FISHERIES LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT IN SADC (SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY): WHAT IS THE ROLE FOR ALCOM?

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ABSTRACT: Information as a national resource for economic development has gained a wide acceptance in the region. Several SADC: governments are already investing in the acquisition and utilisation of information ranging from its storage, generation and management in libraries, archives, and information centres, to dissemination. The library of the Aquaculture for Local Community Development Programme, formally established in 1992, now operates as a research and reference service for fisheries and aquaculture in the SADC region. It is the national aquaculture centre for ZIMAGRINET, provides a central database for 12 participating institutions and cooperates with other regional information networks such as SAAINET.

WHAT IS ALCOM?

ALCOM (Aquaculture for Local Community Development Programme) is a regional fisheries programme of the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) of the United Nations. Based in Harare it covers all twelve member countries of SADC (Southern African Development Community).

INFORMATION NEEDS AND USERS

Information needs in fisheries/aquaculture development vary for different groups or audiences.

Fish Farmers need information on:
- resources like fish stocks, soil and water quality.
- technical innovations to make effective use of resources.
- available institutional support and how to access extension services.
- credit facilities, conditions and implications.
- profitability of alternative resource uses.
- policies and changes in policies impact on fish production.

The main sources of information of the fish farmers are the extension agents.

Extension agents need knowledge about:

- socioeconomic conditions of fish farmers, present resource utilisation patterns, and their perceived needs of information knowledge and inputs.
- appropriate technologies and possibilities of their application.

Research staff and those responsible for research in all fields related to fisheries need information on research methods, research results, research and development projects. This group also plays an advisory role to policy makers, planners and managers, as well as providing inputs to the work of extension services and operators.

Planners and policy makers in fisheries/aquaculture departments require factual, statistical or normative information, such as:

- overall government policies and trends in the rural economies.
- the performance of the fisheries sector relative to the economy (statistical).
- regional and global trends in the sector.
- technical developments in the sector.

The public has a legitimate interest in information on the fisheries/aquaculture sector. One reason is that funds used are generated through taxes and development assistance. The interest of the public relates to the performance of the sector, its contribution to economic growth of the country and the efficient use of funds.

General textbooks, dictionaries, synopses, thesauri, scientific reports, reports of research and development projects, informal communications and scientific journals are the major sources of information required to satisfy the discussed needs.
ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT INFORMATION SERVICES

Information as a national resource for economic development has gained a wide acceptance in the region. Several SADC governments are already investing in the acquisition and utilisation of information ranging from its storage, generation and management in libraries, archives, and information centres, to dissemination. Zimbabwe realised this need and passed an Act of Parliament (National Library and Documentation Services Act 1985) to encourage the development of libraries and documentation centres in the country. This has seen a remarkable improvement in the development of information services in Zimbabwe.

Due to a wide diversity of aquatic resources, fisheries in SADC involves all aspects of fisheries management and development. Thus the countries' information needs are a direct reflection of the diversity of fisheries resources and potential for their development.

At the SADC regional level the individual countries may be grouped by their types of fisheries; countries with the entire range of activities in marine and inland fisheries are Angola, Mozambique, South Africa and Tanzania. The types of fisheries of individual countries clearly determine the scope of information and documentation needs at the national level.

In the region there are a number of small fisheries libraries organised for institutions and agencies but they have low priority. So far in the region, fisheries information services have focused on collections of books, journals, reprints, and documents published by international organisation (e.g. FAO). These are kept in libraries of various institutions or directly in the offices of researchers or administrators. The collections are not well catalogued and those that are catalogued are often not kept up to date. It is very common that only those researchers who have been with a particular institution or research organisation for a long period of time would know broadly what is available in the local fisheries library.

Most of the personnel assigned to manage these libraries are inadequately trained for this type of work. This shows how the information base in the development of aquaculture in the region has been overlooked.

ALCOM'S ROLE

The ALCOM Library was established as an organised library in 1992. Since then it has grown and now operates as a research and reference service for fisheries and aquaculture in the SADC region. The library consists of books, unpublished monographs, journals and audio-visual materials catalogued on a CDJ/ISIS PC-based database. This has enabled the institutions in these countries to down-load information pre-packed from ALCOM library and elsewhere. Information
from these institutions has been stored in the ALCOM Library thus providing easy “up and
down” exchange of information. The library provides access to international databases having
acquired a number of databases on fisheries, and is now connected to the Internet.

The library is the national aquaculture centre for ZIMAGRINET (Zimbabwe Agricultural
Information Network). This is a computerised network which aims at collecting, processing and
disseminating scientific information on agriculture and related subjects. ALCOM library is the
databank for 12 participating institutions. It coordinates with other regional information centres
and aims at creating a network that will liaise with the Southern African Agricultural
Information Network (SAAINET).

The resources for information services and documentation in SADC are severely limited and the
needs of member countries can hardly be fulfilled by relying solely on their national information
sources. It is for this reason that ALCOM library has initiated a network for sharing experiences,
resources, facilities and expertise in the information field where ever possible. Success will
depend on each participating country’s will and actions to strengthen the role of development
resources and services in the national planning process, and in supporting participation and
cooperation in regional information and documentation activities.

FUNCTIONS OF ALCOM AS THE REGIONAL CENTRE

The ALCOM library aims to:

- establish an aquaculture information network which will promote aquaculture information
  exchange in southern Africa, in particular:

a) identify aquaculture information needs in each country.
b) maintain records of ongoing aquaculture research and directories of research institutions and
   research workers
c) provide national directories
d) collect, catalogue, index the locally produced reports, studies and aquaculture information
   and related subjects
e) promote aquaculture information units at the national level
f) provide the following basic services
   I. current awareness
   II. accessions lists
   III. produce national registers
   IV. collect and promote access to locally produced literature
   V. promote access to international and regional literature
- sensitise the national aquaculture research managers to the role of information in research planning, priority setting and monitoring.

- assist national libraries to develop the resources necessary to participate and to provide information services to the aquaculture research sector at national levels.

- assist in the training of personnel and organising workshops for efficient networking among librarians/information officers through personal contacts.

CONCLUSION

The human element is probably the most decisive factor determining whether or not the establishment and operation of an information network will be successful. Therefore the training of staff and users is extremely important to the library and for efficient networking. Furthermore a properly organised national information and documentation service is the first step towards disseminating information and accessing information available elsewhere.

REFERENCES


