is a process which starts in the field and really does not end until the thesis is complete. Because qualitative methods are circular in nature, the researcher will visit and re-visit data throughout fieldwork, transcription, data analysis, and writing of the thesis. In qualitative methodology, the researcher is the primary instrument and must use creativity and

thoughtfulness throughout the process. An analysis process detailed by Creswell (2009) was utilised in this research. Creswell's (2009:185-190) analysis steps are:

- A. Prepare and organise data for analysis – type up field notes, transcribe interviews, etc.
- B. Read through all the data to get a general sense of the material.
- C. Code the data - Read and re-read the interview transcriptions and code like topics in order to derive themes and construct categories (Merriam, 2009:179).
- D. Generate a description of the setting, individuals, and services as well as categories or themes derived from the coding process.
- E. Decide how the description and themes will be represented in the thesis.
- F. Interpret the data – What were the lessons learned?

These were the steps followed in this research study. Step A, which included recording procedures, storage, and organisation of the data, was discussed earlier in this chapter. I then read through the collected data including transcripts, field notes, and demographic data sheets several times and coded them, making notes of observed patterns and themes (Steps B, C, and D). The codes used in this study can be found in Appendix B. The descriptions of the settings and services as well as themes derived from data analysis are included in Chapter 6. All of the steps were completed several times throughout the research process and interpretation of the data is presented in Chapter 7. The last section of this chapter will discuss ethical considerations.

### ***5.11. Ethical considerations***

Ethical considerations are imperative when conducting qualitative research. Subjects are entitled to the right to informed consent and confidentiality. In this research, each participant signed a consent form prior to completing the questionnaire or being interviewed. Participants were knowingly involved and the research was explained to them before they signed the consent form. They were not exposed to any situations which could have inflicted any harm on them and were asked for their consent before an audio recording of the interview was taken. The consent form also explained to participants that the information they provided would be kept confidential. A copy of the informed consent form is included in Appendix B.

As Gorman and Clayton (2009:44) assert, “In most qualitative research confidentiality (concealment of individual identity) is the issue, not anonymity (subjects remaining nameless).” In order to ensure confidentiality in this study, I was the only person to handle the consent forms which are the only documents that included the participants’ names. Furthermore, this research conforms to the University of Pretoria (UP) Code of Ethics and approval from UP’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct research was received prior to the start of the fieldwork.

### ***5.12. Conclusion***

This chapter described the methodology of this research study. The choice of a qualitative case study design was explained and other approaches and strategies of inquiry were described. Case study methods and selection were discussed. A description of uMhlathuze municipality was provided in order to offer a fuller understanding of the context in which the case study libraries were set. It went on to present the two case studies conducted in this research, in eNseleni Library and in Felixton Library, both located within uMhlathuze municipality. A description of



the selection of participants was presented, as well as data collection, recording, and analysis procedures. Issues concerning the ethical considerations, reliability, validity, and generalisability were also included. The research design of this study, including the paradigms, strategies of inquiry, and methodology, as well as the theoretical and historical background described in the previous chapters of this thesis will frame the presentation of the findings in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6

### Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

#### *6.1. Introduction*

Now that the research design and methodology has been presented, along with the theoretical framework, this chapter will report the findings of the research. The purpose of this research was to investigate how public libraries and librarians can help alleviate information inequality and poverty in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Case studies were conducted in two public libraries in KZN and each library was located in a semi-rural area and each served surrounding rural communities. The intention of the case study fieldwork was to experience the libraries in two communities and observe how they were being used in order to fully investigate the problem of information inequality and poverty in KZN. Were information inequality and poverty present in the libraries? How does one know? If so, how did they manifest? In turn, what can be done about them? To answer these questions and investigate the research problem of information inequality and poverty in these libraries, 22 interviews were conducted with library staff and users to investigate and understand their perceptions of information needs, resources they used to meet those needs, and how the library fit into that process. Literature review, document analysis, and observations were conducted, and questionnaires were completed by each participant in order to quantifiably supplement and strengthen the research. As a reminder, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How do information inequality and poverty manifest in KZN?
2. How has public library development influenced the current state of information inequality and poverty in KZN?

3. What is the role of public libraries in alleviating information poverty in KZN?
4. How are community members using libraries? What are the challenges to using libraries?
5. What are KZN library users' information needs? How do they address these needs?

Five major themes emerged from analysis of the data; each theme is directly related to one of the five research questions. These themes and brief descriptions follow:

**Theme 1:** Information inequality and poverty in KZN – Evidence of the existence of information inequality and poverty and how it manifests in KZN is included in this theme.

**Theme 2:** Development of public libraries in KZN – This theme contains information regarding the value of public libraries in KZN and any investment made in their development, staffing, technology, and resources.

**Theme 3:** The role of public libraries in KZN – This theme is based on data collected to explain the various roles of public libraries in KZN and how those roles can serve to alleviate information inequality and poverty.

**Theme 4:** Information-seeking behaviour of KZN library users – Evidence from this study illuminated how people in KZN are using libraries and the challenges that may prevent them from doing so.

**Theme 5:** KZN library users' information needs – Library users expressed their information needs and what resources they use to meet those needs.

In addition, five major findings emerged from the study, each corresponding to a theme and answering one of the five research questions:

**Finding 1:** Information inequality and poverty are present in KZN. Their dimensions vary widely and include the lack of understanding of the value of libraries and their use, deficient information and digital literacy skills, and a shortage of libraries available to community members in KZN.

**Finding 2:** Investment in public library development has helped to alleviate information inequality and poverty in KZN, especially in the areas of information technology, staffing, and information resources (books, etc.) but increased investment is necessary.

**Finding 3:** KZN libraries can play important roles in alleviating information inequality and poverty, primarily by continuing to provide free access to internet, computers, and other information resources (books, etc.).

**Finding 4:** Community members were primarily using the case study libraries for access to computers and the internet and their biggest challenge to library use was when this access was disrupted.

**Finding 5:** Most library users expressed their information needs were focused on schoolwork and a majority indicated that they considered the internet to be their primary (and most trusted) resource for information.

Most importantly (and included in Finding 1), the data analysis indicated challenges to accessing and using libraries and information that were congruent with the definitions, causes, and

characteristics of information poverty as presented in Chapter 2. As a reminder, some of these defining factors and causes include:

- The lack of understanding of the value of information and thus a failure to use information;
- The lack of knowledge about what information options exist;
- The lack of ICT access, infrastructures, and/or digital literacy skills;
- The lack of information literacy skills;
- The lack of quality information; and
- The lack of access to information due to any of the above factors.

This study revealed the existence of all of these factors in KZN and clearly indicated the presence of information inequality and poverty among the community.

This chapter presents detailed explanations of the findings of this study. The research questions will be addressed and findings from the data will be presented by theme and supported by participant statements as well as quantitative data, where appropriate. While this chapter is devoted to a comprehensive presentation of data analysis results, it does not set out to interpret or generalise the findings or discuss their implications (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008:206). A more in-depth interpretation and discussion of the findings and strategies that libraries might use to alleviate information inequality and poverty, organised by these five main themes, will be the focus of Chapters 7 and 8, respectively.

## 6.2. *The findings*

This section will present the findings from this study which aimed to investigate what libraries can do to alleviate information inequality and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal. Data were gathered from 22 participant interviews and questionnaires, as well as from observations and document analysis. It is important to remember that while on-site fieldwork took place in 2011 and 2012, document analysis continued through 2015 in order to continue exploring patterns and changes KZN library use and investment. In addition, all participants' responses are grouped and presented together, regardless of the "type" (*e.g.* library staff or library user). During the process of coding all of these resources, five main themes emerged based on the research questions. The themes are: evidence and dimensions of information inequality and poverty in KZN, the effect of public library development on information inequality and poverty in KZN, the role of public libraries in alleviating information inequality and poverty in KZN, behaviour of KZN library users, and the information needs of KZN library users. Data were collated into these themes which were further subdivided into more specific variables that inform each main theme. Analysis of the data revealed findings that answered the research questions; these findings are presented in this section along with their supporting theme, key variables, quotes from participants, and any additional information that further informs the finding. The relationship between the research questions, themes, key variables, and data collection methods are presented in the following framework which guides the presentation of data:

**Table 13: Framework of this Study**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key Variables/Descriptors</b>	<b>Data Collection Methods</b>
1. How does information inequality and poverty manifest in KZN?	T1: Evidence and dimensions of information inequality and poverty in KZN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illiteracy</li> <li>• Lack of libraries</li> <li>• Limited library use</li> <li>• Limited understanding of use and value of libraries</li> <li>• Lack of reading culture</li> <li>• Generation gap</li> <li>• Unmet information needs?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review</li> <li>• Community Member interview questions 1 and 8</li> <li>• Library Staff interview questions 4, 6, 8, and 10</li> </ul>
2. How has public library development impacted the current state of information inequality and poverty in KZN?	T2: The effect of public library development on information inequality and poverty in KZN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value of libraries</li> <li>• Investment in library structures</li> <li>• Staffing libraries</li> <li>• Library technology</li> <li>• Investment in other resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review</li> <li>• Observations</li> <li>• Document analysis</li> <li>• Community member interview questions 9 and 10</li> <li>• Library Staff interview questions 3, 8, 11, and 12</li> </ul>
3. What is the role of public libraries in alleviating information inequality and poverty in KZN?	T3: Role of public libraries in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to ICT</li> <li>• Staff and Skills Training</li> <li>• Library outreach, services, and partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review</li> <li>• Document analysis</li> <li>• Community Member interview questions 3, 6, 9, and 10</li> <li>• Library Staff interview questions 7, 9, 10, and 12</li> </ul>
4. How are KZN community members using libraries? What	T4: KZN library user behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Library use by the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature review</li> <li>• Observations</li> </ul>

are the challenges to using libraries?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges to library use by the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document Analysis</li> <li>Questionnaire questions 17, 26</li> <li>Community Member interview questions 2-5 and 7-9</li> <li>Library Staff interview questions 8 and 9</li> </ul>
5. What are KZN library users' information needs? How do they address these needs?	T5: Information needs of library users in KZN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>User information needs</li> <li>Ideas to better meet needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature review</li> <li>Observations</li> <li>Document analysis</li> <li>Questionnaire questions 27, 28</li> <li>Community Member interview questions 1, 3, 8, 9</li> <li>Library Staff interview questions 4, 5, 11</li> </ul>

Source: Field Data (2011)

**6.2.1. Finding 1: Information inequality and poverty are present in KZN. Their dimensions vary widely and include the limited understanding of the value of libraries and their use, the lack of information and digital literacy skills, and the shortage of libraries available to community members in KZN.**

The primary finding that emerged from analysing data from interviews, questionnaires, and documents was confirmation of information inequality and poverty in KZN and evidence that it



manifests in a variety of ways. While the researcher, the instruments, and participants did not use the terms *information inequality* or *information poverty* specifically, they all addressed or these issues by proxy and discussed challenges they face when fulfilling daily information needs, which indicates the existence of information inequality and poverty. This finding answers Research Question 1. Questions 1 and 8 on the Community Member Interview Guide and questions 4, 6, 8, and 10 on the Library Staff Interview Guide were designed to investigate this topic.

The dimensions of information inequality and poverty in KZN are varied; this section will present the ways that they manifest in KZN according to participants themselves. The lack of understanding of the value of information and, more specifically, libraries and what they can do to help community members with daily information needs, were both indicated by nine of 22 (40.9%) of those interviewed. Also mentioned by nine of 22 (40.9%), was the limited information and digital literacy skills among community members that prevents them from finding and taking full advantage of useful information that is available in libraries. Another manifestation of information inequality and poverty in KZN is the overall lack of sufficient numbers of libraries in the province, which eight of 22 participants (36.4%) mentioned.

Participants indicated that rural dwellers are often unable to travel the long distance to get to the library during its open hours and they are challenged to find safe, affordable transportation to the library; it can also be troublesome for library staff to verify their home addresses to even receive a library card. Just as many participants (8/22, 36.4%) complained of prohibitively low or expensive access to the internet and computers outside of the library and discussed the lack of a reading culture among (specifically Black) community members. As stated in Chapter 2, economic poverty is a common characteristic associated with information inequality and poverty.

Affording transportation to the library or the fear of being unable to pay any fines that may accrue from library use are common concerns. This research found that high unemployment levels in KZN lead to children leaving school early in order to find work and help support their families. The lack of money to pay for internet cafés, internet access on mobile phones, or home broadband access as well as the lack of computers in libraries illustrate the relationship between digital access and information inequality and poverty. Six of 22 (27.3%) participants indicated that many members of the community did not use libraries at all for information seeking; the same number (6/22, 27.3%) indicated that a lack of access to needed information was an issue for them. The latter is mainly due to the quality of information available, as participants indicated the lack of resources in local languages, the shortage of relevant or current material, and the poor conditions of items in the libraries.

The table below presents a sampling of comments that provide evidence of information inequality and poverty from those interviewed:

**Table 14: Comments Regarding Information Poverty in KZN**

Participant #	Response
R2	<i>...some people have difficulty coming because the library is very far. ...rural, pastoral areas, they don't have libraries, so they have to travel maybe twice a week, so they have to pay bus fare and all those things just to come have access to the internet.</i>
R2	<i>If the library was not there I was not going to have access to [the internet]. Most of us, Black people I'm saying, we don't have access to the internet. We only use it on our phones but it's expensive.</i>

R2	<i>Some people are still behind. They are still lacking the information. So they are still on those old ways of finding information like using the newspapers, listening to radios, or tvs...some don't know how to use a computer, for instance. And some have problems with illiteracy... their English is not so good so they find it difficult to read books, to apply information because they have to use a dictionary as well as the books and people just say, "Okay, I'm not going to do this."</i>
R3	<i>...the youngsters in this community, in this area, most of them leave school early looking for a job to feed their families. Most of them lost their parents during apartheid time. So they grew up not having those parents, they are the parents themselves. So most of the guys that I've gotten to know, which [sic] come to the computers regularly, they only come to search for jobs.</i>
R3	<i>...I do have a feeling that there are some people that actually don't know what happens in the library. You know, they don't have any knowledge of there even being a library in the area.</i>
R5	<i>I don't use the books because...I don't like to read. [If I do read, it's] newspapers because they are shorter, they paraphrase.</i>
R6	<i>I [don't know how] to use the internet. I'm from the rural areas so even in the library they don't have a librarian....even though it's hard for myself, it's hard to use the internet, I can see a Cyber Cadet so I can use it.</i>
R9	<i>[After the library membership application form is completed], we send them a letter saying that their library card is ready to be collected because</i>

	<i>in our Black communities, it's not like the White communities, the parents doesn't [sic] have that...they are not eager to come to the library so to confirm the postal address, we do post the letter saying they should come and collect their card.</i>
R9	<i>...some of the things I hear from the schoolkids, they say, "Mother said I mustn't take the book from the library because if it gets lost, who's going to pay for it?" And then others think the library is a bookshop; if you come into the library, you need to pay for the book. And then others, like in our Black community, people are not familiar with reading...others they don't even have time to come to the library because...we open at nine o'clock and close at five o'clock. Others they think, "Okay, I can go to the library because I need to write an assignment," but the love of reading is not in that person. They just use the library book because she or he is forced to write an assignment.</i>
R10	<i>Old people doesn't [sic] come. They like to sit home and watch tvs. They do not know how to use a computer. No [they don't like to read], they go to the councilors [for information].</i>
R13	<i>...I think [rural people are] suffering somehow. For example, if they are going to school and maybe there's a book that is used in school but he or she can't afford to buy it, if you go to the library, sometimes you can get it. But [if they can't get] the information, I think they are suffering a lot.</i>
R13	<i>I used to see [White people] in the library... borrowing books because [they] have that culture of reading. Us, we don't have that culture.</i>

R14	<i>I grew up in the rural areas so I was not used to come to the library [sic] and when I was 13, that's when I started going to the library so I think [others in rural areas] have the same issue. They don't know [what the library does].</i>
R15	<i>I think adults have grown out of the idea of reading... if they come to the library it's not to borrow books. Most of them are just for the internet. If there were no computers then the library wouldn't be packed as much.</i>
R17	<i>Unfortunately with [rural dwellers] being far away we have a lot of non-returns. We have been having a lot of loss. Because they take out the books and we've got no way of getting to them. A lot of them don't have cell phones or a lot of them are with grandparents...that can't read so if you write a letter [they can't read it] or they don't even have postboxes. Because they live in rural area, they don't have proof of residence, they don't have a street address, they don't have a house number...they then have to go to the induna, which is the chief of the tribal area, and he signs a form saying this person lives in my tribal area. But then if they don't return the books, we've got no way really of getting those books back. So it's a bit of a risk to take them but we do, we do allow them to join.</i>
R17	<i>I'd say there's very few Black adults that are coming to read. The few that do come, we've only got the one shelf [of items in their predominant language]. But I would say that reading is very difficult for everybody across the board. Reading is very difficult to promote in the modern day.</i>

R24	<i>Unfortunately I'm from the rural areas so we didn't have computers in school.</i>
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Source: Field Data (2011)

***6.2.2. Finding 2: Investment in public library development has helped to alleviate information inequality and poverty in KZN, especially in the areas of information technology, staffing, and information resources (books, etc.) but increased investment is necessary.***

The development and improvement of public libraries in South Africa, and in KZN specifically, as explained in Chapter 3 has had important and lasting effects on the current state of information inequality and poverty. Likewise, how libraries continue to be developed, the value placed on them, and the investment made in them will ultimately determine how well they might help in the future alleviation of information inequality and poverty. This finding answers Research Question 2 which examines how public library development in South Africa and KZN in particular influenced the current state information inequality and poverty. Included in this examination are questions of how current library development and library alternatives may influence the future of information inequality and poverty in KZN. Questions 9 and 10 for community members and questions 3, 8, 11, and 12 for library staff seek to investigate this issue. Observations within the case study libraries as well as reviewing of literature and uMhlathuze Annual Reports also gave insight to this topic.

This research study revealed that public library development in five main areas can impact information inequality and poverty levels in KZN:

- The investment in and provision of information technology (mentioned by 17/22 participants (77.3%));
- The investment in library materials (other than ICT, mentioned by 13/22 participants (59.1%));
- The hiring and development of knowledgeable, helpful staff (mentioned by 13/22 participants (59.1%));
- The investment made in library buildings and structures (mentioned by 9/22 participants (40.9%)); and ultimately,
- The value placed on libraries by KZN community members and leaders, library administrators, and legislators (mentioned by 9/22 participants (40.9%)).

Each of these variables are presented in more depth with supporting findings below.

***6.2.2.1. The importance of the provision of information technology by libraries was mentioned by 17 of 22 participants (77.3%).***

This study found that participants believed investment in information technology in libraries is a key to their success and to the development of the KZN community. A majority of participants (17/22, 77.3%) mentioned the importance of access to computers and internet at their public libraries. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, the prohibitively high cost of internet access on mobile phones, at home, and in internet cafés in KZN prompted participants to depend upon their local library for free access. Libraries should increase investments in information technology if only to encourage more community members to visit the library; internet and computer users may then also be encouraged to use the library's other materials and services.

The table below summarises some of the main responses regarding technology in Felixton and eNseleni libraries.

**Table 15: Comments Regarding Information Technology in KZN Public Library Development**

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Response</b>
R2	<i>...the internet sometimes it's not in good order so sometimes we find it offline or it's very slow when you find there are many people waiting to use the internet but the pitch of it is very slow so you end up not getting the chance to use it.</i>
R4	<i>[The library needs] a faxing machine. [Also] laminating a document. Also you see the computers aren't enough so sometimes you get a limited time. You wish you could stay for two hours but you've got to make way for others...</i>
R9	<i>We are supposed to have seven [computers in the library]. The seventh one is for the Cyber [Cadet] but one's motherboard is damaged. It needs to be fixed and so we are waiting for the next financial year. So as it is, we do have five computers that is [sic] working and one is for small kids.</i>
R23	<i>...to improve here in the library... put more computers in order to have a lot of time to be at a computer. But now you have a short time to work. Somebody will come in and you're supposed to move so others can come to the computer, to use the computer.</i>

**Source:** Field Data (2011)



One participant in particular understood the significance of information technology in KZN and South Africa today and the importance of the library enabling access to the internet and computers with the following anecdote:

You see, we had no Facebook, we had no phones, we had no TV games, computer games. There was nothing. You wanted to play, your parents would tell you, “Go out and check the cows...” and that’s what we did. But we enjoyed it; it was our time. It’s their time now... There’s an eight-year-old kid, he comes to the library every day after school. He knows so much about computers, that I, I just couldn’t believe it, you know? He’s eight and he’s telling you there’s a motherboard in there. How does he know? When there are 35-year-old people that doesn’t [*sic*] even know what a motherboard is... It’s their time, it’s their time. (Field Data, 2011).

Document analysis revealed that with support from the provincial government, libraries in uMhlathuze have been able to offer minimal access to information technology to community members. According to KZN Annual Reports, all of the uMhlathuze libraries except Ngwelezana were fully computerised in 2003-2004, with eSikhaleni, Brackenham, and Enseleni going live that fiscal year (City of uMhlathuze, 2004:17). The KZN Public Library Service (PLS) assisted in this initiative so that the libraries could better track materials, circulation, interlibrary loans, etc. In 2003-2004, the KZN PLS was assessing Ngwelezana’s ability to upgrade to the automated system but they did receive the 3M security system from the KZN PLS that was standard in the other uMhlathuze libraries (City of uMhlathuze, 2004:17). It was reported in 2004-2005 that computers were purchased for Ngwelezana, although the library’s automated system was not fully operational there until October 2007 (City of uMhlathuze, 2008:12). To increase service standards to the public throughout uMhlathuze, during the 2007-2008 fiscal year the KZN PLS

provided six computers to each library for public use. In addition, free internet access was provided at Empangeni, Ngwelezana, eSikhaleni, and eNseleni Libraries (City of uMhlathuze, 2008:12).<sup>46</sup> According to that year's Annual Report, all uMhlathuze libraries were provided computers with internet service and Cyber Cadets during the 2008-2009 year (City of uMhlathuze, 2009:30). During 2009-2010, uMhlathuze was chosen as the KZN community in which to launch new open source library system technology that was in line with the national IT strategy. The previous library system, Public Application Library System (PALS), was replaced by Brocade which, while not open source itself, is based on an open source database and interfaces with open source products (City of uMhlathuze, 2010:46). Brocade improved user experience by offering access to one's library record (including fines, materials checked out, etc.) and to the entire provincial library catalog. It is noted in the 2010-2013 reports that the use of the computers and internet is free but users must pay to print documents (City of uMhlathuze, 2010:93, 2011:58, 2012:94, 2013:91). While the document analysis shows positive investments in technology in KZN libraries, this study also found that library users and staff find the provision of information technology inadequate at best and believe increased investments in this area to be of primary importance.

***6.2.2.2. The importance of investment in library materials other than information technology was mentioned by 13 of 22 participants (59.1%) in KZN.***

According to participants in this study, investing in resources other than information technology is another important variable in the development of libraries and the larger uMhlathuze community. Information technology was discussed above, so this variable includes investment in

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<sup>46</sup> This report did not mention the hiring of Cyber Cadets when computers were added to the libraries. It is now regular practice for the libraries to have one or two Cyber Cadets on staff to assist users with computer use and internet skills.

other resources such as books, especially tertiary books, magazines, newspapers, and audiovisual materials. Over half of participants (13/22, 59.1%) indicated they found these resources to be important in meeting their information needs and they appreciated that they were freely offered by their local libraries. Libraries offering current, relevant resources in local languages can see an increase in use and thus on the potential alleviation of information inequality and poverty in a community. The following table lists a sampling of responses regarding the provision of non-ICT resources in the two case study libraries.

**Table 16: Comments Regarding Investment of Information Resources in KZN Public Libraries**

Participant #	Response
R6	<i>I think they could provide more books. We have books but we need more books. Sometimes we at [sic] school, the teachers give us work and...we can write the same thing, maybe we are 26 in the class, we write the same thing and the teacher [tells us] we are copying. So I think we can be provided with many books and the computers.</i>
R7	<i>Sometimes we have a shortage of books. Sometimes at school all of the class learn mathematics so when we come [to the library] we'll find another student using [the book we all need] so we have to wait until they're done and then we can take the book out. So the books are insufficient, yes.</i>
R7	<i>...the teacher had given us a physics exercise, then I came here looking for [information]. They told us the books are not here. [The] books were at Richards Bay Library... so then I had to go there.</i>

R8	<i>I like the books [but] some of the books are old... Or sometimes you come and you find there's a lot of people doing the same assignments...and there's not enough books.</i>
R9	<i>We are not having enough resources, I can say that. I think we have tried a lot. Because...we do have some local schools here, high schools, now we do have some study guides and some of the tertiary books, and also the reference section. And then also they do use the computers to find the relevant information although sometimes...they should supplement with information from books.</i>
R14	<i>...tertiary books are very limited too. Especially for engineering courses we have less books.</i>
R17	<i>We don't actually have university books. We've only got up to high school. So when people from the university, because there is a university not far from here..., when they come here and they ask for study books... we say, "Sorry, we don't have that." So we can't pay for anything past school age. There is the internet if they really, really need something. They tend to want to study from their textbooks.</i>
R17	<i>We actually don't get a budget to do projects; we used to but with the municipality cutting, it's one of the things they cut as well.</i>

Source: Field Data (2011)

***6.2.2.3. The hiring and development of knowledgeable, helpful staff was also mentioned as important to library use by 13 of 22 participants (59.1%).***

A beautiful library building is almost useless without a knowledgeable staff employed to assist users. It is imperative that libraries employ staff that have education, training, and experience in library and information science, technology, and positive customer service skills. Interview data analysed indicated that experiences with library staff can have a positive influence on a community member's continued use of and benefit from the library. During the interview process, over half of participants (13/22, 59.1%) commented on the importance and utility of the librarians, Cyber Cadets, and other staff. Most participants interviewed for this study voiced appreciation of librarians and other staff for their assistance, support, and knowledge. They recognised the positive experiences they have with library staff and appreciate their kindness and expertise. Library staff who were interviewed valued the professional development opportunities they received, whether they were in the form of on-the-job training, LIS classes, or other training sessions held at the municipal or provincial level. At least one library staff member recognised the hiring qualifications had been raised throughout the years which made it more difficult to be hired or promoted without a library degree. With or without a formal library science degree, well-trained, patient, and helpful library staff can go a long way to alleviating the information inequality and poverty of an individual by not only assisting them in locating, evaluating, and using needed information but also by teaching them the information and digital literacy skills they need to accomplish these tasks on their own. Listed below is a sampling of participant comments regarding library staffing.

**Table 17: Comments Regarding Investment in KZN Library Staffing**

Participant #	Response
R2	<i>...the librarians are [very] helpful in anything you inquire of them. They don't just look at you and sit down, they help you, they are interested in doing their job, they love their job. So even if you have a problem with a computer, they guy whose working...can assist you in anything you want to do. The atmosphere here, it's nice.</i>
R3	<i>It doesn't take [children] long [to understand how to use computers]. It doesn't but they get hiccups here and there and that's what I'm there for...</i>
R6	<i>I appreciate the way [the library staff] treat us. They treat us very well and when we come here, we feel comfortable, more than comfortable, the way they act, they know their job. They really know their job and they treat us good [sic].</i>
R9	<i>[The Cyber Cadet's] job is to train the people who don't know how to use the computer, take them step by step, even the adult ones and the young ones. And also to help the people who want to have CVs, some of them don't know how to type the CV...so he do [sic] help them. Others, they are looking for different projects...others want to create emails, he must help them. It's a paid position.</i>
R14	<i>The librarian has helped me [learn] what everything is. And I also went for training in Richards Bay.</i>

R15	<i>[The librarian] is teaching me. We did modules in information science, so I was quite clued up on how the library works because I've also done in-service training at the University of Zululand.</i>
R17	<i>There's a lot of ladies [working in libraries] that aren't qualified. I think a few years back they weren't too bothered but [they're] becoming more strict on it.</i>

Source: Field Data (2011)

#### ***6.2.2.4. The importance of KZN library buildings and structures was mentioned by 9 of 22 participants (40.9%).***

Analysis of interviews revealed that 9 of 22 participants (40.9%) mentioned library buildings, structures, and spaces in favorable ways. Many of these users found the library space more comfortable and quieter than other spaces available to them; this was especially valuable to students. A well-lit, temperature-controlled building with tables and chairs is very appealing. Those libraries that offer meeting rooms available for reservation can be of particular benefit to local community groups, government agencies, and non-profit organizations. If these spaces bring community members into the library, individuals will be more likely to discover the other useful services and resources, thus increasing the chance of information inequality and poverty alleviation. According to a 2011 interview, KZN Provincial Library Administrator Carol Slater stated that the province had built 16 new libraries in rural areas since 1994 (Carol Slater, 2011, personal communication). These were beautiful, high quality buildings that cost between R16 and R20 million each to construct (Carol Slater, 2011, personal communication). While improvements have been made in KZN in existing library buildings and new libraries have been

built, budget cuts in recent years have slowed new KZN library construction to one or two a year despite receiving some fifty applications for new libraries from communities a month (Carol Slater, 2011, personal communication). Most participants in this study spoke about the need for more libraries and bigger libraries. They specifically suggested adding community meeting rooms and the possibility of growing more partnerships with private companies in order to fund expansions and other library improvements. The table below lists a sampling of participant comments regarding the investment in library development in KZN.

**Table 18: Comments Regarding Investment in KZN Library Structure Development**

Participant #	Response
R3	<i>[The library] could've gotten sponsorships from companies around Richards Bay [but the municipality rejected this idea]. There are so many companies that would like a chance to invest in educating community members, especially in rural areas. It would promote them, their businesses, getting involved in...community. ... [and] it would've made life easier for these people.</i>
R9	<i>Sometimes we do [lose electricity in the library]. ...Perhaps twice a month but if there is no electricity at all so the library becomes dark then we'll be forced to say to the people, "Okay it is dark, you can't continue to use the library."</i>
R9	<i>... [the library] can get overcrowded especially [after school hours], so the future is that I wish [the library] can be extended and then I wish that KZN province can put more computers for us. I wish that they can add more</i>



	<i>facilities like...the community room. Because...each and every day that room is booked. Because it's busy, it's the only place where they can hold their meetings.</i>
R14	<i>...the space is too small to accommodate all the community and the kids.</i>
R16	<i>We need to extend the library because it is too small.</i>

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

If government bodies, private companies, or non-profit organisations recognise the value of libraries for development of their communities, they are more likely to invest in building new libraries, refurbishing existing structures, or investigating information-providing library alternatives. Document analysis in this study revealed that there is some consistent investment being made in uMhlathuze libraries by the city council and the KZN Public Library Service (PLS). For example, the need for increased space led the KZN PLS to provide R465 000 in funding towards the approximately R740 000 total cost to expand Empangeni Library's study area in June 2005 (City of uMhlathuze, 2005:14). Likewise, Felixton Library cost a total of R1 472 617 to complete, a portion of which was subsidised by the KZN PLS (City of uMhlathuze, 2009:30).<sup>47</sup> During 2012-2013, new carpets were provided in Richards Bay, Empangeni, and Enseleni Libraries and the furniture was replaced in Richards Bay (City of uMhlathuze, 2013:91). Despite these investments, there are still too few libraries in KZN to meet community information needs and more investment in this area is necessary.

In light of the expense of building new libraries and the decrease in library funding, alternatives to traditional library models must be considered. The findings of this study suggest that some

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<sup>47</sup> At the time of this most current updates to this thesis in 2016, the exchange rate was 1 USD = R 16.5744.

KZN library staff and users realise that libraries are not meeting the information needs of many community members and thus new ideas and models for information delivery may be more successful than traditional libraries. It is also important to recall the colonial history of the traditional idea of library-as-place as mentioned in Chapter 2 and recognise that this idea may not be the best fit for the entire world, especially in impoverished or developing areas. For instance, despite the common belief that libraries should play a role in promoting reading and literacy, it has also been argued that the Western model of libraries does not adequately meet the needs of African communities because of its dismissal of oral traditions (Amadi, 1981; Alemna, 1995; Nyana, 2009). While not a primary focus of this study, it can be fairly determined from illiteracy rates, demographics, etc. that some communities, especially in more rural parts of South Africa, could still be in need of oral sources of knowledge. Libraries in these areas must consider information provision models that take into account the constituents they aim to serve, their traditions, ways of communication, and ways of knowing in order to be successful.

There are many non-traditional ideas that have been explored to meet the needs of the unique communities which they serve. Often these are grassroots efforts that evolve from the needs of the people. A deeper discussion of library alternatives will be presented in Chapter 8 but provided here are some comments from eNseleni and Felixton participants concerning their suggestions for changes to their existing libraries or ideas for alternatives to traditional libraries, mostly in the form of mobile libraries. KZN does have some mobile libraries available to communities, mostly in rural areas but opinions are split on whether or not they are efficient, effective solutions to the inability to build permanent library structures.

**Table 19: Comments Regarding Library Improvements or Alternatives in KZN**

Participant #	Response
R3	<i>...I did some research on starting a project like mobile libraries. Now the community that actually come to the library is maybe about 75% township guys. The rural people, they don't really get the time to come to the library. It's expensive, they have to take buses and taxis. So it's not really that easy for them to come to the library. Now if we had a mobile library, I thought it might help out...Take the books from the library, we even take these computers and take them to the communities...I do see a need for it. A big one.</i>
R8	<i>...they could sometimes give us the opportunity to sit and talk with the librarians. Tell them what we want to be done. Not for them to do something that they think is good for us, no. I think we should have information books where you put ideas about how we can upgrade our library and things like that.</i>
R9	<i>Recently there were people from the Agricultural Department; they [came here] to distribute seeds. They [asked the library] to accommodate them so that they can distribute their seeds [to community members].</i>
R9	<i>Another thing that is done by the library...we do train the [library] students from the university... We show them how to deal with the people, how to use the library, how to capture information, how to load the books in the computer.<sup>48</sup></i>

<sup>48</sup> Students in library school have been placed in KZN libraries in the past for internships, fieldwork, etc.

R9	<i>[Rural kids] that are outside the township, they do have a problem with the transport. Who [is going to] give them the money to pay for the transport? ...some teachers have mentioned the idea [of having] a mobile library. It's difficult because [the municipality and the province] don't have enough funds for that.</i>
R13	<i>I think everyone deserves to know, deserves information. Since they are not aware about how important is the library, I think you should take the library to them... I think we should take the library to them.</i>
R14	<i>I think they should introduce mobile libraries. So we can go to [the rural communities]. They are very poor and they cannot afford to take a taxi to here every time or to town every time so I think mobile libraries would be okay.</i>
R15	<i>[Many people] just come here for the internet. That is why the library also made a rule that if you want to use the internet you must take a book first. At least two books.</i>
R15	<i>I had an idea...my thought would be to have maybe a room [in the library] where [youth] could go in and watch DVDs. Because although there are DVDs that the patrons can take home, some of them don't have the material to actually watch those DVDs. And especially since the children are not allowed to take the DVDs, it's only for adults. [Offer] not just the computers or the books, some other sort of entertainment that can keep them off the streets.</i>

R24	<i>I'd like to see the computer section and the library interacting, finding a common goal like having projects that will show that the computer section is working together with the library so that we won't have a situation whereby people won't be reading books anymore, just be using the computers for everything. Just find a common ground to keep both of the entities equally important.</i>
R24	<i>You've got to find something to draw them in...Sometimes the environment is too stiff for a child to just easily come in. So we need to find some things that we invite them with and then once they're here we can [encourage reading books].</i>

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

**6.2.2.5. All of the participants (22/22, 100%) agreed that libraries were important in KZN but only nine of the 22 participants (40.9%) mentioned the value placed on libraries by other KZN community members and leaders, library administrators, and legislators.**

When asked if libraries were important in communities, every interviewee (22/22, 100%) responded affirmatively and enthusiastically. Less than half (9/22, 40.9%) of participants interviewed for this study mentioned others (legislators, community leaders, etc.) valuing libraries or the information and services they provide. It is important to remember that all participants in this study were library users; they were interviewed about their use of the library so it should not be surprising that they all found the library to be a valuable resource in the community. It can be hypothesised that if non-users in the community were asked this question, they may respond differently. This is supported by the fact that less than half of participants

mentioned the value placed on libraries by those other than themselves during the interview process. From the data analysis, it is clear that the most important variable in the investment and development of libraries, their materials, and their services is recognising their value. As understanding of what libraries can do in the community increases, so does their perceived value. As value increases, so too could investment, which would only have positive effects on the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in a community. Overall, participants in both eNseleni and Felixton felt that the libraries were of great benefit to their communities. While they may not have been able to express the formal role of libraries in community development, they were able to point to specific areas in which the library has helped them, which increased the perception of their value. For instance, they appreciated that they could use the computers and internet for free at the library and were grateful for an alternative to fee-based internet cafés. Others appreciated that the libraries allowed them access to information and thus increased their knowledge and learning opportunities. Participants acknowledged they benefit from the books and appreciated that the libraries promoted a reading culture in their community. They pointed to the helpful and knowledgeable staff as key to the success of the libraries and mentioned they found their libraries easy to use. Some participants appreciated the physical space available for them to use, either for meetings, reading and studying, or just hanging out with friends. The buildings are safe, quiet, and comfortable. The findings of the study revealed that to most participants, the library has come to represent the pursuit of knowledge, the opening of the mind, the raising of expectations, and the improvement of self and community. Those interviewed for this study were people using the library and thus those who already felt the library was valuable to them and their community. Future research on this topic should seek to investigate why other

community members do not use the library or see its value in their lives. A sampling of responses regarding the value of libraries in KZN are included in the table below.

**Table 20: Comments Regarding the Value of KZN Public Libraries**

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Response</b>
R2	<i>[The library] is an important resource in our community. Without it, we wouldn't have access to the internet, access to the information that is in books... so it's a source of knowledge...</i>
R7	<i>[The library is important to the community] because sometimes it gives more than you expected, mostly to us as youth.</i>
R10	<i>Yes, [the library] is very important because you find some things that you don't know here.</i>
R13	<i>The library I think is the cornerstone of our life like if in most cases we need something, it's easy to get it from the library. ...the librarians are very useful.</i>
R18	<i>[What I like most about the library is] reading and getting information and just to open your mind. So keep reading things and then you will know more things if you come to the library.</i>

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

***6.2.3. Finding 3: KZN libraries can play important roles in alleviating information inequality and poverty, primarily by continuing to provide free access to computers and internet and other information resources.***

When investigating the roles of KZN libraries in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty, it was found that 20 of 22 participants (90.9%) indicated that providing free access to information resources, the internet, and computers was the primary role of the local library. The analysis of study data revealed two additional main library roles. The provision of helpful staff and their teaching of information and digital literacy skills were indicated by 13 of 22 participants (59.1%) as an important role of libraries. Finally, outreach efforts, programming, and partnerships were mentioned as important library roles by nine of 22 participants (40.9%). The importance placed on these roles by library users reveals ways that libraries might attract community members to the library in effort to alleviate local information inequality and poverty. This finding answers Research Question 3. Questions 3, 6, 9, and 10 on the Community Member interview guide address this topic as do questions 7, 9, 10, and 12 on the Library Staff interview guide. An analysis of relevant literature and uMhlathuze Annual Reports also give insight into this issue.

The following are variables included in the analysis of library roles in information inequality and poverty alleviation in KZN:

- The provision of free access to information resources, internet, and computers;
- Teaching of information and digital literacy skills by knowledgeable staff; and
- Library outreach efforts, services, programming, and partnerships.



These variables are addressed in more depth in the following sections.

***6.2.3.1. When investigating the role of libraries in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty, it was found that 20 of 22 (90.9%) participants indicated that providing free access to information resources, the internet, and computer was the primary role of the local library.***

One major role of all libraries around the world is providing free access to information and KZN library users understand the importance of this role and acknowledged this in their interviews. It was clear from the interviews conducted at the case study libraries that the cost of accessing information is an issue in KZN. Community members value and use the public library to access needed information largely because it is free to do so. Nevertheless, if the library is found to not be able to provide free access to the information sought, then libraries would lose standing in the community. It is thus very important for libraries in uMhlathuze to focus on providing information that is relevant and appropriate to community members.

Access in KZN can take many forms and the types of information vary by community and individual. It was noted in the 2003-2004 KZN Annual Report that a shift was taking place in the role of the libraries; previously the libraries were used more for leisure reading and activities but by 2004, they had become more populated by learners who used them to study, to use technology, and to receive reference assistance (City of uMhlathuze, 2004). One of the primary purposes of Felixton Library is to serve people in outlying rural areas of uMhlathuze who previously had no access to library facilities within walking distance (City of uMhlathuze, 2008). According to 2011-2013 KZN reports, providing tertiary books was a growing focus of uMhlathuze libraries due to the fact that many students could not afford to buy them on their

own (City of uMhlathuze, 2011, 2012, 2013). Participants interviewed at case study sites also indicated the importance of libraries providing them access to resources to which they normally would not have. A sampling of responses regarding access are provided in the table below.

**Table 21: Comments Regarding Provision of Access to Information in KZN Public Libraries**

Participant #	Response
R5	<i>In the case of the internet, here, it's free. It's free...but at the internet café, you'll find that you pay...maybe [you've] got a very important thing to do on the internet but don't have the money to go to an internet café so libraries are very important.</i>
R7	<i>Like today they have given us a history oral project. So I had to come here and get the information from the librarian and the internet... Maybe even some things you don't understand, you do find books here that will make us understand things better than our teacher explained to us.</i>
R8	<i>Most of the time, it's the library [we go to for information] because it's free...and there's more time [you] get and like at the internet cafés, you have to pay for a minute and here you do not pay for the minutes...</i>

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

**6.2.3.2. The provision of helpful staff who teach information and digital literacy skills was indicated by 13 of 22 participants (59.1%) as an important role of libraries.**

This study showed that library users feel another important role of KZN libraries is to provide knowledgeable, kind staff who can instruct them on digital and information literacy skills. Over

half of participants (13/22, 59.1%) indicated the importance of a helpful staff in improving their information and digital literacy skills as well as their understanding the value of libraries and reading. While they did not use the terms *information literacy* or *digital literacy* specifically, they spoke about learning to use computers, internet, write CVs, apply for jobs online, use newspapers to find employment, evaluate resources, and more. These skills are extremely important and can go a long way to addressing information inequality and poverty in the KZN community.

In the 2006-2007 KZN Annual Report, libraries are referred to as “universities of the poor” and the vision for uMhlathuze libraries was expressed as supporting the education and critical thinking skills of the community, as well as encouraging a reading culture (City of uMhlathuze, 2007:10). According to the 2009-2010 KZN Annual Report, uMhlathuze was shifting its focus to increasing citizen access to technology through libraries. It is noted that increased access to technology would allow South African users to develop necessary skills, such as using email and the internet to find relevant, current information. It would also improve education for students, including distance learning opportunities.<sup>49</sup> It is clear from the 2010-2013 annual reports that Cyber Cadets were very busy, especially with teaching residents how to use the computers and internet.<sup>50</sup> Many people look for research help in uMhlathuze libraries but also for assistance with using computers and internet service to send email and search for employment (uMhlathuze, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013). Evident throughout the reports analysed is the outlook that not only do library staff contribute positively to the quality of life of community members

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<sup>49</sup> It is noted in the 2009-2010 Annual Report that Brackenhams Library did not provide access to computers and internet but previous reports indicated it had. It is not clear from the report why Brackenhams no longer offered these services but this seems to be the case through the latest available (2012-2013) report.

<sup>50</sup> As noted earlier, computers and Cyber Cadets are available in all of the libraries except Brackenhams as of the 2012-2013 Annual Report.

but that they are vital to community development and improvement. This is a valuable role according to participants interviewed as well. The table below provides a sampling of responses regarding KZN library staff roles in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty.

**Table 22: Comments Regarding the Role of Public Library Staff in the Alleviation of Information Inequality and Poverty in KZN**

Participant #	Response
R3	<i>...developing the community is what would make me happy. Having all these kids not play in the streets, not get into drugs, come into the library, use the computers, use the facilities they have. That would make me happy. And delivering a good service to the community, that's what I want.</i>
R9	<i>[The library emphasises] that as [the schoolchildren] are young, they are supposed to like to read whatever is in front of them, especially the newspapers. Even if it's written in isiZulu or in English, they should read them.</i>
R9	<i>We do expose them to the Cyber Cadet, that you can become a Cyber Cadet. You can search the information for the people, show them how to use the computer, show them how to surf the information...you can be able to program the computer to do different things.</i>
R9	<i>It's the kids...we are building the new nation. We motivate them...I think that these kids that we are building, they are the ones that will be able to</i>

	<i>use the public libraries. At the end you have that eagerness of reading the book.</i>
R14	<i>The young adults and older people, they should come here regularly because they must learn how to do their CVs. We cannot do their CVs every time, so they should learn to do their CVs on their own and search for jobs on their own, do a lot of things via internet, and also take out books.</i>
R18	<i>The library is important...to get information you use [and] you come here to get that information and just to read. And the computer they are teaching, they just show you how to do it, the computer, because it's very much important nowadays to just know how to use a computer.</i>
R23	<i>[The library] is important to our community because they open our minds. They give us a different knowledge that [we don't] have before. Yes, it's very important.</i>
R24	<i>We try to make the computer section interact with the library. Like say for instance instead of looking for that recipe [online], I'll maybe recommend a book...so that we can improve both the library and the use of the computers. We try...and encourage them to look for information on the internet but at the same time use the books so that you can encourage and improve your reading.</i>
R24	<i>The main role [of the library] I would say is to assist the community in looking for jobs...I encourage them to type [their CVs] for themselves, then I can come and correct the mistakes...I also run classes for MS</i>

	<i>Suite, Excel, how to use the internet, for somebody who has never used a computer before.</i>
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**Source:** Field Data (2011)

***6.2.3.3. KZN library outreach efforts, services, programming, and partnerships were mentioned as important library roles by 9 of 22 participants (40.9%).***

The last major role of libraries in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN was found to be outreach to community members by offering a variety of services, programming, and partnerships. These initiatives will vary by library according to the needs of the community and the resources available to the library but community partnerships can be extremely beneficial in offering these services. The analysis of uMhlathuze's Annual Reports revealed the many services provided by the libraries and some of the partnerships that exist among libraries as well as between libraries and other community groups, businesses, or government entities. One service provided to library users is the physical space in which they can study, read, use computers, or socialise. The libraries provide space that is warm in the winter and cool in the summer, comfortable furniture, good lighting, and quiet that many cannot get in the close quarters of home. As mentioned earlier, some of the libraries have space in which meetings can be held; these may be separate rooms or the availability of the library after-hours. Traditional library services are provided, such as reader's advisory, reference help, and circulation of materials. Resources offered by the libraries include local and national newspapers, popular magazines, audiovisual materials, reference books, tertiary-level books, children's books, fiction, and non-fiction. Computer and internet skills instruction, including how to create a curriculum vita (CV) or résumé, is also provided. Some of the libraries have televisions and DVD players as

well as headphones for patrons to watch films. Most create interesting displays and exhibits to educate and inform the public about topics such as HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, child abuse, literacy, Zulu culture and crafts, water awareness, and Library Week, to name a few. In 2011-2012, a toy library was created at eSikhaleni and the library also began to offer gaming; it was reported that both were very popular (City of uMhlathuze, 2012:94).

Often KZN libraries will observe provincial or national events and offer holiday programming to keep children occupied and off the streets during breaks from school. For example, the national library theme during the 2008-2009 fiscal year was “Access for all @ Your Library” and uMhlathuze libraries focused on improving access to illiterate, disabled, and rural people in the community (City of uMhlathuze, 2009:30). To support the growth of a reading culture, uMhlathuze libraries participated in the “Read and Grow” campaign which was initiated by the KZN PLS that year and encouraged children to read and explore literature and learning (City of uMhlathuze, 2007:10). The campaign continued at all uMhlathuze libraries except Brackenham and Felixton and holiday programs were offered to keep children busy during school breaks (City of uMhlathuze, 2008:12). While these programs can be highly beneficial to learners, evidence from this study showed concern over the lack of ties between KZN libraries and local schools. The need for increased ties between libraries and schools will be addressed further in Chapter 8.

While some are able to offer more than others, this study revealed that all uMhlathuze libraries are committed to providing educational opportunities and relevant services to their communities but that because overall value and investments in libraries are too low, these services are lacking. A sampling of responses from interviewees is included in the table below.

**Table 23: Comments Regarding KZN Library Outreach, Services, Programming, and Partnerships**

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Response</b>
R9	<i>We do library orientation with [the local schoolchildren]. It's nine schools. ...we lay the background for the library. They should know the policies when they enter the library, what they are supposed to do, and then we tell them which libraries they can use, which kinds of books they can use to read for pleasure and for finding information. Then we also tell them...what is needed from them if they want to become library users or to have the library card. We tell them the duration of the books they borrowed is 14 days...they mustn't bring it late or... they can be charged fines. Then it's very important that they should never touch the books with their dirty hands and they should never take the pictures from the books and that they should take care of the books.</i>
R9	<i>The thing that is frustrating us is that the teacher does not consult us telling us what kind of project we should prepare [for] the children. So we ... hear the project from the kids when they arrive here. So we always said to the teacher, "Please inform us about the project you are going to run so that we can be able to prepare...so that every kid will be having access [to] that particular information."</i>
R9	<i>[Some] business people...they do hold their bookings there...they can hold their meetings. And then it can be people from health department. We do offer them that room so that people they do come and then do their [health screenings]. Every Friday they do have some meetings</i>



	<i>where they discuss the issues about the people that are living with HIV and others they call them the support groups. ...there are people that always have their church services in that room. And then we also have the study room in the other section.</i>
R14	<i>We do displays every month. That's what we do to promote our library and there is also a newspaper for the municipality [in which we advertise].</i>
R15	<i>I think maybe the library should also participate in having campaigns. To organise campaigns where they go out, not just stay indoors all the time. They go out maybe into a certain town and just pass information to the people... So I think that the library [should have] campaigns to reach out, even in the rural place and reach out to them. Teach them about things...maybe if it's once a week, they maybe have a topic, they go to that area, they talk about it...I think it would help a lot if the library goes out, not always be based indoors, to have campaigns outside, even in the rural areas as well.</i>
R17	<i>It's very difficult to reach out to the people of [the rural areas]. When the library opened up the schools came. We invited the schools to the opening and we also had fixed classes for them where the children from the secondary school would come for lessons. But then they found the school had problems with transport so they actually fell away.</i>
R17	<i>[There is] not much [outreach to older generations]. Most people are working. In the beginning, we don't [sic] open on a Saturday. But then</i>

	<i>a lot of people came and asked...so we started opening up on Saturday as well to cater for them.</i>
R17	<i>[The library] is where [kids] also get together...our carpark is just cement block and sometimes they play football there. And then they also got [sic] the jungle gym so they get together.</i>
R24	<i>We give [a local rural school]... a slot on Friday. If they want to bring in the kids that do not normally come to the library after school, we allow them to bring the kids and then we teach them how to use the internet, how to use the computers. So we [are] trying to reach people that do not come.</i>

Source: Field Data (2011)

**6.2.4. Finding 4: Community members were primarily using the case study libraries for access to internet and computers and their biggest challenge to library use was when this access was disrupted.**

Understanding community library use and the challenges to this use is important in the investigation of how KZN libraries can alleviate information inequality and poverty. By observing and understanding how community members are using the library (or why they are not), librarians will be able to connect with the KZN community in relevant, useful, and effective ways to address any issues.

This finding answers Research Question 4 which addresses how KZN community members are using libraries and their perceived challenges to this use. Questions 17, 26, 27, and 28 on the questionnaire address library use as well as Community Member interview questions 2-5 and 7-9

and Library Staff interview questions 8-9. Observations as well as analysis of literature and KZN Annual Reports also support this investigation.

Overwhelmingly, participants were using the case study libraries for access to internet and computers (18/22, 82%). Other reasons participants provided for using the libraries were:

- To check out books (15/22, 68.2%);
- For assistance with schoolwork (14/22, 63.6%);
- Use of other materials in the library, such as magazines and newspapers (13/22, 59.1%);  
and
- For help finding or preparing for employment opportunities (11/22, 50%).

While on the internet, participants usually completed schoolwork or searched for employment. Some liked to play games while others wanted to check their email. Those who used the computers to search for work also created résumés and CVs. These participants also indicated that they used local newspapers to look for work, while others liked to read newspapers and magazines in order to keep up with current events, sports, and politics. Participants also indicated they checked out books and audiovisual materials or just used the space to study. eNseleni has two big meeting room spaces and so often people came into the building to attend meetings and then also stopped at the library. Felixton does offer use of their space after hours but does not have separate meeting room facilities. Several participants mentioned using the library for the helpful staff of librarians, assistants, and Cyber Cadets, and some went to the library to receive instruction on computer and internet usage.

The 2003-2004 KZN Annual Report indicated that library halls and meeting rooms were widely used by groups such as the Red Cross and arts and crafts groups, as well as for HIV/AIDS

counseling, business meetings, local sports development, and community leadership trainings (City of uMhlathuze, 2004:17). While in the beginning Felixton was not computerised as the other uMhlathuze libraries were, there was a photocopier, reference materials, and study space available for patrons. The library was also available after-hours upon request for community meetings (City of uMhlathuze, 2008:12).

With ICT access being the primary use of libraries, it is not surprising that this study revealed that most participants (13/22, 59.1%) indicated their greatest challenge with using the library was dealing with issues that arose from use (or lack thereof) of information technology. When asked to enumerate things that frustrate them about the library and things they would change if they could, almost every participant in this study mentioned information technology. Some complained about the lack of computers and thus, the length of time one had to wait in order to use them. Then once one's turn came about, there was a time limit to use the computer, which was not popular with participants either, even though they seemed to realize the necessity of these rules. Also unpopular was the slow speed of the internet. One participant pointed out that the library was lacking some technology that would be useful for patrons such as a fax machine and a laminating machine. The same patron also was disappointed by the fact that more than once he wanted to use a book to learn more about computer software and the disk which should have accompanied the book was missing.

Other challenges to using the library included:

- Limited understanding of the value of libraries and what they can do to help community members with needs in daily life (9/22, 40.9%);

- Distance from library and/or expense or trouble to get to the nearest library (8/22, 36.4%);
- Cultural beliefs about libraries, information, problem solving, and privacy (8/22, 36.4%); and
- Library hours that prohibit community members from going to the library before or after work, on weekends, etc. (7/22, 31.8%).

Data analysis of interviews also indicated that some users perceived there was a lack of understanding that libraries can provide assistance and information to improve people's lives. This lack of understanding and value deterred many community members from exploring the library for solutions to life's daily issues. Some people related they found it difficult to get to the nearest library. KZN does not have enough libraries to meet the needs of all the people, especially those in rural areas. If they want to use the library, they need to travel long distances and/or be able to pay for transportation and these are not feasible options for many. Also mentioned by participants as deterrents to library use by about one-third of participants respectively were the cultural taboos against asking for help or making private issues public, as well as short open hours that prohibit library visitation for many workers. By understanding the challenges, libraries can work to meet the needs of community members and encourage increased library use in order to decrease information inequality and poverty in KZN.

Figures for library membership and use included in the uMhlathuze Annual Reports were also analysed for this research. In 2003-2004, it was estimated that 1 000 students were using uMhlathuze libraries as study facilities daily and the following year indicated the continued popularity of the library among students (City of uMhlathuze, 2004:17). Felixton Library serves "a huge area of the surrounding rural areas" and its membership, which began at 200, quickly

grew 90% that year to 379 (City of uMhlathuze, 2009:30). During fiscal years 2011 and 2013, Saturdays were reported as the busiest days (uMhlathuze, 2011:58; 2013:91). The analysis of data included those provided by the libraries in Annual Reports included figures regarding circulation, visitors, and membership of the (now, seven) public libraries in uMhlathuze. The findings are shown in the figures below.<sup>51</sup> The data have not been combined because it is helpful to see the information side by side to make comparisons and identify outliers. Data for all uMhlathuze libraries are depicted and then figures are duplicated but with only eNseleni and Felixton data included. Because of the sizeable difference between larger libraries in uMhlathuze and smaller ones like eNseleni and Felixton, it is easier to see circulation, visitor, and member statistics of the two case study libraries on their own.

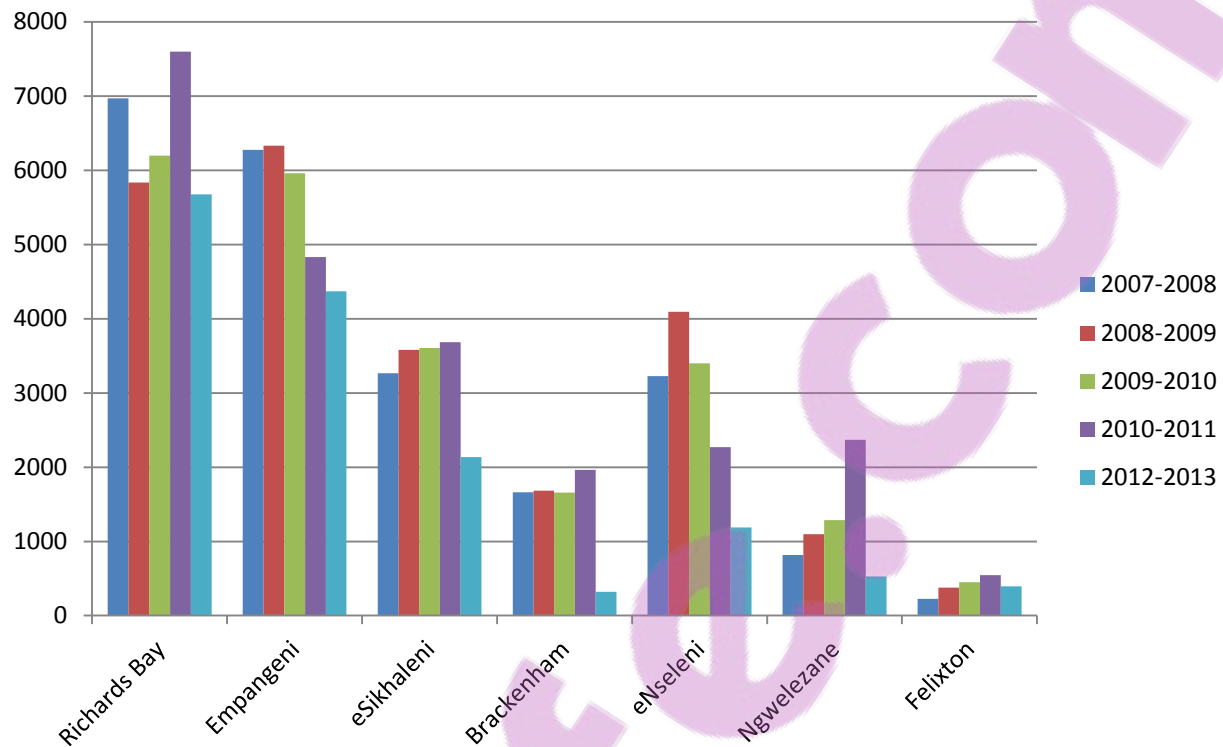
First, figures depicting library membership:

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<sup>51</sup> Recall that statistics for 2005-2006 and 2011-2012 fiscal years were unavailable at the time analysis was conducted. uMhlathuze Annual Reports can be found online at:  
[http://www.umhlathuze.gov.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=20:annual-report&catid=29:finance&Itemid=101](http://www.umhlathuze.gov.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=20:annual-report&catid=29:finance&Itemid=101)

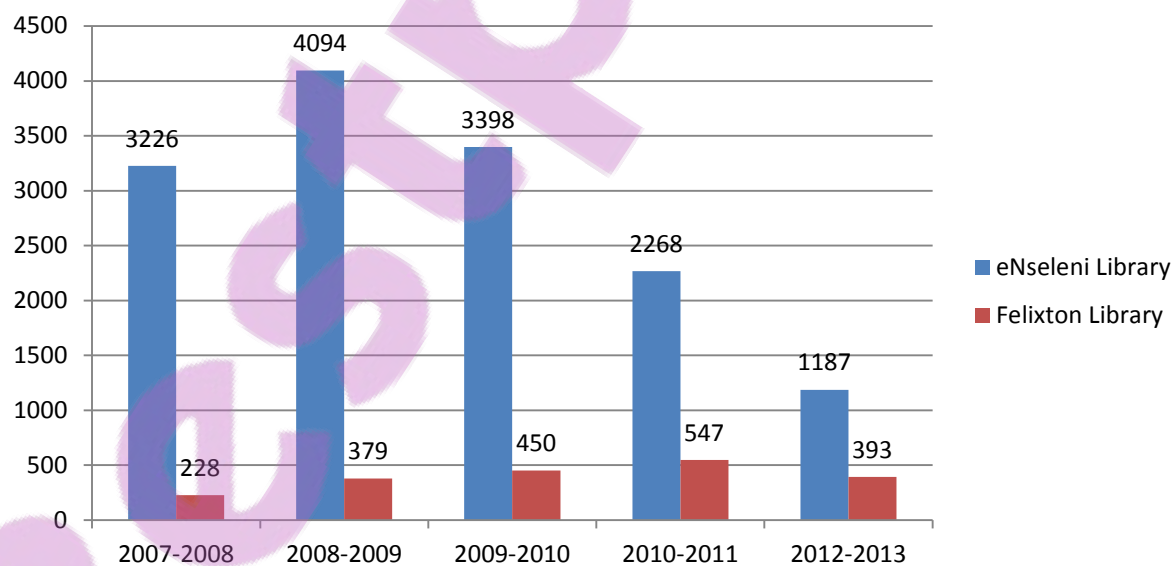
**Figure 21: Members in uMhlathuze Libraries, 2007-2013**

Source: City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013



**Figure 22: eNseleni and Felixton Library members, 2007-2013**

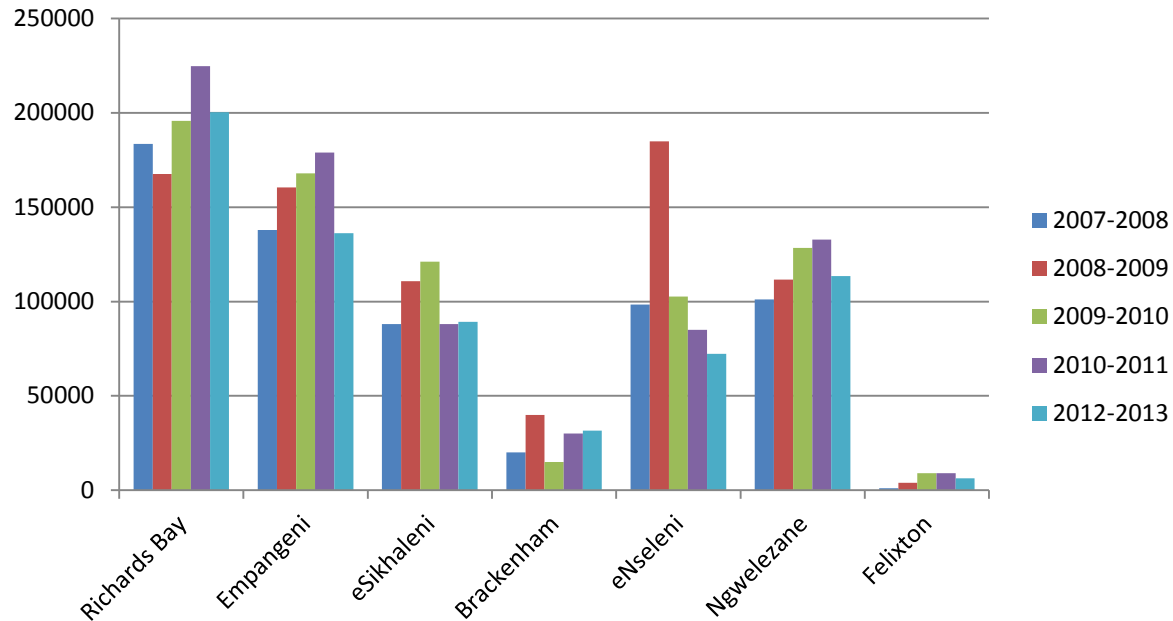
Source: City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013



Next, figures illustrating library visitors:

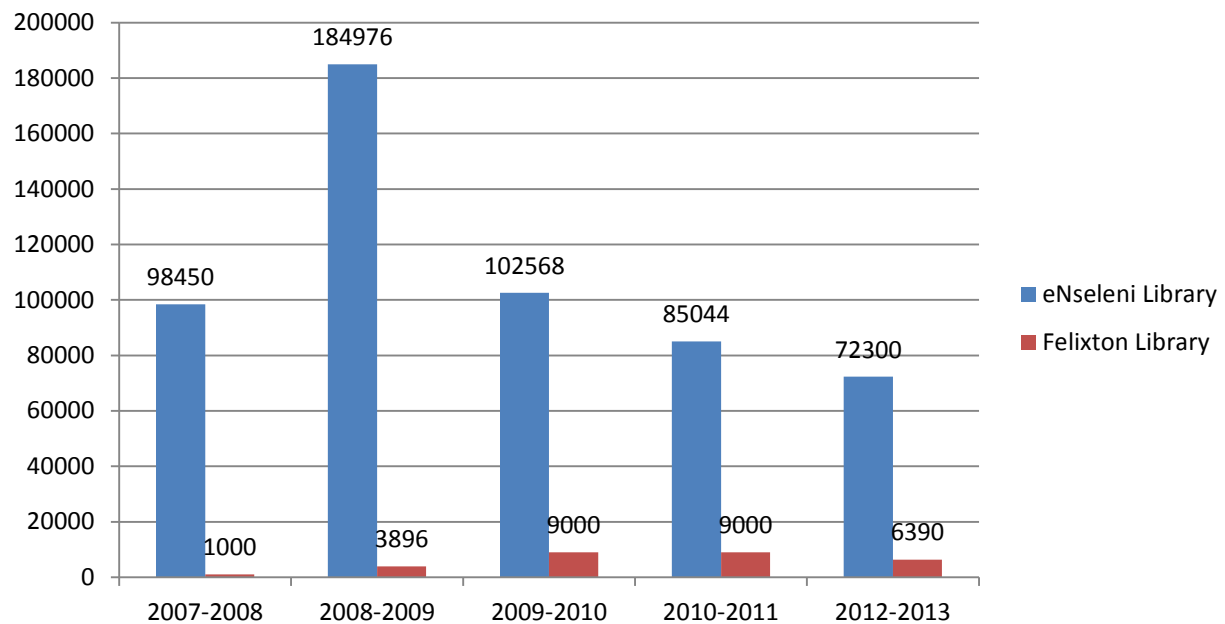
**Figure 23: Visitors to uMhlathuze Libraries, 2007-2013**

Source: City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013



**Figure 24: Visitors to eNseleni and Felixton Libraries, 2007-2013**

Source: City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013

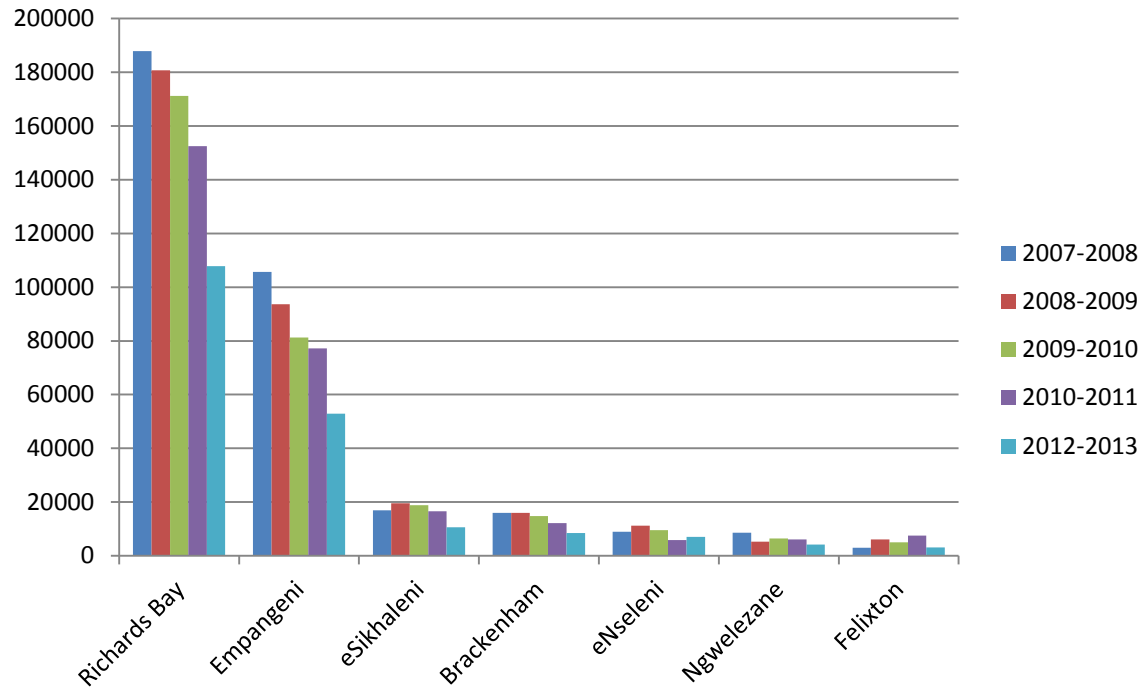




Last, figures showing library circulation:

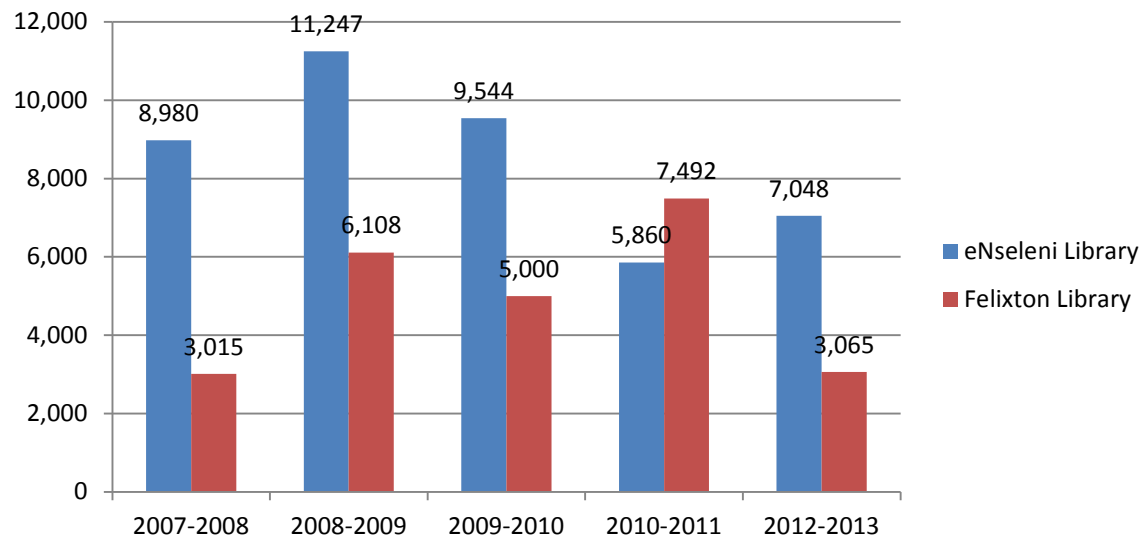
**Figure 25: Circulation in uMhlathuze Libraries, 2007-2013**

Source: City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013



**Figure 26: Circulation in eNseleni and Felixton Libraries, 2007-2013**

Source: City of uMhlathuze Annual Reports, 2007-2013



Circulation data from Annual Reports show how much KZN community members are checking out library materials. While the 2003-2004 circulation data chart available was impossible to read clearly, the report listed the combined membership of the libraries at 28 085. On average, 37 500 books and 3 000 audiovisual items were circulated per month and almost one million patrons visited the libraries that year (City of uMhlathuze, 2004:17). While no individual library data were reported for fiscal year 2004-2005, it was noted that the libraries circulated 480 000 items that year (City of uMhlathuze, 2005:18). Annual reports stated that although circulation of materials decreased between 2010 and 2013, the use of the libraries' facilities and services continued to increase, especially with school-aged learners. Each report lists examples of topics that were researched in the libraries that year.

The following table provides a sampling of responses regarding community use of the library:

**Table 24: Comments Regarding Community Use of KZN Public Libraries**

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Response</b>
R2	<i>[The reason we use the library is because] there is high unemployment, it's work. We look for jobs most of the time. We come here just to look at the papers... and to browse the internet...and try to find jobs. And other things like business opportunities, so we come here and search [the] internet for funds from government.</i>
R4	<i>About 80% [of my library use] is the internet, then the rest is from tertiary books.</i>
R8	<i>I come and finish my homework and by the time I get home, I'm done with my homework, I just have to study and that's it.</i>

R11	<i>I just read the books, magazines, textbooks. I don't know how [to use the internet]. I like to read... the news. I like the news.</i>
R15	<i>[Most people] concentrate more on the internet. Because although they may come in and look for books, most...people are coming in just for the computer. So they don't focus that much on the books.</i>
R16	<i>I come here to the library because it is quiet and it's nice that no one is disturbing me.</i>
R17	<i>They [are] doing CVs on the computer; there's a lot that do CVs. Then they do come in to look at the vacancies in the newspapers.</i>

Source: Field Data (2011)

**6.2.5. Finding 5: Most library users viewed their information needs to be focused on schoolwork and a majority indicated that they considered the internet to be their primary (and most trusted) resource for information.**

In addition to library use, this study investigated library users' expressed information needs and the resources which they usually use to find the information necessary to solve daily issues.

Determining the information needs of a community is imperative for a library to offer relevant resources and services. Just how are a community's information needs determined? Can someone from outside the community make this determination? This issue will be discussed further throughout the rest of this thesis.

This finding answers Research Question 5 which explores what users of KZN public libraries perceive their information needs to be. Questions 1, 3, 8, and 9 of the interviews of community

members and 4-5 and 11 on the library staff interview address user needs. Observations as well as analysis of literature and KZN Annual Reports also support this investigation.

Most library users interviewed (16/22, 72.7%) indicated their information needs focused on schoolwork. Half of those interviewed (11/22, 50%) said they needed information on job opportunities or information about preparing for job interviews. Other expressed information needs included:

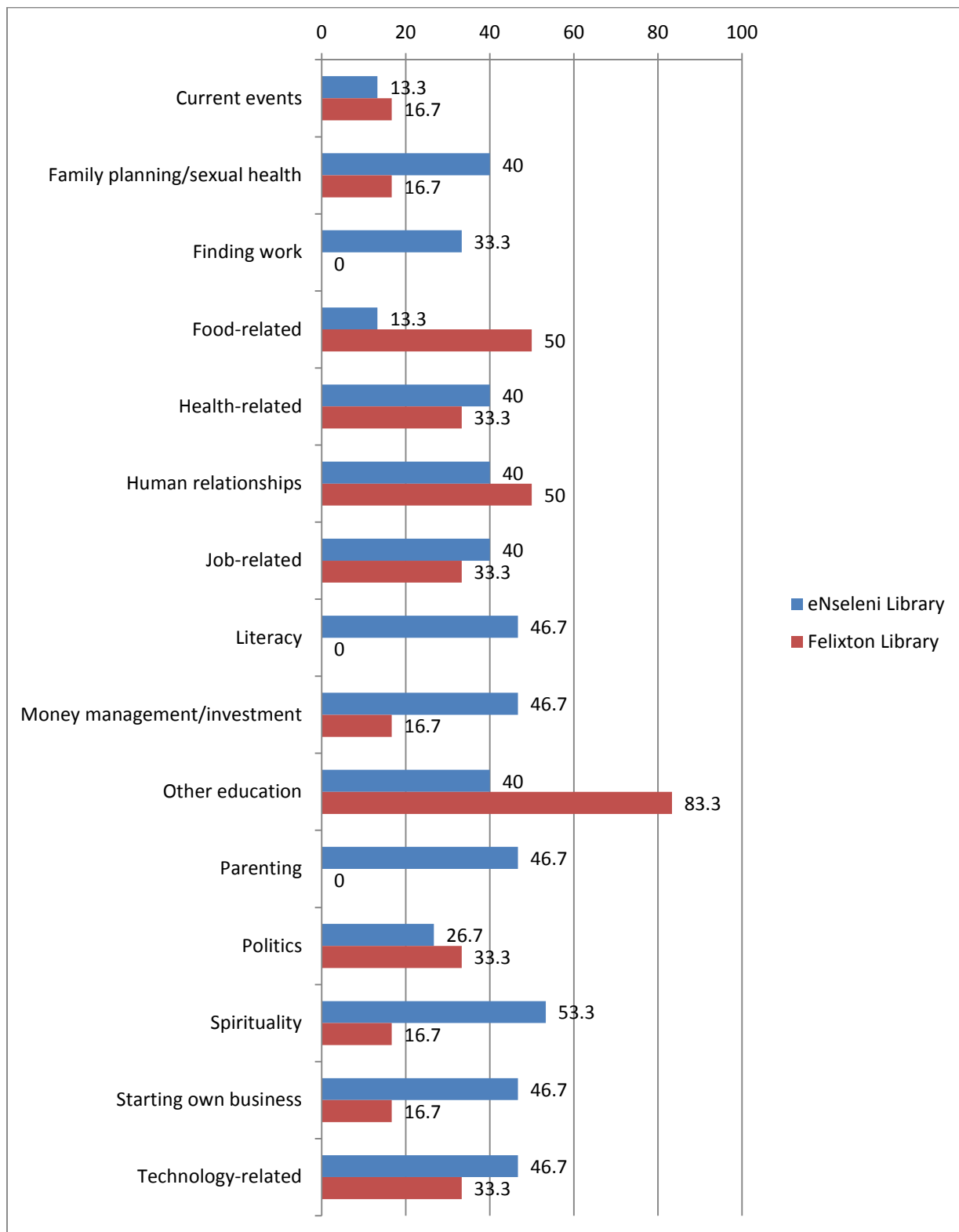
- Learning digital literacy skills (6/22, 27.3%);
- Keeping up with current events (4/22, 18.2%);
- Learning English or getting religious information (both 3/22, 13.6%); and
- A minority of participants (1 or 2 of 22 total) indicated that they had the following information needs: health, information literacy skills, immigration, making a large purchase, literacy, relationships, etc.).

Many participants commented on the need for information for school projects while those who were not in school indicated they needed information for educating themselves about other daily topics. Others were interested in improving their computer skills. Some patrons needed information about potential careers or more practically, information about particular jobs or job training opportunities in their area. Many also desired instruction on how to write résumés and CVs. A few people mentioned religious information as an important need in their lives while others mentioned a desire to learn more about history or famous leaders or icons around the world. Still others were in need of health information, especially regarding sexual health and HIV/AIDS. One mentioned the need to find a used car or gain information to make other large

purchases, while another needed bursary information and forms. On the questionnaire, participants indicated their information needs as follows:

**Figure 27: Expressed information needs of KZN library users, figures in percentages, 2011**

**Source: Field Data, 2011**



When asked about user information needs in KZN, KZN Public Library Service administrator Carol Slater (2011, personal communication) responded that jobs and employment-related information were primary and that libraries needed to play a role in teaching users practical skills such as creating CVs. Ms. Slater (2011, personal communication) indicated other needs include study and school support, government information, and access to email and other social networking. The needs for employment and school assistance were confirmed by library users interviewed in this study who were asked what they perceived their greatest information needs to be as stated above.

The internet was the primary (and most trusted) resource that participants used (19/22, 86.4%) and books were their second choice (17/22, 77.3%). Other information resources included:

- 11/22 (50%) of participants indicated that they turn to family and friends or library staff for information;
- 10/22 (45.5%) looked to newspapers;
- 5/22 (22.7%) turned to a councilor or other local government leader;
- 4/22 (18.2%) used teachers or magazines as resources;
- 3/22 (13.6%) used the television; and
- A minority of participants (1 or 2 of 22) indicated that they use the following information resources: tertiary books, local tribal leaders, and religious leaders.

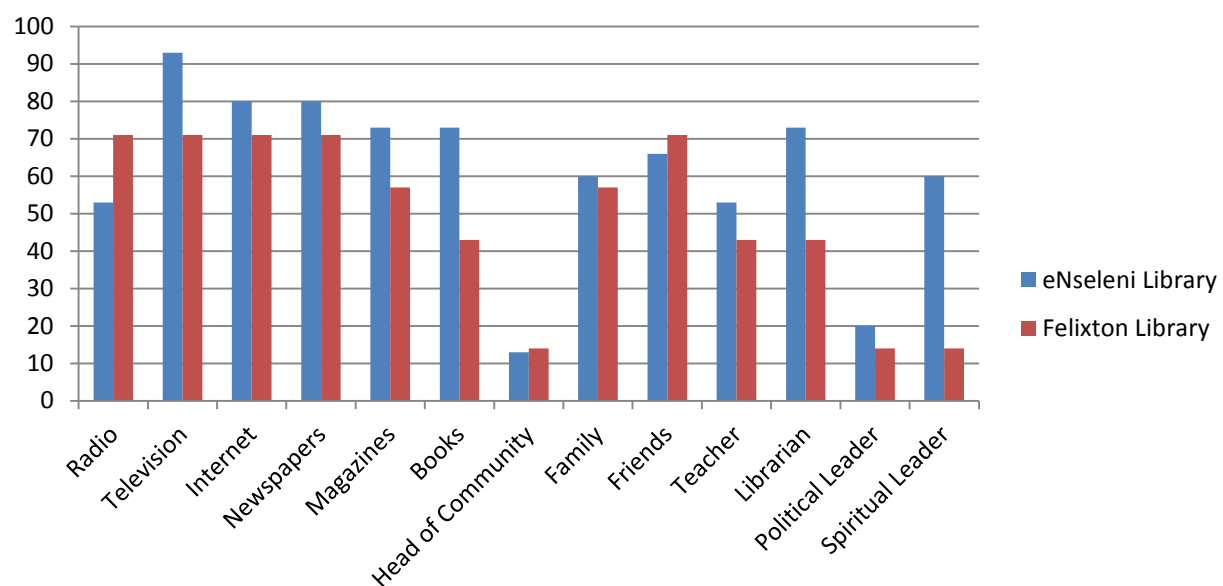
This study revealed that the most regularly used information source of KZN library users was the internet. In addition, patrons indicated they used books, newspapers, and magazines. Many young adults mentioned using tertiary-level books in particular to further their education. Participants also used the library staff to gain information, including librarians, library assistants,

and Cyber Cadets. Outside of the library, participants indicated they spoke to family, friends, and other community leaders to get necessary information or advice. Most are unable to access the internet on their cell phones and use them to gain information because of the high cost of data plans in their area. Most participants were thankful the libraries offered free computer and internet usage because of the high cost of local internet cafés. Several mentioned some community members use the television for information, especially the older generation who watched the local news. Some used the radio for information as well; again, this was more often the older generation than younger.

Data gathered from the questionnaires differed only slightly from the interview data when participants were asked to identify the sources of information they use most frequently to attain needed information. The questionnaire data regarding information sources are presented in the following figure.

**Figure 28: Information resources used regularly by KZN library participants, 2011**

**Source: Field Data, 2011**





A sampling of comments made by participants regarding their information needs and resources is included in the table below.

**Table 25: Comments Regarding KZN Community Information Needs and Resources Used**

<b>Participant #</b>	<b>Response</b>
R2	<i>Black people... we reserve some things, like our parents don't talk about some issues giving us problems in our life like sexual issues and all those things, so we only find those things on internet... There are issues that are not being talked about because of our culture.</i>
R4	<i>Primarily information that I seek is career options and immigration options.</i>
R5	<i>[I look for information on] religion. At the moment, I am looking for a car. So I am looking for a repossessed car so that's why every time I keep checking on the internet...</i>
R8	<i>As a matric student, the questions I have is about the bursaries. When I want to see the types of bursaries they offer, the careers they have...I want to do geomorphology. So I want to know what they do, what's happening in geomorphology, and where I can get bursaries for tat because in a community like this your parents can't really support you with everything.</i>
R9	<i>Different people do come and then they ask for books for agriculture. [We have students who come from] Umfolozi College and...recently we do have a lot of adults that are starting at UNISA [University of South Africa]. ...they do come and ask for the books about education. And we</i>

	<i>also have eNseleni Community Health Service...they come here and ask for the books for medicine. ...there are people that are looking for the books about engineering...and books for communication. And some of the books for computers and others for psychology...human resource...Christianity...cookery books.</i>
R9	<i>...we do have relevant information that can meet the community [needs] although it's not all of them because you are still short with the books for engineering...we hope in the future we will have more.</i>
R15	<i>I think the main [information] need are the students, especially the matrices. They come here more often than the rest of them and they use textbooks and the internet for information.</i>
R24	<i>Mostly I'm getting students from high school looking for different information... it depends on which project they have at that time.  But...adults that are not in school mainly they are looking for social networking sites. I've also got plenty of housewives looking for recipes.  And young people looking for jobs...</i>

**Source:** Field Data (2011)

By thoroughly investigating community members' library use and information needs, libraries can begin to effectively address information inequality and poverty in their communities.

Providing relevant, appropriate, and current materials and services, libraries can show their communities that they understand their daily challenges and seek to empower them to improve their lives.

### **6.3. Conclusion**

This chapter presented the data of this case study research, which were gathered through document analysis, observations, questionnaires, and interviews, and were collated under five main themes and more specific variables related to the research questions. The findings provided answers to the research questions and were presented in this chapter. The next chapter of this thesis will synthesise the findings of this research. The findings will be interpreted and discussed against the theoretical frameworks and my own experiences and insights. Based on this analysis, a compendium of strategies and best practices for libraries wishing to disrupt the cycle of information inequality and poverty in their communities was found and will be presented in the final chapter of this thesis.

## Chapter 7

### Interpretation of Findings and Recommendations

#### *7.1. Introduction*

Now that the data of this research project has been presented, this chapter will synthesise, interpret, and discuss the findings, as well as present recommendations that emerged from the research that public libraries can use to support alleviation of information inequality and poverty within their own communities. The interpretation and discussion chapter aims to bring data and findings together in a broader, meaningful, more holistic analysis (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). In addition, the new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty introduced in Chapter 4 will be applied as an example of how it can be utilised by libraries as a guide to investigating the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in their communities. As a reminder, this study sought to explore how public libraries can help alleviate information inequality and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). To do so, the following research questions were investigated:

1. How do information inequality and poverty manifest in KZN?
2. How has public library development influenced the current state of information inequality and poverty in KZN?
3. What is the role of public libraries in alleviating information poverty in KZN?
4. How are community members using libraries? What are the challenges to using libraries?
5. What are KZN library users' information needs? How do they address these needs?

As explained in Chapter 6, the findings of this study were collated into themes based on the main research questions. These themes were present throughout the research process and provided a framework for organising the data. The themes included: information inequality and poverty, library development, the role of public libraries, library use, and user information needs. Because the answers to the research questions were largely provided in Chapter 6, this chapter will instead focus on exploring the findings of the study within the context of the theoretical frameworks, including the new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty, as well as my own experiences and meanings derived from the research process. In order to accomplish this, connections were explored across themes and synthesised into three comprehensive, layered analytic categories (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008). These categories are tied to the research questions and include the following:

- Analytic Category 1: The presence and dimensions of information inequality and poverty in KZN (Research Question 1)
- Analytic Category 2: The roles KZN public libraries play in alleviating information inequality and poverty and the importance of investment in their continual development (Research Questions 2 and 3)
- Analytic Category 3: Understanding user behaviour and information needs in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN (Research Questions 4 and 5)

The data analysis indicated challenges to accessing and using libraries and information that were congruent with the definitions, causes, and characteristics of information poverty as presented in Chapter 2 and again briefly in Chapter 6. This chapter will present discussions on each analytic category but will first provide an explanation of the practical steps in applying the integrative

approach to information inequality and poverty. This approach was applied to the findings of this study and this analysis will be presented to demonstrate how libraries might utilise the approach in their own communities. The analysis informs the recommendations for libraries looking to alleviate information inequality and poverty which will be presented in the final sections of this chapter.

## ***7.2. Applying the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty***

As stated earlier, a new integrative approach to information inequality and poverty was developed in the course of this research. The theoretical framework of this approach was described in Chapter 4 and now this section will describe the application of the approach by libraries wishing to work towards the alleviation of information inequality and poverty within their communities. The application of the approach includes several steps, each of which correspond to a main research question of this study as well as the emergent themes described in this chapter. After the steps are described in this section, the following sections will demonstrate the application of the approach to the case study libraries to provide a thorough analysis of the study findings.

A word about community participation is presented here first to highlight its importance in this process. The support and active participation of community members is important in all steps of the application of this approach. Drawing upon Freire's research into the individual's involvement in their own empowerment and alleviation of oppression, the importance of community participation in alleviation of information inequality and poverty cannot be overstated. Ideally, representatives from all segments of the community would be involved in each step of this process and in the creation of any new initiative from the initial discussions and

exploration, through planning and implementation, as well as in assessment, adjustment, and maintenance. In order to receive buy-in from community members, a library could enlist the help of community elders and leaders, advertise the upcoming need in local newspapers or other venues, or use word-of-mouth to spread the word. Popular methods of communication in the community must be used and a sampling of each demographic of library users and non-users should be targeted for inclusion. This process will take time but once methods to reach community members are identified, they can continue to be utilised to market strategic planning initiatives, new outreach services or educational programs, or other library information as appropriate. Ideally throughout this process, the visibility of the library will be raised and will prompt more community participation in library initiatives and activities in the future. Ways to include community members will be included in the steps of applying the integrative approach to information inequality respectively in the following sections.

### ***7.2.1. Step 1: Understand information inequality and poverty in your community***

The first step in applying the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty is to understand how information is important in community development. The concepts of information inequality and poverty must be understood in general but more importantly, how they manifest in the local community. In addition, community members should be consulted on how they define information inequality and poverty. Reading library literature about the topic and research or case studies concerning how information inequality and poverty levels are assessed and addressed is a valuable habit for library administrators to maintain. In the absence of resources or formal assessment methods, a library could opt to create its survey that would help frame the dimensions of information poverty in the community. In this research, several steps were taken to gain an understanding of information inequality and poverty in eNseleni and

Felixton. These include interviewing and surveying library users, talking with library staff and administrators, as well as analysing local government documents to learn about initiatives, funding, goals and outcomes, etc. This study would have benefitted from more time at each library in order to gain trust, interview people who were not using the libraries, and to get the public more involved in the process as a whole. Library staff undertaking this process should spend significantly more time on this step not only to gain as much information as possible but also because it entails growing valuable relationships with community members that will be of benefit throughout the remainder of the process.

***7.2.2. Step 2: Investigate how investment in library development can effect information inequality and poverty in your community***

The next step in the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty is investigating how investment in library development can impact information inequality and poverty in the community. In this context, investment primarily refers to financial funding but other types of investments, such as donations of physical space and resources, time and energy of volunteers, and the like, should not be overlooked. In order to do investigate and assess investment in its development, a library should attempt to determine the value placed on it by community members and policy makers. By assessing the use of the library and its resources, analysing the amount of investment placed the library, and learning about the information policies created to protect it, libraries can better understand the value they hold in the community. In addition, looking at the physical structure and space, collections and technology, and staffing can also indicate the state of library development within a community. In this study, I also analysed Annual Reports and spoke to library staff and administrators in order to understand the library's development from an historical perspective. Once an understanding of the state of the library in



the community has been gained, it can better investigate how this investment and development (or lack thereof) has contributed to or subverted information inequality and poverty. This knowledge can be used to create a case for increased funding, resources, structures, or support from government bodies, policymakers, or possible investors. In addition, alternatives to traditional libraries should be investigated; if some have already been attempted, these should undergo rigorous evaluation if they have not in the past to determine whether or not they should continue.

### ***7.2.3. Step 3: Understand the role of the public library in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in your community***

The third step in the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty is to understand the roles of the public library in the community and how these roles may contribute to the alleviation of information inequality and poverty. By examining all of its existing roles, a library can assess ones that are working for the benefit of the community and end those that are not. In this study, I asked library staff and users about their perceptions of the roles the libraries played in the communities. Armed with a thorough understanding of what roles are useful to community members, a library can capitalise on those roles and focus less on those which do not reach the public or positively address information inequality and poverty. This step is based on this study's determination that libraries are institutions of cultural production as laid out by Bourdieu. Libraries must critically examine their roles in community development and information inequality and poverty alleviation in order to determine if they are indeed confirming existing unequal hierarchies in their communities or working to dismantle them.

#### ***7.2.4. Step 4: Assess the use of the library by the community and members' information needs***

The fourth step in the process of applying the integrative approach of information inequality and poverty is to assess how community members are using the library (or not) and examine their information needs. These two issues (library use and information needs) overlap enough to investigate them together but they could be undertaken as two steps; they are combined here to encourage an efficient process. Nussbaum's capabilities approach and the list offered in Chapter 4 that tailors it to libraries helped to inform this step. This list can be used as a baseline for evaluating a community's needs and determine whether and how they are being met. Existing methods of assessing information needs can also be used or a library may opt to create one based on their unique situation. Once again, community participation is key in determining user behavior and needs and time should be spent in developing the trusting relationships that will yield the most useful and honest information about library use and community information needs. Particularly important will be the involvement of community members who historically do not use the library in order to determine how the library might address their information needs.

#### ***7.2.5. Step 5: Determine strategies to alleviate information inequality and poverty in your community***

The last step in applying the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty is determining the strategy or strategies a library should use to alleviate information inequality and poverty in their community. The persons undertaking this task should take time to fully investigate a variety of ideas for strategies that may work in their particular circumstance and community. Research and case studies can be referred to in order to stay abreast of new,

innovative strategies with which to experiment. By collecting and analysing the quantitative and qualitative data from the steps above as well as investigating ideas to address any areas of concern, a library should be able to create a manageable plan of action. Focus should be paid to affordable, sustainable strategies based on the specific context and needs of the community that were determined during assessments made in previous steps. An important part of this step is assessment and evaluation, with the participation of the community, of any strategies undertaken. Assessment should be structured and systematic; once complete, a library should use the results to make any changes to the strategies in use.

### ***7.3. Analysis of the findings of this study***

Now that the steps in applying the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty have been explained, they will be demonstrated in the following sections presenting the analysis of this study's findings. As a reminder, the analysis uncovered three main categories based on the main research questions of the study. Each analytic category will now be presented and discussed.

#### ***7.3.1. Analytic category 1: The presence and dimensions of information inequality and poverty in KZN (Research Question 1)***

This study confirmed that information inequality and poverty exist in KZN, that they are congruent with the defining factors of information inequality and poverty as presented in Chapter 2, and that they manifest in a variety of ways. While the participants of this research study, including librarians, did not use the terms *information inequality* or *information poverty* to describe their communities, they do accurately describe the gap between those in KZN who have access to information and those who do not. This finding is not surprising considering

information inequality and poverty can exist in any community, especially where stratified groups exist. The challenge for librarians in KZN is to explore and understand how information inequality and poverty manifest in their communities in order to work towards their alleviation by meeting a variety of information needs. This category and the process undertaken to its determination (described throughout this thesis) demonstrates the first step in applying the integrative approach to information inequality, identifying how information inequality and poverty manifests in the community in question.

This study revealed the existence of all of the defining factors of information inequality and poverty in KZN thus clearly indicating the presence of information inequality and poverty within the community. Information inequality and poverty manifest in various ways in KZN, without one primary way standing apart from the others. The lack of a full understanding of the roles of libraries and how the availability and use of information can assist community members in their daily lives and goal achievement is extremely important. Particularly in rural KZN, the lack of quality information resources, the absence of information and digital literacy skills, and distance from libraries greatly hinders community members from taking advantage of the resources the library has to offer. Information technology is an issue not only because of the low access and high expense to community members but also because the libraries did not offer enough computers to satisfy the needs of the users. Infrastructurally though, more urban areas of KZN at least offered the basic framework to allow more community members in these areas the ability to access the internet if they have the other personal means available. This is not always the case in more rural parts of KZN and so the prevalence of information inequality and poverty is increased in outlying areas. Also present was an inability to benefit from information which could, in part, be generational with older people being less familiar with using libraries and ICT but with the

lack of libraries and computers in schools, younger generations are not equipped with the skills to take full advantage of information either.<sup>52</sup> This could also be one legacy of the apartheid era in which Black communities were denied equal access to educational and other opportunities.

Libraries were not exempt from this oppressive system; as was explained in Chapter 3, libraries for Africans were fewer, poorly equipped, underfunded, or completely non-existent compared to those available for the dominant White communities. The effects of apartheid can still be felt in the absence of equal informational and educational opportunities in these communities.

This study in KZN also demonstrated several other characteristics of information inequality and poverty as outlined in Chapter 2, including the link to economic poverty. While Chatman (1996) and Thompson (2006) are rightfully skeptical about a constant and causal relationship between information poverty and economic poverty, it is clear from this study that there is at least a correlation between the two in KZN. In many instances in this study, it was shown that access to internet and computers was simply unaffordable to participants in KZN and thus the library offered them a viable alternative to the expense of personal access or access via internet café. There was also an element of Chatman's (1996, 1999) insider/outsider approach to information poverty present in KZN as indicated by some participants' concerns about privacy, family expectations, and cultural norms when looking for information but it was not found to be a major cause of the information inequality and poverty in KZN.

It is clear from this study that information inequality and poverty exist in KZN and manifests in a variety of ways. The lesson learned from this finding is that librarians must seek to know and understand the dimensions of information inequality and poverty within their own communities.

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<sup>52</sup> In 2005, less than half (43.6%) of the 5 653 schools in KZN had computers (Isaacs, 2007:9).

This understanding will help inform decisions regarding investments, services, and more.

Recommendations for methods of exploring and addressing information inequality and poverty will be presented in more depth in a later section of this chapter. The next section will discuss the roles of public libraries in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty and the importance in investing in their development.

***7.3.2. Analytic category 2: The roles KZN public libraries play in alleviating information inequality and poverty and the importance of investment in their continual development (Research Questions 2 and 3)***

The importance of continuing investment in the development of KZN public libraries and its potential effect on alleviation of information inequality and poverty there cannot be overstated. Steps 2 and 3 in the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty, exploring how investment in library development can alleviate information inequality and poverty as well as the roles libraries play in their alleviation, are demonstrated in this analytic category.

In order to increase investments in and thus development of libraries in KZN, it is necessary that people understand and place value on the vital roles libraries play in their communities, particularly in development. With the turn to the information era came many dramatic changes to the landscape in which libraries operate (Abubakar, 2013:5). Thus, Abubakar (2013:5) contends, it is necessary to re-evaluate and clarify the “actual and potential role of public libraries in the new landscape.” The current study illuminated the numerous important roles KZN libraries play in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in the community and thus the many reasons to increase investment in their development. The historical analysis of the libraries in this study revealed that years of apartheid-era policies denying Africans equal access to libraries,

schools, and other educational opportunities has taken its toll in lack of investment and undervaluing of their role and is reflected in the immature state of libraries in communities like eNseleni and Felixton. This data analysis also found that investment (or lack thereof) in public library development in KZN continues to have profound effects on the state of information inequality and poverty there. Recognition of the value of libraries, their role in community development, and thus investments in technology and other library resources, staffing, and library structures and space in KZN are inadequate and must be increased because of the invaluable roles libraries play in the decrease of information inequality and poverty. A more detailed discussion of this analytic category continues below.

This study found that the primary driver of KZN library use and investment is the understanding and recognition of the value libraries and information play in individual and community wellness, and thus in community development and the overall alleviation of information inequality and poverty. Research has shown that the view that libraries play a transformational role in people's lives is directly related to the level of funding support but that even though people claim to support libraries, this does not always translate into firm (financial) commitments (Elbert et al., 2012:149). While 100% of participants in this study (all library users) agreed that libraries were important in KZN, many expressed that others (non-users, leaders, legislators) did not understand the full value and use of libraries and information in the improvement of their lives. Elbert et al. (2012:149) explain that, at least in the United States, "library support is only marginally related to visiting the library and therefore advocacy campaigns have to be focused on other groups than library users." What policy-makers and others must realise is that public libraries can positively affect quality of life and economic poverty, especially in developing communities. They enlighten the public and encourage civic

participation by providing the information and other services “that are required to make a constructive impact on poverty alleviation” (Abubakar, 2013:6). Indeed, as an educational community centre, public libraries must be included in “any poverty eradication programme... [because]...Reducing poverty to the barest minimum begins with having adequate information about its negative and devastating impact” (Abubakar, 2013:6). The key to the fulfillment of the developmental potential of public libraries is providing adequate and sustainable funding, staffing, accommodation, and provision of information and services (Abubakar, 2013:6). Until this point, governments and poverty alleviation organisations have failed to recognise the full potential of public libraries and the developmental roles they could play in the alleviation of (information and economic) poverty in their communities (Abubakar, 2013:10). But as Satgoor (2015:105) states, “The opportunity exists to demonstrate how public libraries may be located as community development partners and how it [*sic*] contributes to the national imperatives related to education, youth unemployment, community development, and upskilling and reskilling of library professionals at a local level.”

This study revealed that a large part of KZN community members’ perceptions of the value of libraries is tied to their understanding of what libraries do and how they might help people in their daily lives. When the role of libraries and information in the development of a community is correct and understood, more value is placed on them and this, in turn, can result in increased use of and investment in libraries as well as improved information policies and governance, especially when aimed at rural populations, who can particularly benefit from the developmental role of libraries. This study confirmed Mansoor and Kamba’s (2010:1) argument that “...many rural communities of the developing countries are aware of the existence and importance of libraries and other information agencies, but are not aware of the role of information in



development.” Nyana (2009:17) agrees that, “The problem of low library use will continue until rural communities realize the connection between libraries and community development, and that libraries are not just for the elites.” For libraries to have real value in KZN communities, the people must have a better understanding of how information and knowledge can help them improve their lives and how libraries can assist them in that pursuit. This *information acceptance*, as termed by Mansoor and Kamba (2010:3), would not only encourage recognition and use of libraries in rural KZN but contribute to an understanding of how information can be used to improve individuals’ lives and the well-being of entire communities.

It is my contention that KZN libraries were not doing enough to advertise their services or market their value to community members, possible investors, and other decision-makers. In order to increase the value of libraries amongst government bodies, policymakers, and community members, library leaders and staff must make assessment and marketing high priorities. Library professionals are often frustrated by requests to quantify their work and prove their successes with hard data but reluctantly understand the necessity, especially when attempting to attain funding from investors. Thus, librarians in KZN (and everywhere) should consider how they are assessing their services, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Measures must be clear to those outside of librarianship in order to prove a high return on investment (Hart, 2007). One example of demonstrating the positive role of the library in the building of social capital and inclusion is provided by Hillenbrand’s 2005 study of Mount Barker Community Library in Adelaide, Australia. This library was successful in clearly incorporating community development into its mission and activities as well as demonstrate its success in its assessment of the diversity of users, its equity of access, and its role in capacity building (Hart, 2007; Hillenbrand, 2005). As a joint-use library between the community and the technical and

further education program, Mount Barker is located in one of the fastest-growing regions in South Australia (Hillenbrand, 2005). The library demonstrated its success through a “social capital audit” in which they surveyed community members and other stakeholders about their strategic goals of social inclusion and building community partnerships (Hillenbrand, 2005). Despite several projects aimed at cataloguing South African libraries and creating benchmarks to provide empirical evidence of their value in community development (Van Helden and Lor, 2002; De Jager and Nassimbeni, 2005; KPMG Services, 2006), none has yet been entirely successful (Lor et al., 2005; Hart, 2007) and so work must be done in this area. Hillenbrand’s (2005) work and the social capital model may provide valuable themes and ideas in the strategic planning and assessment of public libraries in KZN, as well as in the marketing of their successes.

In order to adequately invest in libraries, governments, funders, and communities need to see their value. If the South African government continues to regard libraries simply as “cost centres” and spaces only for the middle class rather than acknowledging their valuable developmental roles to all people, libraries and community members suffer (Hart, 2007:19). For example, document analysis in this study revealed that when KZN policymakers began to see the important role of libraries and their value in their communities post-apartheid, funding to them increased dramatically. Growing value is illustrated in recent investments in South African libraries, such as: a R1 billion government grant over three years to upgrade and improve libraries after a period of research into the greatest needs announced in 2005; a R1.8 billion grant announced in 2008; and a R32 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Global Libraries program in 2014 (National Library of South Africa, 2014).

Despite some increase in investments in libraries over the last ten years, library staff in KZN were clear that they are still not receiving the funding they need to meet community needs, as evidenced by requests for funding being denied and library budgets being cut. In addition, libraries have yet to become an integral part of the country's development program (Hart, 2007; Hart and Nassimbeni, 2014). The global economic downturn beginning in 2008 caused the decline of many public and private investments in information and knowledge society interests (Mansell, 2013). Currently, many libraries across Africa depend on funding from the West to operate and the loss of this funding would have devastating effects on library and information provision (Nyana, 2009). African governments should therefore prioritise library development and clearly demonstrating return on investment. Particularly in rural and impoverished communities, libraries and information services should focus on relevancy, cost-benefit, and innovation in order to stretch limited resources (Mchombu, 1982). Likewise, considering library alternatives is a valuable way to investigate meeting community needs while addressing budgetary or sustainability concerns. It is clear that government leaders and provincial library administrators still do not fully grasp the developmental potential of libraries; their decisions about investing in libraries are short-sighted and demonstrate the undervaluing of the positive economic and social effects that libraries can have on the people of KZN. In order for public libraries to achieve their full potential, especially in developing communities, governments must "understand and appreciate their strategic and potential roles in all spheres of societal development" (Abubakar, 2013:5).

To summarise this section, this study indicated that libraries are undervalued by some community members and decision makers in KZN. In turn, they must do all they can to invite community members, leaders, legislators, and other possible investors to explore the library in

more depth in effort to gain a full understanding of the value of libraries in development of a successful community. Marketing of library successes will encourage more visitors and perhaps more investors. The more people value libraries, the more likely they are to invest their time, money, or energy into their improvement for the good of all. Ideally, libraries would have access to all the funding necessary to fulfill community needs. Realistically though, it is more likely that libraries will need to make tough choices about where to spend any extra funds they may have available. In this case, the findings of this research suggest allocating funds to the places where community members feel they will be most helpful and in KZN, that was overwhelmingly technology. After technology, this study revealed that users would prefer libraries to then consider investments in other library resources, staff, or library structures and space. Each of these will be discussed in more detail below.

The study findings revealed that the primary way for KZN libraries to take on an expanded developmental role in their communities would be to increase investments in information technology. When asked how they would allocate more funding, librarians in Elbert et al.'s (2012:157) study also gave top priority to equipment, which would include computers and other information technology. By investing in information technology and other equipment, KZN libraries could offer more computers and faster internet which would allow for more users.

While ICT is not the singular solution to the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN, it can act as a bridge between libraries and community members. As libraries attract more users from the community with information technology offerings, they will be able to encourage those users to explore other resources and services the library provides in an effort to better meet their information needs. While this research did not formally test the direct link between internet and computer use and alleviation of information inequality and poverty, it did confirm that local

residents used the library primarily for access to the internet and computers and while there, they often used other resources, acquired assistance from library staff, and perceived their information and digital literacy skills to improve, which all have a positive effect on information inequality and poverty.

Increased investment in information technology means increased instruction in digital literacy skills so that KZN community members can be empowered to use the technology to address daily information needs and solve larger life issues. This is corroborated by Mansoor and Kamba (2010:4) who opine, “...ICT is not the end itself. Developing informed citizens should be the ultimate goal” and so digital literacy education must go hand-in-hand with any increase in infrastructural ICT investments in KZN. ICT infrastructure can be an issue in KZN but Mansoor and Kamba (2010) are correct in that even if rural communities there had access to the ICT they needed, they would not be able to take full advantage of it without the skills to access and use it effectively and then only if the information met their specific needs. Combined with digital literacy training and increased overall information acceptance, communities would be able to use information technology for greater development and a more fulfilling quality of life. In order for KZN to achieve full information and knowledge society status and alleviate information inequality and poverty, this study showed that the investment in access to internet and computers and training of digital literacy skills in their libraries must be increased.

Another way libraries could harness the potential of ICT for development is through the use of mobile technology. South Africa offers the most advanced telecommunications network on the continent and is the fourth-fastest growing mobile market in the world (Mbatha, et al., 2011:260). South Africa’s “leapfrogging” over fixed-line technologies is documented (Nassimbeni, 1998; Darch et al., 1999; Stilwell, 2007) and some 87% of youth ages 16 to 24

years “cannot live without their cellphones” (Hart, 2012:5). Hart (2012:5) reminds us though, “...that, while most South African high school students across all income levels have cell phones, only a small number have mobile broadband Internet subscriptions”; this number is estimated at only 5.8% across all age groups (Hart, 2012:5). Indeed, Lesame (2013:74) states that while mobile phone access and use is high in South Africa, it has offered improved access to communications technology only to a limited extent and has not diminished digital exclusion. Despite this, she claims the present and future are mobile and that smartphone users “eventually become Internet users” (Lesame, 2013:81). The ITU agrees and is convinced that the “mobile revolution – including the emerging mobile-broadband Internet” is the key to achieving internationally agreed upon development goals (Lesame, 2013:82). Mansell (2013) warns against leapfrogging into information and knowledge societies as described in Chapter 2; even if this were possible technically, it would be detrimental on economic, political, and social levels. To a large extent, I agree with this; it would take either an enormous grassroots effort to demand this type of leap or a sea change in the government’s priorities towards support of an equitable information and knowledge society. In the current study, only one participant who was not library staff had internet access on his phone and at his home. This participant was clearly in the minority of those interviewed in KZN as cost for internet access via cell phones and at home is prohibitive. However, if numbers of South Africans with smartphones and internet subscriptions continue to rise with competition and falling rates, libraries should consider concentrating more effort and investment in mobile and “app” technologies to increase the visibility, value, and use of libraries and information for development.

While it is important in the global information era, offering computer and internet access is not the only way to increase development of rural communities. As argued above, “Convincing rural

communities of the importance of information will result in acceptance of information as a key for development,” but “The ultimate goal is to be ‘information-haves’ rather than ‘technology-haves’” (Mansoor and Kamba, 2010:3). This study showed that KZN library users understand the importance of ICT in their daily lives but they and non-users often need to be convinced of the developmental importance of other materials the library offers, such as books, audiovisual materials, and library staff. Especially in rural areas, information technology and library use is low and alternatives to traditional library spaces and services might be explored. One consideration is that rural communities in KZN may not even need access to ICT in ways that more urban areas do. Nyana (2009:16) offers a reminder that ICT could be used to enhance oral traditions in African communities but that often “...meeting the needs of rural communities does not require advanced technology” at all. Instead of investing in ICT infrastructure, libraries in KZN may prefer instead to purchase more affordable and sustainable audiovisual materials to transfer print information to oral format or to have the ability to screen DVDs or videos in the library, especially in more rural areas. For those who are illiterate in KZN, print materials could be translated into oral format. As Nyana (2009:16) suggests, “...the provision of information in print-form only is counterproductive to the information needs of rural populations” and thus there should be a balance of print, digital, and oral information available depending on the needs of the specific community.

As this study revealed, access to either digital or print resources exclusively will not solve information inequality in its entirety. Many of the participants in this study commented on the need for more books in the libraries but stressed that the books must be current and relevant to the needs of the community. Tertiary-level books are among those needed the most but it is also clear that increased communications with local schools about learner information needs would

assist libraries in providing needed materials for those in primary and secondary school.

Whatever the format, people in developing communities such as those in KZN must have access to relevant, current information in the language that meets their specific needs. Nyana (2009) points out that book donations from the West, while intended to help developing communities, are mostly irrelevant, outdated, and severely lacking in familiar cultural content. It was found that ninety percent of materials in Ghanaian libraries has been imported from the West, which is a dangerous trend among many libraries throughout Africa (Nyana, 2009). Collection development in KZN is centralised in format; four times a year, libraries go to the central “depot” to acquire new books and have an opportunity to trade out books they no longer want. While library staff can make requests for specific items or topics, all too often the centralised locus of control prohibits each library from obtaining relevant materials that would enjoy high use from their community members. This study showed that increased local control over collection development would be beneficial to libraries in KZN. For these reasons, investment must continue to be made in providing communities with relevant, current resources in a variety of formats and local languages in order for libraries to better meet the needs of community members.

Of vital importance to the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN is the provision of free or subsidised access to relevant, current, necessary information, no matter the format, which is a central role of any public library, as mentioned in Chapter 6. This study found that providing free access to the internet and computers and other information resources was considered by participants to be the primary role of libraries in KZN. The focus on libraries’ support for development by providing access to information is corroborated by the *Internet Manifesto* of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2015) in its



statement that “Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression, regardless of format and frontiers, is a central responsibility of the library and information profession” (Stilwell, 2007:87). Libraries play a role in this mission by providing free access to the internet and other information resources to support the development of the community and by ensuring the removal of barriers to this access (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2015; Stilwell, 2007). Public libraries must take seriously their role of providing information access and other services to users “without any form of barrier” (Abubakar, 2013:5; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2015). It is incumbent upon libraries then to address reasons that the public is not using the library, which may include distance, safety, misunderstanding of library value, lack of relevant materials, etc. While offering free, unfettered access to information may seem an obvious role of public libraries, it is important to note that this study indicated that there are still many people in KZN who do not understand this value or role that libraries can have in their lives. Free access to information may be taken for granted in many parts of the developed world but in the developing world, people may need to be shown the value that libraries can have in improving their lives and offering free access to the internet, computers, and other resources is a central way to accomplish this. The fact that access to computers and internet is the primary motivation for community members to visit a library may be unpalatable to some staff but the reality is that by providing this access, libraries can attract new users to the library, after which the multitude of other uses (books, newspapers, librarians, etc.) can be introduced in attempt to decrease information inequality and poverty in KZN.

As mentioned earlier, access to information alone is not enough to alleviate information inequality and poverty in KZN. Community members need to be equipped with the information

and digital literacy skills to effectively use information, libraries, and ICT; without these skills, community members would be dependent on library staff to find information for them, which would not empower them as would having the ability to do it themselves. Therefore, the role of staff in KZN libraries should not be underestimated and investments in hiring qualified, dedicated library staff should be increased. Librarians and other staff regularly assist users with finding, evaluating, and using information; with reader's advisory and reference questions; with instructing digital and information literacy skills; even with creating information. Educating and meeting the information needs of community members, keeping the library and its materials organised and relevant, and advocating for the community library to government officials and other funders are especially important roles of library staff in KZN rural and developing communities. Analysis of the data collected in this research study confirms the notion that library staff are seen by library users as valuable tools in the education and development of the people. Among the most popular uses of the case study libraries is searching for employment. It is clear that not only are community members using newspapers and the internet to look for open positions but they are also being taught valuable skills by library staff regarding how to efficiently use the internet and how to create curriculum vitae. It is one thing to have a Cyber Cadet do the work for you but quite another for that person to teach you the lifelong skill of being able to complete the work for yourself. This is just one way that library staff at eNseleni and Felixton Libraries are teaching imperative information and digital literacy skills to community members. They are also teaching people, especially children, how to evaluate their information needs, find relevant information, and use it effectively and ethically in order to address a particular information need. Library staff take on as their mission "keeping kids off the streets," and take it seriously, often looking for new ways to encourage children to visit and use

the library space and its resources. In this way, children can stay in school, off drugs, out of trouble, and become productive members of society. Cyber Cadets also model responsible digital and information skills to the people they assist; they may even inspire the children to study computers or pursue careers in IT one day. KZN library users who interacted with Cyber Cadets indicated an increased understanding of the value of technology and how to find the information there that they need to improve their lives. Just as valuable is the lesson that books and other printed information can also help one reach goals. It is clear from interviews with KZN library staff that they intentionally attempt to increase a reading culture among patrons by encouraging them to use books, newspapers, and other materials in addition to the internet. In this way librarians can supplement the education taking place in schools, on the job, and in daily life.

Another important role of library staff is providing outreach, programming, and services to the local community as well as fostering partnerships that could benefit libraries and community development. These play a key role in encouraging community members to use the library, and thus information, to improve their quality of life. In this way, the outreach, services, programming, and partnerships provided by a library can help to alleviate information inequality and poverty. Outreach to communities has become an important topic to libraries around the world because it can serve as the bridge between the library and the community; it helps lend visibility to the library and allows community members a better understanding of the potential value of the library to them and how the library might help them find needed information to achieve goals. For instance, in KZN, the importance of library outreach to and partnerships with local schools cannot be overstated. All library staff interviewed for this study expressed the importance of teaching children the importance of education, literacy, information, and libraries early on so that they become accustomed to reading and using libraries, books, and technology to

find information and grow their skills. Despite its importance, fruitful relationships between the two case study libraries and the local schools are lacking and must be addressed.

Outreach to and programming for adults does not seem to be as much of a priority in uMhlathuze, according to interviews and document analysis in this study. Evidence for this across South Africa is seen in the work of Hart (2007) who points out that it is rare to mention of library outreach to adults or partnerships with adult literacy groups. Nassimbeni and May (2006:19) found that only 23% of libraries in South Africa played a role in adult education, even if only in the provision of a venue (Hart, 2007). The *LIS Transformation Charter* (DAC and NCLIS, 2014) prioritises the needs of youth over other segments of South African society (Hart, 2012) and it is understandable with such limited resources, that libraries must make difficult choices regarding what materials to purchase, services to offer, and outreach to provide. In KZN the focus on youth development and library use is clear.

Some library staff in this study mentioned the importance of outreach to the rural areas but have experienced challenges to putting these services in place. As in KZN, providing sufficient library outreach to outlying groups such as rural people, adults, non-users, etc. is difficult in many developing areas around the world as these groups often have needs that differ from the needs of the majority of library users. Mansoor and Kamba (2010) suggest focusing on the following list of objectives when providing outreach to rural communities:

- Identify the information need and the resource(s) to fulfill that need, or enable the person to do it for themselves;
- Provide the information needed or assist them in finding and using appropriate resources;

- Assist them in evaluating the resource and determining if it best fits their need(s);
- Provide information literacy education to the community; and
- Provide digital literacy education to the community.

These suggestions would indeed be useful when providing outreach to many various groups, not just those in rural areas. Despite the challenge of dwindling investments, providing outreach and relevant services to community members are among the primary roles of KZN libraries and can be powerful tools in encouraging people to use information and libraries and thus in alleviating information inequality and poverty.

Another major role of libraries is creating and maintaining partnerships which can also support the alleviation of information inequality and poverty within a community. A public library cannot stand or function alone; its entire focus is on serving the community and this can only be done by fostering fruitful partnerships in which meeting the unique needs of the community is the goal. The value of partnerships among libraries and between libraries and other institutions is well documented (Hillenbrand, 2005; Nyana, 2009; Ravi and Vivek, 2013). In her article addressing creating libraries that serve the needs of rural people in sub-Saharan Africa, Sylvia A. Nyana (2009:16) heralds collaborations between libraries and NGOs, governments and other organizations as “cost effective and sustainable”. Lesame (2013:77) speaks of the importance of public-private partnerships (PPP) as the “best way to bring together government and private sector resources to improve ICT skills and embark on laborious e-skills training programs.” While not mentioned specifically, public libraries must be included in these PPPs. While some libraries in South Africa have started to take advantage of partnerships with individuals, community organisations, or private businesses to assist with library and community

development, those in KZN have yet to fully capitalise on these opportunities (Hart, 2007). One example pointed out by students and library staff alike in this study was the lack of a relationship between the local schools and the library. The teachers assign a project and tell the students to go to the library to get the information they need to complete the project but fail to inform the library about the projects or assignments. Then when the learners go to the library, they are faced with few or no useful materials to use for their work. While schools and libraries separately may be working on initiatives to increase information and ICT awareness, a partnership between them would greatly increase the chance of success.<sup>53</sup> One factor contributing to strained relations between schools and libraries may be the stress of overwork with increased expectations of both teachers and librarians. Funding cuts to both institutions, the shortage of school libraries and qualified librarians, and the move to a resource-based national school curriculum since the 1990s has made it necessary for schools and libraries to do more with less (Hart, 2007). This increased stress exacerbates the lack of communication between the teachers and the library staff and ultimately has detrimental effects on local youth and thus increased attention should be paid to building strong, sustainable partnerships that are beneficial to all.

KZN libraries are lacking in partnerships that could be of great benefit to their community members, especially in this time of budget cuts. Ravi and Vivek (2013) examine partnerships of libraries in India with three groups: with the community, with non-government organisations (NGOs), and with corporations or private companies. First, they point out that communities should not only participate but should become active partners in library management (Ravi and Vivek, 2013). For instance, libraries should look to local experts, elders, and leaders from within the community with whom to partner (Etebu, 2009; Nyana, 2009). Not only have these people a

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<sup>53</sup> For an overview of ICT initiatives in South African schools, see Isaacs (2007).

wealth of experience and knowledge to impart to others but because they are from within the community, they will have an understanding of the local culture and issues as well as already having valuable relationships with and respect of the community members. The importance of acceptance and support of community leaders in the success of ICT for development (ICT4D or ICTD) projects is well-explained by Mashinini and Lotriet (2011). The findings of their study in J.S. Moroka municipality in South Africa illustrated how community leaders can influence acceptance of cyber communities in rural areas; they found that by understanding community social dynamics, ICT initiatives had a much higher chance of success (Mashinini and Lotriet, 2011). In order to ensure understanding and support of community leaders for such initiatives, it is suggested that leaders are brought together and consulted about potential projects and that projects address a specific community need (Mashinini and Lotriet, 2011). “Given the reality that a top-down approach by government has failed, [Mashinini and Lotriet (2011:56)] argue that the empowering approach for rural communities would be to take ownership of cyber initiatives themselves”; the same could be true for KZN library and information initiatives. Likewise, some scholars have written about the possibilities of partnering with ICT for Development (ICTD or ICT4D) organisations themselves in any number of ways that could be very beneficial for libraries (Austin, 2010; Coward, 2010; Sears and Crandall, 2010). These articles point to the commonalities among libraries and ICTD and encourage partnerships between them. As Sears and Crandall (2010) describe, libraries and ICTD organizations are both service-delivery industries and share some similar goals; partnering on outreach initiatives, training opportunities, and technology could build useful bridges in community development efforts. Examples around

the world include community radio initiatives, voice-based kiosk systems that allow access to locally-generated content, and telecentres.<sup>54</sup>

Another example of partnering with local community members is provided by Etebu (2009) who describes the decision of the government of Bayelsa state in the Niger Delta to employ “indigenous communication mechanisms” (Etebu, 2009:2) such as “town criers”<sup>55</sup> (Etebu, 2009:4) to enable information dissemination to rural community members. One example of this was the service provided by Father John Metcalf in the Cajamarca region of the Andes (Metcalf, 1982; Underwood, 2009). After assessing the information needs of the region, Father Metcalf recognised the value of identifying a person in the community who acted as an “information gatekeeper” (Underwood, 2009:2) or key informant. This person would be provided information in multiple formats and would set about spreading that information throughout the community (Underwood, 2009). Libraries could consider approaching rural communities in this way when considering new outreach programs or services. Consulting with leaders about the needs in their communities could pave the way for increased acceptance of libraries and information for development among the people.

In addition to partnering with communities, Ravi and Vivek (2013) tout the success of library partnerships with NGOs, especially in rural areas, stating that NGOs have the unique ability to act as intermediaries between the government and community members on behalf of libraries.

One example of this are the libraries opened in KZN between 2003 and 2006 in partnership with the Family Literacy Project (FLP), an NGO focused on developing school readiness in rural

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<sup>54</sup> To learn more about these specific initiatives, see Coward (2010).

<sup>55</sup> Historically, a town crier is one employed by a town in order to make proclamations and announcements throughout the town. Hermanus, South Africa, still employs a “whale crier” who blows a horn to announce the arrival of right whales to locals and tourists alike (southafrica.net, 2015).



preschool children (Aitchison, 2006). The first initiatives of the FLP in KZN were workshops conducted with rural women that taught that parents are their children's first educators and to impress upon them the importance of early literacy skills; soon after, the FLP trained local women as literacy facilitators to assist in the training of their peers (Aitchison, 2006). In 2003, a shipping container and books were donated to a local community by Biblionef to open a container library and two years later a two room library was built at another FLP site (Aitchison, 2006).<sup>56</sup> While Aitchison argues that FLP libraries are not necessarily community libraries as defined by Mostert and Vermeulen (1998), they are still valuable examples of the importance of partnerships: "It is important to note that each library was established as a result of the combined efforts of FLP and its members, donor agencies and funders and the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Library and Information Services" (Aitchison, 2006:101).<sup>57</sup>

Finally, libraries could explore partnerships with corporations or private companies. According to Hart (2006; 2007), who studied the relationships of Mpumalanga (South Africa) libraries with SAPPI, SASOL, and Eskom, partnerships with corporations are the most common in South African libraries. Ravi and Vivek (2013) encourage the understanding of the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities wherein corporations attempt to create positive impressions among stakeholders through philanthropy or other socially responsible initiatives within the community. If libraries could harness a company's CSR motivations, both entities could experience mutual benefits among their constituents. One example of this can be seen at the Jabavu Public Library in Soweto, South Africa, where a new children's section was

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<sup>56</sup> See pages 327-328 of this thesis for more information on Biblionef. Or see their webpage at <http://biblionefsa.org.za/>

<sup>57</sup> For more on FLP projects see Aitchison (2006) and <http://www.familyliteracyproject.co.za/>

developed with support from one of the country's largest mobile technology companies, Vodacom (see photo below).

**Figure 29: Vodacom Children's Section at Jabavu Library in Soweto, 2009**



Source: Karla J. Strand, 2009

These relationships can be mutually beneficial for libraries and the partners but those who stand the most to gain are library users but there are challenges to developing and maintaining fruitful partnerships. Distance and lack of ICT access may prevent potential partners from meeting in person or virtually discussing plans and initiatives. Lack of funding or other resources may stymie positive, creative new ideas. Psychological barriers stemming from a place of scarcity can cause attitudes of competition, suspicion, and territorialism (Mchombu, 1982). These challenges should not end potential partnerships before they begin; difficulties can be overcome with dedication to common goals, honest communication about expectations and abilities, and creative participation from stakeholders. Successful partnerships could potentially provide

library users with new or upgraded libraries, much-needed ICTs, books and other resources, literacy and other programs, and innumerable other outcomes.

All of these roles of library staff contribute to the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN. But once again it is clear that people must value librarians as vital to the developmental process of communities in order for them to consider increasing investments in this area. Research has shown that “perceptions of the librarian are highly related to support” (Elbert et al., 2012:149). Underwood (2009) expresses the concern of many in the profession when he brings up the topics of the value and status of librarians.

We must be clear that having status is about recognition of the capacity of one’s profession to make a beneficial difference – it is not about self-importance or aggrandisement. What we seek is recognition by employers, by government and by society that what we do is of significance to the development and protection of society and the communities that we seek to serve (Underwood, 2009:5).

When library staff are undervalued, they lack credibility with policymakers, possible investors, and the community at large (Hart, 2007). In her case study of dual-use community-school libraries, Hart (2012) notes that the school librarians in South Africa with whom she spoke often felt undermined or less respected than their fellow teachers. Public librarians have expressed similar feelings, even feeling “victimised,” when expected to take on increased responsibilities to support schools and learners in the absence of school libraries (Hart, 2004; Hart, 2007:15). In KZN, an understanding of the work librarians do and how they can assist community members in improving their quality of life can increase the value placed on them and the libraries they represent. Public libraries and librarians are uniquely equipped to aid in the development of KZN

communities in these and a multitude of ways; this is part of their true value in alleviating information inequality and poverty.

Hiring qualified staff in rural areas of KZN might look very different than in more affluent areas; librarians versed only in more Western practices and ideals of LIS may not be the right fit for developing or rural communities (Mchombu, 1982). In these areas, hiring a librarian who is versed in digital and print information provision, as well as oral tradition is ideal; this may mean updating South African library school curricula to include storytelling and audiovisual training into future librarians' education (Nyana, 2009). This may be an unrealistic goal and libraries in rural or developing KZN communities may opt instead to hire a local person with a basic education and technical skills who has a desire to help others and learn more through on-the-job training and other professional development opportunities.

By hiring quality employees and investing in their regular professional development, the KZN PLS is showing they value and support public libraries and the role they take in community development. They are also increasing the status and credibility of library staff in the community, with policymakers, and with possible investors. With a transformation of the profession, library staff can feel improved confidence and morale as well as an increase in social responsibility and fulfillment (Kagan, 2002). According to Mchombu (1982), the most important factor in LIS services to developing communities is the attitude of the staff. If staff are seen as able to provide relevant information and share useful knowledge, then community members are more likely to trust and visit them for their information needs. Mchombu's (1982:249) words still hold true: "It is only through such [library staff] involvement in the struggle against the social enemies of poverty, ignorance, and diseases that the relevance of Information services can be firmly established. It takes hard thinking, hard work and patience."

Some scholars remind us of the importance of alternative models of librarianship and the possibility that they may be more appropriate for rural or developing communities in Africa (Amadi, 1981; Onwubiko, 1996; Nyana, 2009). Referred to as “barefoot librarianship” by Adolphe Amadi (1981), one concept envisions a librarian who is either (1) literate and has some initial and ongoing training in librarianship, perhaps in the form of an apprenticeship or (2) a professional librarian who has received a formal education in the field and who chooses to work in a developing area (Underwood, 2009). A “barefoot librarian” has also been described as one who is experienced or trained in traditional ways of knowing and communicating that are common to many rural communities but one that marries this knowledge with that of modern ICT that could be used to enhance these traditions (Onwubiko, 1996; Nyana, 2009). There could be real value in hiring a person such as this in KZN to serve in a rural community library or information centre, especially if that person is from the area. Some remain unconvinced and see the hiring and promotion of those without formal library school education as a lack of respect and value for this qualification (Hart, 2007). Whomever is hired, it is clear from this and other studies that staffing libraries with employees who are seen as knowledgeable and who can communicate and interact positively with the community is very important to the success of the library, as are consistent opportunities for professional development.

The final variable of development to alleviate information inequality and poverty in KZN uncovered in this study was investment in library space and structures. This study showed that the investment currently being made for libraries does not meet the needs of KZN community members, especially those in rural areas. There are simply not enough libraries in KZN. In many cases, rural people must travel long distances along unsafe routes in order to reach the nearest library, which is usually situated in a more populous area. Ideally, if community members,

private investors, and government officials have a comprehensive understanding of what libraries do and of their value in community development, they would be more encouraged to support building new libraries or investments could be made to upgrade existing facilities or investigate more cost-effective alternatives to libraries, especially in rural areas of the province.

Unfortunately, this study showed this has not been the case in KZN in recent years. Because of the expense of building new library buildings and increased budget cuts to KZN PLS, very few communities will enjoy a brand new library building that is built to suit every need, so care and creativity must be exercised to utilise any physical space in ways that will best suit the local community. Once again, alternatives to traditional library structures and services must be considered.

As Mchombu (1982) pointed out, it is not always easy or necessary to build extravagant new library structures such as those in the West. This study found credence in his suggestion to use cost-benefit analysis to build smaller, cheaper yet sustainable structures in order to meet the demand for information services in developing parts of Africa (Mchombu, 1982). Nyana (2009:16) agrees: “There is no need for new buildings in rural areas because there are existing schools, churches, and government buildings that can be used for rural meetings, workshops, or trainings.” Hauke and Werner (2012) discuss the importance of recycling old buildings into libraries mainly for sustainability reasons. They point to the growing significance of this practice especially in developed countries (their success-stories are all located in Western Europe) but also admit “...that the re-use of a building is often a cheaper, often a surprising and realistic opportunity with an acceptable compromise to the alternative of a long and uncertain hope for a new building in the future” (Hauke and Werner, 2012:64), so it stands to reason that this practice can be viable for developing countries as well. There are other alternatives to investing in

physical libraries if KZN is unable or unwilling to make the investment. For instance, instead of rural people traveling to libraries, several participants in this study suggested that librarians travel to the rural areas. They might partner with community leaders and use an existing building for outreach focused on literacy or other educational opportunities for community members. Libraries could partner with local experts or groups to provide regular workshops or other training sessions to meet the unique needs of the community (Nyana, 2009). Of utmost importance in the discussion of creating and considering alternative library models is the practice of innovation. Shaffer (2014) writes about the importance of creating a culture of innovation in libraries when facing new challenges and opportunities presented by what he refers to as the Age of Intelligence. When considering alternatives to traditional structures, services, and initiatives, libraries must be willing and able to practice invention, ingenuity, and improvisation.<sup>58</sup> Further discussion about innovation and alternatives to traditional libraries are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

This analytic category explored the roles of public libraries in the alleviation of information poverty in KZN and the importance of investing in several main areas. All of the variables discussed contribute to one primary role for KZN public libraries: community development. A large part of the value of KZN libraries lies in their support of community education and development. In this way, libraries are cultural producers as defined by Bourdieu and play a role in the aggravation or alleviation of information inequality and poverty. “No community can develop without knowledge, and a community can only become knowledgeable by information as a tool for development” (Mansoor and Kamba, 2010:1). The importance of information for

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<sup>58</sup> Shaffer’s (2014) discussion of the stages of moving from inertia to innovation and how to avoid insularity and inflexibility is accessible and persuasive reading for any library looking to increase or maintain its influence amongst its community.

development, especially in rural communities, has been widely researched (Dent and Goodman, 2015; Mchombu, 1982, 1992, 1996; National Education Policy Investigation, 1992; Wakelin and Simelane, 1995; Sturges and Neill, 1998; Meyer, 2003, 2005; Etebu, 2009). In the early 1980s, library scholars such as Mchombu (1982) were calling attention to the fact that library and information work should play a role in the development of impoverished communities in Africa and that library workers must take an active role in this process. By providing access to relevant and varied reading materials and cooperating with schools, libraries can help increase student grades, introduce more people to the library, and encourage the development of reading cultures in their communities (Dent and Goodman, 2015; Stranger-Johannessen, 2014). Considered radical even in the early 1990s, a focus on the developmental role of libraries was considered by some to be an imperative part of the growth of democracy and equality in the new South Africa (Hart, 2007). Indeed, the National Education Policy Investigation (1992:55) in South Africa called information a “key element in the implementation and sustenance of democracy and the education and empowerment of people” (Hart, 2007:15). The increased focus on building “a reading culture” is explored by Stranger-Johannessen (2014:92) who explains the difference between it and *literacy* as follows: “*Reading culture* moves beyond a focus on decoding skills and connotes a culture in which literacy is widespread and reading is a daily and life-long activity” (emphasis in original). She continues to state the importance of “adequate and appropriate” materials and stresses the “social and affective aspect of reading” (Stranger-Johannessen, 2014:92). The encouragement of a reading culture is just one way in which libraries in KZN can combat the legacy of apartheid amongst the majority of the population and impact community development. This study showed that KZN public libraries play an imperative



role in providing their communities with the information and knowledge necessary for development and thus investments in them must be increased.

This section discussed the second analytic category that emerged from the data analysis of this research, understanding library roles in information inequality and poverty alleviation and investment in library development. The developmental role of libraries and information must first be understood and valued in KZN; then investments in technology, other resources, staff, and structures will more readily be made. The following section discusses the third analytic category uncovered in this research, the role of understanding user behaviour and community information needs in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN.

### ***7.3.3. Analytic category 3: Understanding library use and information needs in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN (Research Questions 4 and 5)***

The third analytic category that emerged from this research focused on user behaviour and information needs; this discussion is of central importance in exploring how KZN libraries can alleviate information inequality and poverty. This analytic category demonstrates the fourth step in applying the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty, determining the use of libraries by the community and investigation of community information needs.

Mansell (2013) attests to the importance of understanding a community's information use and of not assuming that the way one community uses information will be the same as another community. Indeed, this study showed that understanding how community members use the library and (perhaps more importantly why they do not) can assist libraries in making smart decisions about where to invest funding, what resources to provide, and how to deliver effective services to the community. Through informed decision-making that includes direct participation

of community members, libraries can capitalise on their developmental role and help to decrease information inequality and poverty. This section will explore this analytic category in more detail, beginning with consideration of data including visits to, members of, and circulation in the case study libraries.

The discussion of library use in Chapter 6 included an analysis of uMhlathuze visitor, membership, and circulation data as included in Annual Reports. The figures illustrate the decline in circulation which might be due in part to library visitors using the computers to find information online instead of checking out materials to take home with them. What the statistics do not confirm is the claim in the reports of the increased use of facilities and services, at least not by the visitor data provided. Perhaps the libraries are determining those figures by more than just numbers of visitors; they may instead look at numbers of meetings held in library spaces or numbers of attendees at programs. Overall, the number of actual visitors to uMhlathuze libraries seems to be decreasing over the last few years as are numbers of actual members of the libraries. Part of the reason behind these dwindling numbers may be the fairly constant issues that occur with computers and the internet at the libraries. This often includes the public computers being inoperable due to technical reasons and the library staff having to wait for someone from the municipality or province to come in and repair them. In 2012, the staff computer at Felixton Library stopped working and waiting for the government to supply a new one caused significant service delays to patrons. Delays can also occur because of the slowness of the internet or library's automated system. These delays cause ample user frustration. In 2012, Felixton Library's Cyber Cadet left the position for new employment, so the library was without one for many months while the province was hiring someone new (Sandra van Niekerk, 2012, personal communication). Libraries not being able to fill their own open positions or repair or purchase

their own equipment causes significant delays in service provision. In this case, internet access was disrupted and library staff indicated that this caused numbers of visits and circulation to decrease (Sandra van Niekerk, 2012, personal communication). These numbers present a downward trend for uMhlathuze libraries but it should be stressed though that quantitative analysis is not the only or even the best way to measure library effectiveness or importance in the community. The collection of this data may use inconsistent methods; just the automation aspects alone cause one to be skeptical of the data. In addition, declining data of circulation, visits, and members do not necessarily indicate high information inequality in a community. The quantitative data provided by the analysis of the Annual Reports is but one perspective in this research.

The vast difference between eNseleni and Felixton circulation, visits, and members is clear from the figures provided in Chapter 6. A reminder must be given that while eNseleni's operations were computerised in the 2003-2004 fiscal year, Felixton did not get on the computerised library system until fiscal year 2012-2013. So while eNseleni and other uMhlathuze libraries were able to depend on digital records for these figures, Felixton was recording and calculating them manually and are more than likely estimates in some cases. Certainly this is reflected in their statistics, especially in the number of visits as this is not as easily tracked as circulation or membership. The discrepancy in statistics is also due in part because Felixton was a new library in 2008 and while it serves a large surrounding rural area, people in those communities need to understand the value of the library in order to be inspired to use it. In addition, while this library is the closest one has ever been to these rural communities, it is still some distance for people to walk and interviewees and library staff their expressed concern about safety during this walk, especially after dark, when it is often completed by children through tall sugar cane fields.

Information technology has affected the numbers of items circulated, visits, and members. For instance, in all three figures in Chapter 6, Felixton Library experienced a drop in numbers that corresponds to their automation in 2012, perhaps signaling overestimation of these statistics in previous years. In addition, eNseleni Library especially illustrates the jump in numbers of circulation, visits, and members around 2008, which occurred with the addition of computers and free internet use for patrons being offered through the libraries at this time. Both visits and memberships have decreased at eNseleni Library in the last few years and it is difficult to pinpoint why this is the case. Memberships may be decreasing because one does not have to be a member in order to use the computers and internet, only to check items out. Hart (2007) points out the importance of membership figures in the marketing of libraries in effort to increase the perception of their value. “It is hard to make claims about public libraries as agents of social capital when they serve only a tiny minority of the population” (Hart, 2007:20). Numbers of visits have gone down as well though, perhaps the excitement of free internet has worn off, computers are unavailable due to long lines or repairs, or more people are gaining access to internet on their cellular devices. It is clear from this investigation that both quantitative and qualitative data collection and assessment measures are lacking in KZN libraries and must be improved in order to best determine use as well as identifying possible gaps and areas of development.

To provide a greater understanding of how libraries can help to alleviate information inequality and poverty, the discussion of library use in KZN continues here with an exploration into how interview participants said they used the library. The study revealed that most library users needed the library for help with schoolwork. Many also used the library to access reading materials. As was seen in Chapter 6, most participants in eNseleni and Felixton indicated they

regularly read magazines and newspapers. Those at eNseleni Library were more likely to read novels and textbooks and none of them indicated they did not read on a regular basis. On the contrary, 14.3% of those interviewed at Felixton Library said they did not read on a regular basis and they were less likely to read novels, textbooks, and in general. Whether or not participants read on a regular basis and what they choose to read may be influenced by the demographics of the participants. In eNseleni, the participants were younger (average age of 22 years), not married, with no children. They are more likely to read novels and textbooks as learners or perhaps for pleasure than those interviewed in Felixton. Felixton's participants averaged 33 years old, a larger percentage were married and had children than those in eNseleni. The Felixton participants were more likely not to read regularly at all than those in eNseleni. This finding may indicate the increased exposure to and acceptance of libraries and reading by younger generations than by older. Older generations may still experience a distrust or misunderstanding of the value of libraries and reading in their lives and so may not read as much.

Increasing visibility and use in the community is a goal of every library but is especially important in rural and developing areas like KZN. Like assessment, marketing measures in KZN are lacking and must be increased overall but particularly in ways that the community will notice and understand; this might be in newspapers, on the radio or television, or perhaps most importantly, by word of mouth (Nyana, 2009). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, community members must have an understanding of how libraries can help them develop and improve their quality of life before they will make an effort to use them and purposeful marketing can go a long way. The next section of this chapter will include more strategies to increase visibility and use with an overall goal of alleviating information inequality and poverty in KZN communities.

That being said, Elbert et al.'s (2012:155) perception study of library stakeholders in six developing African countries showed that lack of awareness of libraries and their services was not the reason for non-use.<sup>59</sup> In fact, non-users in that study revealed their beliefs that libraries were “essential to the community but not necessarily to themselves” (Elbert et al., 2012:155). When asked what would motivate them to start using the library, the non-users in Elbert et al.'s (2012:154-155) study replied that if anything could, it would be more relevant books. In addition, participants said that more convenient locations and longer open hours would also influence them to begin to use libraries (Elbert et al., 2012:154-155). So while marketing is an important part of ensuring public libraries are known entities in a community, it alone will not guarantee increased use; effective marketing must be combined with relevant, usable resources and services. This finding was confirmed by the present study as were the primary reasons found for dissatisfaction with libraries: types and relevance of materials, space constraints, and lack of computers (Elbert et al., 2012:155). Elbert et al.'s (2012) study and the current study both demonstrate that an understanding of how the public uses the library (and why they do not) is central to increasing use and thus decreasing information inequality and poverty in a community. The consideration of KZN community information needs is also central to this study. It was revealed that while participants were unfamiliar with formal concepts of information inequality and poverty, they are easily able to communicate their information needs when asked. Community members must be consulted about what they perceive their greatest information needs to be. Any library wanting to increase visits, memberships, circulation, user satisfaction,

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<sup>59</sup> Perception studies seek to investigate and understand the perceptions of stakeholders about an institution, service, or programme in question. Elbert et al. (2012) offer an effective example of a perception study of public libraries in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. More on the study can be found at <http://www.eifl.net/perception-study>

and their role in community development must take into account the information needs of community members.

The analysis of the information needs stated by KZN library users in this study displayed two patterns/relationships: the first is that the information needs rated the lowest of both communities were the same and included information about farming, raising animals, water, and building/repair. Second, the top three needs of each community were very different. On the top of the list for eNseleni participants was spirituality, literacy, and money management. For Felixton participants the top needs were other education (which includes information outside of traditional schooling), food, and human relationships. Five of these six top-rated information needs were among the topics that exhibited the greatest difference in percent of participants who saw them as important information needs. For instance, while 53.3% of eNseleni participants regarded spirituality as an information need, only 16.7% of Felixton participants did. Likewise, while 46.7% of eNseleni participants saw literacy as an information need, none of the Felixton participants did. The data show that a community's top information needs could be highly specific to their issues, backgrounds, and contexts, even when the communities are located within miles of one another. In addition though, communities are generally similar enough that they agree upon those topics about which information is not often needed.

One factor influencing the findings of information needs in this study is the fact that the only people interviewed were those already using the library. For example, while many participants indicated they lived in rural areas, none of them stated that they worked in agriculture, with animals, selling produce, etc. Nyana (2009:12) discussed Almena's 1995 findings of information needs in rural Tanzania, Nigeria, and Kenya that were mainly "...related to agricultural skills, marketing of produce, and basic health information..." needs that are not normally addressed by

Western libraries but they were also not seen as major needs by those interviewed in the present study. Thus it can be hypothesised that if further research of this kind would interview rural KZN residents who did not use the libraries, the information needs might be very similar to Alemna's findings, including the fact that many of these needs do not require ICT to be fulfilled (Nyana, 2009). However it is accomplished, the issue of information needs is one that must be addressed in research regarding information inequality and poverty.

There is a need for more research into the information needs of various groups in South Africa, especially those of youth, as Hart (2012) points out. Library staff must take into consideration the needs of all various groups of constituents when planning outreach, programming, and partnerships to determine where to spend resources for the greatest benefit. In a time of limited resources and rapidly changing information needs in developing communities, it is imperative the libraries remain adaptive and nimble, allowing for flexibility in the provision of services, programming, and outreach. This study confirmed the findings of Stilwell and Bell's 2003 research of high school students in South Africa that revealed that the most pressing information need among youth was that which would support their schoolwork. Aside from this, their study showed that information on sexual and family violence, gangs, drugs, anger, stigma, and health were also needs (Hart, 2012). This differed from the findings of the present study but that may be because participants felt uncomfortable disclosing this type of sensitive information to me.

Information needs of those in rural areas can also be unique and vary by community. Some articles discuss the importance of identifying rural community information needs but do not go so far as to say what the needs might be or how to determine those needs (Etebu, 2009; Mansoor and Kamba, 2010; Mashinini and Lotriet, 2011). The findings of the present study confirmed Alegbeleye's (1998) determination concerning rural information needs in that:



- Existing library services and models fall short of meeting the information needs of rural communities;
- Information needs are unique and vary by community according to history, background, socioeconomic conditions, political conditions, etc.;
- Information must be relevant to the community intended to use it;
- For best results, information must be communicated in ways that are known; and understood in the community.

To these factors could be added the importance of involving community members in the delineation of their information needs. Their participation should be encouraged and their unique needs given proper consideration, such as the oral traditions of many rural communities in KZN. While recognising the difficulty of rural communities to afford audiovisual materials, Nyana (2009:15) reminds us that, “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.” Honoring oral traditions is extremely important and should be a goal of librarians who work within communities where these traditions are strong. However, in information and knowledge societies, this must be balanced though with an equally strong respect for literacy. Mchombu and Cadbury (2006:5) are correct when they assert, “In today’s global information society, non-literate people are at a permanent disadvantage – unsure of their rights, unable to fulfill their potential and unable to play a full part in society. They are disempowered. Literacy is a right and a capability that is fundamental to overcoming poverty.” With an intentional balance

of traditional and modern methods and skills, libraries can play a large role in improving the quality of life for community members by aiding in their education and development.<sup>60</sup>

Closely tied to the investigation of information needs of community members is understanding how they are already meeting these needs, if indeed they are. What are the resources to which they have access? What resources do they seek most often when addressing needs? As can be seen in Chapter 6, it is no longer uncommon for eNseleni and Felixton residents to have access to television but fewer are listening to the radio and relying upon it for information, especially among younger generations. More people interviewed at Felixton Library had access to the internet than those at eNseleni and this may be true because those interviewed in Felixton were of an older generation and perhaps had more resources to pay for internet in their homes than did the participants in eNseleni. Another reason may be that Felixton enjoys a stronger ICT infrastructure in Felixton that supports internet access more effectively. Older generations have depended more on radio than current ones do although it is encouraging to see that the internet is becoming more widely used among the people of these two communities. The majority of participants in both eNseleni and Felixton (40% and 71% respectively) indicated they usually accessed the internet in the library, as opposed to at home, work, internet cafés, or via their cell phones.

The most widely used sources of information by those interviewed in both libraries included television, internet, and newspapers. The least likely to be used were political leaders and those considered to be heads of the community. Again, some of the choices to use other resources such as radio, family, books, teachers, and librarians may be influenced by the demographics of the

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<sup>60</sup> For a discussion of the attributes of the oral tradition and how understanding them can help in using information for community development, see Meyer (2003, 2005).

participants. For instance, after television, internet, and newspapers, eNseleni participants were more likely to seek information from books and librarians than those interviewed in Felixton.

The Felixton participants were more likely to use the radio and friends than those in eNseleni.

This finding may again indicate the increased exposure to and acceptance of libraries by younger generations than by older. Older generations may still experience a distrust or misunderstanding of the value of libraries in their lives and so depend more on the trusted sources of radio and personal relationships to gain needed information.

Determining the information needs of a community is imperative for a library to offer relevant resources and services. Just how are a community's information needs determined? Can someone from outside the community make this determination? In order to best meet the needs of community members, libraries should strive to understand the history, people, and issues of the community. In addition, libraries must consult the community members themselves and encourage their active participation in the planning and decision-making processes. It is important that libraries offer information in formats and languages that will be of use to local people and not only in print or in Western languages. Investments should be made to purchase materials published within South Africa in indigenous languages. This does point however to the larger issue of the lack of publishing in African languages as a whole, a discussion which is out of the scope of this thesis but John (1979:337) was correct in asserting that, "Libraries in traditional societies should relentlessly encourage growth in the literary output of the nation." He also stresses the importance of collecting, recording, and preserving indigenous content and the role libraries could play in this initiative (John, 1979). Mansoor and Kamba (2010:4) point to increased involvement by local community members in the capture of indigenous knowledge and traditions in digital formats in order to preserve and make it available for non-literate community

members: “More local content is needed to address the information needs of rural communities, particularly in communities that follow oral traditions.” As mentioned previously, it is also important for researchers in this area to create and utilise more comprehensive assessment tools to evaluate information needs within rural and developing communities. By utilising the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty, specifically the framework for determining information needs, libraries can more systematically investigate strategies to alleviate information inequality and poverty, which is the final step in the approach. These recommendations will be presented in the following sections.

#### ***7.4. Recommendations for libraries in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty***

This study set out to explore information inequality and poverty in KZN with a goal to provide pragmatic recommendations to libraries wishing to expand their role in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in their communities. To that end, the following recommendations were compiled from the literature and the data collected throughout this study. It is clear that KZN and other developing communities throughout the world are doing valuable work in investigating a variety of creative options. I hope that this thesis has provided a more comprehensive list of these options than has been previously available to libraries and that they may consider incorporating them into policy documents or best practices. Because recommendations in each theme overlapped, they will all be presented in one comprehensive list as opposed to being separated out under the specific themes used earlier in this thesis.

***7.4.1. Recommendation 1: Improve methods of data collection, assessment, and marketing and increase their use to encourage perception of library value.***

Community members, policymakers, and investors must be made aware of the true value of libraries, especially in community development. This is a challenging concept to measure and address with concrete actions but libraries must keep the increase in value of libraries as a main principle that guides all they do. In KZN, assessment practices must become comprehensive and routine; marketing results should be a top priority to show positive return on investment. To this end, library practitioners and scholars must create more effective assessment strategies; these would ideally include both qualitative and quantitative measures and be easy and affordable to undertake on a regular basis. Library operations should be automated so that library use, circulation, and other data can be collected easily and dependably; likewise it is important for a standard to be agreed upon and followed throughout KZN to ensure data were being uniformly defined and collected. Campaigns to increase the visibility of libraries and their importance in community development should be creative and dynamic. eNseleni and Felixton librarians should be taught how to market themselves and their libraries to many different constituents, from elderly community members to highly educated government officials. Educating all sectors of the community about the value of information and libraries in development, what librarians do, and how libraries can help people with daily needs should be ongoing and intentional in KZN.

***7.4.2. Recommendation 2: Increase investments in library development including information technology and other resources, staffing, and structures.***

Ideally, governments and other stakeholders would understand the value of libraries in community development and thus increase their investment in them. For most libraries, this will

not be a quick or easy process but one that needs time, persistence, strategic planning, demonstrated return on investment, marketing, and policy development. One of the goals of assessment would be to prioritise any investment possibilities according to what is determined to be of most value to the community, which could include technology, building of new library structures, adding or training staff, other resources, etc. In KZN, investment in ICT is a given (and will be discussed further below) but should be balanced with honouring print and audiovisual resources, as well as indigenous ways of knowing and communicating in rural communities. Resources should be bought as or transferred to usable formats as possible and appropriate. Oral knowledge too can be preserved by libraries with a small investment in equipment. Investment in proper staffing can go far in encouraging community members to use libraries. As Satgoor (2015:104) states, “...the best way to address and support the transformation of libraries into community hubs is to invest in staff development and training.” So not only is hiring skilled staff vital to addressing a community’s information inequality and poverty but investing in regular professional development is equally important. To this end, LIASA has made continuing professional development (CPD) a priority and has identified the following training areas to be ones of critical importance:

- Computer literacy,
- Social media,
- Advocacy,
- Library management,
- Library leadership,
- Communication,
- Marketing,

- Library systems management,
- Strategic planning, and
- Financial management (Satgoor, 2015:104-105).

LIASA “believes that better-trained staff will be able to articulate clearly and effectively the role of libraries in South Africa and will encourage South Africans to take full advantage if the libraries’ resources (Satgoor, 2015:105). Staff members should be well-trained, approachable, patient, and able to communicate effectively with local people. This may begin in the education of library and information science (LIS) students in university. Teaching LIS students about information inequality and poverty, innovative and sustainable thinking in libraries, and leadership, marketing, collaboration, and assessment skills will better equip them to creatively manage the challenges of running libraries in rural and developing areas. Investments in new library structures may be the ideal but this goal may not be realistic for many governments and communities in KZN and other developing areas. Public libraries should also make concerted efforts to seek out and encourage funding from a variety of individuals and corporations instead of relying upon the usual funding sources. In addition, libraries should investigate ways to generate funding through investments of other schemes in order to meet the funding of other investors (Abubakar, 2013:12). Because finding investors will be a challenging endeavour, eNseleni and Felixton libraries should explore collaborating with other libraries and/or the community to investigate beneficial partnerships, creative alternatives to traditional models of information access and provision, multiple-uses or renovations of existing buildings, or cost-effective group training methods, etc. when resources are scarce. A more in-depth discussion of alternatives to traditional library models is included as Recommendation 7 of this section.

#### ***7.4.3. Recommendation 3: Invest in information technology and teaching digital literacy skills.***

It goes without saying that investments in ICT are extremely important in information and knowledge societies. Each library should have available multiple computers, internet access, and the necessary infrastructure must be supplied in order to meet this minimum standard. If ICT provisions are inadequate, partnerships with private companies or other investors could be pursued in order to fill digital divides whenever possible. As was discussed in Chapter 2, technology provision alone will not “solve” information inequality and poverty. Hand in hand with providing ICT access is equipping community members with digital literacy skills and so whenever possible, libraries should employ Cyber Cadets (or similar) and provide digital literacy training to all staff.

#### ***7.4.4. Recommendation 4: Make the creation of sustainable and mutually beneficial community partnerships a top priority.***

KZN libraries should strive to create new partnerships with community members, organizations, NGOs, companies, and others who share in the mission of community development, literacy and education, and poverty eradication. Cost-effectiveness and sustainability must be goals and existing partnerships should be nurtured in order to be maintained. Buy-in from community members from the first phases of development of new initiatives can increase the likelihood of success; one way to do this is by forming partnerships with community leaders and elders. When possible, training community members to educate or assist others with information initiatives is also advisable. eNseleni and Felixton libraries should immediately increase efforts to connect with local schools in order to find smart ways to collaborate for the good of the learners. In her study of reading culture promotion through Kitengesa Community Library in Uganda, Stranger-



Johannessen (2014) described a “borrowing in bulk” scheme that encouraged collaborations with teachers, increased use of library materials, and provided learners with the materials necessary to complete assignments without having to travel long often unsafe distances to the local library.

This partnership allows teachers to check out large numbers (usually between 60 and 200) books at a time and take them back to the school for children to read and use for their work (Stranger-Johannessen, 2014). This partnership has been in place for several years with only a few schools but seemed to be beneficial in creating ties and increasing library visibility and use, especially among rural learners (Stranger-Johannessen, 2014). Stranger-Johannessen (2014) also described several initiatives that libraries created and in which teachers and learners were invited to take part, such as oral competitions between schools, Book Week events, and holiday programs.

Partnerships such as these can benefit all involved in libraries but the primary recipients will be the public.

***7.4.5. Recommendation 5: Explore creative, cost-effective outreach, services, and programming ideas.***

Provision of outreach, services, and programming will always be major components of library work. If executed successfully, these initiatives can serve to support the alleviation of economic poverty in developing or rural areas as well as to positively market the library as a whole and this consideration should go hand-in-hand with outreach, services, and programming planning. Any initiatives should be created in consultation with community members in order to ensure relevancy and support. Once again, the unique context and needs of the community must be assessed to ensure the most meaningful services are provided. It is advisable for libraries to start early and reach out to preschool children and parents as possible; in addition, libraries must play close attention to meeting the needs of rural and developing community members. Whenever

possible, library staff should leave the library and conduct programming within underserved communities. In KZN, this could take the form of participation in community celebrations, conducting educational programs, or simply staffing an informational booth in a high-traffic area. Initiatives should focus on sustainability and incorporate flexibility in order to accommodate special needs and limited resources. Some ideas provided by Abubakar (2013:8, 10-12) in his study of poverty alleviation and public libraries in Nigeria that could be incorporated in KZN include:

- Organising cultural events such as films or drama presentations, or other public lectures of local experts, especially in regional languages;
- Organising literacy days or reading programmes, including inviting local writers or having discussions about texts to encourage people to read relevant, useful information;
- Creating outreach programmes such as exhibits, art displays, or workshops, and using mobile libraries to provide information to underserved communities;
- Creating special collections focused on poverty eradication and supporting local programmes and initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty in the community;
- Encouraging the use of public libraries, community information centres, etc. by poverty eradication or job training programmes to more effectively reach rural populations;
- Creating programmes and providing resources focused on entrepreneurship, productivity, or agriculture, especially for rural dwellers; and
- Partnering with local poverty eradication organisations to support and assist them in their missions by providing space, programme information dissemination, or simply motivating people to take advantage of the programmes.

***7.4.6. Recommendation 6: Be open to investigating and attempting innovative alternatives to traditional library models.***

Alternatives to traditional libraries should be explored when funding for new library structures is unavailable or when the traditional models are not meeting local community needs. Important aspects in considering library alternatives include institutional and community goals and needs, funding and investments of time and energy, community participation, and sustainability. As Hauke and Werner (2012) point out, sustainability is not only focused on green initiatives in libraries but also the preservation of the cultural and historical identity and importance of places, repurposed buildings, and reimagined models. “Sustainable thinking” should be a new criterion for quality library buildings (Hauke and Werner, 2012:65) but in my opinion, in all of library operations more generally, especially in developing areas where cost-effectiveness and increasing value are key.

In addition, some scholars have argued that Western models of libraries are inappropriate for African or other developing countries and an ample amount has been written on alternatives to traditional libraries around the world (Amadi, 1981; Alemna, 1995; Yeboah, 2000; Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006; Witbooi, 2006; Nzimande and Stilwell, 2008; Nyana, 2009; Hart, 2012). The success of alternative models of information provision in KZN and in other developing areas will depend on community need and support, available resources, creative planning, and sustainability. Alternatives include information or resource centres, mobile libraries, joint-use libraries, study libraries, and more. Some alternatives such as mobile libraries, study libraries, and telecentres have already being investigated in KZN to varying degrees of success. Library users only know what works and what does not work; if information service models do not meet their daily needs, they will not take advantage of them. While administrators in KZN have their

own opinions of how to provide the most appropriate LIS to their local communities, community members were clear that they wanted to be consulted and participate in this process.

Several factors should be kept in mind when considering library alternatives. Sylvia Nyana (2009:9) suggests creating “a library system that is sustainable and compatible with the oral tradition...” and one that can “play the role of information providers or storehouses of African cultures and traditions rooted in the oral tradition” (Nyana, 2009:10). The adherence to the Western model of librarianship in Africa can lead to inappropriate training for librarians, irrelevant collections of materials, a disregard for oral traditions and indigenous knowledge (IK), and improper assessment of information needs (Nyana, 2009). Sustainability of libraries or other alternative models is an important facet in their continued utility in developing communities. As Rosenberg (1993) points out, often libraries are opened by well-meaning non-governmental or other aid organizations to a lively response, only to significantly and quickly decrease when aid ends or if the project is unable to be sustained by the local community. The involvement of community members from the initial planning stages through implementation will greatly increase the success of a new project. “...the more the community gets involved...the greater the probability that the centre will become a gathering place for the various concerns of the community and that it will truly be adopted by the community” (Burch, 2007:15-16). Thus, library alternatives in KZN must keep in mind community traditions, training of employees, and sustainability if they are to be successful.

As mentioned earlier, encouraging a culture of innovation can be very useful in creating and considering alternatives to traditional library models and services. Shaffer (2014) offers valuable guidance and language for libraries wishing to foster a more innovative culture. First, we must understand that innovation can take various forms: a library may be inventing something

completely new, using ingenuity to do something traditional in a new way, or using improvisation to respond spontaneously and creatively to a more immediate issue (Shaffer, 2014). Creating a culture of innovation is more than a one-off event and takes sustained and intentional effort including “support [of] long-term investment, constant change and recalibration, high tolerance for transformation, and a willingness to take risk [sic]” (Shaffer, 2014:146). If a library can take the steps necessary to create a culture of community inclusion and innovation, it will be much easier for them to create relevant, cost-effective library models in order to best meet the needs of the community. More specific examples of alternatives to the traditional library model are offered below. Some ideas came directly from KZN library staff and users while others were found in the literature from libraries around the world located within communities similar to KZN.

Some developing countries have experimented with the model of community libraries, also called *community resource centres* or *information centres*. Researchers such as Alemna (1995), Dent and Goodman (2015), Dent and Yannotta (2005), Mostert and Vermeulen (1998), Stilwell (1989, 1991), Stranger-Johannessen (2014), and Sturges and Neill (1998) have described community libraries as small operations, often created by community members themselves in rural areas without electricity or other services, usually without government support, and that otherwise would have no access to books and other information resources. In the 1980s, the term *community library* indicated a library which was created by an NGO or other community-based organization to help in the fight against apartheid but after 1994, much of the funding was diverted to the South African government resulting in a loss by 1999 of some 50% of the 120 community and resource centres that had been in existence in 1990 (Stilwell, 2007:101). It has been noted that while they provided alternatives to traditional models, community libraries and

resource centres at this time were not able to compensate for the enormous inequities of library service provision throughout the apartheid era (Walker, 1994). By 2002, the Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa (PaCLISA) report by Van Helden and Lor did not distinguish between public libraries and community libraries (Hart, 2007). Aitchison (2006), Dent and Yannotta (2005), Mostert and Vermeulen (1998), Mostert and Vermeulen (1998), and Stranger-Johannessen (2014) delineate the ways in which community libraries and resource centres differ from public libraries:

- Community libraries are intentionally established in impoverished, often rural, communities.
- They are more likely to provide utilitarian information as well as reading materials for leisure purposes.
- The community usually initiates the creation of this type of an institution, they are invested in its success, and participate actively in its maintenance.
- They are often not affiliated with a public library program and thus not funded by the government.
- Community needs are investigated and community members consulted on resources and services to be provided. In this way, community members feel investment in the success of the library.
- The library is integrated into the community through outreach programming, educational initiatives, and partnerships with local schools.

- The goal is to provide community members with survival/essential information and citizens' action information and this information might be repackaged by library staff to meet the literacy needs of the community members.

Hart (2007) opines that the rise in usage of the term *community libraries* in the 2000s may have indicated a re-dedication to the focus on community support and development of libraries while Dent and Goodman (2015) argue that the rise of these types of libraries provides evidence of their need in rural and developing communities. Lor (2013) uses the terms *public library* and *community library* interchangeably as they are in much of the literature. The SmartCape Access Project is one example of a community project that used a public library as a base from which internet access was extended to areas which previously lacked it by using existing facilities and resources (Valentine, 2004; Stilwell, 2007).<sup>61</sup>

Dual-use libraries and satellite libraries are two forms of community libraries and were the subjects of two case studies conducted by Hart (2012) in South Africa. The first case explored six dual-use school-community libraries set up in 2001 when it was found that transport to the central public library was very difficult for many rural dwellers. The libraries were set up in area schools and while the goal was to provide services for all community members, most of the users were learners from the schools. Hart (2012) pointed out several reasons for this including the hard-to-find locale of the libraries within the depths of the schools and the possible misunderstanding by community members of the availability and role of the libraries to anyone outside of the schools. The second case investigated a library placed in a small township outside of Cape Town as a satellite of a larger library in a neighbouring predominantly White suburban

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<sup>61</sup> For more information about SmartCape Access Project, see their website at <http://www.smartcape.org.za/home.html>.

community. The satellite library is described as “an ideal arena for social development” and its focus is on educational outreach programs (Hart, 2012:8). Hart (2012) notes the vast difference between the parent library and the satellite in that the latter shows little sign of “traditional” library use of the former, such as browsing the shelves or reading the newspapers. Some important findings of Hart’s (2012) study are confirmed by the present research:

- Sustainability of alternative library models is key. While many of these libraries are created with donor funding, they often end up becoming a part of the larger library system. This can be beneficial for funding but less so regarding the library’s freedom to operate as they themselves should determine in the local community.
- Both cases relied largely on partnerships and sharing a common goal of community development. That being said, both sites were lacking partnerships with area schools and local school officials were not consulted despite their having much to offer libraries regarding information literacy and educational programming more generally. This is also the case in the present research in uMhlathuze municipality.
- Both sites relied heavily on local people at the point of contact for both leadership and volunteer efforts. Related to this is the concern of “passing the torch” along to other individuals to maintain the success these sites have had until now.
- Both sites illustrate the necessity to move outside of traditional library services and create fresh, new initiatives or models that will best suit the needs of unique communities, particularly rural or impoverished ones.

Joint-use libraries were also the focus of a project in Mpumalanga that used multiple partnerships to increase access to ICT in area schools (Le Roux and Hendrikz, 2006; Stilwell, 2007). Also



called the *cluster model*, this method also uses a central facility, often a library, to serve a group of underserved schools (Stilwell, 2007). Nzimande and Stilwell (2008:235) describe some of the benefits of the cluster model:

- Community empowerment and involvement,
- Improved efficiency,
- Improved staff training and quality of teaching and learning, and
- Increased planning and access.

Challenges to using the cluster model include organisation and management, encouraging the willing cooperation of all parties, territorialism and desire for self-sufficiency, and the lack of experience and preparedness (Nzimande and Stilwell, 2008).

Similar to the community library and information centre model is the resource centre movement or the *centre approach* (Snyman and Snyman, 2003). “In South Africa, the Resource Centre Movement typifies information provision that is centred upon communities and where those providing the service are well-attuned to responding to social need” (Underwood, 2009:2). In the late 1990s, the South African Government began to focus on universal service to ICT by creating multi-purpose community centres (MPCCs) and telecentres (Nassimbeni, 1998; Stilwell, 2007). The goal was to create 1 000 telecentres across South Africa by 1998 within thirty minutes’ walk from anywhere in the country but in particular to provide rural community members access to internet and email, telephones, TV/video, photocopying, etc. (Nassimbeni, 1998). Part of the focus of MPCCs is on the feeling of ownership by the community members themselves; one definition states that “An MPCC is an organisation offering a range of developmental services

(including information services) to a specific community and with a large degree of community involvement” (National Information Technology Forum, 1998, quoted in Nassimbeni, 1998:159). The lack of stable ICT infrastructure that extended to rural areas and the monopoly of telecommunication services by Telkom at that time hindered the success of these initiatives (Stilwell, 2007).

Container libraries are another alternative to the traditional library model. This model uses shipping containers to function as the library building (see photos below). Biblionef South Africa is one example. A non-profit whose focus is the donation of storybooks to impoverished communities, Biblionef hopes to encourage a reading culture and support community development while also stimulating local publishing by commissioning books in indigenous languages (Williams, 2006). When no suitable facility is available in a small or sparsely populated community receiving books, Biblionef will use a shipping container to house the donated books (Williams, 2006). Housing 5 000 to 6 000 books, these containers are fitted with windows, doors, security bars, electricity, shelving and storage, as well as appropriate furniture (Williams, 2006). In 2006, Williams (2006:80) estimated it cost approximately R130 000 to set up a fully equipped container library, which is a suitable alternative when local authorities are unable or unwilling to provide a rural community with a formal or traditional library. After investigating the information needs of the community, Biblionef will provide basic reference books and enlist community participation in choosing leisure books as well as in finding people to staff the library (Williams, 2006). A library committee is set up and advises local community members how to run and maintain the facility (Williams, 2006). As of this writing, Biblionef South Africa has donated over one million new storybooks, commissioned the publication or translations of 83 titles in one or more of South Africa’s eleven official languages, and helped

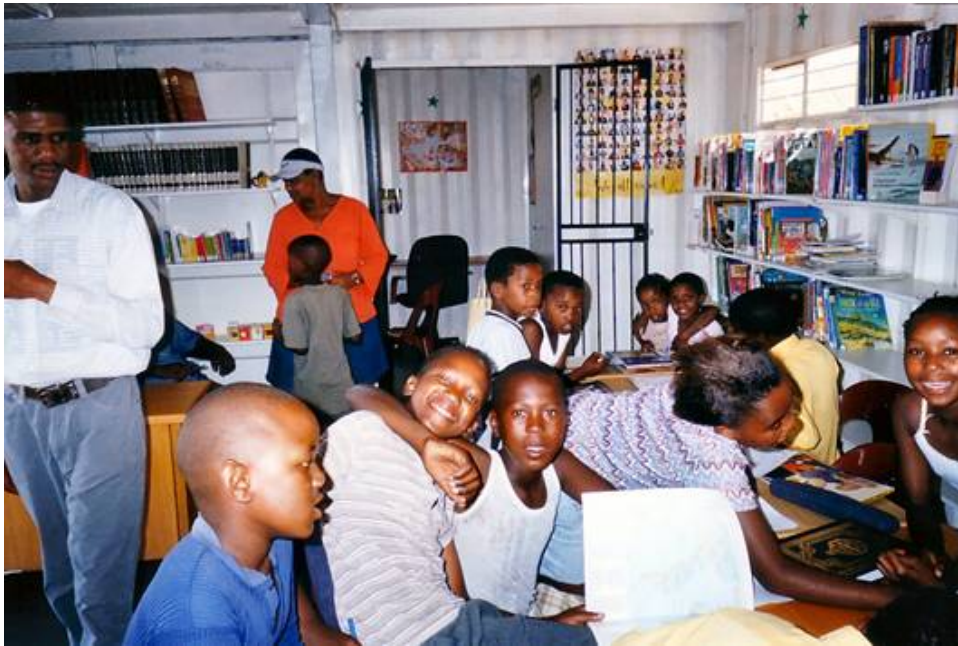
approximately 3 500 schools, 12% of which are located in KZN (Biblioneef South Africa, n.d.). In a 2011 interview with me, Provincial Library Administrator Carol Slater (2011, personal communication) was not interested in pursuing container libraries for KZN; her concern was that if they invested in “lousy little container[s] with no windows,” it would set a precedent and they would never get a formal library again. Ms. Slater (2011, personal communication) said that KZN was exploring “study libraries” which are smaller, less expensive, and offer quiet and comfortable study spaces catering to learners. At approximately 600 square metres, a study library would cost around R2 million to build and may offer some books, especially for tertiary students.

**Figure 30: Exterior of Container Library, Gugulethu Township**



Source: Education for Democracy in South Africa, n.d.

**Figure 31: Interior of Container Library, Gugulethu Township**



Source: Education for Democracy in South Africa, n.d.

Mobile libraries, previously called bookmobiles, are another alternative to traditional libraries that are being experimented with in rural communities, including in KZN. The first three bookmobiles in South Africa were delivered in 1950 to the Orange Free State to help serve rural communities with no nearby library; the Cape Province received one in 1951 (Ehlers, 1972). In 2011, KZN had three large mobile library trucks (see photos below) but only one was operational (Carol Slater, 2011, personal communication). According to Ms. Slater (2011, personal communication), the goal of the library trucks is to travel to impoverished and rural areas to promote reading and provide assistance with government information. The trucks in KZN did not circulate books but they were equipped with three 3G-enabled laptops. To circulate books, the trucks would need to be centralised from a main library and these are not. In addition, they would need to run on a specific schedule to places where people convene and can check out books, like malls or community centres; at the time, this was not an option in KZN, mainly

because of the cost and the perception of low return on investment. The mobile libraries are expensive, it is challenging to find drivers and operate a set schedule, and people find the most value in going to the library for a place to sit and read or study, not just check out books and go home. According to Ms. Slater (2011, personal communication), mobile library trucks were not a need or want for KZN at that time but they were focusing more on mobile library units (MLUs), also called *wheelie wagons* (see photo below). MLUs are smaller trolleys that hold approximately 600 books each; they are on wheels and have locking doors. KZN had two MLUs in 2011 focused in impoverished areas; kept in a community centre or similar, the municipality pays for local community members to open the wagons for set hours each week and then wheel them away for storage while not in use. While not as mobile, steel trunks have also been used as small storage alternatives for books and other resources when schools and small communities do not have storage options (Williams, 2006).

**Figure 32: Gauteng Province Mobile Library Truck**



Source: SouthAfricaWeb, 2012



**Figure 33: KwaZulu-Natal Mobile Library Truck**



Source: Carol Slater, 2011

**Figure 34: KwaZulu-Natal Mobile Library Unit (MLU, aka Wheelie Wagon)**



Source: Carol Slater, 2011

The alternatives to traditional libraries discussed here are only a small sampling of the innovative ideas with which libraries could experiment in investigating providing the best services and resources available to their communities. Using the information delivery model that makes the most sense in the community will be more likely to help the alleviation of information inequality and poverty.

***7.4.7. Recommendation 7: Increase community participation in all aspects of library planning, decision-making, and assessment.***

In order to provide the best library and information services possible, local community members should be consulted on all aspects of library services including, but not limited to, how they use (or do not use) libraries and what their information needs are. Libraries should not forget to go into the community to talk with or survey those who do not regularly use their services in order to unveil any barriers to library use. This information will help guide service and program development, collection development, as well as marketing strategies. As mentioned throughout this thesis, it is imperative to regularly evaluate community library use and information needs because they will vary and evolve. Using Nussbaum's capabilities approach as a guide, this study has provided an approach to determine user needs more effectively. It is suggested that libraries use this approach and these strategies to develop their own methods, assessments, policy documents, and strategies to alleviate information inequality and poverty within their own communities.

***7.4.8. Recommendation 8: Increase use of critical theory, self-reflection and praxis in LIS research and practice.***

Despite the fact that LIS practitioners desire pragmatic approaches to apply to issues, I have included this more reflective recommendation here because of the importance I feel it plays in

the alleviation of information inequality and poverty. As referred to earlier in this thesis, Hudson (2012) encourages those of us in LIS to learn about and use critical development theory in their research and practice. I have attempted to use critical theory in this research because of its focus on social justice as well as my own interest in this approach. While I have included some ideas, researchers, theories, and suggestions to challenge existing dominant frameworks and discourse in information inequality and poverty research in this thesis, there is much more to be done in this area. Most of us could start with critical self-analysis and reflections of our own biases and goals. In addition, we can read the growing body of work produced by those who use critical frameworks to investigate LIS. Conducting critical research and creating original critical LIS theory is important but this starts with exploring our own contexts and practices as well as engaging our peers in courageous conversations with the intention of understanding, and perhaps disrupting, the existing narratives of information and knowledge societies.

## ***7.5. Conclusion***

This chapter provided a holistic discussion of the findings of this research study, which were collated under three main analytic categories. The categories were based on the themes first presented in Chapter 6 and represent each of the research questions. The analytic categories included the evidence of information inequality and poverty, the role of libraries in its alleviation in KZN and investment in their development, and user behaviour and community information needs. The main categories were discussed against the framework of the integrative approach to information inequality and poverty and of the critical theories of Bourdieu, Freire, and Nussbaum in order to present a comprehensive analysis of the research findings. Of central importance in data analysis was the confirmation of the necessity of an integrative approach to information inequality and poverty which asserts Bourdieu's process of cultural socialization, in



which libraries can be agents of social stratification that perpetuate the existing hierarchy of domination and more specifically here, LIS inequalities, information inequality and poverty in particular. It goes on to stipulate that libraries and librarians can and should disrupt this process and information inequality by letting go of the myth of neutrality (Durrani), critically assessing community needs (Nussbaum), and addressing those needs with the community's input and active participation (Freire). This chapter concluded with recommendations libraries can use to alleviate information inequality and poverty based on the main research themes and analytic categories uncovered throughout the study. This thesis will conclude in the next chapter with conclusions of the main findings and suggestions for further research.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusions

#### *8.1. Introduction*

This chapter will provide conclusions of this research study and suggestions will be presented for future research on this topic. The purpose of this study was to investigate how public libraries in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa, might help alleviate information inequality and poverty in their communities. To unpack this topic, five main research questions were addressed:

1. How do information inequality and poverty manifest in KZN?
2. How has public library development impacted the current state of information inequality and poverty in KZN?
3. What is the role of public libraries in alleviating information poverty in KZN?
4. How are community members using libraries? What are the challenges to using libraries?
5. What are KZN library users' information needs? How do they address these needs?

This study utilised a mixed methods case study research design and was set against a framework of the critical theories of Bourdieu, Freire, Durrani, and Nussbaum. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis and the study was supplemented by a questionnaire that provided some quantitative data. All data and findings were then collated and analysed by emergent themes which were presented in Chapter 6. The five major themes included:

**Theme 1:** Information inequality and poverty in KZN – Evidence of the existence of information inequality and poverty and how it manifests in KZN is included in this theme.

**Theme 2:** Development of public libraries in KZN – This theme contains information regarding the value of public libraries in KZN and any investment made in their development, staffing, technology, and resources.

**Theme 3:** The role of public libraries in KZN – This theme is based on data collected to explain the various roles of public libraries in KZN and how those roles can serve to alleviate information inequality and poverty.

**Theme 4:** Information-seeking behaviour of KZN library users – Evidence from this study illuminated how people in KZN are using libraries and the challenges that may prevent them from doing so.

**Theme 5:** KZN library users' information needs – Library users expressed their information needs and what resources they use to meet those needs.

This chapter will now present the conclusions of the study and the thesis will end with suggestions for future research in the area of information inequality and poverty.

## **8.2. Conclusions**

### **8.2.1. Conclusions on information inequality and poverty and its dimensions in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN)**

The first major finding of this study was that information inequality and poverty is evident in KZN and that its dimensions vary widely. In KZN, the absence of libraries and resources, the lack of information and digital literacy skills, the low or expensive access to ICT, the misunderstanding of information and its role in development, and the absence of materials in formats, languages, and with cultural relevancy, all signaled the presence of information

inequality and poverty. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that it is of primary importance for libraries to further investigate and understand how information inequality and poverty manifests in eNseleni and Felixton in order to assist in its alleviation. A related conclusion is that library staff are of primary importance in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN but they must first be aware of it. Adding this to library school curriculum or providing provincial workshops may be effective ways to increase knowledge and understanding of information inequality and poverty, their causes and characteristics, possible manifestations, and options to combat them. The last major conclusion in this theme is the importance of community participation in the process of information inequality and poverty alleviation. In their investigations of information inequality and poverty dimensions in eNseleni and Felixton, libraries should encourage the input of community members, both library users and non-users, as well as community leaders and policy makers. While strides have indeed been made to address information inequality and poverty in KZN and throughout South Africa since the end of apartheid, there is still much work to be done and it must be done with an intentional effort to increase community participation and value of the developmental roles libraries play in daily life.

#### ***8.2.2. Conclusions on the impact public library development has on information inequality and poverty in KZN***

The second theme that emerged from this study is that investment in library development is imperative to the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN, particularly in the areas of technology, staffing, and other available resources. The findings revealed that investment (or lack thereof) in the development of public libraries can alleviate (or exacerbate) the information inequality and poverty of a community. Variables of importance in KZN

included the value placed on libraries, especially with regards to community development, the investment in library buildings or alternatives, as well as support for staffing, technology, and other resources. The conclusion drawn from this finding is that in the case of KZN, investment in public libraries has been insufficient and must be increased. In addition, investments must be better informed, with participation by the community, by an in-depth understanding of the manifestation of information inequality and poverty there, the developmental roles of the libraries and if these are valued by the community, how the community is using the library, and the information needs of community members. While it was evident from this study that libraries in eNseleni and Felixton are valued by their users, convincing non-users, including potential investors and policymakers, of the value of libraries has proven more difficult. It was found that often constituents do not have a full understanding of the developmental role of libraries, what libraries can do to help them in their daily lives, and how librarians could be the key to unlocking the information to meet important needs. Unless libraries work to prove and market the valuable roles they play in community development, they will not receive the honour and investment that will allow them to flourish and meet the needs of all community members. Another conclusion that emerged in this area is that eNseleni and Felixton library staff must be willing and prepared to prioritise and make tough choices regarding where to invest any funding they have. This study found that when decisions must be made in KZN libraries about where to invest, technology is the area participants preferred. It is important to remember to then also increase time and effort into the instruction of digital and information literacy skills. Other areas that KZN community members deemed important were staffing, space, and outreach services. While areas of investment may be similar across communities, the importance placed on each may differ; thus it is important to determine the investment and development priorities in each particular

community. The importance of relevant resources, partnerships, and initiatives is not lost on library staff and users in KZN but they expressed concern over the lack of resources as a key factor in their attempts to meet local needs. Libraries must be cost-effective but also meet the unique needs of local populations in order to increase visibility of LIS and provide the support for development that is needed in the community. As was found throughout this study, the most important factors in determining this balance is understanding the unique needs of the community and including community members in the decision-making process when determining where investments in library development should be made. Associated with this is the conclusion that investigating and creating alternatives to traditional libraries, staff roles, and services with a focus on unique needs may be a more valuable, efficient, and effective way to deliver information services to rural and developing communities like KZN.

### ***8.2.3. Conclusions on the roles of public libraries in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN***

The third major finding of this study confirmed that libraries play multiple significant roles in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN including the provision of free access to ICT and information; the availability of helpful staff; the delivery of outreach, programming, services, and partnerships; and the provision of comfortable structures and useful spaces. From the study findings, it has been concluded that the primary role of public libraries in KZN is community development. As players in the production and preservation of culture, libraries in KZN encourage literacy and a reading culture among community members; support the training of information and digital literacy skills; provide access to information; offer outreach, services, and programming; and grow valuable community partnerships. All of these roles are important in community development and thus the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in KZN.

A related conclusion is that increased community understanding of the roles public libraries play in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty will drive further understanding of their value and ideally, increased investment in them. If community members, leaders, and policy makers are convinced of the important roles libraries play in KZN community development, they may be more apt to support increased investments in them. Last, it was concluded in this theme as well that innovation and the community must have places in the discussion regarding library roles. While the roles libraries perform in various communities may be similar, the priority placed on these roles by the people may differ, and so the people must have an opportunity to voice their opinions about the roles they perceive to be the most important in their communities. In addition, a culture of innovation is valuable in creating and considering influential and cost-effective alternatives to traditional library roles.

#### ***8.2.4. Conclusions on library use in KZN***

The fourth theme that emerged in this research study was focused on KZN library user behaviour which was based on the finding that KZN community members were primarily using the case study libraries for access to the internet and computers and their biggest challenge to library use was when this access was disrupted. This study found quantitative indications of declining use of eNseleni and Felixton libraries derived from circulation, visit, and membership statistics over the last few years which is, in large part, due to instability of information technology provision to users and/or inconsistent data collection measures. While quantitative analysis alone did not indicate the existence of information inequality and poverty in KZN, when combined with interview, observation, and questionnaire data, its presence became more apparent. Other factors contributing to low library use in KZN included the lack of a reading culture, high illiteracy rates, lack of information and digital literacy skills, low visibility of libraries, and a lack of

understanding what libraries do to assist in the daily lives of community members. The conclusion drawn from this finding is that because it is the primary use of libraries by community members in KZN, ICT should see increased investment and be used as a bridge between community members and libraries; access to the internet and computers may be what brings users into the library but introducing them to other resources and teaching them valuable skills may be what keeps them coming back. In addition, any other investments in libraries should be informed by the community and how they use that particular library. As was concluded with the previous findings, community involvement is important in understanding how people are using the library and, more importantly, why they are not. Finally, a broader conclusion in this theme is that information inequality and poverty decreases amongst community members who use the library provided that the library offer relevant, useful, meaningful resources and services and provide users with the information and digital literacy skills to benefit from them. Thus, a thorough understanding of user needs is imperative if KZN libraries are to increase use in communities and to ultimately have a positive effect on information inequality and poverty. Conclusions on information needs are discussed in the following section.

#### ***8.2.5. Conclusions on information needs in KZN***

This study showed that KZN library users view their primary information need to be education. Other needs included information about employment opportunities, technology, relationships, spirituality, and more. It was also revealed that while information needs of communities may be similar, the priority that each is assigned may differ widely. Thus it is imperative for libraries to investigate and understand the information needs of their communities and unfortunately, KZN libraries are not doing enough of this, especially in their rural communities. One conclusion in



this theme is that this understanding of community information needs must help inform any library investments, services, outreach, etc. An additional conclusion is that community members must play an active role in any assessment of these needs and attempts to meet them through library and information services in order to make them relevant and meaningful. A final conclusion is that library partnerships with local schools and businesses in KZN can have positive effects on library use, meeting community needs and thus on community development. Collaborations must be a focus of libraries in developing areas seeking to alleviate information inequality and poverty in their communities.

### ***8.3. Overall conclusions of the research problem***

It is clear from this research study that information inequality and poverty exist in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province of South Africa. Information inequality and poverty there manifest in a variety of ways including a lack of value placed in libraries for development, a shortage of libraries, the absence of the skills necessary to utilise information for development, the lack of access to ICT and other relevant resources, and more. eNseleni and Felixton libraries must invest time and energy into investigating and understanding information inequality and poverty in general and its dimensions in their communities specifically. They can do this by assessing investments made in library development, exploring the roles the library plays in their community, the ways in which community members are using libraries, and their information needs. By achieving a more comprehensive understanding of these factors, libraries would be better situated to assist in the alleviation of information inequality and poverty in their communities. Public libraries in KZN and around the world are exploring a myriad of methods to combat information inequality and poverty and how a library chooses to go forward will depend

upon their assessment of these issues in their respective communities. In light of these conclusions, suggestions for further study will now be presented.

#### ***8.4. Suggestions for further study***

This section will describe suggestions for further study in the area of information inequality and poverty. First, the current study was limited to two libraries and observations in relatively short time-frames. A future study should explore information inequality and poverty among more cases and over a longer period of time. Likewise, libraries from various areas could be investigated including those in more rural or traditional settings as well as those in urban areas to compare similarities and differences. Only library users were interviewed for this study. It would be necessary for future studies to be able to speak with community members outside of libraries to explore more of the challenges to library use; an interpreter or ability to speak the local language may be necessary in this case. Future studies should incorporate more interviews with library administrators or government officials. This study was unable to provide a more complete understanding of the decision-making and budgeting processes as they regard libraries. Research focused on the creation of assessment tools to evaluate information poverty levels and information needs is needed in order to better address information inequality in rural and developing communities. Additionally, there is a need for increased perception studies of library stakeholders. Elbert et al. (2012) offer one effective example of this type of study undertaken in public libraries in six African countries. Finally, research should be conducted investigating how information inequality and poverty affects specific historically marginalised populations, including women and girls, especially through a framework of critical theory and/or non-Western lenses. Mchombu (1999), Schreiner (1999), Jiyane et al. (2013) and others have begun

some research into the effects of information inequality and poverty on women but much more must be undertaken.

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## Appendix A: Demographic Data Sheet (Questionnaire)

1. Date:
2. Town of Residence:
3. Gender:
4. Age:
5. Marital status:
6. Do you have children?      Yes    No
7. If so, how many?
8. Are your children school age?    Yes    No
9. Do they attend school?    Yes    No
10. Are you employed?      Yes      No
11. If so, what work do you do?
12. Are you currently a student?    Yes    No
13. If so, what school do you attend?
14. Level of education:
  - None
  - Some Primary
  - Completed Primary
  - Some Secondary
  - Completed Secondary
  - Some Higher Education
  - Completed Higher Education
  - Other, please specify:
15. Can you write more than your name?    Yes    No
16. Can you read more than your name?    Yes    No
17. If yes, what materials do you read on a regular basis?
  - Magazines
  - Newspapers
  - Novels
  - Textbooks
  - Don't read on a regular basis
  - Other, please specify:
18. Type of residence:
19. Does your residence have electricity?    Yes    No
20. Water?    Yes    No
21. Do you have access to television?    Yes    No
22. Do you have access to radio?    Yes    No
23. Do you have access to Internet?    Yes    No
24. If so, where do you have access?
25. How would you rate your overall health?
  - Excellent
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Poor

26. Do you seek information to solve problems or find answers to questions on a regular basis? Yes No

27. If yes, in which of the following areas do you seek information?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Health-related</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Family planning/sexual health</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Human relationships</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Parenting</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Current events</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Literacy</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other education</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Building/repair</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Starting own business</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Technology-related</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Politics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Money management/investment</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Finding work</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Job-related</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Farming</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Raising animals</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Food-related</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Water-related</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Handcrafts</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Spirituality</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other, please specify:</li> </ul>
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28. If yes, what types of information sources do you use? (Check all that apply.)

Type of Resource:	Have used in the past	Use regularly	Have never used
Radio			
Television			
Internet			
Newspapers			
Magazines			
Books			
Head of community			
Family			
Friends			
Teacher			
Librarian			
Political leader			
Spiritual leader			

## **Appendix B: Informed consent form (Form for research subject's permission)**

(Must be signed by each research subject, and must be kept on record by the researcher)

Title of research project:

I ..... hereby voluntarily grant my permission for participation in the project as explained to me by.....Karla J. Strand, Researcher.....

The nature, objective, possible safety and health implications have been explained to me and I understand them.

I understand my right to choose whether to participate in the project and that the information furnished will be handled confidentially. I am aware that the results of the investigation may be used for the purposes of publication.

Upon signature of this form, you will be provided with a copy.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide I - KZN Community Members**

1. What problems have you on a daily basis that may drive you to seek help or information?
2. Where do you go for information or for help in solving problems or answering questions?
3. What/who would you consider to be your most trusted information source?
4. How often do you use the library?
5. Please tell me in detail about how you use the library.
6. Do you find the library helpful? What do you like most about the library?
7. Do many community members use the library? If not, where else could they go to obtain information to answer questions or solve problems?
8. Have you ever tried to use the library and you were disappointed? Please tell me about this experience.
9. What types of services or resources would you like to have in the library?
10. Do you feel the library is an important service in your community? Why or why not?

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide II - Librarians and Library Staff in KwaZulu Natal**

1. How long have you been a librarian/information provider?
2. Do you live in the town or village in which you provide library services?
3. How have you learned to work in a library?
4. What are the main information needs of community members here?
5. How well are these needs being met in general?
6. Please describe the effects on the people/community when the information needs of community members aren't met.
7. What do you see as the role of the library in meeting the needs of the people?
8. What are the barriers to more community members using the library to meet their information needs?
9. What are librarians doing here to encourage library usage?
10. What more can librarians do in rural KZN to help combat information poverty?
11. Do you feel the library has the resources it needs to meet the needs of the community?
12. What are future goals for the library in this community?

## Appendix E: Observation Guide

- Users of the libraries:
  - The gender and approximate age of users were noted.
  - Was the user by themselves or in a group?
  - What conversations were users having?
- Actions of the users in the libraries:
  - Were they using computers or making photocopies?
  - Were they looking at newspapers, books, or other materials?
  - Did any of them ask a librarian for assistance?
  - Did they check out any materials?
- The physical space, layout, and contents of the library:
  - Size and construct of the building.
  - Were there computers in the library? How many?
  - What is the layout of the library? Are there areas assigned to differing purposes such as a children's area or study areas?
  - How many staff are employed at the library? How many were available to patrons during observations?
  - The size and quality (currency, relevance, language, etc.) of the collections.
  - The condition of the furniture and materials, etc.