

OUR LIBRARY SERVICE



Platteland control areas

PIETER HUGO

Assistant Director, Metropole

The first two articles in this series on an insider's view of the Western Cape Library Service followed the route of the book through the acquisition, selection, cataloguing and preparation processes. Following on these articles the focus moved to the regional organisation. The Library Service has 15 regional offices serving 331 public libraries in the province. In the previous article the role and activities of the five regions in the Metro Control Area were highlighted and in this article we will focus on the ten platteland regions.

PLATTELAND REGIONS

The platteland regions are grouped, five each, into two control areas. The Boland Control Area consists of Hermanus, Saldanha, Stellenbosch, Vanrhynsdorp and Worcester regions, whilst Beaufort West, George, Mossel Bay, Oudtshoorn and Swellendam regions form the Outeniqua Control Area. Together they serve 225 platteland libraries in the Western Cape.



◀ The 80km gravel road to Kliprand, Vanrhynsdorp Region

Except for the vast distances that must be covered, the composition, functions and activities of the

platteland regions are much the same as those of the Metro regions. Well, not quite the same. The majority of the platteland public libraries are not computerised and are still working on the old card-issuing system. This has extra procedural and administrative implications for the regional offices. Other differences, especially regarding new libraries and co-operation with local authorities, will be highlighted later on in the article. The platteland regions typically consist of a regional librarian, one or two library assistants, a driver and a general assistant. The two control areas each has an assistant director and a chief library assistant.

NEW BOOKS

The platteland regions' weekly consignment of new books and other library material from head office is delivered by courier services. As with the Metro regions, it is one of the major responsibilities of the platteland regions to ensure that new library material is fairly distributed to the public libraries. This involves the fair allocation of special requests and multiple copies of new titles between the libraries. Many platteland regions also compile and control temporary block loans to libraries to ensure a wider readership exposure to some categories of books bought in small quantities. The bulk of new books are of course made available for democratic selection by the libraries during the regular tours in the region.

▶ Georgina Libalele (general assistant) working with the new books in Swellendam Region



BOOK PARCELS AND OTHER SPECIAL DELIVERIES

Because of the distances involved, platteland libraries do not have the Metro libraries' luxury of a weekly Combi run to all libraries for special requests and other urgent deliveries. Therefore it is part of the daily activities in platteland regions to make up, send and receive book parcels by post. Some regions, such as Beaufort West, still make use of a delivery bicycle for the daily 'post office run'. Many platteland regions have built up a network of informal delivery agents. They are mostly colleagues from the clinics, police, veterinary service, et cetera, who 'volunteer' to deliver or fetch a box of books or two when visiting neighbouring towns.



◀ Lubabalo Dzedze, until recently the assistant director in Outeniqua Control Area, taking Beaufort West's bicycle on a 'vehicle inspection test'. It was reported that both bicycle and driver passed the test!

BOOK VANS

Travelling long distances (fortunately not by bicycle) is very much part of the platteland experience. Most of the platteland regions do their regular tours to all their libraries with specially designed book vans. Book lovers all over the platteland know from years' experience that the book van in town means it's readers' christmas. Word of the 'book van sighting' spreads like fire through the town and the next day the library usually experiences a mini stampede. It is, after all, only about four times a year that the library receives hundreds of new and, if not all new, at least different, books. Bear in mind that there are no bookshops available in the platteland, except in some bigger towns. Remember also that school libraries are even scarcer than in the city.



◀ The book van

NEW LIBRARIES

During the past five to ten years most platteland regions have expanded, with several new libraries and many wheelie wagon libraries established. Regional librarians are intimately involved in the whole process of building a new library. This involves the initial negotiations and signing of an agreement

with the local authority, planning with the architect and regularly attending site meetings during the building phase.



◀ Lubabalo Dzedze inspecting the construction of Leeu-Gamka Library in Beaufort West Region



◀ A local choir adds some colour to the opening of Leeu-Gamka Library



◀ Sometimes a new library is built as an extension to an existing building. Here the small community of Proteem in Swellendam Region is finally getting their long-awaited library

At the same time the region must build a collection for the new library and might also be involved with the appointment and training of staff. Eventually the region must get all the books onto the new library's shelves before the festive official opening.

▶ A move in Waenhuiskrans, Swellendam Region. De Wet Rossouw (standing) and Godwin Watermeyer (sitting) are both hard at work in getting everything into place



▶ The opening of Rudolf Balie Memorial Library, a new container library in George Region



WHEELIE WAGON LIBRARIES

Very small communities, consisting of a few hundred people only, are found all over the platteland. They are usually far away from the nearest town with a library. Building libraries in these small settlements are not economically viable.



◀ Algeria in Vanrhynsdorp Region

Wheelie wagon libraries are an excellent way to fill this gap. A wheelie wagon library consists of two specially designed metal trolleys with lockable doors, containing about 1 000 books. They are usually housed in community halls, but not always.



◀ Molsvlei wheelie wagon Library in Vanrhynsdorp Region in action



▲ Vleiplaas wheelie wagon Library in a school in Swellendam Region

Some wheelie wagon libraries are housed in church halls, one in a sports facility and some in schools, but even those in schools provide a service to the whole community.

▶ Wittewater wheelie wagon Library, Saldanha Region. The lack of normal library facilities are no deterrent to some. If you do not have a proper exhibition area, you use the top of the trolley for your Easter exhibition!



With an average of five new wheelie wagon libraries opening each year, it continues to add an increasing strain on the activities of some platteland regions. It is a small price to pay, however, for the extension of a much-needed and appreciated library service to the previously 'hidden' platteland.



◀ Another wheelie wagon delivery! This time to Algeria

The Conditional Grant, which funds the wheelie wagon projects, also makes the rural ICT projects happen and funds the municipalities for extra library

staff and other library related projects. All of these, as well as the long standing issue of the unfunded mandate, have made the regional librarians' interaction with their local authorities much more vital and regular than in the past.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Stocktakes must be done in all libraries in a four year cycle. Platteland regional librarians also regularly travel to Cape Town to attend book selection meetings in Head Office (also to deliver and fetch books and other supplies and to network with their urban colleagues).

Platteland regions organise regular training opportunities as well as the annual library forums for public library personnel.



◀ Seen here is a combined training forum held at Masifunde Library, George Region



◀ Some staff even walk the extra mile, promoting Library Week in a shopping centre. (Ltr): Estelle van Rooyen, George Public Library, Lubabalo Dzedze, Thunyiwe Mantyi, until recently regional librarian of George Region, and Sipho Goboza, driver George Region

With all of their activities and responsibilities, it is not all work and no play in the platteland, though . . .



◀ . . . but, even at sports days they have to pull their weight!

Most of the work in the platteland regions involve long distance travelling, with the ever present possibility of accidents. Fortunately, in the more than six decades of the existence of the library service, there was only one fatal accident involving staff on duty.



The horrible accident near Montagu in December 2006, in which Magduld Stopforth was killed and Ronel Mouton (both of Swellendam Region), was very seriously injured



◀ Christa Hayes of Vanrhynsdorp Region proves that lunch in the platteland can be cool. With the help of Wuppertal's pure mountain water, of course!

