

# THE OBJECTIVES AND AIMS OF A MODERN SPECIAL LIBRARY WITH REFERENCE TO THE GHANAIAN SITUATION

GRACE ANNOH  
*ARI Library, Accra*

## ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the nature of special libraries. It explains the meaning of a modern special library as one with modern library facilities and equipment and employing modern methods of information storage and retrieval systems. The objectives and aims of a modern special library are stated and the strategies and services which must be adopted in order to achieve them are discussed. The relevance of the objectives and aims are discussed with regard to the Ghanaian situation.

## INTRODUCTION

A special library forms an integral part of the organisation of which it belongs.

The main purpose of any special library is to provide services that will support the aims and objectives of the organisation. A modern special library here means a library with modern library facilities like computer, photocopier, fax machines desktop publishing equipment and have access to online databases, internet and electronic mail. It also uses information technology to store and disseminate information and forms a network with other libraries.

For the purpose of this paper the defi-

nition of a special library will be given. The objectives and aims of a modern special library will be given. The various services to be performed in order to effectively implement the objectives and aims will be discussed. These services are current awareness service, bibliographic service, photocopier service, inter-library loan, reference service, abstracting and indexing service, translation service and newspaper clippings. Strategies such as library automation, conducting user needs survey, developing an in-depth knowledge of sources of information and marketing and promotion of information services which must be adopted will be discussed.

## WHAT IS A SPECIAL LIBRARY?

The term special library has various meanings for different people. ASLIB defines a special library as "a department or faculty responsible for the acquisition, indexing and distribution of recorded knowledge directly concerned with the work of a specialised organisation or a special group of users" (Halm, 1978:6). A special library is one that limits its scope to a particular subject or group of related subjects. For example, the law or art or medical library. Other libraries are called special because of the form of materials

kept. For example map and picture libraries. Special libraries can be found in departmental libraries of universities or government departments or special divisions of public libraries. They can be found in commercial and industrial firms which may be government or private owned and whose aim is to make profit or in not-for-profit organisations like research institutes, cultural institutions, learned and professional societies like the Institute of Chartered Accountants. All these organisations have different missions and different levels of support but all special libraries are alike in the sense that they focus on a specific subject and they provide customised service to their parent organisation. They have the responsibility to provide the organisation with all the information that will further the organisation's activities.

A special library has special users who are associated with the main organisation of which the library is part. The users have clearly defined subject interest and they can be clearly identified. For example in a law library the users are mostly law students, legal practitioners, members of the bench, and/or clients who all have common interest. The clientele is therefore homogenous.

The collection of a special library is devoted to a specific subject or group of subjects. It should cover the organisation's main subject interest and its related topics and it must also reflect the needs of its users. In addition, the resources of the main field of interest must be developed in greater

depth. Special libraries place special emphasis on materials which have current information and so there is a strong representation of serials such as scholarly journals, yearbooks, memoirs, review articles, bibliographies, annual reports, indexes and abstracts in its collection. These materials could either be in print or non-print format.

Special libraries provide specialised information services for the advantage of the organisation which provides its financial support and the manner in which the service is provided is what distinguishes it from other types of libraries.

The library staff of special libraries must be highly qualified in order to render effective service. Very often they have specialised training in a particular subject and information retrieval (Alemna, 1989).

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

A special library being part of the parent organisation should have specific clearly defined objectives and aims that are designed to meet the information needs and interests of the users of the parent organisation and these aims must be such that they can be achieved. The increase in demand for international coverage of information, increase accessibility and more timely delivery of information has made it necessary for the librarian to look for more effective ways to serve its users. A modern special library will have the following objectives and aims:

### **OBJECTIVES**

The main objective will be to provided

timely information either electronically or in print on demand and in anticipation of demand in a form that is needed to support the activities of the parent organisation.

## AIMS

- To provide an effective library service for the users and to support the aims and objectives of the parent organisation.
- To maintain a full awareness of all potential information sources and to be able to get the best information quickly and cheaply and appropriately packaged.
- To promote the use of information technology in data manipulation and management.
- To promote the education of practitioners and other users interested in the use of information technology.
- To market and promote the library services through abstracts, resumes, bulletins, reports, bibliographies and contacts with individuals.
- To form networks with other libraries.

## THE GHANAIAN SITUATION

With the increase in the number of scientific, business, technical and industrial research in Ghana, many organisations have found the need to establish libraries which will serve the

information needs of the organisation. Most of these organisations are engaged in agricultural research because Ghana is an agricultural country and so we have quite a number of agricultural libraries. Presently there are 59 agricultural related institutions in Ghana and 27 of them have library facilities (Atsodibour, 1996). The Ministry of Agricultural library is the first special library to be set up in Ghana around 1890 (Alemna, 1989). There are other libraries like Research Library on African Affairs, The Regional Institute of Population Studies, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ghana, Cocoa Research Institute, Medical School, Ghana Standards Board, School of Administration, Export Promotions Council and the CSIR group of libraries which is made up of 14 institutes, namely, Animal Research Institute, Institute of Industrial Research, Institute for Scientific and technological Information, Science and Technology Policy Research Institute, Water Research Institute, Oil Palm Research Institute, Plant Genetic Resources Centre, Building and Road Research Institute, Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, Soil Research Institute and Savanna Agricultural Research Institute. The reason for establishing these libraries was the recognition of the fact that libraries play an important role in supporting the research activities of these organisations. Their development have been affected because there is a continuous decrease in the financial allocations of the parent organisations.

In general library services in Ghana at all levels were considered to be performing well in that they were able to

meet the information needs of their respective clientele until the late 1970's when the situation started to decline. The situation of agricultural libraries is considered critical (ISNAR, 1989).

## Materials

The materials in most of the special libraries are outdated and of little use to the researchers (Alemna, 1989). Thus it is difficult to obtain current information. Important journals are not available and those that are available are received late. There are virtually no complete runs of serials. Non-book materials like microfilms and fiche are not available in most of the libraries. They lack modern reference tools and equipment. The relatively weak and small collections coupled with poor acquisition policies has affected the services provided. Thus the existing facilities and literature resources cannot support the existing research work. Inter-library loan and other co-operative efforts are non-existent.

Currently microcomputers can be found in a few of the libraries as well as CD-ROM facilities. A few of the libraries have photocopiers and air conditioners to protect their materials from deterioration. Special libraries with internet and CD-ROM facilities are able to obtain current information on time. The Institute for Scientific and Technological Information (INSTI) now has "The Essential Electronic Library (TEEAL) compact disk and this has improved access to current information for some of the special libraries. INSTI is also the focal point in Ghana for the delivery of Question and Answer Ser-

vice for Ghanaians. This service is being sponsored by The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation (CTA).

## Staffing

Most of the special libraries presently have professional librarians with basic qualifications of postgraduate diploma or Masters in librarianship but most of them lack the specialised training in the management of information. Most of the libraries are also understaffed.

A five year programme to improve library and information systems to enhance agricultural research was started in 1991 by the National Agricultural Research Project (NARP). Fourteen agricultural libraries have benefited from the project. Through the project these libraries have been provided with computers, photocopiers, library furniture, books, journals and CD-ROM for selected libraries. There have also been some training for the librarians in information management, database creation, e-mail and internet usage.

## Services

Most of the special libraries are mainly engaged in traditional services like lending and reference. Other expected services like selective dissemination of information, clipping services, current awareness services and translation services are lacking in these libraries due to funding, staffing, materials and accommodation problems. The libraries with computer facilities have started computerising their libraries collection and

they are able to produce accession lists from it.

Most of the libraries do not know what exist in other libraries. A union list of catalogue and serials are non-existent. It is therefore a difficult task for the librarian to maintain a full awareness of all potential information sources within the country.

The idea of marketing library services is a new concept in most special libraries in Ghana. A few librarians have quite recently been exposed to it and are in the process of developing marketing strategies. At the moment some librarians try to market and promote their libraries through seminars and posters.

The libraries of foreign missions like British Council and FAO are well equipped with modern library facilities and they are able to provide services which meet their aims and objectives.

### **Networking with other libraries**

No formalised network has been formed among the special libraries in Ghana. The CSIR libraries which were sponsored by NARP are still in their infantile stages of developing an effective network system which will make exchange of information easier.

### **Recommendations**

The present picture is not as gloomy as it used to be. There has been progress in many fronts in some libraries which meet international standards. Special libraries in Ghana should increase au-

tomation of information services. They should concentrate on access to information than acquisition. This will mean mapping journals and databases that may be useful to them. They should make use of formal and informal networks like interlibrary loan networks and electronic discussion groups and professional networks. As online access to remote databases are too costly, resource sharing among selected libraries could improve access to information.

### **HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

A special library will be able to implement its aims and objectives by adopting certain strategies and through the services it offers. The strategies to be adopted are library automation, conducting a survey of user needs, developing an in-depth knowledge of information sources and marketing of the services of the library.

#### **Automating the library processes**

The present growth of knowledge demands highly organised retrieval systems. In order for a modern special library to offer the full range of services available the library services will have to be automated. "Library automation is the use of automatic and semi-automatic data processing machines to perform such traditional library activities as acquisitions, cataloguing and circulation". (Attaullah, 1994:234).

The use of computers will improve control over collection development, control over operations, it will help with the establishment of inter-library co-

operation and also improve services to library users. The use of information technology in the special library sector is less documented (Furness and Graham, 1996:23). According to Brittin quoted in (Furness and Graham, 1996:23) "This is to be expected as special libraries generally tend to be under-represented in the literature in comparison with other library sectors". The availability of microcomputers and user-friendly software packages will allow the library to create automated databases of information available and also provide more access to information and special services. Both electronic and printed sources of information will be needed in order to give a well balanced and thorough coverage of literature to the users. It is also important that a computer-based system is developed because this will allow users to interact directly with the library and its databases through their desk terminals.

There are various areas one could automate and cataloguing appears to be one of the first that should be tackled because of the many advantages attached to it. Automation of the cataloguing process will increase the speed with which new materials are catalogued. Consistency with which materials are catalogued will improve and this will in turn improve retrieval process. The information stored will also be more accessible to most people than if they were held in physical formats. The automated catalogue will lead to the ease in creating union catalogues and shared cataloguing thus making it possible for the librarian to locate needed information and access them as

quickly as possible. The library will also be able to access large bibliographic databases and networks to better serve user needs. The description of one document can also be used in different layout in different files for the title catalogue, classified catalogue, alphabetical catalogue and accession lists. It will also increase the access points and large amount of information can be manipulated. Correction to the entries can also be made at any time.

The use of computer networks and electronic resources for the announcements of holdings and new developments along with delivery of reports, articles and books will improve services. Automation of acquisition will help the librarian to detect duplicate titles, to identify materials to be claimed or cancelled and total cost of order which will all in turn improve the management of the library.

### **Knowing the needs of users**

Before any meaningful information can be provided for the right person, at the right time and in the right format the librarian must have some idea of what the information needs of the library users are. This can be known by conducting a survey on user needs, consulting statistics on circulation and inter-library loans. The user needs should not be based on current needs alone but also on potential areas of future needs. Also by attending meetings and having informal chats with the users the librarian will have some idea of what their needs are. From time to time users must be contacted to find out any new changes in their information

needs.

### **Knowing the sources of information**

Knowing your sources of information is very important in order to be able to provide the right information to the right people at the right time. Books are important for basic information, data and facts and the bibliographies they contain may be used in literature searching and may be consulted before carrying out a search. A comprehensive knowledge about the reference materials in the field of the parent organisation is very important. Periodicals which include learned journals published by societies, commercial publishers, trade journals, abstracting and indexing journals, reviews, news and technical journals, reports, conference proceedings must be studied and examined to enable the librarian to discover the various information they contain.

Periodicals are very important because they contain current information which is very important for the users of a special library. On-line databases in the subject area of the organisation must be studied so that the right source will be contacted in times of need and in anticipation of demand. An in-house database on useful internet resources as well as commercial databases like CD-ROM concerning the organisation's subject area may also be compiled to save both the user and librarian's precious time when information is needed. The various materials both print and non print which are relevant to the activities of the organisation must be acquired,

organised and disseminated.

### **Marketing and Promoting Library Services**

Market techniques and publicity in the area of library and information services is significant. In the modern technology era whereby computers are cheap and there are improved ways of acquiring information, if the library does not market its services its role in the future may be that of a warehouse. The library must therefore, advertise the information and services which the library supplies. Very often users are not fully aware of what services are provided by the library and what will benefit them and the organisation as a whole and marketing the services of the library can help to solve this problem. Thus the information service must be publicised and any changes must be made known. "Marketing is a planned process of identifying, attracting, satisfying and gaining support of specific user groups in a manner that furthers the goals of both library and organisation it serves" (Sterngold, 1982:258). Thus it involves a planned approach whereby the user and library product are brought together to facilitate exchange between them. In order for the library to produce an effective service the needs of the users must be studied and the service must be targeted at these needs. The right information must be delivered to the right person at the right time and in the right form. If information is not delivered in the right form and time it can have negative perceptions. The services provided must be reviewed periodically and if they are not serving the needs of

the users they must be removed and replaced with new ones. "Marketing can make a meaningful contribution, since the kinds of services traditionally provided by libraries and the traditional ways of providing such services are viewed by marketers with a new, fresh and different perspective" (Shapiro, 1980:470). Special flyers can be prepared to announce new products like CD-ROM, microfiche or new services like bibliographies or on-line searching. New library materials should be displayed and this will help to attract the attention of users to the library. This may be targeted at particular users or group or the entire organisation. Any appropriate opportunity should be seized to make oral presentation about the library and also get feedback from the users on the performance of the library. The librarian must keep his/her eyes open for new interest of the users. The marketing activities should be evaluated from time to time to see if they are having the desired impact.

## SERVICES

A special library will have to provide certain services in order to achieve its aims and objectives and these services have been explained below.

### Dissemination of information

Dissemination of information can be directed either towards all the staff of the organisation both present and potential or towards groups of users or individuals. Accession lists, periodical title lists and abstract bulletins can be provided to inform

all users about what is available at the library. For special groups or individuals bibliographies, selective dissemination of information, periodical circulation, datasheet, informal conversation, telephone calls and literature searches can be provided. The library will have to decide on the ones that will benefit the users most. Some services could be combined with others. For example a bibliography could be prepared out of an abstracting bulletin. The librarian must provide a core collection of materials whereby the users can have ready access.

### Current Awareness Service

The users of special libraries want information and not how to look it up in a periodical or catalogue. It is therefore the librarian's duty to deliver the materials to the user who is very often busy and want to be saved some time. Current awareness service is a way of making users aware of new publications that may interest them. Current awareness service may be in any of the forms mentioned: selective dissemination of information, accession lists, periodical title list, abstracting or indexing service.

### Selective Dissemination of Information

This involves maintaining a detailed subject interest profiles of the staff and they should be notified of all papers received which are likely to be of interest to them. A software on current contents can be used to provide weekly updates to participating users. In this case a profile of each participating user

is run against the weekly updates of the database and citations that match the users interest is extracted and forwarded by electronic mail each week or sent in the print format where the user does not have access to a computer. Where the materials received are in print format they should be scanned and compared with the individual's subject interest and individuals should be informed of the document. Information sent informing users of any potential useful material should contain enough information like title, author, date of publication and an abstract to enable the user to decide whether to read it or not. A document delivery component which is very important should also be built into it. The library should therefore set aside part of its funding for this purpose because it is no use locating a useful material and not being able to have access to it. Publications should be scanned and searches conducted on databases to identify paper published in periodicals not taken by the library but relevant to its subject interests and request for copies could be sent to authors or purchased. Latest issues of journals should be circulated where the users are small. In the case of a large number of users this will be difficult and other methods should be resorted to. There should also be feedback system whereby the library is informed of how useful the information supplied is and where there are changes in users interest this should be forwarded to the library.

### **Accession Lists**

Current awareness may also take the form of issuing accession lists. The purpose of the accession lists is to inform users of new materials that have been acquired. This may include a whole range of materials from books, new periodical titles web sites, reports trade literature etc. It should include those acquired from outside the organisation as well as that within the organisation. Where the library is large a selected list covering different types of material may be produced.

### **Periodical Title List**

Users can be informed of the contents of journals taken by the library by compiling a list of them and then circulated. Another method would be to photocopy the table of content and then circulate to members but this can be costly. Another alternative will be to circulate the journals but this will depend on the number of journals involved and number of people served. The disadvantage of this method is that there is the danger of loosing the journal or it getting damaged.

### **Abstracting Service**

This may be compiled by scanning through incoming publications in order to select the ones that will be of relevance to the users and then circulate. Even though there are commercial abstracts they have the disadvantage of not being tailored specifically to the needs of the clientele.

## **Indexing Service**

Indexes compiled based on the library's collection will make retrieval of materials easier and faster. Commercial indexes do not cover all the specialised materials of the library in depth.

## **Bibliographic Services**

Literature searches on on-line databases and CD-ROM may be conducted using keywords from the users area of interest to locate and put together items which may be of assistance to members of the organisation who may be embarking on new projects and therefore need some background information of what has been done in the field. This may also involve scanning through journals, technical reports etc which may contain current information.

## **Reference Services**

This is where information is provided in response to a specific request. The nature of such requests vary from simple data enquiry which can be answered by consulting a directory to one which may require extensive searches. These requests may be made through the telephone, e-mail or personal contact. The provision of this service will provide the users with needed information within the shortest time.

## **Inter-library Loan**

No library can be self sufficient and for a special library to be able to supply the right information when it is needed it must resort to borrowing from other

libraries where the material is not available in its own library. Articles which appear in journals not held by the library should be borrowed from other libraries. But the library should be strong in its area of speciality so that it will borrow from materials outside its speciality and lend to others in its speciality.

## **Photocopy Services**

Articles that are needed by the library users should be copied and supplied to them.

## **Translation Services**

Translation services may take the form of either looking for translations of the articles appearing in foreign language or looking for persons or organisations outside the institute that will be able to translate the material into English or vice versa from English into another language. This will enable the clientele to have access to important documents in other languages.

## **Clipping Services**

This is where information about the organisation or any activities which affect the organisation which appear in the newspapers are clipped and kept for reference. This service will keep users abreast with information about and connected with the organisation. This will help to support the organisations aim.

## **Networking**

The growing costs of acquisition and

storage means that libraries should spread information sources among themselves. Also for a broader source of information the library must network with others. This will involve a fast and easy communication system because when a document is located there must be fast and inexpensive ways of obtaining them. The librarian should form an informal network of personal associations with professional associations like Special Libraries Association and through that other materials needed could be obtained. "On-line networks are vital to the successful operations of libraries. As more services involving the transfer and exchange of information about library material becomes available, on-line networks will become an integral part of the library environment(Drake, 1980:515). On-line services will in a way replace reference books, handbooks etc. and the special librarian's knowledge about the client's needs will enable him/her to tailor the information service appropriately.

## Conclusion

The main aim of a special library service should be directed at the goals and activities of the organisation and if this is done the library will be able to win the support it needs.

In order for the library to be able to achieve its objectives the librarian must be part of the decision making process of the organisation. There should be easy and fast communication with other libraries in order to refer inquiries that can not be satisfied by the library's resources. An effective library

must identify its market and offer products that will satisfy its needs. Therefore the librarian must meet the users and discover their information needs. Accurate and authoritative information should be provided and it should be easy to read. Current awareness service must be focused on. The librarian's attitude to fellow employees should reflect his/her interest in their needs. The atmosphere in the library must be appealing so that users will like to enter and browse materials available. The organisation's authorities should be made aware of what the library can offer and their demand for it so that the necessary funds will be made available for the purchase of more resources. A computerised information system if maintained will bring about quick and up-to-date access to data. The efficiency of library services and the quality of library products will improve with the application of computer technology. The librarian must become an expert in the tasks that are valued and expand the services that will serve the objectives and aims of the organisation. The special library must prove itself an asset through the value of its service.

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