

Freedom of access to information is both the reward offered by lifelong literacy and the means by which it is generated and sustained. The two are inseparable.

For freedom of access to information to deliver lifelong literacy there are a host of requirements placed upon all those who work as information professionals in any shape or form. For lifelong literacy to deliver a citizenry more able to gain and exercise their share of power and the benefits of power there are likewise many other requirements.

For librarians in particular there is much that goes beyond the skills of collecting, cataloguing and classifying information, and helping users to find answers from it that have been the core of their professional expertise for centuries.

IFLA/FAIFE THEME REPORT 2004

# Libraries for Lifelong Literacy



[www.ifla.org/FAIFE/index.htm](http://www.ifla.org/FAIFE/index.htm)



IFLA/FAIFE Theme Report

2004

IFLA/FAIFE Theme Report

# Libraries for Lifelong Literacy

Unrestricted access to information as a basis  
for lifelong learning and empowerment

Edited by Susanne Seidelin,  
Stuart Hamilton & Paul Sturges

World Report Series Vol IV

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# Libraries for lifelong literacy. Unrestricted access to information as a basis for lifelong learning and empowerment

IFLA/FAIFE World Report Series vol. IV: IFLA/FAIFE Theme Report 2004

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The Theme Report was initiated by the IFLA/FAIFE Committee and developed by the IFLA/FAIFE office in cooperation with colleagues from Africa, Asia and Central and Latin America who debate the challenges and opportunities of their respective regions and countries.

We wish to record the invaluable contributions of our co-writers Stuart Hamilton, Peter Johan Lor, Ellen Ndeshi Namhila, Nikhil Raj, Basheerhamad Shadrach, Clara Budnik Sinay, Ana Cecilia Torres and Kay Raseroka, the President of IFLA for the preface. Our sincere thanks go to Per Lukman, the designer of *The World Report Series*, for once again offering his commitment and professional skills to creating a design that has become a characteristic of this series and each time communicates the global cultural diversity we wish to express.

Paul Sturges and Susanne Seidelin  
July 2004

# Preface

Kay Raseroka  
President of IFLA

The IFLA/FAIFE theme report of 2004 is *Libraries for Lifelong Literacy*. Librarians, globally, share the belief in freedom of access to information. This right is rooted in the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights, specifically Article 19.

The profession of library and information science has done well in its stewardship role and management of print information. Library services have largely focused on those who are empowered to communicate and engage with print and effectively integrate the information gained with personal experience to learn and develop new understanding. Thus they demonstrate what literacy is at an operational level, for those who communicate through reading.

Though large decreases in illiteracy are reported according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the Institute estimates that of the 802 million illiterate adults in the world, about

two-thirds of these are women who cannot engage with print. Yet many illiterate people have developed an approach to life that empowers them to ask questions, analyse information they hear, clarify issues for themselves and make decisions based on what they have learned, thus developing new understanding that can be applied to their lives in the process of living. These are behaviours, mental attitudes and living processes that demonstrate an application of a process of literacy, even though they cannot read print but instead are dependent on oracy in various modes: from discussion to song and dance as the medium of transmission of information and creation of knowledge.

The challenge for librarians, as stewards of information, is to redefine and extend the definition of literacy to be inclusive of a cluster of life activities of a questioning, analytical and creative mindset dependent on the use of information and knowledge for personal meaning and



life within their societies. In this way reading as a skill will form part of a repertoire of means for communication of information rather than a skill, which the majority lack for a variety of reasons, some of which are linked to socio-economic barriers and operate from a devaluing of oral, based literacy. From this perspective, the literacy process is a continuous, circular process manifested by humanity in various stages of life: from birth to pre-school level to school children to adults to elders and fed back to children as they are nurtured by parents.

The literacy process, therefore, is a lifelong engagement with personal development, growth and creation of unique personal contributions to life and to national development, through the exploitation of information accessible to individuals throughout life. Information is recognised as the foundation of empowerment for humanity, enabling the exercise of control of personal life and contributing to democracy. Further, the emergence of information as a factor of production and a major contributor to economic empowerment mandates librarians to consciously engage in social responsibility through the services they provide, that avail information to humanity in diverse contexts, in fulfilment of the shared professional core values.

IFLA has articulated these in detail through the submissions to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), as summarised in the following issues of concern:

- An inclusive vision of an Information Society in which everyone can create, access, use and share information and knowledge
- Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression
- Cultural and linguistic diversity
- Lifelong literacy in its diversity from oralcy to information literacy
- Support for the disadvantaged and disabled
- Protection of the public domain and balance in intellectual property legislation
- Open access to knowledge, including scientific and technical knowledge
- Preservation of cultural heritage
- Standards to ensure interoperability
- Equitable access to the Internet and Information communication technologies
- Capacity building and enabling provisions (IFLA WSIS Team, 2003)

IFLA members who serve in diverse traditions in the developing world have articulated, in this report, their perspectives of challenges and opportunities towards creating a base for an inclusive Information Society. It is our hope that these case studies and discussion of experiences, together with unprecedented opportunities for capture of content in various information communication media, will become the 'tipping point' that results in concerted efforts by librarians globally to collaborate across all types of libraries and develop inclusive information services in fulfilment of the shared core values.

The literacy process has to be recognised as

inclusive of all ranges of communication that integrate information to memories and experiences. Analysis for the creation of new knowledge is a requirement for all who aspire to the fulfilment of the vision articulated by the core values. It is a process that occurs at all levels and ages of societies, whether they are a predomi-

nantly oral society or have a culture of reading as a basis for accessing information.

Such an approach will create a fundamental shift and redress the denial of a right of access to information, by most librarians, for millions of people who rely on orality as their equivalent of the lifelong literacy process.

# Introduction

Paul Sturges

Susanne Seidelin

In this Theme Report our authors explore the relationship between unrestricted access to information and lifelong literacy in a wide variety of ways. Their approaches, however, have an underlying link in common. Each approach seeks to tell us something important about the way information nourishes the skills that a human being requires to function as an autonomous actor in the world.

Information empowers. We are told this by writer after writer and speaker after speaker in the world of librarianship, but the empowering qualities of information are more often appreciated intuitively or absorbed from observation and experience over many years than they are learned from systematic research or philosophical studies. Indeed, the formulation of this idea that states that information is power is so frequently, and sometimes carelessly, cited as to have become a cliché. Just exactly how information equates to power is much less frequently

explored and the precise ways in which this might work are generally taken for granted.

The control of information certainly equates to power. Authoritarian governments have always appreciated that if they gather great volumes of information together, strictly limit the citizen's access to it, and use their command of it to manage and control both economy and politics, then they can strengthen and perpetuate their power. The struggles of popular movements for a more democratic society have the character of struggles for wider access to information as much as they have been armed conflicts. Social and political change has seldom flourished where those in power have succeeded in using their control of information to confuse, mislead and divide the people. By obtaining access to information, people place themselves in a position to take control of their own lives and to play a positive role in the development of society. This is why freedom of access to infor-

mation is such an important ideal for society and why it has come to be identified as a human right.

Freedom of access to information is also, very naturally, one of the few guiding principles for librarianship. This makes it extremely important for a profession that has generally lacked a well-constructed philosophical underpinning. However, because it is so self evidently appropriate, there is a danger that it can become symbol rather than a genuine contributor to professional decision-making and policy formulation. It is important to remember that not all information is helpful and not all information is easy to interpret. Citizens need to be able to choose information that actually makes sense to them and which gives them the answers that they need. Full freedom of access to information offers this choice and it offers the necessary range of language, format and mode of expression to satisfy all needs.

Yet to take advantage of freedom of access the citizen needs the skills of literacy. What is more, the days when this could be taken to mean the ability to interpret lines of text alone are over. In the twenty first century different forms of literacy have become essential. Information obtained via the computer monitor, rather than the printed page, requires the ability to handle text, numbers, graphics, images, sounds and moving images in bewildering combination from a multitude of sources, presented for purposes that may not at first be at all obvious.

Clearly it is now a wider information literacy that is needed.

Information literacy is the entry requirement for admission to the world of the informed, but it is not like some single membership payment that guarantees the ability to gain access forever after. Literacy and the use of literacy interact and sustain each other. The skills unused, though they may not be entirely lost, will not grow and strengthen and it is precisely growth and strengthening that are required in a fast changing and increasingly complex information environment. This is the lifelong literacy to which Kay Raseroka's IFLA presidential theme refers. As she points out, the literacy process is a continuous, circular process manifested by humanity in various stages of life. It must be recognised as inclusive of all ranges of communication that integrate information to memories and experiences. The librarian's challenge is to therefore to redefine and extend the definition of literacy, for without the kind of literacy that adapts and expands in response to changing technology, the promise of freedom of access to information is only partially fulfilled.

Freedom of access to information is both the reward offered by lifelong literacy and the means by which it is generated and sustained. The two are inseparable. For freedom of access to information to deliver lifelong literacy there are a host of requirements placed upon all those who work as information professionals in any shape or form. For lifelong literacy to deliver a

citizenry more able to gain and exercise their share of power and the benefits of power there are likewise many other requirements. For librarians in particular there is much that goes beyond the skills of collecting, cataloguing and classifying information, and helping users to find answers from it that have been the core of their professional expertise for centuries.

Library work in an environment of freedom of access to information and lifelong literacy is a much more demanding profession than it has ever been before. To understand its demands and respond to them, the professional must be exposed to a much greater range of ideas and consider a much greater range of human experience than was ever required before. In its own small way this Theme Report is meant as a contribution to this range of ideas and experience.

The IFLA presidential theme 2003-2005 highlights the importance of the role of libraries in addressing literacy and lifelong learning issues<sup>1</sup>. The issues of debate in this report have also previously been addressed by IFLA and by IFLA/FAIFE in statements that are included in the appendixes of this report. The *IFLA Internet Manifesto* addresses the principles of freedom of access to information via the Internet, while the *Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge* states the role of libraries and archives in the protection and promotion of indigenous traditional knowledge and local traditional knowledge. The *Statement on Libraries and Sustainable Development* states that library and in-

formation services provide essential support for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development for all. Further to these statements, the IFLA World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) position papers address the challenges of an inclusive information and knowledge society and the role of libraries as agents in the development and promotion of lifelong literacy and learning.<sup>2</sup>

The *IFLA/FAIFE World Report Series* also offers timely and detailed summaries of the state of intellectual freedom and libraries worldwide. The series comprises of two publications, the *IFLA/FAIFE World Report* - published bi-annually - and the *IFLA/FAIFE Theme Report* - published in alternate years. Each year's publication is launched at IFLA's annual World Library and Information Congress.

The first *IFLA/FAIFE World Report on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom*, 2001 reflects on the achievements of the first four years of IFLA/FAIFE activities, and concludes on the state of intellectual freedom relating to libraries in 46 of the world's nations. The second volume in the series, *The IFLA/FAIFE Summary Report: Libraries, Conflicts and the Internet*, 2002 provides an overview of global Internet access barriers; debates the Internet as the information tool of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; libraries and conflicts; 'Beacon for Freedom of Expression' - the Alexandria database; and finally discusses how the library community can respond when intellectual freedoms are at stake.

The *IFLA/FAIFE World Report 2003: Intellectual freedom in the Information Society, libraries and the Internet* debates the challenges of ICTs by focusing on libraries and the Internet. Based on completed questionnaires from 88 countries representing all regions of the world, the report discusses the digital divide, filtering and blocking of information, user privacy, financial barriers, intellectual freedom, and codes of ethics. It analyses the differences region by region and discusses the challenge of the information society with regards to the information haves and the information have-nots.

Based on reliable information sources and detailed analysis, future IFLA/FAIFE World

Reports will follow up on and discuss topics of interest and issues of debate. We hope the *IFLA/FAIFE World Report Series* thus will become a key guide to the issues confronting libraries in providing free and unhampered access to information for their clients.

The editors hope the IFLA/FAIFE Theme Report 2004 provides a good read and would welcome and encourage comments and ideas to be posted to [faife@ifla.org](mailto:faife@ifla.org)

### Notes

- 1 <http://www.ifla.org/III/gb/prtheme03-05.htm>
- 2 <http://www.ifla.org/III/wsis.html>

# Democratic access to information in Chilean public libraries

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## Introduction

The World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in December 2003, declared a common vision for the information society:

“A people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilise 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 ...”

This vision also relates to specific concerns of the library community as reflected in the results of the IFLA brainstorming session in Glasgow in 2002 and the chosen Presidential Theme for 2003 - 2005: ‘Libraries for Lifelong Literacy - unrestricted access to information as a means of promoting literacy, reading and lifelong learning.’

How does Chile measure up to this vision and what strategic actions are we taking to make our libraries centres for lifelong literacy, of all kinds? For many of our colleagues in other developing countries, Chile, would seem to have the problem of unrestricted access to information solved, with the advent of the ‘BiblioRedes: abre tu mundo project’ (supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation by the Chilean government). Beginning in late 2002, this project provides free access to computers and Internet, as well as training, in all our public libraries.

However, our experience with the provision of information technologies has been the same as with the provision of more traditional means of accessing information: success is dependent upon the way in which library staff work with their communities and the relationships and partnerships that they have managed to develop. If the library is not a relevant and strong institution, responding to the particular needs of its community, then it will not have the kind

of information that the community requires, nor will it be able to provide unrestricted access to that information or promote literacy, reading and lifelong learning.

This article focuses upon the very important ground work that has to go on to make sure that libraries are working appropriately with their communities and will show that although the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have greatly enhanced our ability to provide access to information and generate content, the emphasis of our work and our core values, remain the same. ICTs should be regarded as tools and not as an end in themselves.

### **Chilean library network**

In Chile, particularly since the end of the 27-year dictatorship in 1990, we have been working to put in place the foundations for a solid network of public libraries able to support each other and provide at least a minimum level of services. Most public libraries are owned and staffed by the local municipalities and elect to join the network of libraries co-ordinated by the Sub Directorate of Public Libraries, part of the national Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums (DIBAM) by signing an agreement that covers basic operating conditions. In return, member libraries receive bibliographic and digital materials, training for library staff and assistance of the staff of the Library Co-ordination Office in their region (13 offices in

total, one for each region). Member libraries are also included in large-scale projects such as 'BiblioRedes'.

Advocacy on behalf of libraries is one of the most important roles of the Sub Directorate of Public Libraries. Our aim is to arrive at 100% coverage of public libraries throughout Chile. The network began in 1978 with 98 libraries; now we have a total of 411 libraries. Of the 342 municipalities in Chile, 281 (82%) have libraries. To date there is no legislation governing the duty of each municipality to provide public library services, nor are central government funds available to make up this shortfall in the most depressed areas. Advocacy efforts continue from the level of the community and the municipality upwards, to encourage the creation of more libraries and to ensure that they are adequately staffed. The profile of the libraries, both within their own communities and nationally, has been greatly enhanced by the arrival of ICTs. As will be discussed later in this article, this in turn has improved our ability to lobby on their behalf.

Public libraries in Chile play a vital role in the community and one that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The majority of the Chilean public libraries are situated in economically depressed communities. 70% of the users come from households with an average monthly income of around US\$ 312.00. If community members are not part of the school system, or working in offices, libraries represent one of the



very few points of free access to information, in all its formats. Libraries also represent one of the few institutions that are open to all, regardless of age, sex, religion or race. Chile, like many Latin American countries, has a wide spectrum of the population living in some degree of economic poverty with wealth concentrated in a small segment. Regressive trends in income are separating the small section of the population that receive high incomes even further from the rest of the population, (poor as well as middle class), indicating that the public libraries will continue to be key factors in bridging the information literacy divide.

### **Democratic development and the new role of libraries**

With the return to democracy, one of the first tasks of the Sub Directorate of Public Libraries was to encourage the libraries to seek active community participation in their management. This was a radical change. Community participation had only occurred in rare instances during the dictatorship, usually in small nuclei of 'resistance' that valued the local library as a symbol a tolerant and pluralistic society. Chile is also not a country that has a cultural background of community participation and volunteerism. Most libraries at this time were very uninviting: closed stacks, complete silence, and strict control of the books with the head of the library acting as a guard. The perception of the public library as a 'temple' of knowledge and reading, subject to strict behavioural rituals and restricted use had to be overcome. The public

had to be encouraged to occupy the spaces that had been denied to them, and to demand their human rights in terms of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression.

However, opening the public libraries to participation, and establishing and systematising a dynamic, permanent and fluid relationship with each community were not a simple challenge. It was necessary to develop ways of working that allowed diverse community organisations to be incorporated into the management of the library, transforming the head of the library into a cultural manager recognised by their community. The challenge of establishing a new relationship also implied taking on a new notion of culture, one that accepted that people and communities established keys and codes that allowed them to relate to each other and to their environment, constructing their culture in all its diversity. Everything was part of the culture of the community. The challenge of the public library was to share these codes and to channel them into their way of working. They had to appropriate them and incorporate people as actors and not as mere subjects of their actions. Libraries were to become democratic cultural spaces open to diverse forms of expression.

### **New initiatives based on core values**

Many of the guiding principles for this initiative were found in the work being done in other countries and in documents that enshrined human rights in terms of freedom and equity of

access to information and freedom of expression. Particular attention was also paid to the ability of the library to contribute to local development and improve the quality of life in their communities. For the first time the libraries discussed and adopted a mission statement, based on the UNESCO IFLA Public Library Manifesto. Chilean public libraries were to:

“Contribute to the integrated development and identity of the members of a determined community, with the participation of that community, acting as a bridge between what has gone before (accumulated culture) and free access for that community to information, knowledge and recreation”.

In concrete terms, participative management (community management) of the public libraries was implemented over a two-year period (1996-1998). The basic concepts of this way of relating to the community were collected in a manual:

‘Gestión Participativa en Bibliotecas Públicas - Los desafíos de trabajar on la comunidad.’

<sup>1</sup> Rather than a no-fail recipe of how to work with the community, the manual collected the best practices of recent years and suggested a number of different approaches. The manual covered areas such as the need for participative management, how to start participative management (including questionnaires to research cultural interests of the community), the preparation of annual plans to cover cultural, educational and recreational and information needs

in the library, marketing, negotiating, management and the use of performance indicators. The manual was widely disseminated through seminars and workshops between 1996 and 1998 and now forms part of the basic training of all library staff. The libraries were also encouraged to form their own support groups, ‘Friends of the Library’.

While libraries were being asked to work more participative with their communities, the Sub Directorate itself also had to change from a pyramidal to a horizontal structure, responding to regional differences and becoming a truly national network. The Sub Directorate is now present in all the regions, through the Regional Co-ordination offices, and staff from all these offices meets three times a year to share the experiences and concerns of the libraries in their regions. Strategic plans and budgets concerning the overall functioning of the network are discussed at these meetings. Continuing professional development is also provided to the regional co-ordinators, who then replicate this training for the library staff in their jurisdiction.

The results of this effort to form a new way of working with the community have been very positive. In response to different interests identified in the community, all libraries now have special interest areas for children, teenagers, and women and for themes such as health and nutrition, local history, teaching materials for parents and local teachers etc., something

that had never existed before. The public libraries have also become centres for many cultural activities such as literary workshops, exhibitions, film screenings, concerts, talks and book fairs. In 2003, 10,566 cultural events were held in libraries, with the participation of 1,546,153 people. The libraries are particularly active on days such as International Day of the Book and Author's Rights, Cultural Heritage Day and the Festival of Popular Culture.

The collections within the libraries themselves have also changed dramatically. The development policies for the public libraries during the dictatorship had included massive campaigns for the donation of books, meaning that when Chile returned to democracy, the libraries were full of unusable books. Gradually these collections have been upgraded and replaced. Each library makes its own selection of books from the list offered by the Sub Directorate. Some libraries are able to supplement this collection through additional funds from their municipality or through external sources. In keeping with the theme of libraries for lifelong learning, the major demand for books at this stage are for collections relating to personal development, agriculture, accounting, health and nutrition.

### **Promotion of literacy and lifelong learning**

The desire to promote literacy, reading and lifelong learning has also meant that the libraries are constantly working to extend their reach beyond their own four walls. Many innovative

services are taking books and other library services to areas such as markets, supermarkets and shopping centres ('El casero del libro') while other baskets; boxes or trunks of books ('Cajas Viajeras') are delivered to social centres in sectors a long way from the library. The Casero del libro is an idea that has not only been replicated throughout Chile, but is also being reproduced at regional level in an international initiative supported by IFLA/ ALP. Bibliometro (eight networked lending kiosks located in the underground transport system and two above ground train carriages) provides convenient services to workers and other public transport users in Santiago. Mobile services are also provided by the libraries in regions where the population is spread out over vast distances. 33 book mobiles operate in addition to ten tricycles and three 'Dibamóviles' (cultural buses) that bring books, art exhibitions and heritage articles to areas where access to these cultural items is scarce.

Nowhere have the results of participative community management of libraries been more dramatic than in the formation and work of the library support groups. Nearly 80% of the public libraries now have their own: 'Friends of the Library' group who volunteer their services to help library staff in their daily tasks and in the long-term development of libraries. Friends groups organise cultural events in the libraries and also seek sources of external funding for projects to improve library services. In 2003, these groups were responsible for a significant amount of projects presented to regional and

national government funding sources, as well as to the private sector. Projects covered such areas as building improvements, furniture, collection development, mobile services and special events (book fairs, workshops, courses etc.). In 2003, in the IX Region, Friends Groups organised their IV Regional Meeting to discuss their local cultural management experiences. During the meeting they identified key factors that led to the success or failure of their efforts and proposed working even more closely with their library and their Regional Co-ordination staff.

Participative management began in 1996 and is now firmly entrenched as a way establishing a dynamic and permanent relationship between the library and its community. It remains a strategic priority for the Sub Directorate of Public Libraries. During 2004 and 2005, the system of participative management will be renewed and revised, taking into account the results of the first experiences and changes that have occurred in libraries. It will be further strengthened by the creation of a transversal area of Identity and Cultural Management in the Sub Directorate that will ensure that all actions taken are oriented towards stimulating and enhancing the relationship that each library has with its community, taking into account its particular needs and singularities.

### **Use of information and communication technologies**

The relationship between the public libraries

and their communities has been a key factor in the successful introduction of another new tool and service: information and communication technologies (ICTs). The project 'BiblioRedes: abre tu mundo' has been operating for almost two years. Its objective is to work participatively with the community to create channels of socio-cultural exchange and learning. It is oriented towards increasing cultural consumption, through a virtual network of public libraries, principally in those economic segments with difficulties in access to information. It provides the necessary means so that local communities can build, administer and utilise digital contents, products and services, which promote their presence in international networks. It aims to ensure access to and free use of Internet contents, products and services and other digital resources to the communities associated with the network of public libraries.

Demand for these services arose from the communities served by the public library network. Regional library co-ordinators consistently reported that access to computers and Internet was an additional service requested by the users. Chile is a clear example of concerns voiced at the first World Summit on the Information Society: "... the benefits of the information technology revolution are today unevenly distributed between the developed and developing countries and within societies".<sup>2</sup> As of 2004, 20% of Chileans are Internet users. 32% of the computers are found in private homes (450,000 households approximately), 55.5%

in businesses and 12.3% in educational and government institutions. While Chile has the highest per capita computer ownership in Latin America, 70% of the population do not know how to use computers and the distribution of Internet connection is very uneven within the society. In the population segment of greatest income, 50% of the households have access to the Internet, while in the poorest segments only 0.7% is connected. For this poorer segments, especially in rural and isolated areas, the public library is one of the very few free access points to computing and Internet.

The installation of this new tool in the Chilean public libraries was a result of international co-operation. Together with the Chilean government, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation of the United States supported the provision of latest-generation computers, software, fast Internet connections and related equipment such as scanners, printers and digital cameras in all the public libraries in Chile. Between July and October 2002, 1,754 computers were installed in public libraries, stretching from the border with Peru and Bolivia to the Magellan Straits in the south. This support also included a team of trainers to work with library staff and assist them to train their communities in the use of ICTs. This international support enabled the libraries to make a huge leap forward in their ability to provide access to information and ICTs, a step that would otherwise have taken many years to accomplish. Government attention had previously been focussed on the provi-

sion of computer equipment in educational institutions and Tele centres and very few municipalities were in a position to provide their libraries with this infrastructure. The technological infrastructure has also enabled the Sub Directorate to network all libraries, facilitating the sharing of resources and information and overall management of the system.

With a donation of the magnitude of that received from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation it would seem that our financial worries concerning the provision of ICTs would be at an end. However, this is not the case, due to the fact that the municipalities are responsible for paying their ongoing monthly Internet connection costs; costs which varied tremendously from one locality to another as a result of Chile's complicated geography and incipient telecommunications infrastructure. 30% of the Internet connections to the public libraries initially had to be made via satellite. Connection costs varied from US\$100 a month to as high as US\$430 per month in areas with difficult connections - usually poor, remote communities, unable to commit to paying this sum. This situation was overcome through the creation, within the BiblioRedes project, of a Digital Equity Fund, that subsidises the municipalities in accordance with the percentage of poverty within their community (according to the latest government statistics). Thus, the poorest communities pay only US\$60 per month: the highest sum paid by any municipality is US\$100 per month. BiblioRedes is a clear example of the

need for digital solidarity, both nationally and internationally.

### **The BiblioRedes project**

BiblioRedes did not involve just installing a new service, but also teaching its use to a huge community, both library users and non-users, unfamiliar with computers and Internet. The Sub Directorate believes that “Each person should have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in order to understand, participate actively in, and benefit fully from, the Information Society and the knowledge economy”.<sup>3</sup> Each region was equipped with a training laboratory located in the most central and suitable public library (as well as four mobile laboratories for use nationally), staffed with a co-ordinator/trainer and an itinerant team of 26 teachers, who continually visit every library conducting intensive training sessions for the staff and their volunteers. The training model is based on training the library staff (not only technologically, but also in teaching techniques) so that they in turn can pass these skills on to their communities. Each library has been provided with plan for basic classes with detailed instructions about the topic to be covered and exercises that can be used during or after the classes, as well as a visual Power-Point presentation and an information guide for each student. These plans are in module form and easily adaptable to the skill level and interests of each particular group or community. Library staff members are also supported by a permanent

telephone Help-desk service, which operates with guaranteed response times.

With the help of their volunteers (very important given the fact that many rural libraries have only one staff member) the public libraries have undertaken large-scale free training programmes for the public. In 2003 alone, 75,000 people learnt the basic skills to use the new technology placed at their disposition, in sessions taught by public library staff. The training has focussed on groups that have been identified as most marginalised from the Information Society. In studies carried out prior to the implementation of BiblioRedes, women at home and adults with lower levels of education and income were seen as those most in need of help. In 2003, 65.2% of the people trained were women, mostly housewives. Many women, who were not traditional users of the public library, were identified for training through a partnership with the National Service for Women (SERNAM). Specially adapted courses were provided for these women, including lists of web sites that provide information to assist them in accessing further support. 73.1% of the people trained were adults. 79.5% of the people trained did not have any tertiary education and most had not completed secondary education. Initially, particular emphasis has not been placed on children, due to their greater access to training opportunities at school. <sup>4</sup> Younger people, however, were the biggest user group of the permanent, free access to Internet in the libraries.

The IFLA Internet Manifesto has been distributed to every public library and is used as the ethical basis for all questions relating to Internet access. Questions of censorship access to certain sites, privacy, and the types of Internet usage statistics that it would be appropriate to collect, were all hotly debated issues. The Sub Directorate actively promotes a 'no censorship' policy, but as it is a horizontal organisation, it has had to work hard in some cases to gain consensus on this issue. It is still a topic that causes concern, although no outright instances of censorship or denial of access to information have been reported.

Partnerships with other organisations, both State and non-government have been used to offer specialised training aimed at local development. The Sub Directorate recognises that:

“ICTs are an important enabler of growth through efficiency gains and increased productivity, in particular by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). In this regard, the development of the Information Society is important for broadly based economic growth in both developed and developing economies”.<sup>5</sup>

An example of this kind of partnership is one that the Sub Directorate has formed with the Chilean State Bank ('Banco del Estado'). The Bank is interested in making its clients (principally very small business people and independent contractors) digitally literate, particularly

in basic software such as Excel, and use of the information and services offered through the Bank's website. The Bank is paying the libraries for this training, which is in turn helping to ensure the long-term sustainability of the BiblioRedes project.

The use of ICTs is making a huge difference to people's ability to access services in Chile, especially people living in small and remote communities that do not have the presence of even the most basic health or financial institutions. The Sub Directorate of public libraries is approaching government agencies concerned with productivity, health, employment, social welfare and education to promote and offer courses related to their on-line services, at the public libraries. The Sub Directorate firmly supports the belief that “access to continuous adult education, re-training, lifelong learning and distance learning can make an essential contribution to employability and help people benefit from the new opportunities offered by ICTs for traditional jobs, self-employment and new professions. Awareness and literacy in ICTs are an essential foundation in this regard.”<sup>6</sup>

Senior citizens have been identified as another marginalised group in the Information Society in Chile. To make sure that the ICT services offered at the library are reaching this group, a partnership has been formed with the National Pension Institute (INP). Training materials offered by BiblioRedes have been carefully adjusted to meet the needs and skills of this group,

concentrating on the communicational, recreational and cultural aspects of this tool and the use of Internet and E-mail services.

### **Creation of local content**

Without doubt the most difficult and exciting challenge facing the public libraries and the BiblioRedes project in 2004 is to use this new tool to create local content. As highlighted at the World Summit on the Information Society, “The creation, dissemination and preservation of content in diverse languages and formats must be accorded high priority in building an inclusive Information Society, paying particular attention to the diversity of supply of creative work and due recognition of the rights of authors and artists. It is essential to promote the production of and accessibility to all content - educational, scientific, cultural or recreational - in diverse languages and formats. The development of local content suited to domestic or regional needs will encourage social and economic development and will stimulate participation of all stakeholders, including people living in rural, remote and marginal areas.”<sup>7</sup>

BiblioRedes is currently developing a portal that can host content from all the public libraries and their different community organisations. The portal is seen as a major support to the participative, community management of libraries, responding to common interests in that community and acting as a virtual voice for diverse local groups. Three distinct areas

have been visualised for the initial development of content. The first of these is under the broad heading of Culture: local history and local identity. Using the available digital technology, including scanners and digital cameras, it is hoped that each community will begin to record and recover its own history. The Directorate of Libraries, Archives and Museums, to which the Sub Directorate of Public Libraries belongs, is a cultural heritage organisation that actively supports the views of the WSIS on this point: “The preservation of cultural heritage is a crucial component of identity and self-understanding of individuals that links a community to its past. The Information Society should harness and preserve cultural heritage for the future by all appropriate methods, including digitisation.”<sup>8</sup>

The second area for development concerns local economic production through the development of commercial products and local tourism. The third area concerns strengthening local groups and their projection outside their own community, offering them the opportunity to extend their social networks and communicate with other similar groups both nationally and internationally. Discussion groups will be created to facilitate these exchanges.

The portal will not only be a place for presenting information but also a place for searching for information. It will contain local news sections, an Art Gallery for works by different national artists of all different types, an elec-



tronic library and a digital reference service, in addition to a consolidated on-line public libraries catalogue. The portal will also host sites of interest to the communities surrounding the public libraries. These sites could include government, employment, and health and education services. It is anticipated that the portal will be particularly appreciated by the more than one million Chileans living in other countries.

### **The Digital Literacy Campaign**

The introduction of ICTs in public libraries has had a positive impact on the public perception of libraries in general, transforming them into more 'modern institutions'. It has also greatly enhanced the libraries' standing before the central Chilean government. The BiblioRedes project has received the largest foreign donation ever given to a cultural project in Chile. The project itself has become a cornerstone of the current government's massive Digital Literacy Campaign, which has formally and fully incorporated the principles established at the first World Summit of the Information Society. This campaign had the goal of giving basic computer training to 100,000 citizens in 2003: 75,000 of these people were trained in the public libraries. Not only did the President of Chile, Ricardo Lagos, inaugurate the project, he has also mentioned it in his annual public address and on various other occasions. In the last two years he has personally visited four public libraries, a previously unheard of activ-

ity for a Chilean president. The opening of this dialogue with the central government, and its greater understanding of the role of libraries in making the population information literate has been a tremendous, collateral benefit of the introduction of ICTs into the public libraries. It has already provided concrete gains in terms of budgets and special project funding towards the creation of new libraries.

### **Conclusion**

The appearance and expansion of the new information technologies in Chilean society has given rise to the opportunity to significantly change access to knowledge, information, communication and entertainment. It was logical that the public libraries be part of this change. However, this was not only demonstrated by the physical installation of new technology. In keeping with its mission and with the characteristics of the work being done, libraries had to contribute to its appropriation by users: an appropriation that could not only be understood as formal training in its use, but established as a practise of growing and permanent integration in the new world of information and communication.

In other words, the challenge consisted in prolonging the work that had already been developed in relation to reading and participative, cultural management, to the virtual universe. This challenge would not have been possible if the libraries had not already been transformed

into community meeting places at 'ground level'. The introduction and use of ICTs, while revolutionary on one level, is still just a component part of an overall campaign to ensure that libraries become centres for lifelong literacy, capable of defending and providing unrestricted access to information. The emphasis of this campaign has to be developing a way of working that ensures that the libraries are closely integrated into their communities, responding to local needs and in turn being supported and strengthened by their users.

### Notes

**1** Gestión Participative en Bibliotecas Públicas. Los desafíos de trabajar con la comunidad by Ricardo López

Muñoz, Carolina Maillard Mancilla, Paula Palacios Rojas, Miguel Urrutia Fernández with the input of the Sub Directorate of Public Libraries, the Regional Co-ordination Offices and the heads of all the public libraries of Chile.

**2** Declaration of Principles, World Summit on the Information Society, point 10

**3** Declaration of Principles, World Summit on the Information Society, Section 4 Capacity Building, point 29.

**4** The Chilean government Enlaces programme has provided all secondary schools with computers, the majority with connection to Internet.

**5** Declaration of Principles, World Summit on the Information Society, point 41.

**6** Declaration of Principles, World Summit on the Information Society, point 31.

**7** Declaration of Principles, World Summit on the Information Society, point 53.

# Central America: Diversity and challenge for literacy - the case of Costa Rica

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## Introduction

Access to information is only possible when basic human needs are met. Education and social welfare are the most direct instruments to promote literacy and learning. All citizens have the right to information. However, there are political, social and economic barriers to overcome before citizens can obtain and exercise their rights.

This article explores the current situation of Central America and Costa Rica in terms of social and educational frames as a basis for improving life expectations. The methodological approach has been to utilize the following sources: The 'Second Report on Human Development in Central America and Panama', Reports VIII and 'IX on Estado de la Nación en Desarrollo Humano Sostenible', and the 'Survey on Perceptions of Costa Rican citizens about education'. Additionally, answers to the main questions about the library profession, literacy and lifelong learning were provided by library leaders in Costa Rica.

The article includes three sections. The first one is devoted to the social, economic and cultural aspects of Central America and Panama as a region. The second discusses central aspects of human development in Costa Rica, and the third debates the situation regarding reading, literacy and libraries in Costa Rica. Finally, the article provides discussion about challenging areas for regional problems and access to information.

## Central America: Chaos and hope

Two main characteristics distinguish Central America, namely the diversity of economies and the cultural presence of different ethnic groups. This multicultural mosaic still links the region with its Afro Caribbean, Mayan, Garifuna, Aztec, and Olmeca roots. Thus the main characteristics of the region are marginalization and impoverishment.

According to the 'Second Report on Human Development in Central America and Panama', the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) index per capita places the countries in the following order, with the wealthiest first: Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. El Salvador and Guatemala show a gap in human development due to decades of guerrilla warfare in their territories, while social conflicts and turmoil in Nicaragua and Honduras correspond with a low GDP index rating.

In 2003, population ranks in the following order: Guatemala (12,309,400), Honduras (7,001,100), El Salvador (6,638,100), Nicaragua (5,488,700), Costa Rica (4,167,400) and Panama (3,116,300).

### **Social inequity**

In the last ten years, social inequity increased in two countries in the region and remained level in another four. Currently, poverty affects 20 million Central Americans and more than 10 million of these have no access to health care. One in four individuals live in extreme poverty. Their social institutions are fragile, fragmented and mostly concentrated in the capitals of small countries, while the costs of war take their toll.

### **Education and poverty**

More than 60% of the population lives below the poverty line and 50% of Central Americans are below the age of 14. Illiteracy is concentrated in rural areas and affects one in four indi-

viduals over 15 years of age, with women and indigenous groups on the top of the list.

In terms of access to education, there is a high rate of students attending primary school, but also a high rate of students that do not finish high school. This unfortunately produces an environment of low social investment that hampers development in education. It should be noted that women in general are receiving higher grades than men.

### **Libraries in Central America**

The first libraries were opened at the Universities of San Carlos (Guatemala), Leon (Nicaragua), El Salvador and Nicaragua, and the Universidad Santo Tomás (Costa Rica). There are governmental and private libraries in various developmental stages, according to the financial support they receive and the size of their collections. National, public and university libraries support literacy efforts for more privileged groups of society, while indigenous children receive less attention - with the exception of some library service projects sponsored by foreign foundations in e.g. Guatemala.

Development of infrastructure, training and building of collections is much needed to overcome the educational and literacy gaps existing in Central American countries. The lack of national policies concerning information, education and funding has left libraries with a very low profile.

## Human development in Costa Rica

Reading is the basis for knowledge enhancement and human development. Since the invention of the alphabet, reading has been important for humanity as a means to develop human nature and society. However, a strong reason for citizens to attain knowledge is to have social and economic stability. Basic needs such as housing, health, security, education and work are scarce in society.

Costa Rica has a population of four million inhabitants, a poverty rate of 20.6%, and a density of 80 people per square kilometre. 80% of vehicles and 70 % of industries are concentrated in the capital, San José. The regions show marked differences and a slow pace of progress, except in two sectors, tourism and biodiversity.

The myth of Costa Rican as a Central American Switzerland can be accepted in terms of green pastures and mountains, but not in terms of human development. In the last decade, its democratic tradition and high level of education have been affected by the following aspects:

### Political decision-making process

The Parliament is divided by four strong political parties, with low capacity to obtain a majority in project approvals. Therefore, long and expensive processes of negotiation have to be implemented to approve new and important projects for national development. Urgent

fiscal reform is needed to obtain resources and to implement services in society. Costa Rica is burdened with high debts, a low export rate, limited resources in general, and an inflation rate of 9.68 %.

### Population

According to statistics, the majority of the Costa Rican population is 65 years and older, followed by those between 5 and 19 years of age and the group of children between 0 and 4 years. This situation poses an urgent need to focus on the following areas for development: health, education and future employment resources for the group between 5 and 19 years. One could ask the question of what would happen if, in a period of five to ten years, Costa Rica were unable to provide opportunities for these three main groups of the population. Clearly, more attention should be paid to provide health, recreation and library services to the growing population of elderly groups. Better educational opportunities should be provided for the young in order to create professional capacity and leadership to cope in a globalised world. On the other hand, the future of the younger generation between 0 to 4 years old seems more positive as they are expected to have better health, childcare centres and preschool education.

### Social inequity

The gap between high and low income groups is increasing. Two classes of Costa Ricans are

forming, and the strong polarisation of traditional society is opening up areas for social conflicts. Thus there is a need for a new vision and for creativity to direct efforts towards truly sustainable development. Although we see an increase in the percentage of wealthy people, this simply means that the rich are attaining more wealth faster. In fact, there is a general and increasing lack of job opportunities - a pattern that creates the risk of social conflicts.

### **Poverty**

Almost 25% of Costa Rica's population lives below the poverty line. Stable employment has decreased, while unstable employment has increased, creating poor life conditions, insecurity, and instability. As women normally go to school longer than men, they should in theory be better prepared to meet the challenges. The unequal reality is, however, that they are paid 30 to 40% less than men in the private sector, and their employment rate is lower. Further to this most women are housewives.

### **Education**

Although, a positive reality is that 95% of Costa Rican children attend primary school, less than 40% go on to complete high school. The reasons for the high rate of desertion in high school bring strong considerations for innovation in the educational system and better-equipped libraries as well. The three main reasons for leaving high school are: Not in-

terested in studying (29%), lack of economic resources (11%), and boring, duplication, and outdated contents (11%). To attract the attention of students, there is therefore a need to restore the quality of public education and provide the necessary opportunities for all. More significantly, the situation calls for a revision of the traditional concept of a highly educated population and a switch to a new focus on the development of a highly literate population. Consequently requirements for education at all levels should be increased and the educational facilities should be developed.

### **Tourism and natural resources**

The current legislation provides tax exemption for tourism and export activities, creating an enormous lack of resources for the government. However, the fiscal reforms currently being approved will provide the necessary legislation to capture income from these sources. Because of different governmental priorities, there is little chance that these new resources will be spent on education and development of library services. Tourism activities should include funding Biodiversity and National Parks as main national strengths.

### **Reading, literacy and libraries**

Libraries and schools encourage knowledge creation and learning as an integral part of individual development. The goal is for the user to show appreciation for the importance of learn-

ing as a means of higher quality of living. However, the results of a recent study, 'Perceptions of Costa Rican citizens about education' have raised some fundamental questions regarding the educational system. Reading habits are strongly related to quality of public education in a democratic society.

### **Reading is essential to attain education**

However, the results of the study show that for 55% of interviewees reading is a rarely practiced habit. Concerning the main reasons to read, 34.1% consider reading is important to learn, 29% consider reading important to be informed, only while 20.2% consider reading important to enforce knowledge.

The education system in Costa Rica privileges the identification of literary figures, topics, and main and secondary characters while promoting the 'official interpretation' of a literary text, leaving the young people with no options to express their own interpretations towards his or her encounter with the artistic discourse, (C. Rubio, CIDE, UNA). This result implies that the school system encourages no plurality with regards to reading and interpretation of texts but instead offers official readings tutored by teachers that have limited access to information resources.

### **Development of libraries**

Libraries in Costa Rica have had a long story of

development. The first library was opened at University of Santo Tomás in 1843. From 1847 to 1940, several libraries opened their doors, such as The Reading Room in the house of Don Santiago Fernández (1847), Sociedad Filopédica (1861), Anglo Saxon (1874), Instituto Nacional (1974) and Sociedad de la Biblioteca (1890). In 1940, the University of Costa Rica opened the first university library.

The Ministry of Sports, Youth and Culture sponsors the Public Library Systems that consists of 100 libraries throughout the country. A similar pattern exists in other Central America countries; some libraries are partially funded by communities and local governments. Some cities, such as the provinces of Alajuela, Cartago and Heredia, have developed public libraries that hold a strong public image. In San José, the libraries of Guadalupe, San Pedro, Tibas, and Desamparados are good examples of excellent services and dedicated librarians.

The Ministry of Education Library Network reports there are 300 libraries in the country. Some of them have attained large collections whereas others are operating on a very small scale. There are regular session of meetings and continuing education activities for school librarians. The Public Universities Council (CO-NARE) includes a library network that provides a good example of library cooperation among four university libraries. The network has developed service standardization and measurement of collections. Special libraries are located in some private institutions and banks. A few

non-governmental organisations have created small collections of scientific, historical and environmental information.

The teaching and education of librarianship started in 1949 with a technical course for practicing librarians at the University of Costa Rica. The first School of Library Science opened in 1968. At present, there are two schools of library science, one at University of Costa Rica and the other at the National University. The University of Distance and two private universities are also offering educational options.

In comparison to the other Central American countries, Costa Rica still maintains the first position in terms of library development. However, the national socio-economic situation affects the impact and results of these institutions.

### **Libraries for lifelong literacy study**

In order to present a study of opinion, library leaders were asked about the main questions on lifelong literacy. The questionnaire included the following questions: How to promote lifelong learning in your library? How to promote literacy? What is the role of the library association (Colegio) in promotion of literacy? What do you suggest to improve literacy and lifelong learning? How do you see librarianship today? What is the role of IFLA in lifelong learning and literacy?

The questionnaire was distributed to the senior librarians in Costa Rica by email, and the answers provided express several interesting opinions. In the following, responses concerning each of the six questions along with general comments will be presented.

### **How to promote lifelong learning in libraries**

Traditionally, Costa Rica has a high rate of literacy (85%), and the majority of the population completes primary school. The responses concerning ways to promote lifelong learning truly refer to general activities in libraries:

- User education provides better skills to know and get familiar with the library and establishes the need to use it to maximise sources of knowledge
- User education transmits values such as honesty and respect for the collections in accessing library services
- Providing efficient information services
- Meeting the information needs of clients
- Providing continuing education for librarians in order to improve library services
- Improving search techniques and information sending skills or the selective dissemination of the information to users
- Advocating the value of information and knowledge
- Advocating the love of reading, entertainment, and knowledge
- Making libraries and information centres



- pleasant and dynamic places for the clients
- Preparing our young generations for reading and the use of libraries
  - Taking as principle that the library is a centre for culture and knowledge
  - Promoting diverse harmonious activities in special libraries.
  - Promoting user participation in library events during the year
  - Training courses for librarians in promotional activities at schools, universities or their own institution or library
  - Using the promotion of the library in the local community as a means to reach specific objectives
  - Inviting specialists to give lectures in the library
- Arranging user education courses
  - Arranging lectures and workshops about current topics
  - Hosting exhibits about national holidays and celebrations.
  - Facilitating freedom of access to information
  - Running courses for university students on how to use the library
  - Arranging reading and animation workshops for children, teachers and the public in general
  - Lecturing on topics that raise the interest of adults and art exhibits to encourage the appreciation of artistic works
  - Ensuring that libraries are promoted in educational programs of the Ministry of Public Education
  - Increasing the quality of information search by teaching computer literacy skills

In my opinion, libraries of Costa Rica do not promote learning but rather reading and bibliographical research. High School libraries help develop students' research habits such as training in search strategies, locating information, research techniques, and presentation and writing of proposals during the years of study.

### **How to promote literacy in your libraries, centres and information units**

The responses show a concern for libraries as organisers of activities that increase the level of understanding and knowledge. It should be noted that there are no responses concerning library services to the illiterate part of the population. The suggestions provided regarding the promotion of literacy are:

### **How the Colegio of Bibliotecarios (Library Association) helps to promote literacy**

More than addressing the actual question, the responses demonstrate a real concern and high expectations about the role of the library association as an institution that protects and reshapes the profession. However, the conclusion that there seems to be a strong need for leadership and innovation is interesting to note. The Colegio of Bibliotecarios was founded in 1973. From 1949 to 1972, the Association of Librarians of Costa Rica established the basis for the new association. Responses regarding the promotion work of the association list as follows:

- The Colegio (Association) needs to work harder publicising its activities, take more initiatives and create greater interest amongst librarians to participate in its work
- The Colegio should set up a new paradigm of librarianship, which enhances and provides greater values to our profession
- The Colegio should play a more active role in continuing education, updating its activities in terms of advances in the professional field
- The Colegio's bylaws express the following aims:
  - To promote and to prompt the study and teaching of library science
  - To dignify the profession in all aspects
  - To watch for the protection and defence of the professional interests of members
  - To lobby to Government for promulgation of laws for development of the profession
  - To respect and comply with the Code of Ethics and other regulations
  - To establish a fund of benefit and subsidies for members
  - To provide visibility to the profession in society
- The Colegio has a predominant role for libraries, literacy, and learning in society. The Colegio sets up the guidelines and supports initiatives for new courses, lectures, and seminars
- The librarians should do more to change and improve the professional image in society
- The Colegio is not very active in promoting literacy or learning but instead concentrates on continuing educational activities
- It is urgent the Colegio supports the information and knowledge society in areas of education and learning. It is needed to teach the user to utilize digital sources. Librarians need to keep up to date in innovations and technology. Therefore, the Colegio must provide training in: Information knowledge management, virtual user services, and innovative programmes for information access, quality and standardization

### **Please suggest activities to promote literacy and lifelong learning**

The responses demonstrate a general interest in the promotion of literacy and lifelong learning in libraries as well as in the provision of better services and activities that further the cooperation among institutions. The following activities were suggested to promote literacy and lifelong learning in libraries:

- Diffusing new advances in general themes of interest
- Providing facilities for consultation of materials, in terms of well-maintained collections
- Offering up-to-date services with Internet facilities
- Improving services by showing a positive attitude and professional eagerness
- Dedicating efforts in library schools, associations, and institutions such as National System of Public Libraries and National Health System
- Organising workshops that promote literacy and lifelong learning during the year

- Organising public libraries workshops
- Empowering libraries services within the institutions
- Offering permanent and systematic training to the professionals in the field
- Establishing a National Information Policy
- Reviving the National Council of Libraries
- Updating the School Library System to meet the needs of students and improve leadership planning

### How do you see librarianship today?

In terms of the status of librarianship in the country, the responses identify a need for changing the traditional aspects of the profession. The lack of financial resources makes, generally speaking, only room for a modest professional performance. However, on the more positive side it should be noticed that the new professionals have attained updated computer skills and leadership attitudes. This development counteracts with the traditional profile of librarians. The views on librarianship represent the following opinions:

- Resistance to technological change
- Needs to leave shell and to face the new changes
- Dare to change of attitude in library services
- Open to innovative services
- We are stopped in the time unless we change attitudes, look to solidarity, cooperative efforts and innovations
- I consider that we as professionals are in

a not prominent in the cultural life of our country

- Professionals should pay more attention to the application of new technologies
- Quality of services and modernisation are not priorities
- Information and communication technologies have provided a wider range of opportunities to libraries, due to storage capacity and rapid access to information. Library schools could not imagine the effect generated by the computer in the exercise of the profession. Therefore, actions directed at the implementation of new technologies arrived somewhat late in the preparation of the students to respond to the changing reality and be capable of taking on challenges and commitments with assertiveness and vision
- Currently, a few library leaders operate valuable projects within the profession. Nevertheless, they have had an arduous work to empower the profession and the librarian as a professional with credibility

### IFLA, lifelong learning and literacy

The responses on this issue show that there is little knowledge about IFLA activities, and therefore the role of IFLA as an instrument for changing libraries seems diffuse, as illustrated by the following answers:

- We need to learn more about IFLA activities
- We fail by not reading more IFLA articles and other documentation

- All respect, but I have little knowledge about IFLA but assume that IFLA is very important, since they offer seminars to international level, for good exchange of opinions and experiences
- IFLA should establish a fund of benefits and subsidies for member affiliations
- As it can be seen, the Library Association has not yet been involved in IFLA activities but is open to encourage their members to carry out literacy and lifelong learning activities

### **Overall findings of the study**

Libraries in Costa Rica are affected by the same challenges to national and human development as other countries. In order to improve services and facilities, it is necessary to confront the following national challenges:

- To regain national trust in politics and improve the quality of democracy
- To create new jobs and opportunities and better salaries for more educated citizens
- To modernise infrastructure for transportation and communication systems
- To close economic development gaps in the region
- To adopt national politics in fiscal control, immigration and foreign relations
- To prioritise information and education of adults in high school institutions in order to reduce poverty and provide better opportunities for the young generations
- To restore the relationship between democ-

racy and social equity

- To encourage more investment in human resources, health and employment
- To approve a national information and library policy

By reflecting on how to meet these national challenges, it is important to note that the role of libraries is to serve as centres of culture. Librarians should more actively provide the necessary information to increase the skills and knowledge needed to close the existing gaps in society. Librarians, who are able to understand the socio economic diversity, should ensure access for the poor and for those sectors of the society in most need to be informed. They should uphold the vision of libraries as a means to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

Also, formal education, research, and creativity are part of the national quest to increase educational and job opportunities for all. Libraries and librarians are responsible for the creation of collections and services that can meet Costa Rican society needs for better information access.

### **Conclusion Strategy for success**

In terms of a vision on how libraries can promote literacy and lifelong learning in Costa Rica, we have to consider that libraries are institutions that serve different types of users. The National Library offers access to research mate-

rials but it has not developed strong bonds with citizens in general or approached the national socio-economic problems Costa Rica is facing. The lack of funding of library programmes is a hindrance for the creation of better opportunities on a larger scale. There is no governmental interest in taking advantage of the opportunities libraries offer as national symbols for access to knowledge and information.

Taking Costa Rica as an example of a developing country in need of developing a national strategy that can promote literacy and lifelong learning in libraries, the following steps should be included in the work:

Raise national interest for the importance of libraries in the community and increase the visibility of libraries by the revival of library leadership at different levels. For libraries in the Ministry of Education System, more efforts should be devoted to funding activities. With a few exceptions, libraries are generally small institutions that have little importance in the developing processes of education in institutions. There is little coordination and financial support of the role of libraries from heads of the institutions. In this respect, librarians do not fully participate in schools' activities, as their main objectives are to support students with their homework or consult sources already assigned by the teachers. To further the involvement between librarians and teachers more time should be dedicated to encouraging cooperation. On the other hand, technical processes

and management also take time and the majority of libraries only have one librarian so the lack of funding of human resources becomes a major obstacle in reaching this goal. The high number of students in primary schools requires better-equipped libraries whereas the high rate of desertion in high schools requires stronger support of libraries in the curriculum to serve better citizens.

Obviously, the socio economic situation of developing countries, such as is the case of Costa Rica, calls for citizens with better opportunities to meet the challenges of a globalized environment. At present, the opportunities of better living conditions are directed to people that have better skills and knowledge to perform non-traditional jobs. By offering information and workshops to increase knowledge and skills, libraries can help overcome the gaps between the rich and poor groups of society. The reality is, however, that information resources are scarce and generally the collections are not updated. Therefore, librarians should seek governmental resources in order to create repositories of information for improvement of services in the following topics: Politics and democracy quality for citizens; new jobs and opportunities in a globalised world; immigration policies, rights and regulations; high school education and recreation for all; information services for the elderly, pregnant mothers, and children; health information and services; rights and obligations for citizens; and activities that promote lifelong literacy and implement

IFLA core values regarding freedom of access to information.

According to responses provided for the above-mentioned study, library leaders stated that there is very little knowledge about the benefits of library associations such as the Colegio or IFLA. The reasons are mainly economical due to the fact that salaries are in general very low and consequently there is not a wide acceptance of paying the fees. In some countries, such as Costa Rica, membership of the Colegio is required according to law if a librarian is employed by a public institution.

Although IFLA has become better known in recent years, the cost of membership is not within the economic means of most institutions, professionals or students. The culture of professional associations is known and accepted with regards to the benefits of meetings, research, exchange of experiences and collaboration among peers. Over the past years, details of IFLA/ FAIFE and IFLA/LAC activities have been disseminated in the librarians' community in the Central America region at different meetings; however, the economic aspect is indeed a barrier for full participation in IFLA. Therefore, funding for attending conferences and covering membership fee expenses is the main obstacle.

The strategy for furthering participation in IFLA activities is to set up an exchange programme in cooperation with library leaders in

each country of the region. The programme is to strengthen the motivation of institutions that could afford participation of librarians in IFLA meetings. This way, the region could benefit more from IFLA/ FAIFE activities. The programme would also increase the sharing of information amongst libraries and this way improve the present situation where, in most cases, the librarians attending meetings do not share information obtained, mainly because they work for private libraries and do not participate in the Colegio activities.

Since it is closely related to lack of funding for librarians and their institutions, access to information and the right to use information for improvement of quality of life is an issue poorly addressed in the region of Central America.

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# Empowering people through ICT- enabled lifelong learning.

## Role of libraries and NGOs in South Asia

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### Introduction

#### Role of libraries: evolving paradigm

Libraries across all societies have existed and continue to evolve within a complex and dynamic knowledge system that encompasses the lifecycle of information and knowledge from creation, through dissemination and curation to use. They have shaped activities that we have historically called scholarly communication and the dissemination and use of cultural materials. Cultural needs and requirements provide an essential foundation for the dynamic information system, of which libraries have always been an integral part. Libraries have broadly strived to provide efficient linkages between knowledge and information systems. They have demonstrated the potential for enabling transformation of sorts - from social, cultural, political and even economic.

Recent discourses on the emerging role of libraries have begun to focus on enabling a shift in the organisational model and are suggestive of alternative frames for development of library services. These suggested new forms and strategies for change are based on the recognition that all libraries have to work as cooperating partners in a coherent system rather than as single institutions to:

- Provide access for everybody to all published material no matter how it be stored
- Present and organise the material in a way that makes it easily accessible for as many groups as possible
- Integrate access into daily life, the ultimate goal being 'the personal library' that generates information resources due to a chosen individual or group's profile linked with a library service

- Possess the capability to adapt and adopt learning facilities, such as easy access to library organised computer and information literacy programmes.

It should be noted that some of these requirements are not new to information managers. The fact that these requirements still continue to define the role of libraries in the wake of fast track changes in terms of integration of the global economy is ample indication of the underlying concern that some of these parameters are yet to be integrated in the overall objectives and roles of libraries. The larger question then boils down to identifying the path to achieve these. The emphasis on quickly responding to the changing needs of the information age and hence the need to infuse changes in the role of libraries has led to some theorising in terms of organisational frameworks. 'The Danish Model', seeks to provide an organising framework where libraries change their organisational nature and move closer to/or in line with the information society technologies and become networking partners in a coherent system (including traditional fields such as collection building). Proponents of such frameworks are of the opinion that there is complete clarity in the visions for access in the 21st century. However what is missing is the efficient means to make them come true.

Ideas of a single coherent library system, that have been developed for small country contexts, wherein forcible merger of resources appears to

be the most efficient solution may however have limitations for large and culturally diverse landscapes and hence diverse needs for information, particularly in the South Asian region. Yet it may be argued that creating conducive environments for all libraries (traditional and modern) to work together would serve as at least a necessary condition in terms of achieving satisfying access to information. Cost efficiency considerations would however be important constraints in achieving an optimal solution. If one looks at a broader definition and role of libraries in the modern context, it emerges that their key objectives are to promote information, education and cultural activity by making available books, periodicals, talking books and other suitable material, such as recorded music and electronic information resources, (including internet and multimedia). The basic mission of libraries has remained largely the same, when seen in terms of the traditional roles where they served as a repository of information, sometimes even costly information.

While libraries continue to give access to information and the raw material for knowledge, which is an important factor in creating and maintaining welfare societies, the mission of libraries in civic society is gradually changing to help people to manage and improve their lives. The keywords in the evolving scenario are learning, understanding, insight and inspiration. Libraries would, therefore, have to acquire a larger role as cornerstones in building democratic, enlightened populations. They should



link to research and education on all levels and promote culture and support the building and maintaining of cultural identities. This is traditional knowledge, but it has to be re-interpreted in new ways all the time to be understood properly. This is where the libraries will have to play the critical role of agents for facilitating lifelong learning. The really new element in the emerging paradigm is thus related to the use of new media and technology. Libraries are no longer defined as a collection of books but would have to serve as an institution giving access to information no matter what format or medium it be stored in. This implies a major change in the means to fulfil the library mission. The new means can also be expressed in terms of defining new roles for the library.

## Education and lifelong learning

### The global setting: Rights to education and information

#### *Education as means to empowerment*

In the global scene, education has been recognised as a change agent to empowering societies to participate in knowledge societies.

Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prepared in 1947 and 1948 by commission of Human Rights states,

“.. everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and

professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

Although the Declaration provides the framework, the ongoing debate of who will provide education to ‘everyone’, what kind of ‘education’, and ‘how and when’ poses multi-faceted questions. When the Declaration was written, only a minority of the world’s young people had access to any kind of formal education, let alone the choices of different kinds, and a little more than one half of the world’s adults could read and write a simple passage about their everyday lives. Education opportunities have greatly increased in the years since the declaration was proclaimed. A majority of the world’s young people now go to school, and participation in formal education has expanded. However, the absolute number of illiterate adults has only increased marginally over the past five decades.

As compared to 525 million illiterate adults in Asia in 1950, today we have more than 650 million illiterate adults in the region. Even

among those who are 'literate' it is difficult to assess how much progress has been made in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Are people's literacy skills, for example, adequate to enable them to participate fully in the political, economical, cultural and social life of their society, both in the developed and the developing world? Are schools doing enough to counter discrimination and allow for tolerance in today's polarised world is another question facing the education planners. Similarly, there is the question of the boundaries of education - meaning the notion of education itself when there is enough recognition of the fact that the time to learn is the whole life time, and that education is 'a continuum, coextensive with life', as suggested by the International Commission on Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In such a scenario, education cannot be taken to mean just schooling, while not denying the importance of schooling. Also, at the same time, one cannot say that the limited definition of education was irrelevant to the 650 million illiterate adults in Asia and the total of 875 million of them all over the world.

In the context of unlimited education boundaries, the concept of fundamental education, as outlined in the Declaration has gone out of fashion today. The content and the meaning of 'fundamental' education should first and foremost fall within the range of the most pressing needs and problems of the communities concerned. The content of 'fundamental' education therefore would vary widely with circumstances to include:

- a) Skills of thinking and communicating
- b) Vocational skills
- c) Domestic skills
- d) Skills to express art, crafts and culture
- e) Education for hygiene and health
- f) Knowledge and understanding of physical and natural environment
- g) Knowledge of people in other parts of the world
- h) Knowledge of spiritual and moral ethics; and
- i) Development qualities of outside world

The means and methods to achieve the above kind of education have been widespread according to the context and diversified human conditions. These range from adult literacy campaigns, agricultural and health training and extension services, co-operatives, organising community groups, libraries and community centres spreading information, and, mass media methods and techniques. It is therefore recognised that fundamental education be concerned with the community as a whole, and should lead to some social and collective action - to help the people to help themselves.

The largest literacy campaign of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the one witnessed in Russia where at the beginning of the century more than seventy percent of the people were unable to read or write. Illiteracy among women was three times higher than that of their counterparts. Among the actors in the special anti-illiteracy campaign were librarians, teachers, doctors, agronomists, engineers, college and school students and gov-

ernment clerks. By 1926, the number of literates doubled. In 1932, the campaigners numbered 1.2 million. The campaign was built with astonishing speed and results. 1.3 million people were taught to read and write between 1927-28; 2.7 million between 1928-29; 10.5 million between 1929-30; and, 22 million between 1930-31. By 1939, 95.1% of the men and 83.4% of the women in the USSR were literate. Thus, the notion of schooling as a means for literacy was challenged in the later year campaigns of mass literacy.

It was at this time that Paulo Freire's thoughts influenced the world. For Freire, learning to read and write necessarily was accompanied by the learner's increasing consciousness of his/her existential situation and of the possibility of acting independently to change it, a process which he termed conscientisation, which is today popularly and passionately termed empowerment. The idea of learning to empower leads to contrasting education through schooling. It obliges us to recognise that education by its very nature is a continuing process, starting from earliest infancy through adulthood, following informal, formal and non-formal roots and methods.

The diversity and complexity of basic learning needs and the drive behind the need among children, youth and adults necessitates broadening and redefining the scope of basic education to include the following components:

- a) Learning begins at birth
- b) The main delivery system of learning outside children's homes is the primary schooling system

- c) The basic learning needs of youth and adults are diverse and should be met through a variety of delivery systems
- d) All available channels and instruments of information, communication, and social action could be used to help convey knowledge and information on social, cultural and livelihoods issues. Thus, the larger vision of basic and fundamental education was recognised in the words of 'lifelong learning.' The third world conference on adult education in Tokyo in 1972 declared its belief that 'right of individuals to education, their right to learn and go on learning.'

#### *Information as means to empowerment*

Similar to that of the history behind the right to education movement, there has been an exciting trend towards recognition of the right to information by all nations, intergovernmental organisations, civil society and the people at large. The Declarations on right to information have come from different quarters of power such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Organisation of American States, the Council of Europe and the OECD countries. In 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights where in its Article 19, guaranteeing that: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."

It is argued now that without information citizens cannot possibly make informed decisions, including electoral choices, or participate in decision-making processes. The right to information is also essential to accountability and good governance of the State. The right to access the information held by the State has been recognised in Sweden for more than two hundred years, but it is only now in the last three decades that the right to information campaign all over the world has gained momentum. Both nationally and internationally, governments, intergovernmental organisations and international financial institutions have adopted laws and policies, which provide for a right to access to information held by public bodies.

Although the source of right to information emerges from the Universal Declarations of Human Rights that include right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, it is also evident that many national governments and non-governmental actors have recognised the need for a separate protection for the right to access information held by the State. In a more general sense, it can also be derived from the recognition that democracy, and indeed the whole system for protection of human rights, cannot function properly without freedom of information - a fundamental human right upon which other rights depend. It is also witnessed today that right to freedom of information can only be effective if it is guaranteed by law, and if the modalities by which it is to be exercised are set out clearly in legislation or, for international

governing bodies, in binding policy statements such as:

- a) A strong call for maximum disclosure
- b) Broad definitions of information and public bodies
- c) Positive obligations to publish key categories of information
- d) Clear and narrowly drawn exceptions
- e) Effective oversight of the right by an independent administrative body

In a number of countries, freedom of information, including the right to access information held by the State, has been recognised at the constitutional level. In some countries, national courts have been reluctant to accept that the guarantee of freedom of expression includes the right to access information held by the State. For example, in the U.S., the Supreme Court has held that the First Amendment of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and of the press, does not mandate a right to access government information or sources of information within government's control. In other countries including Japan, India and South Korea, senior courts have held the right to access information held by the State. In South Korea, the courts have maintained in certain cases that the right was violated when government officials refuse to disclose requested documents. Elsewhere in Asia, political change in the early part of the decade in Nepal produced the 1990 Constitution, which protects the right to access and receive information. The people power that

overthrew the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines guarantees the right to access information held by the State.

It is indeed clear that individuals do have a human right to freedom of information, including access to information held by public authorities. The specific content of that right has been elaborated by a number of authoritative sources, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expressions. Article 19 has set out the international standards and best practice for access to information, endorsed by the UN Special Rapporteur in his 2000 Annual Report. There are nine principles that underpin freedom of information legislation:

- 1) Maximum disclosure
- 2) Obligation to publish
- 3) Promotion of open government
- 4) Limited scope of exceptions
- 5) Process to facilitate access
- 6) Low-costs for accessing information
- 7) Open meetings of decision making processes
- 8) Interpretation of legislation with a disclosure requirement (pre-requisite)
- 9) Protection of whistleblowers

While the constitutions and legal framework do offer opportunities for citizens to access information, the implementation process worldwide has been very weak. Various institutions such as the non-governmental organisations and community based libraries and information centres do find an opportunity to enable people with access to their basic rights - education and information pertaining to their daily

living. Despite the democratic nature of most of the commonwealth and developing nations, ensuring the rights to education and information among the citizens has always been a challenging experience for all involved.

### **Ensuring the rights to education and information: Recent movements in South Asia**

#### *Education as means to women's social and economic empowerment*

High instance of poverty is reflected in children staying out of school in South Asia, a region where children form 40% of total population. Around 540 million of more than 1.2 billion people in South Asia are under 18 years old. Recent studies reveal a strong correlation between the incidence of child labour and poor school attendance and education achievement. While only a few educational planners have understood the patterns of disadvantage caused by caste, gender, ethnicity and livelihood insecurity, education services need to be geared to the needs of the marginalised.

Analyses of recent findings suggest that in India and Bangladesh dropout rates are boosted by mechanistic forms of learning. Certain inflexible school schedules not attuned to the agricultural calendar, unmotivated and indolent teachers and toleration of bullying from higher caste children are a few of many problems facing children who come from poor families. Indian states with similar levels of poverty have strikingly different levels of educational per-

formance - 32 percent of rural Uttar Pradesh children go to school while Kerala, a state that is equally poor witnesses 98 percent of children in schools. Discontent with state education is so widespread that private schools are no longer only for the privileged but attract pupils from families across the spectrum of income groups, including rural areas.

There have been a number of interesting initiatives in South Asia ensuring the rights to education and rights to information among children, youth and adults in India. We have witnessed effective campaigns for demanding public domain information held by the State. This section outlines a few of those experiments.

Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been key instruments in South Asia, for boosting state's efforts to achieve education for all, especially girls. Among many NGOs in Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) works directly in the area of girl's education while in India; NGOs serve more as laboratories for innovative educational experimentations providing opportunities for community learning. BRAC's non-formal primary education model in rural education for the poorest children in the age group 8-10 ensures at least 70% of children, especially girls, in schools. The BRAC model is distinct in four ways: providing good school facilities while keeping the total number of children in each class below 33; training of teachers on a continual basis; curriculum development tailored

to address the needs of rural communities; and higher levels of community participation in school education, especially by rural parents. The results of these experiments have encouraged more than 400 NGOs in Bangladesh to take up the mandate of education for all in the recent years.

The micro-finance revolution in many part of the world, especially in South Asia is a subject of contention as regards its effectiveness in reaching the poorest, and in empowering women, but positive benefits for households' abilities to save money and invest in children's education have been noted in the recent years. In South Asia, evidence suggests that the provision of loans to women has a stronger effect in promoting children's education, particularly girls' education and in reducing child labour. When women are able to take control of their lives, they hold the key to changes in many areas of human activity. Linkages between human rights and women's empowerment have been noted in recent years. However, rights of women have limited meaning if they are not able to come forward and claim their rights. Providing women with education and supporting them in their realisation of their rights is highly understood among the NGOs these days. Without such support structures in place, the risks for women are too high as they also face backlashes in conditions where they demand their rights at places of resistance.

The Mahila Samakhya programme, working in several districts in India, set out to involve

women in educational planning, and thus empower them as means to achieving education to all. The programme design has moved away from the conventional stereotypes to consider the following:

- a) Organising women into *Sanghas* - which become forms of mutual solidarity and reflection
- b) Get them to articulate their need in a range of interconnected ways. The programme does not specify one single agenda, but emphasises on women's collective power as a means to overcome their disadvantages that extend beyond material things to perceptions of their own abilities and capabilities.

### *Demanding information as means to realising the human rights*

During the last decade, especially since the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, in Principle 10, there has been increasing recognition that access to information on the environment, including information held by public authorities, is key to sustainable development. There is enough recognition that environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at all levels. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. It is emphasised in Principle 10 of Rio Convention that the State shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available.

Effective access to judicial and administrative proceeding, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.

There have been equal moves within the international community to recognise a special aspect of the right to freedom of information in relation to human rights ever since in 1988, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to promote and protect universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms. Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others to know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including having access to information as to how these rights and freedoms are given effect in domestic legislative, judicial or administrative systems.

The main thrust of the right to information movement in South Asia has been around the right to survive as the majority of poor in the whole world live in this region. More than 40% of world's poor live in India and some 10% -15% more live in the rest of South Asia. The right to information campaign has extended its premise to food security, shelter, environment and employment as all these issues are bound up within the right to information paradigm. In the absence of information, these basic rights that enable people, especially the poor, to survive have no meaning. The other aspect of the right to information campaign in South Asia

targets the element of governmental secrecy. Secrecy has been an element of disempowerment of common people and their exclusion from processes, which vitally affect their existence. Information on matters such as employment schemes, obtaining certificates for various purposes, recommendation for different types of loans, access to different poverty alleviation programmes, irrigation, drinking water, sanitation and education is mandatory for ordinary people, and information of these sorts, it is recognised, should be provided proactively.

In recent years, several NGO efforts to address the lack of information on these and other matters have shown a ray of hope for the marginalised. The information revolution and the decentralised form of governance in South Asia are seen responsible for gaining access to information at local levels.

The case of Sardar Sarovar dam project on the Narmada River is a good example where NGOs working on the issue of displacement and rehabilitation have been demanding information about this project that affects the lives of thousands of people. People affected have been provided with almost no information regarding the construction of the dam, the acquisition of their lands, their own displacement and compensation or relief packages. Today, in India, we witness a major movement on Sardar Sarovar dam project where NGOs are very active. NGOs have sensitised the government on environmental issues like contamination of groundwater

have direct effects on people's lives. The movements have made the governments and public authorities realise that people now can demand information, not suffer the ill effects of wrong decisions taken by some others.

The Mazdoor Kisaan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) movement has led the way in terms of advocacy on the right to information in India. The MKSS is a massive grassroots movement today that grew out of a local struggle for minimum wages and a realisation among the founding members that change for the local people will only come through a political process. Early in 1999, when the government of Rajasthan constituted a committee to draft a right to information law, the MKSS travelled through the five divisions of Rajasthan holding consultations, street-corner meetings, performing street plays and reaching out to large numbers of people. Apart from meeting and mobilising people and creating pressure, the street meetings also became platforms for democratic debate, eliciting local views on the draft orders passed by the government. The use of different mechanisms of participation, such as street theatre, led to people's empowerment with the sale of post-cards addressed to the Chief Minister urging the government to pass legislation on the right to information. This approach has caught the attention of the country's media, lawyers, jurists, academics, and even bureaucrats and legislators, many of whom came together to form the national campaign.



Similarly, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) has been holding awareness workshops among NGO representatives, lawyers, media workers, bureaucrats, youth groups, students and people from all walks of life. Having involved in government's initiatives on the right to information in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Karnataka and Rajasthan, the CHRI campaign has brought together people doing advocacy work at all levels and has forged links between actors working at different levels, both within civil society as well as with government.

In recent years, various consumer groups have taken up the right to information campaign, considering that the citizen is a consumer of governmental or private sector services. The Consumer info online is a forum that provides legal assistance to citizens (consumers) who are affected by injustice. The NGO movements have taken the campaign at a level today, the issues is a regular part of the training given to new civil servants at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussorie, India.

In Pakistan, the issue of freedom of information has now been taken up by various groups such as the national chapter of Transparency International who are advocating for governmental transparency. In the recent elections, the declaration by the President of Pakistan that general elections will be conducted in a transparent manner has reiterated the fact that the need for a concentrated and sustained campaign for

freedom of information will yield results. Under the prevailing conditions all governments in Pakistan are likely to support the public and NGO efforts for freedom of information.

### **Libraries as critical agents in lifelong learning**

#### *The emerging trend among worldwide libraries*

In the context of the above campaigns for right to education and right to information, the relationship between information and lifelong learning and realising one's own rights is evident. The library scene in South Asia could largely be divided into five major segments, namely the national library sector, the academic library sector, the scientific library sector, the governmental library sector and the public library sector. These libraries largely operate as collection-oriented organisations while there are demands for these institutions to become service-oriented organisations. In a recent article, a well-known librarian in India has recommended that at the decision-taking level, all nations in South Asia should develop their national policy on libraries and should encourage library planners to consider the following:

- Take stock of the actual need of the library and its users;
- Bring about change in the functions of the library to make it service-oriented rather than collection-oriented;
- Resource sharing and networking of libraries;
- Consider both preservation and access as vital components of library service;

- Marketing of information and library services;
- Development of library professionals to cope with the new environment; and,
- Utilisation of management techniques for dealing with the new objectives.

It may be worthwhile to look at the issues identified by the Library Association in the UK (now CILIP) while considering the role of library and information centres and their services to support the lifelong learning agenda:

- Create a single, integrated delivery system by establishing closer links between libraries in further and higher education and education institutions; and by establishing links with organisation with power and influence at local, regional and national levels
- Become learner-centred rather than institution-centred by encouraging wider participation, standardising the concept of open learning, tailoring learning support to the learning style of the individual and, exploiting the opportunities opening up by e-learning and electronic networks
- Assure quality by closer involvement in the pre- and post- inspection and quality assurance processing by monitoring standards, benchmarks in the context of best value and other self assessment and action planning quality systems
- Tackle social exclusion by targeting funding towards initiatives that seek to encourage the 'difficult to reach' to participate in learning, building on the concept of 'inclusive learning'

as developed by the Tomlinson Committee in its report on learning difficulties and/or disabilities to the Further Education Funding Council, promoting the concept of learning intermediaries in the community and the workplace and providing the appropriate facilities to support the learning and learners in deprived communities, and, developing homework clubs and study support activities to address the learning needs of socially excluded young people

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has recognised the role of public libraries as nodes connecting the local learning setting with the global resources of information and knowledge. Public libraries are called to play a role of fundamental importance in the development of future systems of lifelong learning by exploiting the opportunities offered by the information and communication technologies. IFLA sees the role of public libraries in strengthening and creating democratic knowledge societies all around the world. It is also evident that the library and information professionals will have to adapt to new demands, working conditions and professional tasks. In addition, there is also emerging need for libraries to embark of collaborative cultural programmes with other types of memory institutions in the share network space created by the Internet.

### *NGO-led information interventions in South Asia: An overview*

The above framework clearly establishes that

improvements in access to information, (spear-headed by libraries in their new role), have the potential to improve lifelong learning. Recent times have been witness to attempts at introducing and piloting various forms of providing access to information learning opportunities through the use of ICTs in South Asia.

While libraries have miserably failed, and library planners are unprepared to meet the needs and demands, a new brand of information service has come into being in South Asia. These are run by the non-governmental organisations that are neither librarians nor governmental actors with a mandate to provide either public library or national library services to citizens. As the ICTs become an essential medium of communication and organisation in all realms of activity, it is obvious that social movements and the political process are increasingly using, the Internet as well, making it a privileged tool for acting, informing, recruiting, organising, dominating and counter-dominating. In the South Asian context, it is now increasingly recognised that the concepts of 'community informatics' provide new ways of approaching old problems of community development and enhancing civil society.

These NGOs can be classified into six types of major social movements that are engaging in a global form of co-ordination and action: human rights, women's, environmental, labour, religious and peace movements. The Internet-equipped NGOs are able to use the technology as a tool to assist their unconnected stakehold-

ers with access to information and lifelong learning opportunities. In all cases, the need to build global coalitions, and their reliance on global information networks, make the civil society movements highly dependent on the Internet. The intervention of NGOs using information-based models has opened up communication between citizens and the government, and the ability by the citizens to access government information.

There is abundant anecdotal evidence that the public's respect for governments is eroded by political and bureaucratic corruption. The citizens often have more confidence in public servants than in politicians. Still, there is only modest comfort in this finding. Citizens tend to rate the ethical standards of both public servants and politicians less highly than other professions. Available evidence and common sense suggest that reducing official corruption can enhance respect for governments. Lack of transparency in government functioning and lack of government information resulted in citizens losing their trust in governmental institutions. It is recognized that rebuilding the lost trust among its citizens is vital for governments to continue to perform in the present day. Government reform agenda have geared up the change processes in various countries albeit at a pace that needs acceleration. Governments need to interface with citizens through innovative ways and consult with them for not only providing the required public service, but also for creating a sense of ownership and responsibility in the

reform process.

There is therefore a renewed call for a strong partnership between the civil society, public and private sectors, this time to harness the potentials of the ICTs. Such a partnership may result in helping the communities in overcoming the cultural barriers to information and communication enabling them to access locale-specific, demand-driven content through the use of appropriate technologies; aiding in the development of local applications in a participatory way; reiterating the need to be gender-friendly, inclusive and transparent, even if they find the new ICTs to be a threat to their corrupt practices; and sensitizing and reinventing the governments in the information age to be more responsive, listening and accountable to their citizens.

Further, a number of national governments have made it possible by law that information be made available pertaining to execution of budgets, to the lowest level of disaggregation; purchase orders and public contracts; payment orders submitted to and issued by the national treasury and other treasuries of the national public administration; financial and employment data concerning permanent and contracted staff, and those working for projects financed by multilateral organisations; an account of the public debt, including terms, guarantees, interest costs, etc.; inventory of plants and equipments and financial investments; outstanding tax and customs obligations of companies and

people; regulations governing the provision of public services, and the regulatory organizations themselves; and, all information necessary for the community control of social expenditure. With the opportunities offered through ICTs, the oversight function of civil society to help governments perform effective functions is being recognised now.

In South Asia, the evolution of Telecentre models initiated by NGOs and development agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in developing countries since the mid-90s has opened new doors for connecting the unconnected, and has been one answer to the prevailing condition of uneven and unequal access to information in rural and/or remote areas. Telecentres are generally defined as, “a location which facilitates and encourages the provision of a wide variety of public and private information-based goods and services, and which supports local economic or social development.”

Since 1999, the Telecentre approach has encouraged experts to recognise the importance of the convergence of both new and traditional ICTs to empower these communities that are characteristically poor due to social ills such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to finances, unemployment, greater dependency on farm labour and poor infrastructure. Although Telecentres appear not to have a universally accepted definition, the general concept has been that of a physical centre to provide public access to

long-distance communication and information services, using a variety of technologies, including phone, fax, computers, and the Internet. Telecentres have been publicly or privately owned, being a part of a public or private franchise, or have been provided by international donors. They have run the spectrum from 'phone shops' through to 'cyber cafés,' cottage Telecentres for telework or telecommuting, and specially constructed multipurpose community Telecentres (MCTs), some with advanced services, such as medical diagnosis and telemedicine.

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) -funded rural knowledge centre project (known as the 'info village' project), implemented by the M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Pondicherry, India; the UNESCO-sponsored Kothmale community radio initiative in Sri Lanka; and, the infodev-funded 'infodes' project in Lima, Peru are only a few of the thousands of Telecentre initiatives around the world that aim to increase the income opportunities of poor communities using new and traditional ICTs. Similar to the scenario observed for twenty years now in the U.S., these initiatives in the developing world have now been focusing on providing three types of information to the communities they serve: human service information, local information and citizen action information.

There have been more than one hundred initiatives in India alone since 1997 that involve ICTs as a solution to the alleviation of poverty. Some

examples are:

- Gyandoot<sup>1</sup> in Madhya Pradesh, initiated by the District Administration
- Bhoomi<sup>2</sup> in Karnataka and similar efforts by various provincial governments
- Sustainable Access in Rural India project<sup>3</sup> in Tamilnadu, initiated by IIT-Madras; MIT Media Lab; Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University Law School; and the I-Gyan Foundation. It is carried out jointly with n-Logue Communicaitons Pvt. Ltd.
- Wired Village project<sup>4</sup> in Maharashtra initiated by the National Informatic Centre in partnership with the central, state and local governments
- InfoVillage project<sup>5</sup> of M S Swaminathan Research Foundation in Pondicherry

These Telecentres are seen as the 'real' change agents that provide opportunities for people to access their information and realise their rights to lifelong learning at a pace they can afford to, and in the context in which they live, cope-up with their day-to-day struggle to survive.

#### *Telecentre in Pondicherry - a case study*

Recognising the emerging technological divide to be an important factor in widening the right-poor divide both among and within nations, and also the danger of poor people and the marginalised being crippled to realise their rights to information and rights to education, an India based, NGO, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) chose to deploy an

ICT-enabled programme in the southern part of India. The information village project initiated in 1998 in the Union Territory of Pondicherry with the support from the International Development Research Centre is an eye-opener to many library and information professionals world-wide, in South Asia in particular. What the traditional libraries have failed to achieve, the information village project of MSSRF is achieving.

Acknowledging that information that is location and time specific is of value to rural women and men, the centres of information collation, generation and dissemination in rural areas of MSSRF are called the rural knowledge centres. Through these knowledge centres, the knowledge workers or facilitators in rural areas convert the generic information they obtain from various sources into location-specific information through value addition. These knowledge facilitators, mostly village volunteers are trained to adding value to information. From their experience over the past six years, the MSSRF is now attempting at implementing the following linkages in their rural knowledge centres programme:

- Lab-to-Lab: involving a consortium of scientific institutions and data providers
- Lab-to-Land: involving symbiotic linkages between the providers of information and the users, so that the information disseminated is relevant to the life and work of rural families
- Land-to-Lab: recognising that there is considerable traditional knowledge and wisdom concerning the sustainable management of

natural resources, particularly water, technical experts should not only learn from traditional knowledge and experience, but also take steps to conserve the dying wisdom and the dying crops for prosperity

- Land-to-Land: realising that there is much scope for lateral learning among rural families, such learning has high credibility as they come from fellow men and women, a peer-to-peer learning process will be highly valuable.

The movement of establishing rural knowledge centre based on an integrated application of new and conventional information and communication technologies do provide opportunities for rural women and men to engage in lifelong learning practices and in 'real' access information that has traditionally been held with either authorities or among academia.

The MSSRF's lifelong learning and information access programme stands as a challenge to almost all of the traditional information dissemination structures such as the national, public, academic, scientific and private sector libraries. The library and information service sector in South Asia is now beginning to realise that their opportunity in providing valuable services to all forms of learning is round the corner.

The MSSRF approach in turning today's rural knowledge centres or info kiosks, as these are popularly known into a multipurpose community to centre to serve the following can be a learning experience for providing lifelong learn-

ing and participatory opportunities among the majority people living in South Asia, quite often stricken by poverty:

- Communication hub providing multiple telephone and communication services to people to connect, access and provide information
- Virtual academy and training centre to provide lifelong peer-to-peer learning opportunities
- Support centre for rural entrepreneurship to graduate the accessed information and learning into a formidable revenue generation activity
- Banking, financial and insurance service outlet to ensure that their right to learn; right to access information results in gaining financial security to their day to day struggle to survive
- Social empowerment outlet to ensure the rights dimension and the advocacy dimension in the info-kiosks movement - demanding, accessing and applying information traditionally held by the governments. The realisation among the rural women and men that they can demand information, demand public services and demand higher level of government transparency is seen as the success of the info-kiosk movement
- Support centre for providing health, education and livelihoods information and access to their entitlements of all government programmes designed to assist the poor.

It is now recognised that to provide the above services and facilities in rural areas, there arises a need for multi-stakeholder partnerships bring the private sector and the government

for infrastructure development; civil society organisations for community participation and capacity building; academia for innovation and research, especially in harnessing the potentials of distance learning techniques and possibilities; and, the banking institutions for financing and scaling-up the spread of information centres. Interestingly enough, the role for libraries is less perceived in the emerging trend of knowledge centres movement.

### *The emerging concept of Open Knowledge Network*

As a complimentary effort to the knowledge centre movement witnessed in South Asia, Africa and Latin America in the recent years founded in the principle that poor people must be able to access knowledge and information and learn lifelong from the good and appropriate practices, the Open Knowledge Network ([www.openknowledge.net](http://www.openknowledge.net)) movement, spear-headed by OneWorld International and a host of other partners, is emerging. Recognising that poor people must also be able to express and communicate locally relevant knowledge in local languages if they are to shape decisions which affect their livelihoods, the Open Knowledge Network programme attempts to be a human network that collects shares and disseminates local knowledge to the stakeholders in academia, governments, research stations and local planning bodies.

Today, through the Open Knowledge Network programme, people at the grassroots are able to

access global information, provide local information using appropriate data capturing methods and through application of various locally-relevant dissemination channels such as the community newspaper, community radio, cable television network and the human peer-to-peer learning methods. People in Africa, Asia and the Americas are now able to create digital content in their own language, which is then exchanged with others through networks of community knowledge centres. The knowledge centres channel the content to and from the value addition 'hub' organisations for wider exchange. These 'hubs' are located in existing organisations that support the exchange of knowledge at grassroots level. While the 'hubs' are linked to each other through shared standards and open source software tools, the Open Knowledge Network is becoming a flexible tool as it operates in any local language and is compatible with both new and traditional communication media tools.

### *Governance and right to information - the use of ICTs*

Another case study worth highlighting is the governance and right to information project through the application of ICT tools, currently managed by a group of civil society organisations in India, Pakistan, Croatia and Nigeria. The programme was initiated recently on the basis that public services in most developing countries are widely perceived to be unsatisfactory and deteriorating despite huge investments made by the public authorities. The poor and disadvan-

tagged communities in developing countries do suffer in relation to delivery of public services. First, the lack of access to those services due to physical, financial, informational, political and other barriers. Secondly, they lack effective mechanisms for feeding back their complaints, views and requests in relation to those services. As a result, public services to the poor in developing countries lack transparency, accountability and quality. The poor and the disadvantaged are particularly vulnerable as they rely completely on the state for accessing critical services like drinking water, health and education with no 'exit' option available to them in case of dissatisfaction with the service provided.

To address the above problem, a pro-poor ICT-led transparency project is being researched into by the national chapters of Transparency International and OneWorld International focussing largely on access to information and the inadequate state of grievance redress and feedback mechanisms on services to poor women and men and the opportunities for ICT to strengthen those mechanisms. Certain applications of ICT may be relevant to particular local circumstances. However, the common core of this project is to combine ICT with the report card methodology and with other participatory techniques. Recent action research has shown the effectiveness of report card techniques - simple adaptations of market survey methods that gather views from the poor about various public services. This bottom up approach is in contrast to traditional ICT approaches (and



indeed public service provision), which tend to be top down and unresponsive to user needs. Results of such surveys are communicated to appropriate government authorities and also publicised, thus providing a powerful tool for empowerment of the poor and for improved quality of public services for the poor. Transparency International's national chapters have been using these techniques and other participatory methods e.g. focus groups to lobby for better public services to citizens.

### **Emerging Needs and concerns**

In the context of failing library services, and the emerging trend of info-kiosks or Telecentre movement in South Asia, it is important to revisit the concept of libraries in order to redefine their standards and settings.

Technological advances have always and will affect libraries. In the recent past, as technologies trickle into public libraries, they force libraries to improve existing services and to add new formats. It is further anticipated that in the new millennium, a number of emerging technologies will change the way libraries function transforming issues including enhancing convenience and expediency, providing varying and overlapping information formats, extending operating hours and points-of-service, addressing permanency of material, serving broader constituencies, managing costs of services and even testing the essential right to loan material.

Participatory approaches to information services is a strange phenomenon among library professionals, but is increasingly recognised to be of great value. The British Council libraries in South Asia enjoy the status of being customer-friendly as well as a system that adapts to the changing environment. Not only they collect more than 1 million pounds to recover 50% of their total costs of running their nearly 20 libraries in the region, but also they are known to be consulting their members every now and then. Their activities go beyond traditional standards of library services of loaning and providing reference and referral services. Their approach has been an eye-opener to almost the entire failing national and public library systems in the region, especially while providing services to the urban elite.

Rural libraries in South Asia are facing a huge challenge in the face of limited financial allocation. But for the attempts by the technology giant, Infosys, the rural library system in South Asia is in the verge of collapsing. However, the current model of rural libraries will have to go through a drastic change, embracing the info-kiosk approach in service provision. These libraries will have to be redefined to become change agents in rural lives and in their attempt to engage in lifelong learning. Further, these libraries should also attempt to provide locale-specific targeted information services to people through a continual consultative process as witnessed in the MSSRF's rural knowledge centre programme.

Bringing the scientists and rural poor together, closer through appropriate networking, the concept of knowledge services for rural prosperity should emerge in South Asia. The knowledge centres should aim to bring knowledge to every home and hut in every village in every state all over South Asia through the application of ICT techniques to meet their day to day survival - enable them to access food, water security, health service and livelihoods needs. Application of appropriate - not necessarily low-cost - technologies such as the Internet, cable TV, community and ham radio, and community newspaper are crucial for an era of knowledge revolution in South Asia, among the poor communities. For agriculture is the backbone of the livelihood security system of the rural areas where more than 65 percent of the South Asian population lives. A considerable part of this population has no land to work with and no education to rely on. Therefore, a knowledge centre movement should lay emphasis on fostering sustainable livelihood options both in the farm and non-farm sectors, promoting a job-led economic growth in the villages of South Asia.

The village knowledge centres should help to bridge the growing gap between scientific know-how and field level do-how. These centres should aim to foster an evergreen revolution in South Asian farms, designed to enhance productivity in perpetuity without ecological harm.

Finally, in the context of bridging the gap between the scientific know-how and farm do-how, the emergence of rural virtual academicians should be seen as a solution to information poverty among the poor or even an alternative to the rural librarians. These academicians who are from the rural communities are being recognised as the change agents capable of translating global information into locally digestible and accessible formats while at the same time engaging in local content generation, dissemination, diffusion and utilisation of knowledge in rural areas. The MSSRF-TATA national virtual academy of food security and rural prosperity has recognised thus far a handful of these academicians while aiming to recognise more than a million in the next decade. If this movement is supported at a national level, and at a regional level, no doubt, there will be a real future for library services in rural and urban locations among the poor communities who do need support in accessing information as well as lifelong learning opportunities. For they need to live, survive and know their right to survive.

### Notes

- 1 <http://gyandoot.nic.in/>
- 2 <http://www.revdept-01.kar.nic.in/Bhoomi/Home.htm>
- 3 <http://evelopment.media.mit.edu/SARI/mainsari.html>
- 4 <http://www.mah.nic.in/warana/>
- 5 <http://www.mssrf.org>

# Indigenous knowledge, minority languages and lifelong learning: a role for public libraries?

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## Introduction

Teaching and motivating poor communities to read and providing them with reading matter are laudable endeavours. They empower communities to take their first steps on the road of lifelong learning - a road that leads to effective participation in democratic governance processes, to a greater capacity for determining their own future, and, it is hoped, to an improved quality of life for their children.

I have two reservations about this statement. First, providing a poor community with reading matter may imply that this community is a passive recipient of material provided by others. Second, there is much emphasis on the future, but no mention of the community's past. I believe that to put a community firmly on the road of literacy and lifelong learning, we need

to empower people to be producers as well as consumers of reading matter, in their own languages. In this essay I shall argue that the indigenous knowledge of traditional communities is an asset that can be harnessed in establishing a culture of reading and lifelong learning. The essay explores issues relating to the production of learning materials for children and adults speaking minority languages as well as issues relating to the survival of these languages. It also outlines a possible role that the public library may play in preserving indigenous knowledge, promoting an awareness and appreciation of it, and using it as a basis for developing writing and reading communities. The context is the developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa

## Books by, of and for the community

### Relevant reading matter

To learn to read, to develop reading skills and to remain lifelong readers and learners, people need reading matter:

“Literacy can only be maintained if there is an adequate supply of reading material, for adolescents and adults as well as for school children, and for entertainment as well as for study” (UNESCO 1953: 69)

A plentiful supply of books is taken for granted in wealthy countries. African librarians visiting Europe are dazzled by the constantly renewed supply of interesting and attractive books such as one sees in the public libraries of the Nordic countries. This is far removed from the situation in poorer countries, especially in sub-Saharan countries. The lack of books in Africa has been labelled a ‘book famine’ (cf. Zell 1987; MacLam 1988).

The obvious humane response in cases of famine is to send food. Hence, if there is a book famine, send books. There are good many organisations in the developed countries that run book donation programmes (Zell 1987; Watkins 1997). By and large, these are run by idealistic people with altruistic motives (cf. Rosen 2001; Watkins 1997). But not all. Sturges and Neill (1998) cite cases, all too familiar to African librarians, of entirely inappropriate

donations to African libraries. In some cases the real beneficiaries are not African children and adult learners, but American publishers, who earn handsome tax cuts by making these donations (cf. Rosen 2001). Even well intentioned programmes without ulterior motives may have unintended negative consequences. African publishers, for example, are concerned about well-intentioned ‘book aid’ that might flood the limited markets for indigenous publications (Zell, 1992; cf. Mutula & Nakitto 2002) and wipe out their fragile industry. Educationalists on the other hand are concerned about the readability and relevance of donated materials. Could books from the United States, written in American English confuse children being taught the British variety of that language? A minor problem, perhaps, compared to that of intelligibility and relevance: what are Zambian or Chadian children to make of a story in which their Canadian or Swedish counterparts, warmly wrapped up against sub-zero temperatures, go skating on a frozen lake?

New readers, whether children or adults, need to be provided with material that is relevant to them. UNESCO’s Handbook for adult learning materials development at community level emphasises that learning material used or adult education programmes must be relevant to the learners, and recommends the use of ‘real things, written materials, folk media and relevant objects/materials locally available’ in developing learning materials for adult learners (UNESCO 2001:8,11).

## Books in the learner's mother tongue

The biggest disadvantage of donated (or purchased) foreign books is that generally they are in foreign languages. It was long taken for granted that children entering school and adults entering adult literacy programmes in Africa would learn to read and write in English, French or Portuguese - the languages of the former colonial powers. Parents and teachers expected this, and in fact may still insist on it (cf. Land 2002), since in most African countries these languages are the languages of administration and government, and their mastery is seen as opening the way towards a career in government service or commerce. But to realise how difficult this must be, imagine a six-year old Portuguese child having to start her schooling (in Portugal) by learning to read and write in Finnish, a language totally unrelated to her mother tongue and one she is unlikely to have heard spoken in her immediate environment. Citizens of the EU would have no hesitation in condemning this as pedagogically unsound and politically unacceptable. Yet this is an exact analogy of the hurdle that millions of African children and adults have to overcome to become literate.

Today it is widely recognised that children should be taught to read and write in their mother tongue (cf. Veloso 2002). In a UNESCO education position paper entitled *Education in a multilingual world*, it is stated that:

“learning in a language which is not one's own provides a double set of challenges, not

only is there the challenge of learning a new language but also that of learning new knowledge contained in that language. These challenges may be further exacerbated in the case of certain groups already in situations of educational risk or stress such as illiterates, minorities and refugees. Gender considerations cross cut these situations of educational risk, for girls and women may be in a particularly disadvantaged position. In most traditional societies, it is the girls and women who tend to be monolingual, being less exposed either through schooling, salaried labour, or migration to the national language, than their sons, brothers or husbands.

Studies have shown that, in many cases, instruction in the mother tongue is beneficial to language competencies in the first language, achievement in other subject areas, and second language learning” (UNESCO 2003:15).

Various international declarations and covenants, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948, enshrine language rights. In Article 2 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as ... language”, which implies that discrimination on the grounds of language is not permissible. Specific covenants and declarations deal with the rights of minorities, including linguistic minorities. Article 4 of the 1992 Declaration on

the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities states that persons belonging to minorities should have adequate opportunities “to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue” and that measures should be taken “in order to encourage knowledge of the ... language and culture of the minorities”. The educational rights of indigenous peoples are addressed by the 1989 ILO Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. Article 28 requires inter alia that “children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong”. The Article provides at the same time that “measures shall be taken to preserve and promote the development and practice of the indigenous languages of the peoples concerned” (cited in UNESCO 2003:22-23). Various UNESCO declarations and conventions, as well as statements formulated by international conferences, support these principles (UNESCO 2003:24-26)

### **... if the mother tongue survives**

It has been estimated that around 6000 to 7000 languages are still spoken in the world today. Many languages have disappeared, and half of those still spoken are in danger of extinction (Bernard 1997; Wurm & Heyward 2001). Vigdis Finnbogadottir, UNESCO’s Goodwill Ambassador for Languages, has said that

“Everyone loses if one language is lost because then a nation and a culture lose their memory, and so does the complex tapestry from which the world is woven and which makes the world an exciting place.” (cited in UNESCO 2004a)

In sub-Saharan Africa the Niger-Congo group of languages, which is by far the largest, but not the only, language group in the subregion, includes an estimated 1.400 languages and many more dialects (Niger-Congo... 2004). In most sub-Saharan countries the language of the former colonizers is used as the official language of government. This not surprising, since most countries have many indigenous languages, most of which are spoken by relatively small percentages of the national population. In Cameroon, a country with a population of 15,5 million (World Almanac 1999:781), approximately 260 indigenous languages are spoken (Publishing ... 2001). Assuming one mother tongue per person this works out at an average of about 60.000 speakers per language. Even in cases where a single indigenous language is spoken by a substantial percentage, selecting it as the official language could lead to political repercussions.

South Africa’s idealistic constitution enshrines eleven official languages. Although English now predominates *de facto* in government and commerce, only 9% of South Africans speak English as their mother tongue and less than 50% speak it as a second or third language (Du Plessis & Schuring 2000). Thus South Africa does not

have a 'majority language' or 'national language'. All South Africans speak a minority language. This mirrors the situation in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole: the mother tongue of the vast majority of Africans is a minority language and many of these languages are under threat.

### **Language and literacy in sub-Saharan Africa**

In most of Africa's minority languages, if not in all of the languages indigenous to Africa, reading matter and learning materials are in short supply. This is a great obstacle to the mother tongue instruction advocated internationally by UNESCO and other organizations. To remedy this situation it is essential to create learning materials in the languages of minorities. This serves a dual purpose. It makes mother tongue instruction possible. It can also serve to keep these languages alive and protect them from extinction. To save languages from extinction it is necessary not just to preserve them by documenting them in dictionaries and grammars, but to 'vitalize' them (Bernard 1997) which implies writing, publishing and teaching in them.

This is more easily said than done. A host of problems has to be overcome. Many languages are not standardised. Which variant or dialect should be chosen to become the vehicle for reading and writing? The orthography, the way in which the language is written, may have to be worked out or standardised. As indicated above, many languages are spoken by quite small groups, the languages least spoken counting

only a few thousand speakers, a few hundred or just a handful of elderly people. What is the cut-off point for viable language development? From the point of view of book production, we need to consider how many of these individuals can read: is this a large enough market to make it commercially feasible to publish in these languages, and if so, how many speakers will be found able and willing to write in them? A community of readers cannot survive without a nucleus of writers. Where to begin seems to present a classic 'chicken or egg' dilemma: to be able to write, people must first be taught to read and write the language, but how can they learn that if there is nothing written in it?

In many cases the missionaries were the first to develop orthographies, dictionaries and grammars for African languages. These enabled them to translate the Bible and other religious literature into these languages. Laudable as this may be, a living language must have a living, home-grown literature. Hence indigenous writing is critically important to the development of literacy and a reading culture. It reflects the community's own stories. It has the immediate relevance that also makes community radio such a powerful medium. By its rootedness in the community it engenders self-respect and pride in the community's heritage. People need to be creators as well as consumers of reading matter, not mere passive receptacles of information from outside.

It therefore makes sense to attempt to create learning material locally, in the community that

speaks the language, as a cooperative effort of educationalists, literacy workers and community members. The latter are bearers of knowledge and skills that can be utilised. UNESCO's 'Handbook for adult learning materials development at community level' recommends that "local resource persons, those who have special skills like story writing, song narration, traditional herbal practices, occupational practices, performing traditional shows and religious practices" should be enlisted to develop learning materials (UNESCO 2001:15). This brings us to a possible role for indigenous knowledge.

### **Indigenous knowledge**

What do we understand by indigenous knowledge? Much has been written about indigenous knowledge, and many definitions are offered. Some definitions emphasise the holders of indigenous knowledge, indigenous peoples, "groups of people each having their own ways of life":

"Indigenous knowledge ... refers to those ways of life that are often intertwined with the family, religion, nature and land and with wisdom gained through generations of observation and teaching" (Mabawonku 2002:49).

The local dimension is reflected in many definitions of indigenous knowledge, while others emphasise the ecological and evolutionary context of indigenous knowledge, for example, Kaniki and Mphahlele (2002:17):

"It is the sum total of knowledge and skills possessed by people belonging to a particular geographic area, which enables them to benefit from their natural environment. Such knowledge and skills are shared over generations, and each new generation adds and adapts in response to changing circumstances and environmental conditions."

Another strand of definition or characterisation of indigenous knowledge differentiates it from "Western, scientific or modern knowledge, which may be developed by research institutions and universities". By contrast:

"The main feature of IK is that it is mainly transferred by word of mouth. It is therefore largely undocumented, making "bibliographic" control in the traditional sense almost impossible" (Kaniki & Mphahlele 2002:17-18).

The description provided on the web site of the World Bank is useful as a working definition for our purposes:

- Indigenous knowledge (IK) is local knowledge
- IK is unique to every culture or society
- IK is the basis for local-level decision-making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management [and] a host of other activities in communities
- IK provides problem-solving strategies for communities
- IK is commonly held by communities rather than individuals



- IK is tacit knowledge and therefore difficult to codify, it is embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals (World Bank, 2002)

UNESCO has recognised indigenous knowledge as an important part of the heritage of humankind and in 2002 launched a ‘cross-cutting’ project known as LINKS (Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in a Global Society), aimed *inter alia* at “... revitalizing traditional knowledge transmission within local communities by strengthening ties between elders and youth and evaluating the opportunities and constraints of existing educational frameworks” (UNESCO 2004c).

Although indigenous knowledge is tenacious, indigenous knowledge is also vulnerable. It is largely dependent on oral transmission and thus on the survival of community structures and traditions. When these break down, transmission is interrupted and the knowledge cannot outlive its traditional custodians. There are various threats to the survival of indigenous knowledge: the high status and glamour of western scientific knowledge as propagated by the educational system; usurping of traditional custodians by ‘modern’ authorities and leaders; urbanisation; disruption of traditional communities by war, famine and forced migrations; and last but not least the disappearance of the indigenous languages in which the knowledge is transmitted.

Indigenous knowledge is indissolubly linked to the language of the community whose heritage

it is. Africa’s languages may not be allowed to slip into extinction. This is also true of indigenous knowledge, which is increasingly seen as essential to sustainable development and biodiversity management (UNESCO 2004b). Perhaps more important in our context is its potential to restore pride and a sense of dignity among people often looked down upon as primitive and backward.

### **Harnessing indigenous knowledge for literacy and lifelong learning**

The question now arises: can we bring together the need for relevant reading matter and teaching materials in minority languages, the need to safeguard languages that are threatened by extinction, and the preservation and optimal utilisation of indigenous knowledge? For the purpose so this essay, I include stories, poetry, songs and dances as part of indigenous knowledge, for in traditional communities there is no artificial distinction between fiction and non-fiction. All these cultural manifestations are carriers of the community’s knowledge heritage.

A Namibian project illustrates both the potential value of indigenous knowledge in promoting literacy and lifelong learning using locally relevant material in local languages, and the pitfalls that can be encountered in such an enterprise. Hays (2002) describes a project among the Ju|’hoan, a small San community in Namibia spread over 35 villages in the Tsumkwe District of Namibia. The Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project aimed to establish village

schools in which children would be taught in their own language, known as Ju|'hoansi (the characters |' represent the click sounds that are characteristic of this language group). An important feature of the project was that it incorporated an attempt to develop the curriculum in consultation with the community:

“One important vision driving the Village Schools Project was to pioneer the creation of a ‘selfliterate’ population, working with the Nyae Nyae villages to design curriculum communally in a newly-written language ... The mother-tongue education aspect was seen by many as the most important aspect of the school, in large part because it would allow the incorporation of the stories of the elders into the curriculum. Early reports ... indicate that there was tremendous community support for and involvement in this aspect of the project. The initial materials were developed in close consultation with the communities by a core team that included the teachers, an anthropologist, a teacher-trainer and an education co-ordinator. These efforts resulted in a set of Ju|'hoansi readers with English translations, a songbook and a music booklet ...” (Hays 2002:128).

The developers took care to incorporate local culture, characteristics and environment into the materials and community elders contributed their stories and knowledge. Adult education was part of the project and an attempt was made to “create a learning environment

in which adults and children could learn together and from each other both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ skills relevant to their lives” (Hays 2002:131).

Sadly, this project has not been an unqualified success. Community participation tapered off as it began to be perceived as a ‘government’ responsibility. It also appeared that the village teachers, recruited from the Ju|'hoan community but representing an elite group, lost enthusiasm for learning materials in their own language (Hays 2002). Presumably, more prestigious languages held a greater attraction for them. However, the problems experienced should not detract from the important principle applied in this project, namely that of basing the development of learning materials on the knowledge and culture of the community.

### **A role for public libraries?**

It is generally recognised today that public libraries in Africa must contribute to national development. They are not merely there to serve an educated elite, as in colonial times. Neither can they cling to the blueprints provided by the developed world. Instead, they must become true community resource centres (cf. Raseroka 1994), providing access to all media, providing learning resources for learners of all ages, and serving as access points for resources for and of the community. The latter point is particularly relevant here. Today progressive librarians recognise that the community itself has many

untapped resources, including community leaders and elders who are custodians of traditional culture and indigenous knowledge.

Public libraries have a special role to play in addressing the needs of linguistic and other minorities, in particular the rural or urban communities that have suffered neglect and have been looked down as 'backward' and 'primitive' on account of poverty (in terms of material possessions and access to material resources), illiteracy, lack of formal education, and non-western, non-materialist world-views. Services to such groups should not be undertaken in a condescending manner. Library workers need to recognise the wealth of experience, creativity and talent in these communities. Thus the public library

"... must be open to the ideas, world views and knowledge of those disregarded by the mainstream or the dominant culture or power groups" (Brammage 1992:6).

How can public libraries assist in preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge and in making use of it for in the interest of the community? Elsewhere (Lor, in press) I identified six functions for libraries in relation to indigenous knowledge:

- Identifying: Local librarians who have accepted the challenge of serving as community workers and who are immersed in, and engaged with, the communities they serve, are in a good position to gain the confidence of the holders of indigenous knowledge and to enter into partnerships with indigenous knowledge

researchers, assisting them in communicating with the community and so in the recording of indigenous knowledge. In some public libraries databases of community information and registers of local expertise are maintained so that these resources can be mobilised.

- Collecting: The recording of indigenous knowledge with a view to its preservation is a specialized task that requires both theoretical and technical training. There are also significant legal and ethical issues to be taken into account. It is therefore a task best undertaken by trained researchers. But in many cases there is simply too much to do and there are not enough trained researchers. In such situations public or community librarians should be trained as 'barefoot' indigenous knowledge researchers to save what might otherwise be lost forever. It is of the utmost importance that this task should be undertaken in a spirit of respect for the knowledge holders. Their prior permission must be obtained and recording should be a collaborative activity.
- Organising: Librarians are trained in cataloguing, classifying and indexing documents so that they can be retrieved speedily. This expertise can be put to work in organizing recorded indigenous knowledge from the community served by the library.
- Preserving: Librarians are trained to preserve documents so that they may be accessible to future generations. Ideally, recorded indigenous knowledge will be preserved in well-

equipped national institutions such as the national library. This may not always be possible. Even if ultimate responsibility for preservation of documented indigenous knowledge lies elsewhere, public libraries should also preserve copies of these documents in so far as they relate to their communities. Local collections are desirable not only as a backup for the national institutions, but also because the documents are a community asset and should be a source of community pride.

- Promoting awareness and appreciation: Public libraries also have a role in promoting awareness and appreciation of indigenous knowledge in their communities, thereby countering the devaluation of this knowledge and helping to restore its dignity. Raseroka (2002:10) recommends that library and information service professionals should empower local communities by “giving the IKS (indigenous knowledge systems) a voice”, and by “facilitating interactive activities that bring communities on board as equal partners in knowledge creation, sharing and use”. This can be done by story-telling sessions, exhibitions and demonstrations. Such events should be interactive. Audiences should be invited to participate and contribute their versions of stories and their understanding of indigenous knowledge as they have learned and used it in their families and villages.
- Providing access: The public library should serve as a repository of recorded indigenous

knowledge and point of access to it for nearby communities. Such repositories should not only be located in universities and institutes in distant cities, but also in community centres where indigenous knowledge can be both used and added to as a community resource. This exposure should not take place in a vacuum. The indigenous knowledge and cultural artifacts of a community are not curiosities to be gaped at. They should be treated with respect. This requires that when access is provided to recorded indigenous knowledge it needs to be contextualised and interpreted by competent persons.

In light of what has been said above about the role of indigenous knowledge in the development of learning materials in indigenous languages, a seventh task should be added to the above list:

- Utilisation for development: The indigenous knowledge resources of the public library should be put at the disposal of the multi-disciplinary teams (linguists, educators, community elders, learners, etc.) involved in developing learning materials for both children and adult learners. The community librarian should be an essential member of such teams providing not only recorded resources but also expertise in such tasks as organizing collected material and facilities (e.g. word processing and desk-top publishing) for developing, reproducing and collating draft materials.

The functions outlined here offer opportunities and challenges. It goes without saying that the challenges are not to be underestimated. Public librarians will have to accept what amounts to a paradigm shift away from the norm of recorded, formally published, 'library material', towards a broader and more diverse concept of the public library collection. In this concept, unpublished, and frequently unrecorded, sources of knowledge from the grassroots are afforded the same dignity and appreciation as the more conventional library material that comes from the urban centres and foreign sources. It is not only concepts of library collection that are challenged. Concepts of service are significantly impacted: a much greater level of involvement and solidarity with the community is called for. The decision-makers at the headquarters of public library systems and their political heads need to rethink policies concerning the missions and priorities of public library services, the location, physical accommodation, equipment and staffing of public libraries, and the accountability of the local public library to its community. All these have significant funding implications. There are also implications for the recruitment, education and in-service training of public librarians.

## Conclusion

For lifelong learning to take root in communities, community members must be literate. Access to interesting and relevant learning material and reading matter in the language spoken by the community is essential for learning to read

and remaining literate. The creation of such material is not only essential for literacy and education, but also for the survival of the community's language. In the creation of educational and reading materials indigenous knowledge can serve as a source of relevant, interesting and useful content. Three important development thrusts converge here: literacy and life-long learning, the survival and development of indigenous languages, and the preservation and utilization of indigenous knowledge. Librarians in developing countries, in particular public and community librarians, find themselves at the point where these three thrusts converge. This offers them scope for participating meaningfully in community development and demonstrating the difference that libraries can make in the lives of their communities.

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# Library responses to information literacy and life long learning in the SADC Region

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## Introduction

“Public libraries are instruments of equal opportunity and must provide a safety-net against alienation and social exclusion from technological advance by becoming the electronic doorway to information in the digital age. They should enable all citizens to have access to the information that will enable them to manage their lives at local level, to acquire essential information about the democratic process and to participate positively in an increasingly global society.”<sup>1</sup>

The above recommendation by IFLA is one of the principles Libraries and Information Services in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region try to embrace in provision of library services to the multi-dimensional needs of their users. A number of initiatives have been launched; for example, librarians

from the SADC region met in Pretoria, South Africa during year 2000 and drafted a resolution that would establish Library and Information as part of the Culture desk in SADC. There is also the Southern African Bibliographic Network (SABINET), which provides bibliographic services, inter-library loan services throughout South Africa, Namibia and Botswana. Equally there has been an initiative towards formulating SADC information policy that is still in a draft stage.

The African region is aware of the benefits of information and knowledge to the economy of the continent and to the wellbeing of its people. To this end, a number of intensive workshops on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been organized, with the latest held in Gaborone, Botswana, during February 2004, which was attended by librarians from over 10 African countries. The IFLA-Africa Section

sponsored this workshop with financial assistance from IFLA ALP.

The region is however, not at the top level of technological advancement, although the level of ICT development differs from country to country. Critical gaps in budgetary provision for the library and information services in addition to too many competing priority needs severely hamper library development. Unlike a classroom that could be held under a tree in desperate situation, one cannot buy library books, computers, photocopiers etc and house them under a tree, open to dust, rain, sun and theft. The physical infrastructure necessary to provide security and safety and enabling environment for literacy and lifelong learning is therefore also necessary. Some examples of this basic investment are the Botswana National Library Service that has just moved into a new library complex and not to speak of the world class University of Botswana Library building. Equally, Namibia completed a custom-built library and archives building in addition to 24 public libraries completed between years 1991-2003. The construction of these buildings is costly, but they are necessary to create enabling environment for equal utilization of information resources and deployment of facilities and resources to bring about the desired literacy and lifelong learning.

This paper attempts to discuss the role libraries can play in life long learning in the Southern Africa sub-region, using Namibia as an example. The following questions are addressed: How can

libraries promote life long learning in the context of WSIS? What strategies can we develop to address the lifelong learning issues in the sub region? What activities can be undertaken to promote lifelong learning? The paper looks at the digital divide between rural and urban areas as well as the divides between income groups. It argues that knowledge management is an important component of an information society, which is not brought about by libraries alone. Partnerships are important and using ICT tools to create local content is indispensable. Literate in the context of this paper implies ability to read with meaning and to understand the written text in order to make effective use of information gained from what is read so as to survive in society and contribute positively to development.

### **The Information Society context**

Namibia is still far from providing equal access to information, but it has a functional telecommunication infrastructure, political stability and an attractive economic environment for investors. This is an incentive for Namibia to become an information society. This similar statement could also be said of Botswana with whom Namibia works closely through a bi-lateral agreement, which includes libraries, museums and archives.

The e-sectors are growing rapidly in Southern Africa, but not at the same pace as elsewhere in the world. For example, a digital divide exists between income groups in Namibia as well as



between Namibia's rural and urban population. The lack of ICT expertise in Namibia, particularly in rural areas, and the high communication costs are critical challenges. Overcoming these problems is a challenge to the country's ICT policy and program implementation.

In Namibia, the legal framework for the building of an information society is found in the basic laws of the land. Article 21 (1) of the Namibian Constitution provides for the free flow of information. The constitution recognizes that access to information is a key factor in improving the quality of life and is fundamental to the existence of human race.

Vision 2030 of the Namibian Government plans that by the year 2030 Namibians should enjoy standards of living comparable to a developed country. Other countries in Southern Africa have got similar vision statements. So far, ICTs have changed the way people live and work in some sectors of society. In most offices and businesses, if people arrive at work and there is no electricity, for example, most workers would sit in the offices without much to do because most of the work is based on computer systems. A knowledge economy is the main means by which Namibians can reach the status of a developed country by 2030. Such tremendous development has to be a step-by-step process.

ICTs are seen as a necessary tool for bringing about efficiency and effectiveness in the Public and Private Sectors and not necessarily as a tool

for bringing about the country's transformation from agriculture to an information society. The Namibian Government embraced ICTs as enabling tools for reaching out to people and teaching of democracy. There was an urgent need to reach out and to spread government information to the people. The belief was that access to information would help build and sustain the country's hard-won democracy, promote transparency and good governance. From the very beginning ICT initiative has been driven toward creating content and making it available so that services are brought closer to those that need them.

The Information Society is mainly used as an economic concept, referring to the value contribution made to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by information rather than through industry or agriculture services. The actual value can only be determined when the information has actually been used and depending on who used it and how it was used. Advances in ICTs are the factors behind the phenomenal increase in importance of information.

The transition to an information society relies heavily on a reliable ICT infrastructure to serve as a superhighway to the new society. Africa has joined other continents in creating the tools to move from a largely agricultural society to an information society. Since 1995, African countries have held conferences, passed on a number of declarations<sup>2</sup>, agreements<sup>3</sup>, and formulated strategies aimed at overcoming the digital divide

and providing universal access to information and knowledge. Individual African countries have taken the initiative to formulate national policies and strategies to transform their economies from raw material based to value added finished product for local and export markets.

### **ICTs in the education sector**

Education Institutions in Namibia have taken training in ICTs seriously to ensure that the lacking ICTs skills in the country became a priority for training. At secondary school level, plans are underway to ensure that computer studies is one of the courses offered. At the moment Basic Information Science (teaching information literacy) is a compulsory subject in all schools in Namibia from grades 4-7 while those in grades 8-10 have a weekly period in their school timetable devoted to this subject. There is a Syllabus and an Information Manual for teaching this subject in schools. The syllabus is currently revised to include teaching of computer science. At our two institutions of higher learning, namely, the University of Namibia and the Polytechnic of Namibia, there are many courses offered on ICT skills. Significantly, the University of Namibia has now introduced computer awareness as a compulsory course for all students at first year level.

A draft ICT policy for the Education Sector is currently under review in Namibia. If libraries do their homework by reviewing critically this draft policy and making concrete written

amendments for inclusion, chances are there that libraries will truly become gateways to information including creating content. Policies are important instruments; they provide legal framework for certain demands to be made, for positions to be established, for certain equipment to be purchased and for procurement of a budget to meet certain standard requirements. If libraries are not mentioned in the policy, they have no basis to benefit from the provisions made by that policy.

In this particular case, libraries ensured that they are represented in the committee that drafted the ICT policy and that they continuously lobby for their inclusion. ICT development processes are not necessarily driven by libraries or governments alone, but by partnership of public and private organizations that may not necessary think of libraries as having a stake in the ICT policy. It is the librarians' responsibility to decide their fate, to be silent and remain document based or claim their rightful place in society. The ideal situation is that the policy must recognize libraries as partner as well as focal points for implementation. If this recognition is not given through policy legislation and policy guidelines, chances are that Computer Centres, Telecentres etc. may be created to run parallel to libraries instead of using ICT to empower the information provision by libraries.

### **Partnerships**

In Namibia, there are library partnerships with

three educational projects run by Namibian Non governmental organisations (NGOs). Firstly, there is the Namibian Open Learning Network (NOLNet). This project aims to provide distance education learners throughout Namibia with greater access to prescribed textbooks. Out of 46 public libraries, 24 provide access to these NOLNet textbooks for secondary or tertiary courses. NOLNet has also provided three of our biggest libraries with four or five computers and a printer to enhance resource based information provision to rural Namibia. NOLNet provided library assistants with computer training for self-empowerment and for them, in turn, to provide the same computer training to library users. This training is an ongoing process.

Another project in which we have a partnership is the Community Learning and Development Centre (CLDC) project which provides equipment such as televisions with videocassette recorder, radios, computers, printers and photocopying machines to their centres. We have been establishing libraries with CLDC sharing the same building in order to provide users of both the library and the CLDC access to information and use of facilities in the two institutions. They also provide development courses, in basic computers, needlework, small business development and literacy amongst others.

Thirdly, there is SchoolNet Namibia, which has an agreement with the Ministry to provide an Internet connection to schools and libraries and

in some cases also provide second hand computers. One of the most important aspects of SchoolNet is that it is so far the only organization, which has formed partnerships with other service providers such as TeleCom for communication lines and Nampower for electrification and Education. SchoolNet has a board with representatives from all sectors.

### **Are there real needs?**

There is a considerable drive towards self-improvement in Namibia. Young people in Namibia are especially keen to better their qualifications so that they can find jobs. Their desire to learn computer skills is huge. Since 1999, Community Library Service has done several Reading Needs Surveys. The results of each library survey have shown an overwhelming need to have access to computers. In those few libraries, which have computers, the demand to use them is very high as the computer facilities are always fully booked and one has to book well in advance. The members of the public want to use the computers to type study assignments, curriculum vitae or to access Internet in order to find information and to send e-mails.

Many distance education institutions make use of their Websites to convey information to students and to provide access to the supplementary courses offered to their learners. These include local Namibian institutions as well as those in South Africa. Sending in of assignments and correspondence about assignments are all

carried out electronically as are publication of examination timetables and examination results. The majority of distance education learners in Namibia are in a tremendously disadvantaged position because they lack access to facilities that many take for granted. And, when the library fails them, these disadvantaged learners have to rely on slow postal services and expensive courier services to deliver study material or to post assignments on time. Many end up frustrated and despairing and simply give up before they have completed their courses. These students depend on public library support and libraries cannot afford to shy away from these needs because doing so negates the principal of life long learning.

Library staffs have an equal need for computers for word processing, computerized cataloguing and for access to databases. Access to databases is crucial for interlibrary loans. The library staff equally suffers without ICT facilities: if they are unable to find information for students and researchers in their book collections, they have no access to the Internet for further searching. Neither do they have access to the databases of the National Library and National Archives, which could further aid them in their searches. If library staff and researchers have no access to the enormous range of information available in electronic journals, they are in a disadvantaged position which undermines the principal of literacy and lifelong learning.

A new interlibrary loan system, which is at present being developed in Namibia, will oper-

ate electronically. This would further hamper the already disadvantaged community library users. They will be slipping further and further behind in their struggle to find information to improve their lives and their qualifications.

In today's information society, computers are a major and necessary part of any library service and probably play a greater role in providing up to date information than books. In order to ensure equitable access to information to support literacy and lifelong learning, SADC countries need to put computers in every single community/public library in the country. A point must be made however, that it is not access to the computers or to the Internet alone that will bring about the desired literacy and lifelong learning, but that, basic literacy is still very important. Without the basic literacy, the ability to read, understand and effectively utilize knowledge for meaningful development, lifelong learning is undermined because a person is still acquired to read the information obtained through the Internet, computer or a book.

### **How can libraries provide literacy and life long learning?**

The most crucial challenges for libraries and librarians in Africa is, the marketing of libraries and information services to create a culture that values information and knowledge, a culture that reads and consults existing information before taking a decision in all aspects of their lives. The learners come to the libraries in order to

complete school projects and the university students use the public libraries to find information necessary for them to complete assignments and research. All our libraries are full to capacity during the examination period, but their use dramatically declines for the rest of the year. Thus, there is no awareness of the value of information beyond passing examinations even for Africa's young generation of scholars and learners.

The concept of literacy originally meant 'the ability to read and write'. This simple meaning was derived from the fact that the literate person should be able to both receive and transmit information in her/his written language. However, the environment described above shows that the term literacy needs to change in meaning from the original concept. Increasingly a major tool for communication is technology and hence a literate person now needs to also be ICT literate in order to be considered fully literate. These are the challenges of the modern society and technologies, which are now in our hands.

The efforts of libraries to promote literacy can succeed if they start by identifying the needs of those they claim to serve and then use this knowledge to build up a case to get funding that would enable them to meaningfully meet the needs of their clients. Literacy is a tool for communication, but also for achieving a better life for people. In developing societies, for the majority of the people, this means that literacy has to be a tool to access information for development purposes including education, health,

agriculture, economic information, income generation, small businesses, sources of finance, government policies on economic development and social empowerment, gender relations, good governance and democracy, to mention but a few. Such information should also be in languages understood by the majority of the people. An important role for libraries is, therefore, to ensure that there is local information content relevant to the development aspirations of their populations, which is in both print and electronic format for easy access and sharing in the country.

### **The Digital Divide**

The information society initiative has changed the job market in some economic sectors in Namibia and created a divide between those who can afford the luxury of ICT and those who cannot. Information technology literacy has also created a redundant workforce of people who are challenged by the transformation from typewriters to computers. Computer literacy has become a requirement in about 80% of skilled job advertisements. So, as society moves towards information literacy, it creates legacies, challenges and gaps within itself. For example, in all the SADC countries, about 20% of the population is living in the information age. They have a telephone, fax, and a computer with Internet connection, printers, and photocopiers, email facilities, a radio, television and cellular telephone either at home or in the office. They can be reached 24 hours a day and can access

information around the globe at any place and time. However, there is the other 80% of the population to whom information society is still a distant dream, they are still queuing up for basic services and have no direct or easy access to information technology and other information services.

Often the digital divide is referred to as dividing the developed from developing countries. This is supported by statistics that show how many Internet users there are in developed countries compared to developing countries. However, it fails to examine the main reason for the digital divide, which is income disparity. The digital divides run more sharply between income groups than nations. Teenagers of wealthy families in Vietnam, Namibia, the USA and Europe all have access to cell-phones, computer, and Internet while teenagers from poor families in these countries do not have similar access.

However, there are clear signs that communication is growing to be recognized as a broad human right even without the intervention of information professionals. A case in point is the use of cellular telephones. One is simply amazed that even the oldest people in the villages, who cannot even speak English, the official language, or the ones that do not have a bank account, these people have and use cellular telephones. There has been no campaign to introduce cellular telephones, yet their diffusion has been both wide and rapid. Why?

### **The Digital Divide between rural and urban**

During 2002, public libraries in the rural areas of Namibia got computers and the Internet connections for the first time in our history. The Internet providers are situated in the capital city, Windhoek, and the rural areas are connected by the use of the regional telephone networks and not the local telephone network. The library users were quick to learn the use of the Internet and email for communication purposes. The users of these libraries created their email accounts through web-based systems.

However, when these developments were conceived, an important component had been overlooked - the information and communication infrastructure, the lack of electricity and the availability of technical expertise at local level. The libraries got their Internet connections through the normal telephone lines dial-up service because this was the only existing communication infrastructure. Within a few months, most of those connections were cut because the telephone bills, which had become too high, were not paid. Unfortunately, when the system was disrupted, the initiative was lost. Three months later, when the Internet was restored, users came back only to find that their email account did not work anymore and their email communications were lost. This was detrimental to the people who used the library Internet service for their study assignments and important communication. These disruptions undermine the credibility of public libraries as centres of ac-

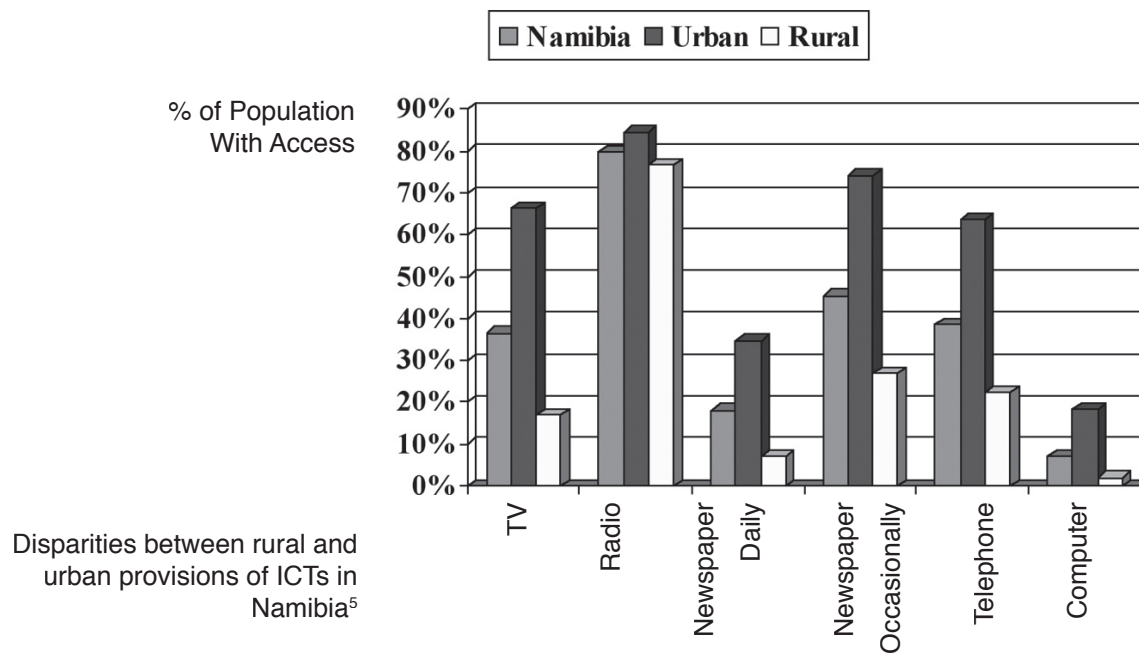
cess to global information and knowledge.

According to the IFLA Internet Manifesto: “Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual both to hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information; it is the basis of democracy and it is the core of library service.” However there is a price to exercising this right, which need to be taken into account. The lack of communication infrastructure such as leased lines makes the Internet connections much more expensive and difficult to maintain in the rural areas than it is in Windhoek, Swakopmund and Walvisbay. The rural libraries are forced to sustain their services by charging high fees to the users. The majority of families in the rural areas survive mainly on subsistence agriculture with little cash income. You can therefore imagine the difficulties individual users face when they have to pay high fees compared to those paid in urban areas. Equitable access, a main principle in the public provision of education and information, is undermined.

The other obstacle is posed by the lack of technical experts in the rural areas. The Internet providers and ICT experts and technicians are mainly in Windhoek. So, whenever there is a breakdown, it takes months to get a technician from Windhoek to go and repair the problem which in some cases could have been solved with basic computer skills. The bottom line is that these breakdowns are frustrating to the institutions providing the service and it affects the morale of the frontline staff in the rural libraries.

Take the example of the small rural town of Keetmanshoop, one of the 13 Namibian regional capitals. It is located about 500km South of Windhoek in the Karas Region. In this beautiful small town, there is a public library, which also serves as a legal deposit library in terms of the Library Act<sup>4</sup>. This library is equipped with one computer and printer that had been actively used by the library users and for the administrative functions of the library. After only three months of usage, the computer became dysfunctional. The library staff did not have simple computer skills to analyze and address the problem. The matter was reported to the library Head Office in Windhoek and a colleague who was already on his way travelling through Keetmanshoop was asked to look at the problem. He found the mouse was not in working order and after various telephone calls to try and find out if there was a place in Keetmanshoop he could buy a mouse. He was finally told that there was no shop that sold such devices in Keetmanshoop and the colleague returned to Windhoek without sorting out the problem. The library users were impatiently waiting for the computer to be repaired; meanwhile, the library staff is sitting with an asset they cannot effectively operate.

The diagram below illustrates the rural urban disparities in the overall provision of ICTs in Namibia.



This table can be understood considering the following information. Namibia has a population of 1.83 million people, out of which 67% live in the rural areas and only 33% live in the urban areas. According to the diagram above only 2% of the rural population (76% of Namibian population) has access to a computer while 18.2% of the urban population (33% of Namibian population) had access to computers in 2001. While this scenario has slightly changed over 2002, 2003 and 2004, the urban/rural disparities remain generally unchallenged.

Finding solutions to the lack of ICT skills and the high cost of ICT infrastructure is made worse by the scattered settlement pattern whereby people do not settle in villages, but in

farms, cattle posts and homesteads that are far from each other. Providing services to each of these farms, cattle posts and homesteads would require a substantial investment.

### Libraries and archives in the transition to an Information Society

What is the role of libraries and archives in the information age? Is there any role for libraries and archives in the paperless society? The role of librarians and other information professionals is the creation of local content and usability of electronic information resources. ICT specialists are often not able to perceive the need for this clearly, given their preoccupation with technical matters. Mlaki<sup>6</sup>, for example, calls for ICTs to



be seen as an extension of tools for information access rather than a new medium with no relation with the traditional tools. The involvement of librarians, archivists and records managers becomes essential to ensure that ICT developments are supported by an adequate input from these information professionals. Several examples illustrate the problems created by the inadequate involvement of library and archives staff.

The information on the government and parastatal websites is seldom sent to the document registry for archival preservation because we are in the information age or paperless society. For future administration and research or in an event of legal challenge to a government decision, this could be catastrophic.

A very important function of information, which is as evidence and memory of government offices, has been overlooked. A lot of important documents, reports and correspondence done through electronic means is lost to government because officials create documents, use them electronically and delete them as they so wish. They exchange electronic files and leave no trace of their day-to-day administrative decisions. When they retire or are transferred, they leave behind an empty office. The new incumbent who will inherit their job will not understand what their predecessors did and important commitments made by that office might be lost. So the information society has posed a challenge to continuity because officials do not understand the value of records and information beyond the immediate office use.

Preservation is the core function of memory institutions, such as the National Library and National Archives. In 1999, the National Archives of Namibia issued a circular<sup>7</sup> to the whole public service with directives on how to preserve the administrative memory by continuing to send paper records to the registries. The experience of Botswana is one we should all closely watch in the future. The National Archives of Botswana has put out tender, inviting bids for an electronic records management system that would help them to manage paper records electronically. Information is intended to provide evidence that can indicate liability. So far paper records are the only fully recognized legal evidence in courts of law and they will remain so until the legal base is changed. This will only happen if technical tools for digital signatures and protecting records from falsification become widely available.

### **Enhancement of effective utilization of information through knowledge management**

The Namibian Ministry of Mines and Energy demonstrates the importance of knowledge management. This Ministry places a high value on its library and this appreciation is derived from economic benefits the library information contributes to the national economy. The library has also demonstrated its ability to meet the demands of its clientele and embraced the new technologies to its advantage and to the benefits of its users. The mining sector is very much dependent on costly geological mapping, exploratory studies and research data analysis.

In Namibia, the Ministry of Mines and Energy has established a Directorate of the Geological Survey, which carries out the geological mapping, and evaluation of exploration results. The exploration rights are leased to international companies to carry out the exploration studies to locate and evaluate the existing mineral resources and to mine. These companies are required by law to submit a detailed report of their exploration findings irrespective of whether or not the exploration results lead to mining investment. Thus, the Mining Act<sup>8</sup> taps into a rich vein of knowledge for the future development of the country because every company which explore/prospect for minerals needs a license. This compels them to write a report on all the exploration experiments and results and deposit the findings with the Ministry of Mines and Energy.

These exploration reports form a repository archive at the library of the Ministry and it has reports dating back to the last century. This archive is now being digitized to safe guard the original documents. Digitization also aims to incorporate information from exploration reports and geological maps as well as other available geological data and information. This has proven to be an extremely valuable information databank as can be judged from the high interest from national and international investors and mineral exploration companies. This digitization in the context of the Ministry of Mines and Energy is not used as a solution for preservation but as means to enhance effective communication.

### ALUKA

ALUKA meaning return/ repatriate is the name of a digitization project launched in Pretoria, South Africa, in March 2004 in order to digitize the most crucial documents on the history of freedom and liberation in Southern Africa. Participating countries include South Africa, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe. This project has already seen results from South Africa and Mozambique that are already available through the web. This project is critical not only for providing information, but also for providing the necessary ICT training and equipment to the participating countries.

### **Strategies to address literacy and life long learning in ICT context**

ICTs are expensive and most individual citizens cannot afford to buy computers of their own or to pay telecommunication fees to access the Internet. So, the technology is there but it is only benefiting the few. Community Libraries throughout the region provide access to information and knowledge; they are the centres for lifelong learning. ICT skills training for library staff and the provision of ICT equipment and software are necessary because these libraries exist all around the country and many people utilize them on a daily basis. With ICT support these libraries have a potential to become centres for literacy and lifelong learning.

Maybe with the exception of South Africa, ICT

expertise is needed in SADC at both planning and implementation levels to make ICTs strategies feasible. The SADC countries are urged to make ICT training a priority field of study to ensure the availability of local expertise to build, sustain and maintain the infrastructure and find alternative strategies for implementing feasible ICT programmes. There is a need for partnership forming amongst the institutions that need telecommunication infrastructure to strengthen their negotiating power to secure sustainable/affordable telecommunication services.

Libraries should develop realistic ICT strategies that are practically possible taking into consideration levels of infrastructure and ICT support in each country. Such strategies should be aimed at addressing some of the issues raised above, including the creation of local content, addressing digital divide problems within countries as well as internationally, starting ICT units within public libraries where the average person can learn to use computers and access the internet at affordable price, and retraining staff to acquire ICT skills to provide the services required under the information society umbrella. While championing the course of modern technologies, we should not forsake the old technology of reading and writing.

Libraries working with other partners should provide facilities and space for people without basic literacy to learn how to read and write. This may require partnerships with Departments of Non Formal Education and NGOs

committed to promoting literacy because even the information acquired through computer terminals still require a user to read and understand it before putting it to effective usage. Therefore, reading remains the key to literacy and lifelong learning.

### **Activities by libraries to support literacy and life long learning**

In order to adequately support literacy and life long learning, libraries need to carry out a number of activities, amongst them:

- Re-training of staff to acquire ICT skills in order to manage the provision of various services using ICT, including Internet, PC troubleshooting and basic computers to library users
- Building ICT capacity to be able to have in-house databases of local information content developed with interested stakeholders
- Supporting basic literacy classes by providing space, materials, and literacy tutors to ensure that anyone who wants to become literate can do so
- Keeping internal directories of NGOs and literacy groups in the community to help anyone looking for a class to be able to find such groups to work with
- Entering into partnership agreements with

other stakeholders to pursue jointly goals of adult learning and lifelong learning (for example, Departments of Non Formal and Adult Education, Distance Learning Institutions, and small businesses organizations etc.)

- Carrying out advocacy and lobbying work to ensure the goals of literacy and life long learning are kept in the public and policy agenda of the country
- Promoting reading for young people and carrying out campaigns at least once year to maintain interest in the reading activities in respective communities
- Given the oral communication nature of African society, libraries should consider having lectures by experts in the community such as health workers, agricultural extension workers, and others on pressing social issues

rather than depending on dissemination of information through print and electronic mediums only

### Notes

- 1** Gill, Philip ... 'etel' (1997): The Public Library Service: IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development. (IFLA Publications 97).
- 2** Yaounde Declaration (2001), Istanbul Declaration (2002).
- 3** Cotonou Agreement (2003).
- 4** Namibia Library and Information Service Act, 4 of 2000.
- 5** Christoph Stork and Albertus Aochamub (2003), Namibian in the Information Age, NEPRU research report no.25.
- 6** Mlaki, Theo (1998) Convergence of information and informatics. Paper delivered at the 12th session of the PGI Council and the 7th Session of if the IIP Committee, held in Paris from 7-11 December 1998.
- 7** Circular to All Ministries, Local Authorities and Parastatals Falling Under the Archives Act, No.12 of 1992 in respect of record keeping: Official communication sent or received as email, (26 March 1999), Ref: 2/4/24/3.
- 8** Mineral Prospecting and Mining Act, No.33 of 1992.

# An inclusive information and knowledge society

Susanne Seidelin & Stuart Hamilton

To be recognised as trustworthy agents in the process towards the information and knowledge society, libraries need to engage in partnerships at a local, regional and international level. To this end, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) provides excellent opportunities for the international library community not only to advocate its core values and the role of libraries but also to engage in partnerships that can further the role of libraries and information services worldwide.

As stated in this report, the gap between urban and rural areas and between literate and illiterate people - or between the information haves and the information have nots - are the most important challenges for libraries to address and act upon. The digital divide exists not only between North and South, or between rural and urban areas but also between income groups within developing countries themselves.

Further to this, the lack of funding and adequate infrastructure that can cope with needed changes in library services is considered a huge problem in most developing countries. Meeting these challenges will require actions such as the development of co-operative networks, the funding of supportive projects and the education of staff at all levels of organisations.

In IFLA President Kay Raseroka's preface it is suggested that to further the concept of an inclusive information and knowledge society, one of the challenges for libraries is to redefine and extend the definition of literacy. From this point of view, the literacy process should be recognised as a lifelong engagement in social responsibilities helped by the development of library services.

In many ways, the recommendations in this report are similar to those of the IFLA/FAIFE World Report 2003 survey that also identified the lack of funding, resources, equipment, edu-

Conclusion

cation and infrastructure as the most important barriers to accessing information and participation in the development of the information and knowledge society. However, the emphasis in this year's report on the gap between rural and urban areas and between income groups in developing countries opens up new topics for investigation and follow up in future World Reports.

### **Promoting literacy and lifelong learning**

In this report colleagues have presented their visions on how libraries can best promote literacy and lifelong learning. It is said that the literacy process has to be recognised as inclusive of all ranges of communication, and that it occurs at all levels and ages of societies, whether they are predominantly oral societies or have a culture of reading as a basis for accessing information. Such an approach will create a fundamental shift and redress the denial of a right of access to information, by most librarians, for millions of people who rely on orality as their equivalent of the lifelong literacy process.

### **Partnerships**

In Chile, the concept of participative community management of libraries was introduced in 1996 and has proved successful as a way to make dynamic relations between a library and its local community. Nearly 80% of public libraries have a local "Friends of the Library" support group that volunteer their services to help library staff

in their daily tasks and in the long-term development of libraries. Friends groups organise cultural events in libraries and also seek sources of external funding for projects to improve library services. In 2003, these groups were responsible for a significant amount of projects presented to regional and national government funding sources, as well as to the private sector. At a national level, participative management is a strategic priority and initiatives to further develop the concept will include actions that further stimulate the relationship between the local library and its community, taking into account its particular needs and singularities.

Another one of the methods suggested for promoting literacy is to extend the reach of libraries both at community and regional levels by taking books and other services to places where people meet such as markets and shopping areas. Another is to engage in international development projects, e.g. in cooperation with IFLA and other relevant international NGOs, private foundations and governmental agencies. Partnerships are stressed to improve the provision of information, make it easily accessible, and generally improve services, and the paper from Asia suggested that libraries work as cooperating partners in a coherent system rather than as single institutions. Overall, however, this report stresses that partnerships at a local level are highly important.

## Strategies

The need for national strategies has to be recognised in developing countries if literacy and lifelong learning are to be promoted. A strategy could tackle issues such as the important role of libraries in communities, cooperation with the educational system, and new ways of library management. Furthermore, library activities that increase knowledge and skills to help overcome the economic gaps in society should be undertaken, along with funding activities to ensure development of library collections and services.

Equally important is the provision of information that helps increase the skills and knowledge needed to close the existing gaps in society. Librarians should be aware of the socio-economic diversity of society and adapt their services to prioritise those in most need for access to information.

They should uphold the vision of libraries as a means of improving the quality of life for all citizens. However, in Central America - as is the case in other developing areas of the world - access to information and the right to use information is closely related to lack of library funding

It is interesting to note that Costa Rican heads of libraries very clearly connect the democratic and economic development of society with that of libraries by identifying a number of political reforms that need to be implemented in the country alongside initiatives that will improve library services. Thus issues such as e.g. fiscal reforms, education, human resources, health and

employment, and improvement of infrastructure are identified as challenges that need to be addressed to improve library services.

In Africa, one of the challenges identified in the promotion of literacy and lifelong learning is the marketing of libraries and information services to create a culture that values information and knowledge and makes use of it in all aspects of life. In this context, the term literacy needs to change from the original concept, “the ability to read and write”, to include ICT literacy as well as oral based literacy. Only then will people be considered fully literate.

To successfully promote literacy libraries have to identify the needs of those they serve and ensure the necessary funding. In developing societies, literacy is considered a tool to access information for development purposes and for achieving better life conditions. To this end, libraries should ensure that information is made available in local languages and that there is local information content relevant to their users - both in print and electronic formats. It is argued that to put a community firmly on the road of literacy and lifelong learning, libraries need to empower people to be producers as well as consumers of reading matter in their own languages. To learn to read, develop reading skills and remain lifelong readers and learners, people need reading materials. This is an obvious fact in the developed world but a problem in developing countries. The lack of books in Africa has been labelled a ‘book famine’ and the response is

book aid - but there is a shortage of information in African indigenous languages and the problem is not solved by irrelevant reading materials in languages foreign to most readers.

### **The right to information in the information and knowledge society**

It has been argued that without information citizens cannot possibly make informed decisions, electoral choices or otherwise participate in decision-making processes in their countries. Looking at Asia, a number of countries have recognised freedom of information, including the right to access information held by the state, at constitutional level whereas in others national courts have been reluctant to accept that the guarantee of freedom of expression includes the right to access information held by the state. During the last decade, especially since the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, there has been increasing recognition that access to information on the environment, including information held by public authorities, is key to sustainable development. In recent years, several NGO efforts to address the lack of information on these and other matters have shown a ray of hope for marginalised groups. The information revolution and the decentralised form of governance seen in South Asia are considered responsible for gaining access to information at local levels.

In Namibia, the legal framework for the building of an information society is found in the

Namibian Constitution (Article 21.1) that provides for the free flow of information. The constitution recognises that access to information is a key factor in improving the quality of life and is fundamental to the existence of the human race.

### **How to meet the challenges of the 21st century**

The World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva in December 2003, declared a common vision for the information society:

“A people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilise 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...”

The emergence of ICTs calls for new strategic approaches regarding the development of libraries and their services. Both in Central and Latin America, Asia and Africa, the need for national strategic development, regional cooperation and funding has been recognised. On top of the list is identification of the needs of library users, development of services that can respond to these needs, resource sharing, networking and building of strong partnerships within and outside the library community, education and post-education of staff, development of management techniques and marketing of information and library services.



## Africa

Although the ICT development differs from country to country, the African region as a whole is at a very low level of technological development. Critical gaps in budgetary provision for the library and information services in addition to too many competing priority needs severely hamper library development. The physical infrastructure necessary to provide security, safety and an enabling environment for literacy and lifelong learning is therefore also necessary.

The transition to an information society relies heavily on a reliable ICT infrastructure. Africa has joined other continents in creating the necessary tools to move from a largely agricultural society to an information society. African countries are supporting each other through mutual initiatives that support core values, policies and strategic development aimed at overcoming the digital divide and the provision of universal access to information and knowledge. Though many African countries are still far from providing equal access to information, some, such as Namibia and Botswana, have developed functional telecommunication infrastructures, political stability and an economic environment that is considered attractive by investors. In southern Africa, the e-sectors are growing rapidly - although not as quickly as in the developed world. However, the lack of ICT expertise, particularly in rural areas, and the high costs of communication are critical challenges that have to be part of development strategies for the region.

ICTs are widely recognised as a major part of library services - in some countries ICTs probably play a greater role than print material in providing up to date information. However, access to computers and the Internet alone will not safeguard literacy and lifelong learning. The ability to read, understand and use knowledge is the first most important step to take.

## Latin America

Chile provides a clear example of how to respond to the concerns voiced at the first World Summit on the Information Society: "... the benefits of the information technology revolution are today unevenly distributed between the developed and developing countries and within societies".<sup>1</sup>

It should be noted that the success of information technologies is measured in the same way as more traditional means of accessing information, in that it is dependent on the work of library staff and partnerships that they have developed. In Chile, the relationship between the public libraries and their communities has guaranteed a successful introduction of ICTs. To this end, the *BiblioRedes* project should be mentioned as an inspiration to others. It aims at increasing cultural consumption through a virtual network of public libraries, primarily for those with difficulties in access to information, ensuring free of charge access to and use of Internet content, products and services and other digital resources to the communities associated with the network of public libraries.

Chile is also an excellent example of how cooperation and the forming of partnerships with funding agencies can support library evolution. In the case of Chile a development project, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has enabled libraries to make a huge leap forward in their ability to provide access to information and ICTs, a step that would otherwise have taken years to accomplish. The new technological infrastructure has also enabled Chilean library authorities to network all libraries, facilitating the sharing of Internet connection costs, other resources, information and overall management of the system.

The introduction of ICTs in public libraries has not only had a positive impact on the image of public libraries in general, but also significantly changed access to knowledge, information, communication and entertainment. The project itself has become a cornerstone of the Chilean government's massive Digital Literacy Campaign, which has formally and fully incorporated the principles established at the first World Summit of the Information Society.

The challenge in Chile consisted in transferring the work that had already been developed in relation to reading and participative cultural management. As Budnik points out, this challenge would not have been possible to meet if the libraries had not already been transformed into community meeting places at 'ground level'. The introduction and use of ICTs, though considered evolutionary, is still just a part of an

overall campaign to ensure that libraries become centres for lifelong literacy, capable of defending and providing unrestricted access to information. The emphasis of the campaign in Chile was to develop a way of working that would ensure a close integration of libraries into their communities, making them capable of responding to local needs and in turn being supported and strengthened by their users.

### **South Asia**

As stated in the report on South Asia, attempts at introducing access to information learning opportunities through the use of ICTs in libraries have not proved successful in contrast to the Telecentre model introduced by NGOs. In the South Asian context, it is increasingly recognised that the concepts of 'community informatics' provide new ways of approaching old problems of community development and enhancing civil society. Also, strong partnerships between civil society and the public and private sectors are called for to harness the potentials of ICTs. Such partnerships may help communities overcome the cultural barriers to information and communication.

The evolution of telecentre models initiated by NGOs and development agencies has thus opened new doors for accessing information in rural and remote areas. Telecentres are generally defined as, "a location which facilitates and encourages the provision of a wide variety of public and private information-based goods and

services, and which supports local economic or social development.” Since 1999, the Telecentre approach has encouraged experts to recognise the importance of the convergence of both new and traditional ICTs to empower South Asian communities that suffer from poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to finances, and adequate infrastructure. Using a variety of technologies, including phone, fax, computers, and the Internet, Telecentres provide public access to long-distance communication and information services. The centres are providing three types of information to the communities they serve: human service, local information and citizen action information. Telecentres have been publicly or privately owned, or funded by international donors. Likewise, knowledge centres are identified as the means to bring information and knowledge to rural communities by the application of appropriate ICTs, including local content.

Due to financial, informational, and political barriers, as well as a weak public response to services, the poor and disadvantaged communities in developing countries suffer in relation to the delivery of public services and their lack of transparency, accountability and quality. Rural libraries in the South Asian region are facing huge challenges due to limited financial resources and will have to take drastic steps to become change agents in rural lives and succeed in their attempts to engage in lifelong learning, e.g. by embracing the info-kiosk approach in service provision.

## Local content

As highlighted at the World Summit on the Information Society, “The creation, dissemination and preservation of content in diverse languages and formats must be accorded high priority in building an inclusive Information Society, paying particular attention to the diversity of supply of creative work and due recognition of the rights of authors and artists. It is essential to promote the production of and accessibility to all content - educational, scientific, cultural or recreational - in diverse languages and formats. The development of local content suited to domestic or regional needs will encourage social and economic development and will stimulate participation of all stakeholders, including people living in rural, remote and marginal areas”.

To this end, ICTs are considered the means to create local content and are identified as one of the most difficult and exciting challenges facing public libraries.

As a complimentary effort to the knowledge centre movement witnessed in South Asia, Africa and Latin America in the recent years, the Open Knowledge Network ([www.openknowledge.net](http://www.openknowledge.net)), spearheaded by OneWorld International and a host of other partners, is emerging. Recognising that poor people must be able to express and communicate locally relevant knowledge in local languages if they are to shape decisions which affect their livelihoods, the Open Knowledge Network programme attempts

to be a human network that collects shares and disseminates local knowledge to stakeholders in academia, government, research stations and local planning bodies.

An example of a human network as a part of information policy is seen in South Asia, where the emergence of rural virtual academicians has come to bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and farming practice. These academicians have a local background that enables the translation of globally available knowledge into locally relevant formats, a process that is supported by the generation of local content and its dissemination, diffusion and utilisation in rural areas. If this movement is supported at regional and national levels then the possibilities for library services in rural and urban locations among the poor communities are greatly encouraging.

### **Indigenous knowledge**

Indigenous knowledge is local knowledge that is unique to every culture or society. It is tacit knowledge and difficult to define, for it is embedded in community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals (World Bank, 2002).

In its statement on indigenous knowledge, IFLA acknowledges “the intrinsic value and importance of indigenous and traditional knowledge and local community knowledge, and the need to consider it holistically in spite of contested definitions and use”. Recognising that its continuing preservation should be ensured by

libraries and archives by way of initiatives and programmes that ensure the collection, preservation, dissemination, promotion and availability of indigenous knowledge. Thus the statement clearly indicates that libraries and archives do have an important role to play in the provision of indigenous and traditional knowledge content.

Lor states in his contribution to this report that although indigenous knowledge is tenacious, it is also vulnerable. It is largely dependent on oral transmission and thus on the survival of community structures and traditions. As can be seen in the South African experience, various threats exist to the survival of indigenous knowledge that can lead to the breakdown and dissolution of communities. There are great dangers to communities in the developing world should this happen, especially as indigenous knowledge is increasingly seen as essential to sustainable development and biodiversity management (UNESCO 2004b).

It falls to the library to help safeguard languages threatened by extinction. The need for relevant reading matter and teaching materials in minority languages is great indeed, and through the collection of such materials - along with stories, poetry, songs and dances - it could be that indigenous knowledge stands a chance of preservation. It is generally recognised today that public libraries in Africa must contribute to national development. They must become true community source centres, providing access to all media, providing learning resources for

learners of all ages, and serving as access points for resources for and of the community. The latter point is particularly relevant here. Today progressive librarians recognise that the community itself has many untapped resources, including community leaders and elders who are custodians of traditional culture and indigenous knowledge.

How can public libraries assist in preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge and in making use of it for in the interest of the community? Lor's paper identified seven functions for libraries in relation to indigenous knowledge. These included the identification of indigenous knowledge holders in the community and utilising their expertise; the collection of this indigenous knowledge in order to best preserve it; organizing recorded indigenous knowledge to best help the community served by the library; the actual preservation of indigenous knowledge, both for the near future and for future generations within the community; promoting awareness and appreciation of indigenous knowledge, through the library, in order to counter any devaluation or loss of dignity; providing equal and unhampered access to indigenous knowledge; and utilising this knowledge so that it may be used as a real community resource, especially in education. Libraries are equal to all of these tasks.

For lifelong learning to take root in communities, community members must be literate. Access to interesting, relevant content in the local language is essential for learning to read

and remaining literate, and the creation of such material will also help to safeguard local dialects for the future. In the creation of educational and reading materials indigenous knowledge can serve as a source of relevant, interesting and useful content. Lor points out that three important development thrusts converge here: literacy and lifelong learning, the survival and development of indigenous languages, and the preservation and utilization of indigenous knowledge. Librarians in developing countries, in particular public and community librarians, find themselves at the point where these three thrusts come together. This offers them scope for meaningful participation in the development of their communities and enables them to demonstrate the difference that libraries can make in the lives of their communities.

### **ICTs implementation and access barriers**

The implementation of ICTs and the freedom to access digital format information are FAIFE areas of concern. The topics are addressed in the PhD project FAIFE is engaged in, as well as in the IFLA Internet Manifesto developed by FAIFE, and they will be further addressed in the Internet guidelines that IFLA and UNESCO are to develop. The concerns and challenges of developing countries are especially subject to examination. The barriers discussed in this theme report, especially those relating to ICT infrastructure, training, local content and cost, have all been seen in reports FAIFE has generated in the previous two years. The World Report

2003 particularly highlighted the digital divide that exists on a global scale, but also reminded us that divides between urban and rural populations, as well as rich and poor, exist within individual countries. Interviews carried out for the PhD research have confirmed the existence of these divides within countries from northern and southern Europe, Asia and Africa. Most recently, an Internet Manifesto workshop held in Kampala, Uganda showed that delegates from southern and eastern Africa are concerned not only with infrastructure difficulties in the provision of ICTs, but also with the need for access to relevant online materials to keep new users interested in new technology. Without appropriate content that can be used at a local level ICTs will not be able to properly contribute to the lifelong learning process.

What the most recent FAIFE reports show is that these concerns are here to stay, at least for the immediate future. While ICT use around the world continues to grow, admittedly at a slower pace in some regions than in others, fundamental barriers remain and require tackling. The

problems that the World Report series has highlighted are present, to an extent, in all countries of the world, with some problems becoming more pertinent at different stages of ICT development. What is seen in the Theme Report 2004 is that libraries in developing countries are having to come up with novel ways to deal with problems that bigger, richer countries are able to tackle differently. The principles at stake are similar, but local conditions create different sets of problems and solutions in each country. What the contributions to this report have done is to show how different processes - funding partnerships, community involvement, staff and user training - can be mooted or implemented to enable libraries to make a greater contribution to the lifelong learning process. The situations and solutions outlined here may inspire librarians in other countries in their quest to empower their users.

### Notes

1 Declaration of Principles, World Summit on the Information Society, point 10

## The IFLA Internet Manifesto

Unhindered access to information is essential to freedom, equality, global understanding and peace. Therefore, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) asserts that:

- Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual both to hold and express opinions and to seek and receive information; it is the basis of democracy; and it is at the core of library service.
- Freedom of access to information, regardless of medium and frontiers, is a central responsibility of the library and information profession.
- The provision of unhindered access to the Internet by libraries and information services supports communities and individuals to attain freedom, prosperity and development.
- Barriers to the flow of information should be removed, especially those that promote inequality, poverty, and despair.

Freedom of Access to Information, the

### Internet and Libraries and Information Services

Libraries and information services are vibrant institutions that connect people with global information resources and the ideas and creative works they seek. Libraries and information services make available the richness of human expression and cultural diversity in all media.

The global Internet enables individuals and communities throughout the world, whether in the smallest and most remote villages or the largest cities, to have equality of access to information for personal development, education, stimulation, cultural enrichment, economic activity and informed participation in democracy. All can present their interests, knowledge and culture for the world to visit.

Libraries and information services provide essential gateways to the Internet. For some

they offer convenience, guidance, and assistance, while for others they are the only available access points. They provide a mechanism to overcome the barriers created by differences in resources, technology, and training.

### Principles of Freedom of Access to Information via the Internet

Access to the Internet and all of its resources should be consistent with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and especially Article 19:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

The global interconnectedness of the Internet provides a medium through which this right may be enjoyed by all. Consequently, access should neither be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor to economic barriers.

Libraries and information services also have a responsibility to serve all of the members of their communities, regardless of age, race, nationality, religion, culture, political affiliation, physical or other disabilities, gender or sexual orientation, or any other status.

Libraries and information services should support the right of users to seek information of their choice.

Libraries and information services should respect the privacy of their users and recognize that the resources they use should remain confidential.

Libraries and information services have a responsibility to facilitate and promote public access to quality information and communication. Users should be assisted with the necessary skills and a suitable environment in which to use their chosen information sources and services freely and confidently.

In addition to the many valuable resources available on the Internet, some are incorrect, misleading and may be offensive. Librarians should provide the information and resources for library users to learn to use the Internet and electronic information efficiently and effectively. They should proactively promote and facilitate responsible access to quality networked information for all their users, including children and young people.

In common with other core services, access to the Internet in libraries and information services should be without charge.



## Implementing the Manifesto

IFLA encourages the international community to support the development of Internet accessibility worldwide, and especially in developing countries, to thus obtain the global benefits of information for all offered by the Internet.

IFLA encourages national governments to develop a national information infrastructure which will deliver Internet access to all the nation's population.

IFLA encourages all governments to support the unhindered flow of Internet accessible information via libraries and information services and to oppose any attempts to censor or inhibit access.

IFLA urges the library community and decision makers at national and local levels to develop strategies, policies, and plans that implement the principles expressed in this Manifesto.

This Manifesto was prepared by IFLA/FAIFE. Proclaimed by IFLA 1 May 2002.

# Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge

IFLA (The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) declares that human beings have a fundamental right to access to expressions of knowledge, creative thought and intellectual activity, and to express their views publicly.

IFLA acknowledges the intrinsic value and importance of indigenous traditional knowledge and local community knowledge, and the need to consider it holistically in spite of contested conceptual definitions and uses.

IFLA furthermore notes the need

- To recognize the significance, relevance and value of integrating both indigenous traditional knowledge and local community knowledge in providing solutions to some of the most difficult modern issues and encourages its use in project planning and implementation.
- To protect indigenous traditional knowledge and local traditional knowledge for

the benefit of indigenous peoples as well as for the benefit of the rest of the world. It is vulnerable both because it is exploitable and has been exploited, and because of the loss of Elders and the significant decline in emphasis on transmission of this knowledge to younger generations in the face of pressures for modernisation.

- To implement effective mechanisms for technology transfer, capacity building, and protection against exploitation in accordance with the Convention on Biological Diversity, the ILO Convention 169 and other conventions relating to sustainable development and the interests of indigenous peoples.

IFLA recognizes that the character of indigenous traditional knowledge does not lend itself to print, electronic or audiovisual means of recording but, in order to ensure its continuing preservation, access and elaboration recommends that libraries and archives:

- 1 Implement programs to collect, preserve and disseminate indigenous and local traditional knowledge resources.
- 2 Make available and promote information resources which support research and learning about indigenous and local traditional knowledge, its importance and use in modern society.
- 3 Publicize the value, contribution, and importance of indigenous and local traditional knowledge to both non-indigenous and indigenous peoples.
- 4 Involve Elders and communities in the production of resources and teaching children to understand and appreciate the traditional knowledge background and sense identity that is associated with indigenous knowledge systems.
- 5 Urge governments to ensure the exemption from value added taxes of books and other recording media on indigenous and local traditional knowledge.
- 6 Encourage the recognition of principles of intellectual property to ensure the proper protection and use of indigenous traditional knowledge and products derived from it.

Based on a resolution of the 15th Standing Conference for Eastern, Central and Southern African Library Associations (SCECSAL) 2002.

Approved by the Governing Board of IFLA, December 2002, The Hague, Netherlands.

# Statement on Libraries and Sustainable Development

Meeting in Glasgow on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of its formation, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

- Declares that all human beings have the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well-being.
- Acknowledges the importance of a commitment to sustainable development to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future .
- Asserts that library and information services promote sustainable development by ensuring freedom of access to information.

## **IFLA further affirms that:**

- The international library and information community forms a network that connects developing and developed countries, supports the development of library and information services worldwide, and ensures these services

respect equity, the general quality of life for all people and the natural environment.

- Library and information professionals acknowledge the importance of education in various forms for all. Library and information services act as gateways to knowledge and culture. They provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in various formats, supporting personal development of all age groups and active participation in society and decision-making processes.
- Library and information services provide essential support for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development for all. Through their vast collections and variety of media, they offer guidance and learning opportunities. Library and information services help people improve educational and social skills, indispensable in an information society and for sustained participation in democracy. Libraries further reading habits, information literacy and promote education, public awareness and training.

- Library and information services contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help safeguard basic democratic values and universal civil rights. They respect the identity, independent choice, decision-making and privacy of their users without discrimination.
- To this end, library and information services acquire, preserve and make available to all users without discrimination the widest variety of materials, reflecting the plurality and cultural diversity of society and the richness of our environments.
- Library and information services are helping to tackle information inequality demonstrated in the growing information gap and the digital divide. Through their network of services, information on research and innovation is made available to advance sustainable development and the welfare of peoples worldwide.

IFLA therefore calls upon library and information services and their staff to uphold and promote the principles of sustainable development.

This Declaration was approved by the Governing Board of IFLA meeting on 24 August 2002 in Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom.