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RESOURCE SHARING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

MYTH OR REALITY?

by

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ABSTRACT

Resource sharing is defined as sharing library collections through interlibrary loan. The resource sharing program, Universal Availability of Publications is described along with the AGRIS program sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The successes and failures of these programs are discussed and impediments to their development are described. These impediments are categorized as economic, technical, socio-cultural, legal, political, physical, and functional. The paper concludes with some concrete ways to overcome the professional isolationism of many librarians in developing countries.

The term "resource sharing" can mean many things in the library arena. Libraries can share their unique resource, their bibliographic records; they can share the acquisitions of expensive materials; they can cooperate in collecting and housing grey literature; and they can share their collections and even their staff. All these issues are complex and have thousands of pages written about them. For the purposes of this presentation and I am going to limit my discussion to the sharing of library collections through what we know as interlibrary loan or lending in developing countries. This has generated thousands of pages in the literature I am going to try to distill it into a 25 minute presentation.

I entitled this paper, "Resource Sharing in Developing Countries: Myth or Reality?" Much has been written about proposals to aid in the sharing of library resources but very little records the success or failure. The sharing of library collections has been aspired to for many years and the earliest occurrence of it in relation to developing countries, that I could find, was in the early 1950s. I found much written about plans to put forward and problems with the idea but little about the implementation of any programs. I conducted an international survey with a group of fifteen librarians and received replies from only four. While some of the librarians who took the time to respond felt it had potential, most were not positive about the process.

J.S. Parker defines the basic function of the information profession as matching the needs of the user with the content of the document. This simplistic concept requires a complex set of variables to accomplish. Comprehensive document delivery on the global level has been a dream for years and an objective for several international organizations. Unesco in 1955 put forth the idea of an international library card so scholars could move from country to country to do their work and be admitted to the library of their choice without the formalities then required. This was delivering the client to the document, information delivery in a grossly inefficient manner. The Unesco idea did not come to fruition.

The idea of international access did not die and in 1972 Donald Urquhart, founder of the National Lending Library for Science and Technology at Boston Spa in the United Kingdom and Maurice Line, Chairman and Secretary of IFLA's Committee on International Lending and Union Catalogues conceived the Universal Availability of Publications Programme (UAP).

UAP can best be described by Maurice Line:

"The objective [of UAP] is the widest possible availability of published material (that is recorded knowledge issued for public use) to intending users, wherever and whenever they need it, as an essential element in economic, social, technological, educational and personal development. The programme aims to improve availability at all levels, from the local to the international, and at all stages, from the publication of new material to the retention of last copies, both by positive action and the removal of barriers." (Line and Vickers. (*Universal Availability of Publications (UAP)*), p. 325)

In short "all published information, wherever and whenever published should be available to anyone, wherever and whenever." (Steele, p. 358)

This is tied in with another IFLA program, that of UBC or Universal Bibliographic Control. Once you know what is there, it must be provided. In 1974, the IFLA General Council approved the establishment of an office for international lending and UNESCO declared its support in both philosophical and financial terms. In 1980 an international office for UAP was put in place and work began to standardize the request form and to develop various models for countries to use. The proponents of UAP worked tirelessly for their ideal but in the last UAP

report submitted by Maurice Line upon his retirement in 1989, he writes ". . . the main disappointment has been the inability to initiate a practical UAP Programme in one or two individual countries." (Line, *Annual Report of the IFLA UAP Programme*, p. 264)

During the same time period another program was in its infancy and grew similarly to the UBC. The idea was born at a meeting of the International Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists, (IAALD) in Bogota, Columbia in 1968. This idea modeled itself on the International Nuclear Information System (INIS) operated by the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna but covered the area of Agriculture. It was to be an international cooperative network dealing with both the bibliographic end and the document delivery end of the process. The program began in 1968 when Raymond Aubrac, a representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), took the idea to the FAO offices in Rome. In April of 1970 the Director General of the FAO created a panel of experts to study the issue and in November of 1971 the 16th session of the FAO Conference passed a formal resolution regarding the establishment of an International Information System for Agricultural Sciences and Technology (AGRIS) and to begin technical cooperation with INIS. In January 1972 *AGRINDEX* experimental number was distributed and in November of 1972 the 17th Conference of the FAO funded AGRIS for a 3 year period. AGRIS survived its three years and in 1982 published its own vocabulary AGROVOC in five languages. By 1983 on its tenth anniversary, AGRIS had 130 participating processing centers. While the bibliographic control part of the project grew, the document delivery aspect did not.

AGRIS eased the exchange of information by requesting that inputting centers include the addresses of authors so users could obtain reprints or a document availability note for non-conventional literature. At the 1984 technical consultation it was resolved that Agris centers provide a world-wide delivery for documents in their own areas and that countries move to get their own national document activities under control.

There has been much attention paid to document delivery over the past two decades and during the 1980s the literature was filled with interlibrary lending projects. Projects in the Caribbean and Latin America have been written about and many consortium described. COMUT, a program developed in Brazil in 1981 was geared toward delivering material at the national level in selected subject areas. As of 1986 COMUT had not begun. REPIDISCA was or may still be an information network for the Latin American and Caribbean Region dealing with information on water. REPIDISCA was described in an article in 1982 with national centers cooperating responsible for identifying, selecting and obtaining national documents within the subject scope of the network, preparing the input work sheets for the document, disseminating the products and services of the network to local users and providing on request, copies of national documents at cost. At the time of the publication of the article, the document delivery portion had not begun but the bibliographic portion was well off the ground.

The reality appears to be that resource sharing in the interlending area is a myth. While much is written about networks and document delivery, it seems the writing is at the beginning of the project and I could find no evidence that it ever happened. The reality is that there are many obstacles to interlending internationally and document delivery locally. The problems are tied in with many areas of a country's development and cannot be considered independently of that country's environment.

Why have all of these endeavors seemingly failed? One only has to read the massive amount of literature written by information professionals in both developed and developing countries to come to a general understanding of why this is not working.

The UAP idea brings together "all those involved with the production, storage, dissemination, conservation and use of publications, from the author, publisher and distributor, through information, library and archives personnel, to the user, the ultimate beneficiary."(Steele, p. 359) The five main elements to UAP are publication, supply, acquisitions, interlending and retention. The program calls for support at the national level with each country taking responsibility for supplying other countries with their own publications. It is not an independent program but requires a considerable degree of political and financial support at the local level.

To have UAP you must first have NAP (National Availability of Publications) and here is the root of the problem. The reasons are many and complicated but can be pigeon holed into seven categories; economic, technical, socio-cultural, legal, political, physical, and functional.

The economic problems facing developing countries are overwhelming. There is a serious shortage of resources; human, financial and material that limits the services that can be provided. The lack of trained librarians with a service ethic, the inability to pay for the service among libraries, lack of materials to lend and the amount of money needed to provide the service all hinder the development of an interlending system. These problems are compounded by the high over head cost per item, because many have to come from overseas, and the problems associated with the exchange of currency are overwhelming.

Technical problems are also an impediment. The lack of photographic equipment, insufficient maintenance of the equipment available, shortages of paper and spare parts, erratic electrical supply, inadequate printing and binding of materials make the storage of these materials and the provision of them on demand difficult at best. Lack of a good communication system in a country as far flung as Indonesia make national availability a near impossibility.

Socio-cultural problems present the greatest challenge to NAP. The potential user does not have motivation to seek the information and many times lacks the training and tradition to use information. There is only a small number of people involved in research and in some countries, reading habits are poorly developed because of a strong oral tradition. There is a lack of social recognition of the library as an institution and the value of the library profession. The intangibility of the benefits of information escapes the potential users and much of the information available is in a language that they cannot read. In areas where librarians know one another there is informal interlibrary lending and they cannot see a reason to formalize it. Few statistics are gathered to assess the

Legal restrictions impede the development of NAP. Many countries do not have a copyright deposit law and if they do there are ways to get around it. Many legal deposit laws exclude government publications. Even if there is a flourishing publishing industry, publishers are not required to deposit nationally and libraries have to try to locate and acquire the material through other means. In some developing countries microtexts are subject to customs scrutiny and librarians are personally responsible for the protection of their collection. This makes them reluctant to share them within the country let alone outside the country.

The politics of a country also play an important role in the development of NAP. Censorship is very much the norm for some of these countries and governments limit the information both coming or going. There is no clear distinction between classified and unrestricted documents and an official can take an oath of secrecy if they do not want to give out a printed document for whatever reason. Many governments divide the responsibility for libraries in different areas of the government or divides them by size or type. There is competition and duplication of effort because of poor planning. The lack of appropriate information policies and information infrastructure slows any movement toward NAP. Cumbersome bureaucratic procedures in both administration and financing allow for no cohesive development of a national library or designate a decentralized program of NAP. To paraphrase a librarian from one developing country, ethics are harder to have in a repressive regime.

The physical area or geography of a country makes a difference. It is much easier to develop programs for physical movement of materials nationally in a country such as Lesotho that is compact than it is in a country such as Indonesia that is comprised of 931 inhabited islands with 5 main islands. The physical layout of the country coupled with an inadequate communication system hinder NAP.

The functionality of the existing system conflicts with the development of a good national system. There are few tools available to identify references and no established delivery system for nonconventional materials. Procedures and controls are complex and bureaucratic. Even if these obstacles were overcome, there is the problem of poor postal systems, frequent power failures and the other technical problems mentioned earlier. The ineffective performance of the system, the lack of effective policies and procedures, lack of tools, inadequate bibliographic

control by the book trade and libraries, insufficiently trained personnel and lack of attention to failure in library services all slow the development of a national publications program.

The articles from the developing countries about the UAP program echo the above problems. It seems that these problems are universal no matter where the library is located. Lack of trained personnel and staff, limited resources, unstable governments, centralization of decision making, constant changing of priorities, poor communications system all seem to be the common bond. Until some of these problems are addressed at the most basic level, NAP appears to be more a myth than a reality.

No one part of the system can be ignored. Inadequate libraries generate little demand. With no demand, tools are not developed to identify references and with no demand or no money there are no references to identify. There are solutions to these problems but they are not quick or inexpensive. Western models cannot be realized in developing countries where psychological and political aspects differ. Planning needs to take into account the condition of the country and the environment that the information system must exist in.

Leaders of developing countries need to be convinced of the priority of information. Many developing countries have no national library and the information function is spread throughout the government in competing agencies. There is no coordination of information activities and the lack of a publications deposit law hinders the collecting of in country publications. Library cooperation begins at the grassroots level so resource sharing among nearby institutions should be encouraged. Government policies making the librarian personally responsible for the book collection must be eliminated if any interlibrary lending even on the most basic level is to happen. The role of the political forces cannot be under emphasized in this process.

The establishment of networks has met with some success. The term network dates back to 1560 and generally describes any cooperation activity between individuals or institutions. A network has its unique policies and caters to the needs of the group. Networking has been successful when networks have common characteristics and needs. While AGRIS is not a perfect network and has not solved the document delivery problem, it has set up a world wide network to deal with the bibliographic accessibility of publications. This common need to access the subject has made AGRIS a viable network and it continues to work toward solving the document delivery problem with the establishment of AGLINET, a voluntary association of large agricultural libraries collaborating to improve provision of the needed publications. Many networks in Latin America remain in existence today because they have a common bond by subject and language. It does no good to bind a network together if they cannot communicate in a common language. The most successful networks are the ones that have many characteristics in common in both socio-economic development and bureaucratic capability. Networks should be dynamic and change with the changing needs or cease if there is no longer a need to exist.

The problems of no common currency can be overcome if there is a willingness to do it. AGRIS has proposed a coupon scheme for its members where coupons are sent in lieu of cash. The coupons would be good for up to 10 pages of a document or one microfiche duplicate plus airmail costs. Coupons could be reused and excess coupons could be redeemed in local currency each year. Net lenders could trade their coupons in for cash if they do not borrow enough to use them. Still to be determined is who is to provide the cash.

As in other aspects of a country's development, evolution is preferable to revolution. The movement toward NAP will not happen overnight and will not happen at all if there is no demand for it. Change must begin at the grassroots level and that is where the library professional comes in. Many librarians are not librarians at all but clerks who do clerical work. The mechanics of the library is stressed but not the service aspect. Networking within the country for the information professionals is important to information development. Existing professional associations must act as a forum for change. Professional associations could aid in the adoption of standard forms and help develop a general manual to promote resource sharing on the practical level. This is something the librarians can do themselves but they will need help. Many professionals, particularly in science and technology, who are studying in developed countries could be great allies for these people. These people could create the demand for

information services and then there would be a need for the demand to be met.

This may seem like a simplistic approach and perhaps it is. In all the reading I have done, over and over information systems developed by someone outside the country have failed. It is up to the librarians of these countries to begin working on their own problems and applying their own solutions. As countries develop and become more literate the demand will be there for publications. National library professional organizations can play a key role in aiding in this process. One voice can be ignored but many cannot. By networking both within and without the country librarians can adapt the information technology to their needs. Some of the problems are within their control and can be address. Many librarians have a choice on how to spend their resources and perhaps spending them on local material and a photocopier instead of expensive publications from a western publisher may be a small part of the solution to their problem. Training of professionals is also the key. Good in country training programs with technology adaptation will raise the qualifications of the profession and we hope the status.

Professional isolation is a serious problem for librarians in developing countries. Even those who have studied abroad are cut off from what is happening in the information industry once they get back into their own environment. By networking with their colleagues the professional isolationism will be minimized.

How can we as librarians in development help in this process? We can help by working with our professional associations to make sure that development projects have a library component. In working with our colleagues from developing countries we can listen to them and to their ideas. Ask them what will work in their environment. We can help them by talking of the value of information with the higher officials in their countries. We can work with them to put systems in place that will survive and thrive in their environment. Most of all we should be working with them to adapt the new technology to their working environment. Technology may not be the answer for some while it may solve a serious problem for someone else.

As information professionals we can help the librarians on a grass roots level. For those librarians in anglophone countries and for those who have a good command of English in the other countries we can diminish the professional isolation. We should be lobbying our library organizations to give a reduced rate for librarians from developing countries -- I believe ALA already does and then we should be working toward funding for these librarians to become members of these organizations. One idea I have given some thought to is an adopt a librarian program where librarians from the developed countries would give memberships to librarians from developing countries. There would be much involved in the administration of this but I believe that by reducing the professional isolation of librarians in developing countries we could aid progress in information management on a very basic level.

As I have presented here today, resource sharing, in the interlibrary lending arena in developing countries is a myth. The obstacles to this process are great and will not be resolved overnight. To go in and impose our information systems will not work and we should not want to do that. The key to dealing with this is from within the country. The librarians in these countries hold the key and it is up to us to help them. By lobbying for good information components in our development projects and working with administrators from the governments of these countries on the value of information, we should begin making some progress in the information flow. By allowing the national information systems to develop in a natural way insures sustainability of the system. If a high ranking government official has to choose between funding a program that will feed the starving nation and a program that will provide information to these starving people, the food program will take precedent. For those countries that are resource poor but feeding their population, a good information system may hold the key to their further development. There are no pat answers or easy solutions. As information professionals working in the international arena we must continue to be aware of the information environment and work toward self help and sustainability of the system as our final goal.

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