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Libraries in Cambodia: Rebuilding a Past and a Future

Cambodia is a small Southeast Asian country bordered by Vietnam to the east, Thailand to the northwest, and Lao to the northwest. In 1997 the population was estimated to be around 10.7 million. Cambodia is probably best known for the magnificent 12th century Angkor Wat temple complex in Siem Reap Province and for the fearful activities of the Khmer Rouge regime of genocide from 1975 to 1979.

From 1863 to 1954 Cambodia was a French colony. Following independence in 1954 a brief period of rapid development in the 1960s and early 1970s was shattered when the Khmer Rouge took over the country and forced everybody to leave cities and towns and go out into the countryside.¹ Many of them never returned to their homes, they died, many tragically were victims of deprivation, starvation and torture. In the period between 1975 and 1979 schools and universities, as well as the normal framework of the country, were closed and the buildings fell into neglect.² In January 1979 the Khmer Rouge were driven out by Vietnamese troops supported by Cambodian forces who had previously escaped to Vietnam. Beginning in 1979, the country began to rebuild slowly. People came back from Pol Pot centres in the provinces and attempted to rebuild their lives and their wartorn country.³

When I went to Cambodia in 1986, evidence of the destruction of the country was still to be seen everywhere - the shattered shells of buildings, the huge pile of vehicles and discarded equipment in a side street near the National Library were grim reminders. People I met spoke of their experiences, and I was taken to see Toul Sleng, one of the many Khmer Rouge detention centres. Toul Sleng is now a museum where visitors witness the place of suffering and read the "testimonies" the victims were forced to write. On this first visit to Cambodia I encountered a group of people who, despite the tragedies they had suffered, were hard at work trying to rebuild their country. This was a difficult period because foreign development aid was denied by many governments for political reasons.⁴ My work then was with the Australian Quakers, who, with the assistance of the American Friends Service Committee, were implementing a programme of

teaching English funded by the Australian government. I made my first visit to the National Library of Cambodia and met some of the staff. The following year, in 1987, I spent several months working at the university setting up a library for the Quaker's English language teaching programme and training the librarian of the Foreign Languages Institute. I ran the first small workshop for librarians from the Ministry of Education. In those days libraries were all on closed access and staff were poorly paid and often unable to come to work for various reasons. Two phrases in Khmer were probably the first I learned at this time: *Neak kan sar ot mok* (The person with the key (to the library) hasn't come) and *Ot mean pleung te* (The electricity isn't working). I learned that the most important attributes one needed in this situation were patience, a sense of humor and willingness to take the long view in development. Ten years later, although there have been many changes, and in some ways Cambodia is like a different country now, patience, a sense of humor and taking the long view are still as important as ever.

In 1997 political unease increased as the election period moved closer and constrained development. The effect of the trauma is still evident in people's lives. The long-term impact of conflict upon self-help skills such as confidence, initiative, motivation planning skills, and social relations are seriously under-estimated.⁵ All these factors restrict development and the rebuilding of infrastructure.

There are a number of other factors constraining library development in Cambodia. Cambodian society lacks a tradition of reading. Most of the publishing in the past was of religious books disseminated by the Buddhist Institute, which had a network of libraries in the pagodas in the provinces. Libraries in government departments and educational institutions have not received any funding for the purchase of books. Funding when it was available has come from overseas sources.

Government salaries are very low (USD 25-30 per month for those in senior positions). Therefore many good library staff are forced to take second jobs, or seek employment in the private or non-governmental sectors. Currently much of the impetus for developing or redeveloping libraries in Cambodia is coming from people who studied overseas in the 1980s in Russia, East Germany, Bulgaria and Cuba and those who more

recently studied in the USA, Australia and France. These young people found, and learned to value, the wealth of information in libraries during their studies. Now they want to continue to be able to use libraries.

In order to present a picture of libraries in Cambodia I will describe the four major libraries: the National Library of Cambodia (NLC); the Hun Sen Library (Royal University of Phnom Penh); the Buddhist Institute Library; and the National Assembly Library. Apart from these four major libraries, both in the governmental and non-governmental sectors there has been a rapid growth of small libraries. The "Joy of Reading Library" is a small village-based mobile library service for children in Battambang, where books are taken by motorcycle from village to village. The Cambodia Development Research Institute focuses on development planning and research, and the Library of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia for the NGO community.

National Library of Cambodia

The National Library of Cambodia opened in 1924 with a collection of 2,879 volumes. The NLC, at that time known as the Bibliothèque Centrale, was part of the Directorate of Archives and Libraries of Indochina established by the French colonial government. The library was mostly used by officials and visiting French scholars and access was closed. It was not until the 1950s that the first books in Khmer were added to the library's collection. By 1975 there was a sizeable collection, much of which was dispersed around the city during the turmoil. In 1979 two of the former staff returned to work at the library. Of the 40 staff at NLC in April 1975, only six survived; most suffered the fate of many of the country's intellectuals: death by torture or starvation. The library itself was used to store food and cooking utensils and the gardens used to raise pigs. The adjacent Hotel Royal accommodated Chinese advisors, and their cooks lived in the library building. I once saw a brief sequence of video footage taken inside the library in early 1979. Cooking pots and implements were stored on the bookshelves. Books were scattered around, some stored in piles in the corners. Miraculously a major part of the collection survived, although it seems that part of it may have found its way into private hands in the early months before proper systems were re-established.⁶

After reorganization the NLC reopened in January 1980. Books were donated from a variety of sources. Both Vietnam and the USSR assisted in publishing books in Khmer. In 1980 the NLC received a collection of multiple copies of pre-1975 Khmer language books from the Buddhist Institute. In the mid-1980s there were some delightful children's picture books published in Russia available in the markets in Phnom Penh. Books were donated from many sources during the UN emergency period in the early 1980s. Training for the library staff was provided by Russia and Vietnam, some

staff travelling to Vietnam for training. In the late 1980s some international non-governmental agencies began to provide small amounts of assistance. Since 1988 four full-time expatriate volunteers have spent time working for periods of up to two years with the NLC. Cornell University funded a project to microfilm the library's rare collection of palm-leaf manuscripts and to improve the preservation of the originals. Training has been provided, and the current national librarian is a graduate of the School of Librarianship of the University of New South Wales. A French government-assisted project has established a bindery and conservation workshop, and developed a special section for French colonial collection materials acquired before independence in 1954. The old west wing of the library was renovated to house a collection of some 25,000 volumes, mainly 19th century French literature and historical guides on Cambodia. A separate database of this material is being prepared. The section also includes a valuable collection of colonial prints.

Currently collection building at the NLC is entirely dependent on donations. Cambodia has yet to pass a copyright law, although there have been several drafts produced by different Ministries. However, organizations and government departments publishing materials are encouraged to donate copies of their publications to the library. Some of the material donated from overseas has enhanced the collection, but the library has also received material which is totally irrelevant to its needs now or in the future. The National Library of Australia provides books to the value of USD 1600 each year. The books are selected by NLC staff from recently published Australian titles. This has enabled the library to acquire some new books, particularly material on Southeast Asia. The "Books for Asia" programme of the Asia Foundation is the NLC's major donor of new publications. Both of these sources are important because, unlike most donations from other sources, the library staff themselves are involved in selecting the materials. Vital skills in collection development can be acquired by the staff, and the collection is thereby enhanced.

There is still a need to acquire publications lost or damaged, and publications on Cambodia and the Southeast Asian region which have been published in the years since 1975, and for which the NLC has incomplete holdings, are needed. In addition the NLC has to address issues such as the urgent need for a complete review of its collection and the volume of materials donated but not yet added to the collections. The task is immense and daunting. A thorough study of the NLC collection and recommendations for action were made by George Smith, Deputy Director of the State Library of Alaska during his time at NLC as ALA Fellow from September 1994 to April 1995. Sadly these have yet to be acted upon.⁷

Since 1980 the NLC has come under the authority of the Ministry of Culture and its status in that Ministry would not seem to be equivalent to the status of national

libraries elsewhere in the region. If there is no change in attitude, and the NLC continues to lack funding for books and even general running costs, its status as the prominent library in the country is in jeopardy. There needs to be a more coordinated approach to the whole problem of the National Library of Cambodia, its staff and its services.

Royal University of Phnom Penh Library (Hun Sen Library)

The university was founded in 1960, and much of the teaching was done by foreign professors. From 1975 to 1979 the campus was closed down and the buildings fell into disuse and were later vandalized. The grounds were very overgrown when the first survivors struggled back and set about restoring their institution, as they explained, "with our bare hands". In 1997 the picture was different; the main building constructed in the 1960s has recently been renovated with a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). During the ADB renovations of the main building the library operated from one small classroom. The stock was moved three times during a period of 18 months. The new university library was completed at the end of 1996 and opened on 7 January 1997. It is adjacent to the main university building. The new library has an area of 180,000 square metres, whereas the old library was only 300 square metres and had limited space for readers, and very few books. Second Prime Minister Hun Sen provided the funds for the construction of the new library which is named in his honor. We found the most effective way to transport books was by "cyclo" or Pedicab.⁸ Hun Sen was the first library building of its size to be opened in Cambodia since the National Library of Cambodia was opened in December 1924. A grant from Bilance (European Catholic funder) made it possible for the new library to open fully equipped with the latest technology and facilities which most students in universities around the world would take for granted. After many years of substandard library provision, we can now provide a much improved service for students and staff at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

Collection development for the Central Library (now the Hun Sen Library) began in 1992 and the first priority was to establish a sound reference library. The Hun Sen Library now has the best reference collection in any library in Cambodia. Future purchases will concentrate on expanding various subject areas and journal sources through the purchase of CD-ROMs. This has only been made possible because my colleague, Sister Luise Ahrens of Maryknoll, and I have sought funding from various sources in Europe, USA and Australia. The university, like other Ministry and Institutional Libraries in Cambodia, has no funds for purchasing resources. Prior to 1992 the bulk of the university library collection was made up of old, out-of-date material and typed or handwritten books known as

"Cours". These "Cours" were course notes which had been prepared by teachers over the years. Some were in French, but most were Khmer translations of parts of longer works. Most "Cours" were outdated and included a fair measure of "propaganda". Hun Sen Library currently has an effective stock of 2000 Khmer books, 10,000 English books and 4000 French books. The library has a staff of 12 Cambodians and two expatriate librarians.

The Buddhist Institute Library

The Buddhist Institute was established in 1930 but had its genesis in the Cambodian Library founded by King Sisowath in 1921, from 1925 known as the Royal Library. The objective of the institute was, and remains, the study and research of Theravada Buddhism. Before 1975 the collection held over 40,000 volumes in Khmer, French, English, Thai, Burmese, Laotian, and Sihanalese. The library was also a victim of the devastation of the period 1975-79. In 1980 part of the collection (mostly multiple copies of Buddhist Institute publications) was sent to the NLC. In 1992 the Buddhist Institute was re-established and began to receive assistance from the Japanese Sotoshu Relief Committee and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Many of the earlier Buddhist Institute publications, including the 110 volume *Tripitaka* (Buddhist Bible), and the monthly journal *Kampuja Suriya* (first published in 1926), have been reissued and copies distributed to libraries and pagodas throughout the country. Originals used for republishing came from the NLC collection. The Buddhist Institute Library currently has a collection of 3,240 volumes in Khmer and 2,852 volumes, mostly in English and some in French. It subscribes to 13 newspapers (eight in Khmer) and has 20 Khmer periodical subscriptions and 30 subscriptions in foreign languages. The library has received grants from the Heinrich Böll Foundation to purchase books, materials and serial subscriptions. The librarian and his staff have the immense task of rebuilding a collection which was once considered one of the richest collections in Oriental studies in Southeast Asia. The accidental discovery of part of the printed catalogue of the pre-1975 collection by M.C. Ragavan will be invaluable for those involved in this task. A new building for the Buddhist Institute Library is due to be completed in 1998.

House of Assembly Library

The Library of the National Assembly was established in early 1994 with initial assistance coming from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Asia Foundation. The library is housed in a small building behind the House of Assembly and space is severely limited. The library has a collection of almost 2,000 books in Khmer, English and French and subscriptions to 20 newspapers

and journals. In addition, the library holds multiple copies of laws from the period 1979-1991. There are three Cambodian staff. The Assembly collection is small but specialized, concentrating on providing reference materials for the Committees of the Assembly and for members. In developing the foundation collection, we found the *Parliamentary Reference Library Bibliography of Core Materials* prepared by the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress to be a valuable guide.⁹ Staff training has emphasized the need for awareness of availability of materials from other library collections, especially the nearby Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice, as well as the NLC and the Hun Sen Library at the university.

The Future: Collection Development

These four libraries and other governmental and non-governmental libraries share common difficulties in regard to the acquisition of resources. Collection building risks being donor-driven. In September 1992 I began work as a Library Resources Advisor at the University of Phnom Penh. Immediately I began the task of assessing the existing stock and looking at the library's requirements to enable it to function effectively and provide a service for the staff and students. It was soon obvious that much of the collection was unusable. Many cartons of books awaiting unpacking contained "more of the same". As we have no budget from university sources, the library depends for the foreseeable future on donations. Therefore, it is important that these are relevant and useful. Together with library staff we developed a resources policy statement which has been revised several times over the past five years as our situation has gradually improved. Overseas institutions and individuals who make offers to donate books are sent a copy of this statement: "Shipping books to developing countries is expensive and money is wasted if out dated and irrelevant material is sent." My personal guideline is that if a book is out of date and irrelevant in Australia, the USA or wherever, it is unlikely that it will be of use in a developing country, even one where resources are limited. This advice also applies to old computers and similar equipment.

In 1997 collection development still tends to be donor-driven. Although we welcome donated resources, Cambodian librarians do not yet have the skills and experience to assess donated materials and know which to accept, which to reject and which to pass on to other more suitable library collections. This skill takes time to acquire. Secondly, Ministry officials not understanding the situation feel that libraries should keep all the books given or acquired. Exchanges with other libraries are difficult to organize if done through official channels. There is also a reluctance to dispose of anything at all because people still feel strongly the loss of personal possessions during the Pol Pot period.

For libraries with small or nonexistent budgets, collection development can be an exercise in ingenuity, or a frustrating exercise in trying to achieve the impossible. Without experience and knowledge of what material is valuable and what is simply a waste of space, the task can be daunting, so no action is taken and the boxes continue to pile up.

The challenge I have found is to try to teach new librarians how to assess donated materials. In my training programmes I try to help librarians understand the concepts of collection development with an emphasis on how to deal with donations. Using actual examples of donations sent to the Hun Sen Library and the National Library of Cambodia, I try to encourage librarians to make these important decisions in the classroom together in the hope that they will develop enough confidence to take action in their own libraries. But as I mentioned earlier, changes and improvement take time to achieve. There is a real need to "educate" donors too! In 1992 I expressed some of these thoughts. "Languishing on the shelves at the back of the stacks in our small university library we keep a small collection to show to visitors. It is not that we are proud of these books. We just want people to see some of the inappropriate materials which are sent to Third World libraries like ours, and for which we are expected to be grateful. Some of these gems are: Trachtenberg's *A History of Legislation for the Protection of Coal Miners in Pennsylvania* (1934); a beautiful two-volume *History of Yorkshire* with engravings published in the 1870s; a large-print edition of *World Book Encyclopedia*, 1960s edition minus four volumes. We also received copies of outdated directories 20 years old!

My work in libraries in Cambodia is challenging, but at times frustrating. Working in Cambodia always means that I must always expect the unexpected (lost electrical power, lost and/or delayed mail or shipments, and other unknown hindrances to our work). Projects which, despite all the problems, do actually work make up for these difficulties. To see students coming into the new library each day, to be able to help a parliamentarian find a particular reference, is indeed a privilege for me. To return to my three essentials: patience, a sense of humor, and the ability to take the "long view" in development. In conclusion, I would like to end on a note of optimism and hope. My optimistic hope is that the future for Cambodia will be peaceful to enable its people to develop their society as they would want it to be, to be well informed about the wider world, and to take a vital part in the community in the Southeast Asian region and beyond.

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Libraries and Cultural Heritage in Africa

Introduction

"Culture or civilization... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".¹ More simply put, the culture of a people refers to their way of life, their traditional behavior including their ideas, acts and artifacts.² A people's cultural heritage, therefore, is their way of life and, in a broad sense, their traditional behavior including the ideas, acts and artefacts which are passed on from one generation to another.

However, a society's culture is not biologically determined but learned. Therefore society has a responsibility for ensuring that the "transcript" or record of its culture in more or less permanent form is communicated to members of society in a variety of ways.³

Furthermore, culture is not static but changes over time and as a result of both internal and external influences. When assailed by powerful external cultural influences, for instance, a society may respond by discarding or modifying some of its own body of customs and beliefs while retaining others.

Change and continuity best describe the response of African societies to the external cultural influences, notably from the West and Near East resulting from decades of contact, through trade, travel, religious proselytization, colonial rule and its legacies of Western education, books, libraries, print and electronic media, etc.⁴ Although these have brought about noticeable changes in indigenous African cultures, particularly among the educated urban elite, many important

elements of indigenous African cultures are still perceptible in the way of life and behavior of peoples and institutions of contemporary Africa most especially, but not exclusively, among the non-literate rural dwellers.

One example of the complexity in contemporary African cultures which is of particular relevance to our present purpose is the continuing resilience of the oral tradition as the bedrock of African cultures and the medium for their "transcript" as well as communication, in the face of decade of exposure to the literary tradition of Western education and culture.⁵ African cultures are still therefore largely undocumented.

Finally, mention must be made of the diversity of African cultures deriving from the multiplicity of linguistic and social groups who inhabit Sub-Saharan Africa.

From the earliest times, the primary role of libraries was as repositories of the records of human civilization and culture. The invention of printing, the proliferation of records and the popularization of knowledge acquisition has led to a broadening of the purposes of libraries to make them one of the primary institutions for communicating knowledge and culture.

Although all types of libraries can be said to be, in various degrees, tools for cultural diffusion, it is on public libraries that this responsibility primarily rests.

The 1949 edition of the Unesco Public Library Manifesto includes the following among the goals of the public library:

- To facilitate appreciation of the achievement of humanity in knowledge and culture.
- To be the principal means whereby the record of man's thought and ideas, and the expression of his creative imagination, are made freely available to all.⁶

The 1995 edition of the Manifesto canvasses a more proactive role for public libraries with regard to the cultural heritage and affirms the diversity of the forms and expressions of the cultural heritage in the following excerpts:

- Promoting awareness of cultural heritage, appreciation of the arts, scientific achievement and innovations.
- Providing access to cultural expressions of all performing arts.
- Fostering intercultural dialogue and favoring cultural diversity.
- Supporting the oral tradition.⁷

This article will therefore examine the extent to which public libraries in Africa are discharging their cultural remit. The inquiry will also be extended to the role of rural libraries/community information centres in the same regard, since they were designed to supplement the services of the conventional public libraries.⁸

African Public Libraries and the Cultural Heritage

Modern libraries in Africa as a whole are post-colonial phenomena and resulted from the initiatives and support of individuals and institutions such as colonial administrators, missionaries, the British Council, the United States Information Agency, the Carnegie Corporation, UNESCO and Scandinavian-based agencies. They were established to support Western-style education, particularly higher education, as well as social and scientific research and the administration of justice.⁹⁻¹¹

Public libraries were established on models derived from Western countries from where their pioneer librarians were appointed and where their African successors received their library training.¹²

One implication of this is that African public libraries were not rooted in the cultures of their societies. They were largely designed as one of the tools for fostering "development" which was understood largely as the replication of the cultural and social institutions of the West. Studies have shown that the acquisition practices of these libraries show a bias in favor of former colonial ties.¹³ On the other hand the literary, products and rich cultural heritage of Germany, Japan, the Nordic countries and the newly industrialized countries are hardly reflected in their collection. The capacity of these libraries for fostering intercultural dialogue is therefore considerably flawed.¹⁴

Their capacity has been further reduced in recent years as they have been obliged to reduce their acquisition of new books to largely what they can get from donor agencies, as a result of dwindling subventions, the high cost of books and scarce foreign

exchange. Consequently, studies have shown that these libraries now serve mainly as reading rooms for students preparing for school certificate examinations.¹⁵

This scenario of the low and restricted impact of the public library in Africa is further buttressed by statistics which show that only minuscule percentages of their populations have access to their services. Mchombu's studies of Botswana, Kenya and Tanzania found that only 7.5%, 2.3% and 1-2% respectively have such access,¹⁶ while similar statistics on Nigeria show that less than 1% of that country's population have that privilege.¹⁷

A major factor accounting for this low impact is the almost exclusive reliance on the book medium in the public libraries, thus excluding the 70% of the sector of the population which is non-literate. This also means that the libraries cannot play the much desired role as the primary agency for the documentation and dissemination of indigenous African cultures.¹⁸

All in all, conventional public libraries in Africa are seriously flawed as centres for the promotion of an awareness of the African cultural heritage and the oral tradition. Nor are they faring much better as agencies for promoting intercultural dialogue since their collections provide access to a small and rapidly diminishing proportion of the records of the world cultural heritage.

We will now examine the contribution of rural libraries/community centres to the promotion of the African cultural heritage.

Rural Libraries and the African Cultural Heritage

Discussions of the inadequacies of the conventional public library services have led to the proposal of an alternative information service model focusing specifically on the needs of rural populations.¹⁹⁻²³

The concept of a rural library/community information centre is of a multi-purpose, multi-disciplinary centre where information is presented in a variety of media to meet the needs and abilities of users, many of whom are new literates or non-literates. It also attempts to disseminate and document the indigenous knowledge system drawn from the African cultural heritage.

Much of the work of a rural library/community information centre therefore involves the identification, collection, storage and repackaging of oral tradition from a rapidly diminishing pool of traditional intellectuals: elders, clan heads, priests, historians, and story-tellers. Equal emphasis is also given to the dissemination of information in the oral medium by the use of discussion forums, listening and viewing sessions, drama, etc.

The librarian or information worker performs his work as a member of a multidisciplinary team which could

include local elders and sages, social workers, agricultural extension service officers, public health nurses, and adult educators.

There is still a great deal of experimentation regarding the ideal structure of the rural library/community information centre.²⁴ However, it is generally agreed that an essential requirement is that there should be community participation in its establishment and maintenance. It is also considered desirable that the centre should reflect the communal nature of the traditional African way of life. Thus it should operate within a multi-purpose community centre where people would meet regularly and learn, regardless of age, class or social standing.²⁵

Centre de Lecture et l'Animation Culturelle (CLAC)

One of the more outstanding examples of this model is the Centre de Lecture et l'Animation Culturelle (CLAC) or the Centres for Reading and Cultural Activity in the Ivory Coast.²⁶ They are places for reading, information and leisure where the rural public can have access to books, audiovisual materials and educational, social and cultural activities. Activities at the Centres include: lending of books; use of the library for reference; lending of educational games and toys; watching of documentary or fiction films; group activities and activities with schools or associations (e.g., reading and debating clubs); and cultural activities (e.g., theatre, music and dance).

Each CLAC is equipped with collections of books reflecting the interests of the community; educational and social games; and audiovisual equipment and material.

An indication of the impact of the CLAC network is that the total number of users rose from 80,305 in 1992 to 126,894 in 1993. Similarly annual visits rose from 183,455 in 1992 to 223,368 in 1993.

The Public Library and Rural Audio Libraries of Mali

An even more interesting example is the Public Library and Rural Audio Libraries of Mali.²⁷ Mali had a conventional public library service until 1977 when it launched the Operation Lecture Publique (Operation Popular Reading). Before that event, "the situation of popular reading was distressing, especially in the rural areas. The libraries and documentation centres which were privileged places of cultural development were concentrated in Bamako, the capital, and the rural areas, which make up 80% of the total population, did not benefit in any way from library services..."²⁸

Following Operation Lecture Publique, the public library service was reorganized into a network of community libraries covering all the 46 zones of the country with each library catering for its zone's information, training and entertainment needs.

Each library contains a bookstock consisting of fiction, references works and children's books and a tape library generated locally from the recording of the locality's oral tradition carried out by the librarian. This valuable collection of the cultural heritage consists of local history, tales, riddles, traditional technologies, and the traditional pharmacopoeia which are used by the public in collective listening sessions and some have been transcribed, published and fed into the bookstock. Between 1981 and March 1994 some 336 hours of recordings on cassettes had been generated.

Statistics of use of the libraries in the network are impressive and are a remarkable contrast to similar statistics in conventional public libraries. Between 1992 and 1993 the network was consulted by 184,000 users made up as follows: young people, 54% and adults, 46%. 34,000 loans were issued in the same year. As an indication of the network's promotion of intercultural dialogue, it maintains exchange programmes with 250 foreign partners and correspondents.

A separate rural audio libraries project was established in 1982 by the Millian Ministry of Culture in cooperation with the UNDP and IDRC "as part of the search for a rapid, efficient solution to the problems of information provision and the continuing education of the rural population on the one hand, and the need to collect and disseminate the resources of the oral tradition on the other".²⁹ The national network now covers 146 villages.

The procedure followed involves the use of the indigenous knowledge system drawn from local history, tales, pharmacopoeia, technology, and popular songs to disseminate information on hygiene, health, animal husbandry, environmental protection, agricultural production and scientific and technical subjects to the target rural population.

Other examples include: the Culture Houses of Zimbabwe, which are the "grassroots component of the National Library and Documentation Service,"³⁰ and the 850 Rural Library Centres of the Malawi National Library.³¹

From the above facts, it seems fair to suggest that the approaches to public library or community information service adopted by rural libraries/community information centres is more relevant to the needs of Africa where the vast majority of the population are either non-literates or new literates. At the same time, the priority given to the identification, collection and conservation of the indigenous knowledge system - the indigenous cultural heritage - and its use for innovative information services and cultural exchange programmes show the potential of these libraries as valuable agents in the promotion of the African cultural heritage.

Although the services were inspired by, and designed for, the needs of the information-starved rural populations, their relevance is not limited to that group; for neither the rural nor the urban population is homogeneous in its demographic profile. Nor are their

information needs mutually exclusive. Both consist, in different measures, of non-literates, new literates and literates; have children and youth with similar information needs and have significant sections of the population for whom the indigenous cultural heritage is a source of profound pleasure and spiritual upliftment and the oral medium, the preferred medium of communication.

What is needed therefore is a public library service formed out of a convergence of the print-oriented conventional public library service and the multimedia-oriented rural/community information service. The Malian model appears to offer an example of the way such an integrated system on national scale could be structured, assuming the existing separate structure for the audio library project will eventually be absorbed into the structure of the public library network.

Conclusion

Three years after the Gaborone workshop on rural libraries, there is still hardly any evidence of the rural/community library revolution in Africa. Yet support for the idea has been strong and widespread among library practitioners.

One reason for the apparent stall is that change usually does not come easily and radical change comes even less readily.

Secondly, the bottom-up, community-based structure advocated in the rural/community library model is not only in conflict with the top-down structure of the existing services but it is likely to be a more complex and difficult administrative structure to operate, given the proliferation of communities in Africa. To give a frightening example, there are reported to be 97,000 communities in Nigeria alone!³² Some trepidation at this prospect is therefore quite understandable and this probably explains why there was no clear recommendation on an ideal structure at the Gaborone workshop.³³

The liberal information ethos and the civil society empowerment which is implied in rural/community library model may also be considered to be at odds with the status quo and capable of threatening existing power relations in those African countries without democratic systems of government.

Another knotty problem when contemplating the expected transition is staffing and the associated problem of training. There is widespread advocacy of the use of non-librarians in the new dispensation and library schools are not keen on offering rural librarianship as a specialty. Yet without an agreed body of knowledge for those offering services, it will be difficult to guarantee a standard of practice and performance.

Perhaps, then, more sensitization and awareness-raising is still required among the present generation of

public library practitioners in Africa at the national level.

However, in spite of the constraints, fears and problems delaying the desired transformation of public libraries, it is to be hoped that an appreciation of the urgency of the present situation will compel all concerned to act before it is too late. This is because as things now stand, conventional public libraries in Africa are gradually dying and so are the human "libraries", the repositories and communicators of the African cultural heritage: the elders, traditional historians, priests, and medicine men. But they can both be saved by the simple expedient of forging a partnership between them. That union will transform the present public library services into national networks of community libraries with each library in the network arising out of, and being responsive to the needs and aspirations of its community and offering, in concert with other cultural and socioeconomic agents, the most wide-ranging services, using all available print and non-print media. The aggregation of the resources and services of each national network of community libraries will be a formidable tool for the conservation and dissemination of the national cultural heritage and a major source for fostering intercultural dialogue and exchange.

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Memory of Iberoamerica: Rescuing 19th Century Latin American Newspapers, 1993-1997

Introduction

Newspapers, as a form of national cultural expression, reflect not only the most important events of the day, but also the political, economic, industrial, literary, religious and moral aspects of a society.

Many initiatives have been undertaken at international level to preserve this patrimonial wealth. One of the most important was the resolution accepted by IFLA's International Conference on Administration and Preservation of Periodical Publications, held in Washington DC in 1989, which gave long overdue attention to newspaper preservation as part of the preservation of the cultural inheritance of each country.

Nevertheless, it is UNESCO's "Memory of the World" Programme which gives a definitive thrust to this world crusade. In 1992, the Association of National Libraries of Iberoamerica (ABINIA) granted priority attention to this mandate, submitting the project "Memory of Iberoamerica" to UNESCO, obtaining its approval and a grant of USD 30,000 for the pilot phase.

This project follows up on ABINIA's successful experience in creating the Union Catalogue of 16th to 18th Century Iberoamerican Antique Printed Works which was subsequently edited in CD-ROM format under the name *Novum Regestrum*, with 100,000 bibliographic references from 22 national libraries.

The pilot phase was carried out in the national libraries of Costa Rica, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela. Project coordination fell upon the National Library of Venezuela, and activities were initiated in November 1992.

With the help of the library system of the University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras, an information-gathering form for newspaper inventory was revised and adapted. This form had been successfully applied by U.S. academic libraries as part of a federal project. To

date, the 19th Century Iberoamerican Newspaper Database contains an accumulated total of 8,329 records of titles provided by the national libraries of 19 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Starting in August 1994, project activities have been financed exclusively by the national libraries and ABINIA, as outside funding has not been available.

Historical Importance of Newspapers in Latin America

The appearance of the printing press in Latin America radically transformed cultural life. Arriving in Mexico around 1535, it had reached Peru by 1584, and much later, at the beginning of the 19th century, was smuggled into Venezuela by Francisco de Miranda.

Nevertheless, it was through newspapers, not books, that the doctrines of the Enlightenment became known and that the new ideas that would bring about profound changes to the continent's young nations were propagated.

It is difficult to imagine the cultural situation of 19th century societies, where the population was 90% illiterate. Books were accessible only to the elite, a small group of privileged and notable families who held social, political and economic power. Newspapers, on the other hand, were read aloud publicly in plazas and markets, and exerted an extraordinary influence in their communities, parochial though they were, but eager for news and willing to change. In fact, at that time, in Latin America, newspaper production was much more important than book production.

Thus, newspapers had a decisive impact on different aspects of 19th century life, especially in the political arena. Between 1800 and 1820, just before Independence, they reflected on one hand the ideas and values of the monarchic power established in these overseas colonies, and on the other, they contributed to disseminate libertarian ideals and to spread the seed of

emancipation, so deeply desired by a wide sector of colonial society.

Independence from Spain became a reality but this did not in any way signify political peace. Newspapers continued to exert a fundamental role as promoters of the debate between conservatives and liberals, the two contending political groups whose power struggle spread throughout all Latin American, from Mexico to Argentina. The press also reflected the clash between militarists and proponents of civilian government.

The rupture with the old colonial order did not prevent new governments from practicing censorship, and the press, determined to uphold its commitment in favor of the oppressed sectors, began to produce newspapers edited in clandestine, itinerant "road printing presses" as a response to governmental persecution.

Latin American newspapers of the 19th century encompass an incommensurable universe. It is difficult to establish the number of newspapers and other publications, some long-lived, some not, that circulated in the continent. Many of them achieved continuity in time, such as Chile's *Gaceta Ministerial*, with its 343 numbers, or Venezuela's *Gaceta de Caracas*, founded in 1808 and published until 1822 under different names.

Because of their inestimable value, newspapers undoubtedly constitute an essential and primary material for studying history, literature, customs and daily life in Latin America. It was thanks to the press that at the beginning of the 19th century, the echoes of Romanticism reached many of our countries. This important cultural and aesthetic movement, born in Europe at the end of the 19th century, was particularly well received and became deeply rooted in the region, generally, linked to nationalism and the liberal doctrine.

As documentary patrimony contained in a particularly fragile support, newspapers must be preserved and rescued. Safeguarding these materials is a priority task for those of us who have the responsibility of upholding our national patrimony. It is in this perspective, and in the framework of the "Memory of the World" Programme that the project "Memory of Iberoamerica" finds its *raison d'être*.

Present Situation

As a result of diagnosis and information gathered through surveys, ABINIA, together with the IFLA/PAC Centre for Latin America and the Caribbean which functions in the National Library of Venezuela, detected a series of shortcomings which pointed to the urgent need to develop this project. The most important of these were:

- Inadequate storage conditions, with serious climatic and infrastructure deficiencies

- Uneven collection development
- Weak bibliographic control which impeded the identification of missing issues
- A significant percentage of collections had not been microfilmed
- In the region, government agencies responsible for the preservation of cultural patrimony have paid very little attention to archives, printed works on paper, and audiovisual materials.

General Objective

The general objective of the project is to identify, localize, organize, preserve, and disseminate information about collections of 19th century Iberoamerican newspapers available in national libraries of the region, so as to safeguard this support and guarantee access to the information.

ABINIA adopted the project on Rescuing 19th Century Newspapers in its Madrid Assembly held in October 1992, taking into account diagnostic results and the importance of these materials to the academic community as a first-hand historical source.

Project Phases

The phases of the project were as follows:

- Organization and processing of material to create a Union Catalogue
- Preservation by microfilming, establishment of adequate storage, and adoption of other conservation standards
- Assurance of access and dissemination by way of a CD-ROM containing digitized images and bibliographic records of the material
- Promotion of research and exhibits on the subject.

Project Development

Phase 1: Development of Union Catalogue 1993-1995

- Definition of the following normative guidelines for the Union Catalogue:
 - a) Adopt and adapt the 30-item information-gathering form used by U.S. academic libraries for the Federal Project on Newspaper Inventories sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities.
 - b) Design a database in Notis Software using Marc Format and Anglo-American Rules, 2nd edition.

- c) Elaborate a NOTIS-Microsis conversion programme to ensure wider access in Latin America.
- d) Develop a set of standardized abbreviations based on the ISO 1177-78 norm (Symbols for the identification of languages, countries and organizations) to identify record location by library.
- Data from Venezuela was used to create the Union Catalogue.
 - In 1993 an information-gathering form was distributed to the national libraries in Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba and Peru.
 - In 1993, initial data from the above mentioned countries was input into automated Union Catalogue for a total of 1,145 records.
 - In 1994, data from the national libraries of Brazil, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico is added for an accumulated total of 3,100 records.
 - In 1995, information from the national libraries of Chile and Portugal was incorporated and new records from the National Libraries of Brazil and Colombia brought the accumulated total to 5,729.
 - In 1996, the input of data from the National Library of Mexico brought the total number of participants to 12 and total records to 6,000.
 - In 1997, eight institutions were incorporated: the national libraries of Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Spain and Uruguay. The database reached a total of 8,329 records, according to data specified as follows:

Country	Register Number
Argentina	53
Brazil	2,592
Bolivia	7
Colombia	1,447
Costa Rica	183
Cuba	253
Chile	202
Ecuador	91
Spain	400
Guatemala	10 *
Honduras	7
Mexico	293
Nicaragua	253
Peru	308
Puerto Rico	134
Portugal	357
Panama	137
Uruguay	80
Venezuela	1,522
Total General	8,329

[* We are waiting for 85 new records to be sent by the Guatemala National Library]

Phase 2: Preservation

During the second half of 1995, a request for financial aid for a regional workshop on microfilming was submitted to UNESCO. Approved in 1996, this workshop was held in Caracas on 16 September 1996, for five national libraries: Cuba, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Peru. Its cost of USD 24,120, was distributed as follows: UNESCO: USD 15,000; National Library of Venezuela: USD 9,120.

The selection criteria applied for attendance to workshop were:

- Holding collections of 19th century newspapers with bibliographic control.
- Availability of a minimum infrastructure of microfilming equipment and personnel in the corresponding national library
- The commitment of the national librarian to the project.

The workshop's final product was the elaboration of a quality control plan for microform production in each of the countries.

A guideline for organizing microform archives emphasizing adequate storage conditions is being elaborated.

Phase 3: Digitization and Dissemination

ABINIA submitted a request to the Andrew Mellon Foundation for financial support for the pilot stage of the third phase of the project: digitizing 1,161 titles of Venezuelan 19th century newspapers and subsequent edition in CD-ROM.

Selection Criteria. Venezuelan 19th century newspapers are the only ones that have been totally microfilmed and catalogued. The project was to start during the second half of 1996 and last for 18 months. Costs were estimated at USD 151,863 in local funds and USD 318,115 in international funds.

Products. The products would be 1) a digitized database; 2) a CD-ROM conformed by bibliographic records and images of Venezuelan 19th century newspapers.

Future Actions

Future actions include:

- Enhancement of union catalogues with entries from countries such as Spain, Guatemala and Paraguay,

which hold important collections

- Promotion of microfilming activities starting from the regional workshop
- Intensification of interlibrary loans and exchange of microfilmed material
- Provision of online access to the digitized database
- Transferring the digitization experience to other countries which have completed the previous phases (bibliographic control and microfilming)
- Promotion of exhibits and research.

John Agada and Malore I. Brown

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Towards a Networked Community of Africans in the Diaspora: Problems and Prospects

Introduction

Information is recognized as the most strategic resource in contemporary society.^{1,2} With this recognition has come the quest for universal access to national and global information infrastructures.³ These infrastructures facilitate retrieval of recorded knowledge from databases as well as communication between system users worldwide. The Internet is the symbol of this emergent information environment. Connectivity to and use of the Internet is therefore perceived as a measure of the degree to which individuals or groups exploit the benefits of the new information resource.

The African Diaspora has historically been one of the most isolated regions of the globe. Since the peoples of the Diaspora share a common cultural heritage and socio-economic conditions, access to the Internet would enable them to create culturally relevant networks for sharing experiences and collaborating to solve common problems. Surveys of Internet access, however, suggest that these populations experience low connectivity and use compared to other regions and races.^{4,6} This finding may be attributed to factors ranging from culture, technology, politics, and economics.^{7,8}

This article discusses the unique prospects of Internet access for networking among peoples of the Diaspora and attendant obstacles. Based on the insider-outsider theory of information transfer from the sociology of knowledge⁹ it is assumed that use of the Internet by this group would increase if more information on the net

were contributed by persons from within their subculture. The article therefore suggests avenues for developing indigenous capacities for networking across the region. A sample of Web sites contributed by peoples of African origins is appended.

Rationale for Diaspora-Wide Networks

Conditions of Underdevelopment in the African Diaspora

The African Diaspora consists of all regions inhabited by Africans and their descendants. For purposes of this article, the regions of interest will be limited to Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and North America. In this article examples will be drawn from Nigeria, Jamaica and inner cities of the USA. Although dispersed geographically, these regions share a heritage of African ancestry. Consequently, there is a cultural continuity throughout the region as manifested in the arts, language, music, beliefs and lifestyles.¹⁰ In the health sciences, for instance, conditions such as sickle cell anemia and hypertension in the West have been traced to genetic roots on the African continent.¹¹

Peoples of the African Diaspora are also characterized by conditions of underdevelopment, poverty and need. African Americans who inhabit one of the foremost industrialized nations are no exception. According to a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report, more than 82% of the countries in the African Diaspora belong among the regions with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) in the world. The HDI is a measure of life expectancy at birth, income, adult literacy and mean years of schooling.¹² The following table illustrates the disparity between the

Table 1: Human Development Index (1992)*

Nation	Life Expectancy at birth	Adult literacy rate (%)	Mean years of schooling	HDI
High HDI (standard)	74.1	97.3	9.8	0.886
U.S.A.*	75.6	99.0	12.4	0.925
Spain	77.4	98.0	6.9	0.888
Chile	71.9	93.8	7.8	0.848
China	70.5	80.0	5.0	0.644
The Caribbean				
Grenada	70.0	98.0	4.7	0.707
Haiti	56.0	55.0	1.7	0.354
Jamaica	73.3	98.5	5.3	0.743
Africa				
Nigeria	51.9	52.0	1.2	0.348
Uganda	42.6	50.5	1.1	0.272
Zambia	45.5	74.8	2.7	0.352

*African Americans are at least 10 points below the USA figures.

The origins of these conditions may be traced to the slave trade and consequent colonization of the region by Europe. The economies and peoples of the African Diaspora have remained the most dependent and marginalized within the global system, long after national independence and emancipation from slavery. Today, their populations serve as consumer markets for Western manufactured goods, aid and welfare programmes.¹³ Except for the USA, their national economies are debt-ridden and undergoing structural adjustment programmes under the aegis of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.¹⁴ Despite the infusion of numerous development programmes during the last three decades, the conditions of underdevelopment in the Diaspora have persisted.¹⁵

The modest dividends of aid and welfare programmes in the Diaspora may be traced to the fact that they were often conceived and packaged by "experts" whose world views and value systems are inconsistent with

those of potential implementers and beneficiaries.^{16,17} Agada posits that these programmes are informed by positivist assumptions that knowledge had universal and historical relevance.¹⁸ Consequently, little attempt was made to adapt these programs and their infrastructures to the needs, aspirations and value systems of the consumers. A counter-movement seems to be emerging in current approaches to development.

Grassroots Participation as a Development Strategy

The history of development models since the turn of the century suggests ten-year shifts in strategies.¹⁹ Between 1955 and 1975, development strategies were dominated by the "trickle-down" and "basic needs" perspectives. While the "trickle down" perspective favored central government planning and control of economic growth initiatives, the "basic needs" approach which emerged around 1965 favored

decentralized administration, emphasizing social equity over growth as measured by economic indices only. This people orientation evolved by the late 1970s into the grassroots participation approach. Although the emphasis on social equity was maintained, the role of the people shifted from being passive recipients of development "inputs" to being active designers of development projects.

These perspectives converged with the emergence since the late 1980s of a new development strategy of indigenous capacity building. This approach is defined as "open and pluralist, providing the conditions in which economic and political restructuring can take place in a constructive fashion".²⁰ Small group and individual initiatives are coordinated through intermediaries such as non-governmental and community-based organizations. The quest for social equity within this development strategy assumes a democratic process in society. The wave of democratic reforms across the globe since the last decade is in part a legacy of this development ideology.²¹

The implications of these approaches to development efforts in the African Diaspora are two fold. First, they call for grassroots participation in the design and delivery of development programmes. Secondly, since indigenous experts are few and far between, they draw attention to a need for them to exchange ideas and collaborate on joint projects. Given their shared historical, cultural and socio-economic conditions, they could share experiences of adaptations of "Western" or Eurocentric-oriented programmes to local problems. Such networks are likely to yield higher dividends in resolving problems arising from their common conditions.

Diaspora-wide collaborations would facilitate development of a body of indigenous knowledge and practices relevant to local needs as well as other parts of the developing world. As Esther Hicks, General Secretary of the Advisory Council for Scientific Research in Development Problems in the Netherlands noted, "Research results such as the lessons learned from Senegal and the Gambia about the effectiveness - in the field - of oral and injectable polio vaccines are potentially also relevant in South Asia, for example".²² Such knowledge, however, rarely crosses national borders. The Internet would make such Diaspora-wide communication and grassroots participation in development activities feasible. The prospects of Diaspora-wide networks using the Internet to balance global information flows and enhance communication efficiency and effectiveness are covered below.

Prospects for Diaspora-Wide Networks

Balancing Global Information Flows

Compared to print, information sharing on the Internet is theoretically more democratic, allowing dialogue rather

than one way communication. In the 1970s and 1980s, imbalances in the flows of communication of news and research content had led developing countries in UNESCO forums to advocate a "New World Information Order".²³ Such imbalances are still evident in the control of news by a few multinational entities based in the West. Recently, David Lush of the Media Institute of Southern Africa lamented that "newspapers in Botswana were relying on Reuters for a story on Namibia and if there was no war or famine in Namibia, then no news on Namibia appeared in the papers".²⁴

Similar patterns of coverage are evident in the scholarly literature. Analysis of scientific papers published in 1994 by some 3,300 journals included in the Science Citation Index, a commercial database widely used by researchers indicated these contributions by the following countries:

Table 2: Number of Papers Indexed in *Science Citation Index*, 1994

African Diaspora		Non African Diaspora	
Nigeria	0.073*	U.S.	30.817
Jamaica	0.029	U.K.	7.924
Zimbabwe	0.024	Spain	2.028
Haiti	0.001	China	1.339
Bahamas	0.000	Chile	0.176

* Percentage of total for all nations

This imbalance in contributions from the African Diaspora and the rest of the world prevents researchers in these countries from sharing their discoveries with the industrialized world and with one another. This state of affairs may be attributed to patterns in the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge in the West. Inclusion in the *Science Citation Index* and a few top databases ensures that an article will be read and cited when scientists search the literature for new discoveries in their field. Western research libraries and database publishers also rely on citation rates to select the journals they include.

For journals from the less developed world, this is a vicious circle. According to Benitez-Bribiesca, editor of a Mexican medical journal, "We don't get many citations, because the journal is not well known because it is not in the international indexes". This closed system of review and citation has also been blamed on subtle prejudices as evident in the remark by Jerome Kassirer, Editor-in-Chief of the *New England Journal of Medicine*: "Very poor countries have much more to worry about than doing high quality research...There is no science there".²⁵

Such sentiments make the Internet appropriate for researchers, professionals and lay persons in the African Diaspora to share their work, experiences and findings, rather than pander to the research agenda of their colleagues in the West. In 1995, Benitez had observed that although researchers in Mexico have discovered new strains of drug-resistant cholera, "international journals refuse our papers because they don't consider cholera a hot topic. But what if these strains spread across the border to Texas or California? They will think it important then. Meanwhile, the previous knowledge about the disease will have been lost."²⁶ Researchers in the Diaspora who rely on Western scientific literature therefore learn of problems or discoveries of local relevance only when such problems have reached epidemic proportions with global implications as in the case of the outbreak of Ebola in Central Africa.

The Internet is said to be a symbol of the information era, as the book was for the industrial era. As a "system of systems",²⁷ it comprises multiple public and private telecommunications networks with the capacity for transmitting voice, data, text and visual information. Besides its use as an information source, the Internet is also a communication tool. The latter use may be in the forms of electronic mail, bulletin board, electronic journal and computer conferencing. However, the development of its services and content already reflects the biases of the print era. As Michael Marriott and his colleagues observed:

Blacks can feel like interlopers when they venture into computer stores, crammed with software that seldom reflects black images or African American tastes and habits. While popular CD-ROM discs are transforming computer screens into art museums of European and Euro-American art, few discs feature African or Latin American and African American art. The solution may be in browning of cyberspace. That means more content and services that appeal to non-whites.²⁸

Enhancing Communication Efficiency and Effectiveness

Internet and electronic networking facilities provide savings in time and cost, compared to telephone and mail services. These savings may be in forms of:

- increased efficiency through elimination of unreturned telephone calls and memos. Participants in an exchange do not have to be present simultaneously for messages to be received.
- costs are reduced due to lower phone and mail rates and reduction in paper work.
- increased effectiveness by offering additional communication options, adapting to user convenience and providing archives of user transactions.

Use of the Internet for dialogue between individuals and groups in the African Diaspora would ameliorate its

image as a "white thing".²⁹ Africans in the Diaspora suspect the validity and relevance of knowledge originating from outside their lived experiences, trusting personal more than impersonal sources.^{30,31} Like print, most contributors of information on the Internet are not black and come from outside the Diaspora.^{32,33} However, the prospects for reducing ethnocentric bias in communication are higher for the Internet than print.

In 1996, Nicholas Negropte³⁴ advanced three reasons why the Internet can be made free of ethnocentric bias:

- *Low entry cost.* One could publish on the Internet in any language with less than USD 2,000 in capital equipment and USD 10 per month in recurrent costs.
- *Customized access.* Information can be delivered to a sparsely populated universe around the globe, without regard to geographic density and mass audience criteria. Thus, five Yoruba-speaking physicians, who may have different lingua franca, can consult with each other and their clients on the effect of drugs, food and life style on conditions of sickle cell anemia.
- *Selectivity.* You "pull" information from the Internet, rather than have it "pushed" at you. Consequently, the reader has control of choice in what to view. Its potentials for multimedia and language translation (with multilingual browser) enhances its relevance and use by non-literates and non-English speaking populations who constitute a majority in the Diaspora.

To be competitive in the global economy, for instance, "national markets" in the African Diaspora need to be unified into regional systems. Online access to electronic markets and investment flows would enable formation of alliances and the development of niches for Diaspora products and services in the global marketplace. Without such collaboration, competitive production of raw materials and services could create conditions of oversupply and price dampening in the global economy. The fall in cocoa prices between 1986 and 1989 by almost 48%, for example, is attributed to boosts in cocoa exports by the contiguous West African nations of Ghana, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire.³⁵ Although these countries are members of the West African Economic Commission (ECOWAS), there had been little information sharing and coordination of their market environments and strategies.³⁶

However, the Internet has been largely perceived as a unidirectional information source. The interactive communication facilities of the Internet has not been well publicized. Given the popularity of added values to telephone services, such as cellular, three-way lines, call waiting options among the African American population in the USA, it is speculated that the prospects of the Internet in the Diaspora lie in its use as a communications tool. Several obstacles however, need to be overcome become such prospects are realized.

Obstacles to Internet Access and Use

Obstacles to Internet access and use may be traced to historical and contemporary trends in the region. These trends are due to political, technological, economic, and socio-cultural factors.

Political Factors

Although the peoples of the African Diaspora share a history and culture, the colonial experience left on them imprints of diverse political, economic and ideological systems. Thus, in each country, a system of European world views, values and language was superimposed on indigenous ethnic cultures and languages. In West Africa, for instance, the Yoruba ethnic group like many others, was divided into French and English colonies. The assimilationist policies of the French and American governments ensured that educated citizens of French colonies and African Americans respectively, were even more differentiated from their counterparts in other parts of the Diaspora. These differences are further exacerbated by the absence of a harmonized information infrastructure for Diaspora-wide networking.

Although new patterns of influence replaced the colonial balkanization of the Diaspora, Internet service providers still operate on national, rather than regional basis. Since no country (except Brazil) or group of Africans produce their own communications technology, the trend to deregulate the industry promises to place the provision of Internet services throughout the Diaspora in the hands of multinational corporations. Consequently the same multinational entity could theoretically serve African populations in the USA, Jamaica and Nigeria. Although such monopoly has not materialized, the prospect raises problems of the sovereignty of those nations as well as the security, privacy and control of the intellectual products of their citizens. It also discourages development of indigenous telecommunications industries.

Technological Factors: Structural

The infrastructures for information services installed in the African Diaspora were inherited from the erstwhile colonies of Europe. The Caribbean and African nations, unlike the USA, could not afford to replace these systems upon gaining independence. Most often, the quality and stability of electrical power in these countries was therefore marginal and their communication facilities, particularly the switching devices, were unsuitable for transmission of digital data. Moreover, the region is home to a vast variety of national information infrastructures, many of which have incompatible telecommunications and electricity standards.

International contact within the Diaspora is therefore difficult. For example, telephone contact between Lagos

in English-speaking Nigeria and Lome in French-speaking Benin Republic, which are less than 100 miles apart, has to be routed through London and Paris, because of their colonial links.³⁷ Such bottlenecks have persisted in the coupling of national infrastructures. For example, links between the 100% digital network of Botswana and the extensive, digital, fiber optic and ISDN capacities of South Africa can only be coupled with analog circuits at 9.6 Kbps,³⁸ which is barely enough for individual user, let alone an entire nation's international traffic onto the global information infrastructure. Such problems leave satellite and off-continent connections as viable options for intra-Diaspora communication.

This option is, however, unpopular in countries where the communications industry has not been fully deregulated. In Nigeria, for instance, the government has clamped down on satellite phone companies which circumvent the services of the state-run Nigerian Telecommunications (NITEL).³⁹ In Jamaica too, all the private service providers are tied to the government mandated telephone monopoly.⁴⁰

In Africa, although up to 40 countries have electronic connectivity, only Egypt, Zambia, South Africa, Ghana, Algeria and Mozambique have direct Internet access. Others access the Internet via nodes in the host countries of donor agencies. In Southern Africa, there are no less than 45 service providers.⁴¹ International donors and non-governmental agencies are largely responsible for such access at little or no fees. There is, however, little coordination between them. As a result, incompatible systems which cannot "speak" directly to each other have been installed within one country. In Nigeria, for instance, e-mails between Lagos and Ilorin, cities which are about 100 miles apart, have to be routed through the nodes of their respective sponsors: the UNESCO Regional Informatics Network in Africa in Italy and McMaster University, Ontario, Canada.⁴² Similarly, e-mail messages between Kingston and Mandeville, both in Jamaica are routed through the Network Access Point in Virginia, USA.⁴³ Such routing not only makes use of the Internet slow and expensive, but is reminiscent of the colonial telephone services.

Technological Factors: Social

Internet hardware and software are mostly developed and produced outside of the Diaspora. To attain optimal benefits, Internet use ought to be integrated, not only into the technical but also the cultural, and socio-economic environment of the Diaspora. Access to and effective use of the Internet require literate and technically skilled populations. The lack of indigenous skilled systems designers, programmers and analysts would limit the degree to which services could be customized to local needs and communication patterns. Currently however, unemployment is relatively high throughout the African Diaspora and their labor force is poorly trained. Moreover, there are indications that

illiteracy and the school dropout rates are on the increase among these populations.⁴⁴

Use of the Internet suggests an increase in the level and education of the work force. Moreover, there is evidence that children who have computers in the home are more likely to be computer-literate.⁴⁵ Given the socio-economic conditions in the Diaspora, ownership of computers is largely restricted to the upper middle class. A 1994 study for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, for instance, found that black households had the lowest rate of ownership of computers and modems among the racial groups in the USA.⁴⁶ In Africa and the Caribbean, the cost of a PC could be equivalent to several years' of a middle class income, thanks to IMF mandated currency devaluation. Consequently, most network participants depend on institutional, mostly government computers and subsidized billing payments. In addition, e-mail correspondence yielded several responses in which individuals from several Caribbean countries (Jamaica, Trinidad and the Bahamas) stated that they did have Internet access, but only through their place of employment or attendance at a university. Most respondents stated that they did not own a personal computer and the few that did own a computer stated the computers were not Internet-capable.⁴⁷

Although the grassroots vision of the Internet is yet to be realized in the more affluent West, the prospects for such a vision are more dismal in African Diaspora. It is unlikely, for instance, that multinationals would champion the diverse needs of the specialized submarkets and niches of these populations. Such needs, which include the development of multilingual browsers for indigenous language translations and the integration of voice and image capabilities in electronic networks, may be unattractive to profit-seeking multinationals. There is an historical precedent in the publishing of indigenous language literature in Africa during the last three decades. Such specialized markets were shunned by profit-oriented publishers. Sponsorship of services to specialized groups like non-literate and indigenous-speaking populations may therefore be left to the government and donor community.⁴⁸

Socio-Economic Factors

Capital resources in Africa and the Caribbean are scarce and many of the nations are debt ridden and currently undergoing economic structural adjustment. Investment in importation and maintenance of computers without direct and visible impact on the economy may therefore be hard to justify. Moreover, it may be argued that traditional communication modes are cheaper and more convenient (not requiring specialized training) than the investment in computer networks. Computers may also be perceived as replacing workers when used for clerical and labor intensive tasks.

A reoccurring issue in the development of networks in the Diaspora relates to project sustainability. According

to Lisse, "too many projects in developing countries have faltered after the outside funding ran out."⁴⁹ Issues in the sustainability of network projects range from funding to technical support, service value, and user ownership of projects. With dwindling aid budgets and the constraints on expenditures placed on welfare and social service programmes, it is unlikely that many network projects will survive without fees. Economics of scale therefore serves as a powerful incentive for expanding network communities.

According to the Nairobi-based Environment Liaison Centre International (ELCI), a self-sustaining community using Fidonet software would require a base of 50 users paying USD 10 per month and 50 cents per message. While such rates may be considered "cheap" in Western terms, in Africa where countries such as Ghana suffered a currency devaluation of up to 97%, without a commensurate growth in real income, they are exorbitant.⁵⁰

Cost may not be the only deterrent to Internet use. Other reasons may arise from the lack of a technological culture. A study of use of a Milwaukee-based "grassroots" electronic network, however, indicated that provision of these services alone does not guarantee use. Although the five-year old service charged an annual subscription fee of USD 25 (which could be waived based on need), none of the study sample of gatekeepers in Milwaukee's African American inner city neighborhood had ever used the network.⁵¹

Conclusion

Recommendations

Many of the obstacles identified above fall in the realm of international economic and political relations; and therefore beyond the direct responsibilities of information professionals. However, the need to update existing infrastructures and train skilled manpower has long been recognized.⁵² Given the multiple initiatives by national governments, multinational enterprises and non-governmental organizations, it is reasonable to expect that the structural problems of technology access may be resolved in a couple of years.

The economic and social obstacles may be ameliorated in part by integrating the Internet into the information environment of Africans in the Diaspora. To ensure sustained use, the Internet must be identified with the popular cultural communication modes among Africans in the Diaspora. In particular, it ought to provide access to such knowledge systems that define reality for the majority of the populations. Such undertaking would involve those schooled in indigenous knowledge systems in information exchange on the Internet. Indigenous knowledge ultimately needs to be

documented, organized, up-loaded (in diverse formats and languages) and made accessible at any location. The following recommendations were made specifically for the Black Caucus of the American Library Association and its sister organizations in Africa and the Caribbean:

1. Create a consortium of library associations in the Diaspora to serve as an advocacy group to monitor Internet access and use among Diaspora populations as well as a forum for training and sharing expertise, resources and experiences.
2. Seek grants to support projects for linking libraries that do not have access to the Internet and training of staff and clients.
3. Organize workshops (free of charge or subsidized) for training on computer and Internet use for clients, and encourage them to input data to the Internet, rather than use it solely for information retrieval.
4. Establish a listserv devoted to discussions relevant to common interests and problems of professionals and lay persons alike throughout the Diaspora.
5. Create home pages on the World Wide Web linked to information on the Internet dealing with issues of interest to Diaspora listservs and discussion groups.
6. Establish electronic mail services between clients throughout the Diaspora.

Summary

Peoples of the African Diaspora are historically the most isolated populations of the world. Given their shared history, culture, and socio-economic conditions, they could benefit from sharing ideas, experiences and collaborating to resolve common problems. The Internet and electronic networking technologies offer timely ways to interact with information resources and individuals worldwide. Current development and democratic forces all over the world favor the use of the Internet for mass information sharing between professionals, scholars and lay persons alike in the Diaspora. Obstacles for mass access to and use of Internet and networking technologies have origins in the historical and contemporary developments in the political, socio-economic, and technology transfer issues of the Diaspora.

This poses an enormous challenge to librarians, archivists, and documentalists, among others. While librarians and information professionals cannot directly impact all these factors, it is recommended that if we create Diaspora-wide professional linkages, offer forums for clients across the Diaspora to network, and encourage mass training and education on the values and use of the Internet, such programmes would go a long way in inculcating a culture of Internet use and ownership of its content in the Diaspora.

Appendix

Web Site Contributed by Peoples of the Diaspora

- American Visions: <http://www.americanvisions.com>
A magazine of Afro-American culture, art, history, music, cuisine, heritage; an online service and web hosting service.
- Go-Jamaica: <http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com>
Provides up-to-date information by the national newspaper (The Gleaner). Includes current news, tourism information and information on commerce and industry.
- SpectraLinks: <http://maelstrom.stjohns.edu/archives/spectralinks.html>
Internet guide to African Americans.
- USAfrica Online: <http://www.usafricaonline.com>
A medium to bring Africans and African Americans to the same issues and interests of community service and strategic business networking.
- WorldWide Black Online: <http://www.wwbol.com>
A forum to develop and publish information for people of African descent on the Internet.
- Blackworld: <http://www.Blackworld.com>
"Your Friendly Internet Directory" includes "webvertisers" classified listings of businesses in Jamaica, Nigeria, Toronto, London, Capetown, Los Angeles and San Francisco.
- NetNoir: <http://www.netnoir.com>
Interactive online community for Blacks. Includes cultural information, news, entertainment, business and politics and shopping.

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Women as Managers of Libraries: A Developmental Process in India

Introduction

The status of women has to be measured by the actual position occupied by women in society, family, place of work and within the economic power structure. Since status is synonymous with power, prestige and privilege, the measurement of the actual status of women in any society will obviously mean the power enjoyed, followed by the prestige and privileges attached to the seat of power.

In the Indian context the power enjoyed by a woman until very recently was basically dependent upon the hierarchical position within the family and motherhood, especially of male children. The economic status of an Indian woman was dependent upon the family occupation and the position held by the father, husband or son. The selection of a profession was not common for women within the economic system of the middle and upper echelons of Indian society. The educated working woman is a new concept mainly of the late 19th and the early 20th century in the world and the process is slower in the Indian context.

The freedom movement and the partition of the Indian sub-continent have been vital in the emergence of the economic role of the Indian woman in the educated Indian society. Women's participation in white collar employment other than teaching, nursing and the medical profession is a 20th century phenomenon in India.

Librarianship as a Profession for Women

Librarianship as a profession in India was for the scholar librarians until the early part of the 20th century. It was mainly only men of letters who were custodians of

libraries and the written cultural heritage. However, the first woman credited with occupying a key post in India was Anandibai Prabhudesai, who was the superintendent at the children's library in Baroda in the 1930s.

The social stereotype is clearly reflected in the division of professions which need specific training and higher education. Academia, scientific professions, research, law, etc., are male-oriented and male-dominated professions, whereas teaching, social work, and, later librarianship have been considered service professions which are suitable for women. It has always been observed in both developed and developing countries that women by nature and upbringing can better support the service professions. The main dichotomy of the situation is that when it comes to higher positions there is a hierarchical discrimination because the decision makers allege that the women bearing poor health, and lack of business and decision-making abilities, justified their second-rate status within the profession.

Through various surveys it has been seen that in more developed countries women still accounted for more than 80% of the library profession. But in most countries there is a dual career structure for men and women. In the Indian context the situation is slightly different. Women were admitted into the professional arena mainly during the first half of the 20th century. In 1940 the first group of students was admitted to a training course conducted by the Bengal Library Association, Calcutta and in 1942 the first qualified female librarian took a job at the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Until 1975 the number of women in the field of librarianship in India was not very significant. Though it was felt that this profession would be very right for women in India because nature has bestowed women with qualities of patience, sympathy and perseverance, the enrolment statistics now available show that librarianship is still not a female-intensive profession in India. The average ratio

of male:female enrolment in the Bachelor of Library and Information Science and Master of Library and Information Science is 3:2 and 3:1 respectively. Teaching remained the main occupation for women in India until the early 1970s.

Why Women in India Select Librarianship as a Profession

Though women of middle-class families have started working outside the family structure, the social pressures on educated women to accept those jobs which will fit into the stereotype of Indian womanhood still persist. Teaching, social work and the medical profession were acceptable because these professions were needed not only for the compartmentalization of the sexes, but also to restrict Indian womanhood within the four walls of approved diktat. Librarianship as a profession developed in the early 1940s and by the 1960s the major universities had training courses in librarianship. Education being the main thrust of independent India, the need for setting up libraries became inevitable. Employment in libraries came within the purview of the government, universities, academic institutions, research organizations, etc.

Women opted to take up librarianship as a career often due to the following reasons:

- Women who wanted employment but were not particularly prepared to teach, considered librarianship a good alternative, because the environment would be academic whereas the work would not have the requirement of teaching on a regular basis.
- Security of women is a major factor in an Indian family. Indian society being totally compartmentalized between the sexes, which is reflected in the upbringing of boys and girls, the work place which ensures security has a very important role in women's employment.
- The qualities expected in an Indian woman are suited to the activities in a library.
- Librarianship generally does not demand mobility in service, and women in India are not expected to be mobile outside the family structure.
- Jobs in a library can allow women to remain unattached to colleagues and the public especially to males.

Status and Hierarchical Position of Women in Librarianship in India

The Indian Library system can be divided into five major areas of work: the national library system; academic library system; special library system; public library system; and informatics.

Within these systems of librarianship, women now work in various capacities and positions. However, the age-old stereotype of regarding the women's role as teachers, and child bearers and rearers is reflected in the staff structure of these systems also. Within these systems there is a major difference between the type of libraries that absorb the maximum number of women. Very much like the Western world the children's libraries, school libraries and to a certain extent college libraries employ women as librarians in larger numbers, in contrast to the scientific and specialized library system. Women are also in demand in girls' schools and women's colleges which are in significant numbers in India. But within the hierarchy of the library system the prevalence of women in these types of libraries does not make them eligible to occupy the top positions in major libraries. In the government library sector the maximum number of women are seen in a cadre which is above the paraprofessionals but below the decision-making level.

The percentage of women librarians in different categories in the three large libraries under the government of India such as the National Library, Central Secretariat Library and the Delhi Public Library clearly shows that most women hold posts up to the sectional head only. The topmost positions are still held by males in general.

The reasons for this situation are manifold.

- Women professionals are often satisfied with the qualifications which will place them at a convenient level in the professional ladder.
- Since mobility of women is not an acceptable feature in an Indian family, especially for married women, women in libraries have to wait for their chance for promotion on a seniority basis as and when such vacancies arise.
- Most families consider women's income as a supplementary input which caters to the additional necessities of a household in general. Therefore, women are satisfied to hold a convenient position which will enable them to pay more attention to their family responsibilities.
- The male ego often works as a deterrent for women of substance to aspire to higher positions in service.
- It is still true that women are brought up to be more concerned about personal and familial relationships in contrast to men whose personal achievements reflect the achievements of the family as a whole.
- The qualities which are expected and accepted in men are not acceptable in women. A man who is career-oriented is lauded, whereas a woman who is equally concerned about her capabilities and career is branded as careerist in a negative sense.
- There is a lack of training for women to cope with the new developments in the profession.

Redeeming Features in the Indian Situation

Unlike developed countries, most Indian libraries which are under the government or under the institutions supported by the government do not have disparity in the pay structure of men and women librarians for holding similar posts and responsibilities.

Since the promotional channels are the same within the different institutions there is less possibility of discrimination in promotion when such vacancies arise.

In spite of these two major issues there are just a handful of women who have reached the higher positions within the library system in India. From this number many have served in American libraries and the British Council libraries in India.

Since most women, especially those who are married, cannot attend training programmes organized outside the city of work, women lag behind their male colleagues. Therefore, when promotions are considered by seniority cum fitness, then the assessment reports do not reflect any additional qualification or achievement. This becomes a deterrent in the case of women.

Moreover, since librarianship does not have an organized cadre as yet, most vacancies are advertised through various media channels. These posts are to be filled through direct recruitment and interviews. Such posts comprise a certain percentage of the total posts available in an institution. Women facing the interview board often do not come up to the expectations of the selectors in the new environment for the following reasons. They are generally shy and not outgoing enough to face the interview board. The interview boards, which mainly are comprised of men in high positions, have a built-in bias against female candidates if the post is of a managerial rank. Due to a lack of proper training, women candidates are not informed enough to be able to face the board with confidence.

Present and Future Trends in Management in Libraries

The libraries of tomorrow will be information centres of a new type, relying on information technology for almost every aspect of library activities. The skills needed to handle future library services will be different from what they are at present. In this new world of information technology the female librarians of tomorrow will also have to be equally skilled to have the status which they deserve. However, at present, the indications are that women will have less opportunities to develop the skills needed for running the libraries of tomorrow due to the factors mentioned earlier. Special motivating facilities will have to be created to provide equal opportunities to women professionals at all levels. The future managerial models will also change with the changing concept of librarianship.

Influences of Gender in Librarianship

For centuries it has been accepted that leadership comes automatically to men, and women, being dependent and submissive, lack leadership qualities. However, research from both the points of view of psychology and management has been carried out in developed countries on this issue. Though women were expected to accept the male behavioral stereotype when they held high position in the past, the recent concept emphasizes that in democratic and humane management the old male-oriented, autocratic and directive style may not be accepted in the future. Interpersonal relationships and participative style of administration often have better task accomplishments. In the information age the value of the old hierarchical system of administration may be too bureaucratic, and the future system may believe more in communication flow within the system. In this new environment women's understanding, patience and sincerity might prove better and more fruitful than the male-oriented, competitive, tough and decisive administration. Women will help in interacting with subordinates and encourage participation rather than issue directives to subordinates from the top.

Acceptance of Women as Leaders

Although the scenario throughout the world and in India as well is developing towards acceptance of women in high places, in the field of librarianship the notion of women as leaders is still foreign to both male and female staff. Women who usually reach the top positions have to be extremely well qualified, must have proven records of accomplishment and have to be well prepared for the positions to which they aspire. Once these positions are attained, women have to balance between their accepted behavioral pattern and the role expected of a professional in that position.

The Prospects for Indian Women in Managerial Positions in the Indian Context

Though I am a woman librarian, I have had the opportunity to hold some of the highest positions in the library system of India. In spite of the fact that this is an exception rather than the rule, I have felt that there are some problems which the Indian woman faces if given higher positions; but at the same time the qualities available in the psyche of the Indian woman often make it easier for her to work as a successful administrator in a democratic set up.

In the Indian context it is seen that once a woman proves her ability as a professional and acquires a high status within the profession, the Indian situation permits her to develop in the right direction and she is given her due respect and importance by her male colleagues as

well as superiors. Strangely enough she often finds women subordinates facing problems if she believes in equality between her subordinates. Women employees are often used to taking undue privileges, citing their social and familial responsibilities and male bosses usually do not interfere in this situation. A woman superior who is well aware of such behavior may become unpopular if she does not believe in granting privileges at the cost of duties and expects equality of responsibility between male and female professionals. This situation, however, may be just a passing phase because women are also becoming more aware of their responsibilities in their place of work, and social attitudes in the Indian society are also undergoing change. There is a new wave of anti-discriminatory attitudes, and there are less patriarchal and dictatorial males. All this will also help in changing the attitude of women as professionals.

The Changing Role of Women in Indian Librarianship

Though librarianship has been stereotyped as a woman-oriented vocation in developed countries, the Indian situation cannot be stereotyped in that direction. As noted earlier, it is seen that from the university level itself, the number of female students is still less than their male counterparts. There is also the dropout factor. However, the reasons for resignation are different for males and females. Whereas the male student often resigns to join more lucrative avenues, women often have to resign due to marriage and to suit the family convenience.

In the past 20 years it can be seen that the number of women managers in libraries has increased. The "International Year of the Woman, 1975" did not see more than ten senior professionals in this field, whereas at present eight libraries are being headed by women librarians in the city of Mumbai alone. Of course the situation in Mumbai is not representative of the country as a whole and does not necessarily indicate the trend. However, many specialized libraries in the larger cities are also being headed by women.

There are certain developments which should take place within this field to allow women to become good managers. While gauging management capabilities of women it may be said that there are natural abilities in Indian women which will help them to be good managers. To elaborate this point it is stated that the psyche of the Indian woman is a product of the familial and social situation. The expectations of the family and society from an Indian woman is sincerity, patience and understanding. All three qualities help in making a person a successful administrator in the new environment.

The library system as a whole should emphasize the following to allow women to perform well at the higher levels.

- Women should be able to select their placement so that they can utilize their capability to the maximum. Since employment is no longer available on a platter they have to take jobs for which they are either not competent or they are not interested in performing. Such situations lead to placement of women in libraries and institutions where their actual capabilities are not recognized. Therefore, the vicious circle of non-performance and thereby non-selection for higher decision-making position starts.
- Women should be encouraged to take up jobs in new and challenging fields of work. Libraries and information systems which will cater to the need relating to women's development may be taken up as a new challenge by women librarians. Dissemination of relevant information for women's development is the need of the hour in Indian society.
- Suitable training facilities relevant to their special needs should be organized so that they are equipped to handle the new environment in the libraries.
- A support system to help women to cope with the responsibilities of family and career should be developed. This facility, of course, is a part of the larger social responsibility of institutions as a whole and not that of the library in particular.
- That women are not suitable for managerial positions because they cannot handle a large staff is a myth which has to be suitably exploded through seminars, discussion groups, etc., to ensure women's development in the field of librarianship.
- More research on the status of women in the libraries should be conducted to collect and analyze the data which is not available so far. This will help to better the present situation within the library system.

Conclusion

The woman's role in all aspects of Indian political, social and economic fields is undergoing positive changes. India has national and state level commissions for women which are responsible for dealing with women's issues arising in different situations. The constitution of the democratically elected urban and village level local administrative bodies with not less than one-third of the seats occupied by women has provided a tremendous boost to the empowerment of women in India. When women start playing a major role at such levels, the status of women in all fields will automatically change. Women will then become capable of coping with positions at higher levels in all professional fields, and librarianship will not be an exception.

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Internet in All Public Libraries: A Major Government Initiative in Flanders (Belgium)

In the course of 1996-97, the Flemish government connected its complete public library system to the Internet. Although the main objective was of course to provide all citizens with access to information worldwide, the underlying aim was to install a cooperative network among public library institutions which are basically solitary working bodies. Three steps have already been taken: technical connection and installations; training of library staff; and the development of BIBnet, a Web site for public libraries. The challenge for the future is to allow the infrastructure to evolve into the backbone of a genuine public libraries network, that strengthens the collaborative organization and attitude of the networked individual public library.

Background

Since 1995 Belgium has been a federation of two language communities: the Dutch-speaking "Flanders", and the French-speaking "Wallonia". In the '70s, cultural matters, including public libraries, were one of the first governmental departments to be transferred to the communities. Both entities had a Public Libraries Act voted upon in 1978, which was very similar with regard to rationale and content and which had the intention to bring about a landscape of interrelated public library institutions organized in a semi-hierarchical structure. These acts replaced the previous, completely outdated legislation of 1921. This article deals with the situation in Flanders, a country with 5.6 million inhabitants.

A crucial factor in the implementation of the Public Library Act is the legally imposed responsibility for local authorities to organize a public library; only the private initiatives already operational before 1978 could

continue to exist. The Flemish government has taken a bottom-up approach in stimulating the establishment of local public libraries which comply with the rules and regulations of the Public Library Act. The considerable financial effort of grants for staff (85% of salary) and, until 1995, 60% of investment costs resulted in 90% of the 308 communities having a public library, with over 90% of the population living in a library-equipped community. Six central public libraries, one for each province, fulfill a supporting function to the smaller local public libraries in their working area. The coping stone of the Flemish public library structure, a national support centre, has not been established so far.

A tangible result from the Public Library Act is the VLACC, the Flemish Automated Union Catalogue, which was initiated in 1987. During the last four years the impact of this networking initiative has increased markedly because of enhanced automation and networking technology. It is kept up to date through shared cataloguing by the six central public libraries. It is the backbone of the national interlibrary loan system and it offers single public libraries both input for acquisitions as well as the possibility to download records in their local databases.

Half of all public libraries regularly use VLACC data for inhouse activities, but most of them use one of the batch products: a CD-ROM or diskette format. Seven out of ten libraries have been automated or are in one or another preparatory phase. It is not self-evident that smaller public libraries will also become automated effectively over the next few years. After all, the majority of the local communities in Belgium have a very small population, the average being 20,000 inhabitants. This is too small a base and hardly leaves any margin for major investments or innovative services.

The local authorities are autonomous bodies - each one has to cater independently for their citizens' needs - and so there is no stimulus or tradition of cooperation. As noted before, the implementation of the library act resulted in a densely populated library landscape, because most local authorities stood up to the

challenge, but all of them separately and with few means. Since grants are linked to the number of population served, the other side to this dense public library landscape is that most libraries do not have any financial strength for whatever IT-related initiatives in which they might be interested.

Moreover, on the local level, internal administrative rules are too rigid to allow for a flexible and autonomous policy. Since libraries are city departments, they do not possess a dedicated budget which the librarian can spend as he sees fit. Every purchase has to be approved by the city council. This method of deciding and financing severely hampers the integration of new services.

The Internet Strategy

Within the Libraries Department of the Flemish Ministry, a double strategy to overcome this deadlock has been developed. First of all, the library act is actually being revised in order to impose cooperation within a networking structure on all individual libraries. At the same time, an Intranet amongst all public libraries is being put in place.

In July 1996, the Flemish government decided to connect all public libraries to the Internet. Of course, the overriding objective of the government's decision is to provide all citizens with an easily accessible - both in terms of money as well as in assistance offered - connection to information worldwide. Before this aim can be accomplished, it is necessary 1) to have an infrastructure in place; 2) to make sure that librarians are able to work with it; and 3) to provide guidance and assistance for the non-professional user. These requirements correspond with the three main parts of the initiative: the connection of all libraries to the Internet, via a private network, and the making available of the necessary infrastructure; the development of BIBnet, a Web site dedicated to public libraries; and the provision of training to the library staff.

Infrastructure

The infrastructure was put in place by the end of June 1997. This was a major technical operation, implying:

- supplying all 330 public libraries with an ISDN-connection,
- ordering and delivering the hardware configuration (Intel Pentium 133Mhz, 16MB RAM, 256 KB cache, a 1 GB hard disk and 8xspeed CD-ROM drive), plus router,
- installing the systems (Windows Explorer, PC/DACS)
- the reservation of sufficient bandwidth to set up a private network for all public libraries, the basic concept of BIBnet.

All costs associated with this project are paid for by the

Flemish government, except for the communication costs of individual libraries.

Apart from being a convenient tool for the librarian, BIBnet, the Web site for public libraries, allows the "average" library to become familiar with the Internet and its features.

BIBnet as a Communications Channel

At the moment, three communication types are available:

Communication between public libraries and their users

- a general introduction about the Flemish public library system
- making available a manual for the operation, including an overview of "frequently asked questions"
- providing address information
- providing services related to the VLACC
- announcing library news, local and national initiatives
- referring to other library and documentation services
- highlighting new media.

Communication between the public libraries by

- making available a table of contents stating specific information
- communicating via the electronic message traffic
- creating a forum for the exchange of experiences, via electronic discussion groups
- making available a helpdesk to compensate for the often limited technological knowledge of the personnel
- creating a distribution system by making available files, such as annual reports

Communication between the public libraries and the government through

- communication with the Libraries Department, through the electronic sending of messages, announcements and reports
- communication about the VLACC service by loading the accession files and downloading title descriptions, reporting errors related to these descriptions by e-mail
- input of statistical data and immediate processing.

Two communication types will be developed at a later stage: communication between the public libraries and their suppliers; and communication between the users.

Contents of BIBnet

BIBnet consists of two sections. The first one is intended for library users. The second part is reserved for librarians.

A team of 12 librarians (called the WebWijzerWerkgroep) has developed a three-stage model to identify, select, and describe Internet information sources that may be of interest to the Flemish user. One main criteria of course is the language. But apart from that they mainly select on the basis of quality. This is what distinguishes them from search engines such as Alta Vista and Yahoo. The latter only produce lists of hits, without any guarantee for relevance. Moreover, the selected sites are grouped in subject areas, which is another distinctive feature. An abstract is made of each selected site, and it is classified and catalogued according to the VLACC format to allow for reference. Via an option in BIBnet, every librarian coming across an interesting site can inform the subject coordinator, who screens the proposal, adds keywords, and regularly checks to see if the site remains updated.

Library User Section

The "library user" section of the site has the following main heading: the "practical guide", a collection of information sources, specifically selected, classified and disclosed for the average reader and containing 1) the Flemish Union Catalogue (the VLACC); 2) abstracts of new books; and 3) a database with Internet sites.

These files can be accessed in two ways:

- by keyword, based on the keyword authority file, the theme file and the author file of the VLACC. This index is updated daily on the basis of new classified sites and of new or altered keywords, input by the VLACC.
- by means of "search trees". These search trees will be constructed in a dynamic manner on the basis of categories that are assigned to the description of each site.

The union catalogue VLACC can be accessed through a very user-friendly WWW-interface, allowing the user to search on author, title, keyword, and universal classification number. Boolean searches are also possible. The search results are printed or downloaded on disc.

Abstracts of new books are made available to the public. The abstracts can be retrieved by means of keywords or full text-search on the actual texts of the abstracts. Other information consists of HTML pages, hyperlinks to other existing sites, frequently asked questions and bestseller lists. All the pages are structured according to certain layout instructions and reflect a very high degree of user-friendliness.

Librarian Section

The "librarian" section comprises a public librarian's entire working field. Information is grouped under four chapters: 1) macro data: policy statements, legislation, statistics, address books, and history of the libraries; 2) management data: performance measurement, staff, acquisitions, finances, and automation; 3) aspects of services: departments, target groups, and public relations; and 4) regional support: ILL, training, professional events, and professional literature.



The data behind this table of contents can be retrieved via the respective items, but also via a keyword. An editorial group, which is responsible for updating the site, will ensure the contents of these headings and establish links with other sites. Parts of this section are designed for interactive use by: 1) providing statistical data; 2) signalling of Web sites; 3) VLACC subscription and downloading of data (with security for subscribers); and 4) ILL. Other features are a manual of Internet services, such as e-mail, discussion groups, mailing lists, etc. The librarian also has all the options that are offered to the user.

Training of Staff

For each library, two members of staff attended a two-day training course. The first, the theoretical session, covered the following: 1) generalities, background and terminology; 2) introduction to BIBnet, the public library Web site; and 3) introduction to maintenance and support.

In a second, practical session, staff was trained in: 1) using the Internet (use of WWW, indexes and search engines and e-mail); 2) using BIBnet; 3) support and maintenance activities; 4) problem analysis; 5) helpdesk; and 6) managing use of Internet PCs (registration, security) by means of PC/DACS.

Management

The entire project is guided by a Steering Group, composed of representatives of the Libraries Department, the technical partner in charge of the project and 12 librarians. The assignment of the Steering Group is to advise on design and development of the Web site, and to guide the implementation process. With respect to the latter assignment, the following have been achieved so far: 1) the composition of the training package; 2) a set of "user regulations" was drafted which individual libraries can adopt; and 3) an evaluation methodology was developed, identifying a two-stage approach.

On leaving BIBnet, visitors will be offered a brief online questionnaire, requesting a quick response. The answers can be easily processed. In a later stage, focus groups will test and evaluate those areas that needs further investigation and evaluation.

Important areas of work to be accomplished in the near future are:

- broadening and enhancing the communication lines already in place (between librarians, with users and with the Libraries Department).
- exploring the still to be developed communication lines (with suppliers, between users).
- exploring multimedia applications.
- outreach to other sectors: libraries, memory institutions.

The BIBnet Web site is expected to act as a catalyst to get more, if not all, Flemish public libraries on the Internet. BIBnet will offer them a standard yet individualized page on the Web.

Referring to its rationale - to stimulate cooperation between public libraries - this initiative should exceed its features of a worldwide information source and professional communications channel and evolve into the backbone of a public libraries network. The aim is to strengthen the collaborative organization and attitude of the networked individual public library. Models for resource development and resource sharing will be drawn, subsequently tested and evaluated on their impact and cost-effectiveness. To learn as much as possible from cooperative experiences from other library systems, the Libraries Department has submitted a project proposal in response to the latest call for proposals from the European Commission. The consortium, consisting of the Greek Ministry of National Education, Probiblio (the largest regional service-providing organization for rural public libraries in the Netherlands), the EARL consortium of the UK and the Finnish Library Association, will develop different models, tools and applications for building and enhancing public library network infrastructures over the Internet. Economic models will be applied and social and human aspects related with the shift to networking will be taken into account and the possibilities of cross-sectoral cooperation will be explored.