THE ROLE OF INTER-LIBRARY LOAN IN ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY AND AQUATIC INFORMATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT: It is now widely accepted that access to information is more important than possession. No one library is self-sufficient, hence the need for Inter-library Loan (ILL). Although the problems that have brought inter-library loan are universal, it is in developing countries, like Kenya, that they manifest themselves acutely. These include importation of 90% of published books & journals, failing budgets vis-à-vis rising costs, and falling foreign exchange rates. As research in marine and aquatic sciences takes root in developing countries, the demand for such specialized information by researchers is on the increase. Of special mention is the need for unpublished grey literature. Such a demand can only be met through ILL. Unfortunately certain problems seem to affect ILL in developing countries; including, the lack of union catalogues, distance and communication, lack of resources, copyright restrictions, and lack of foreign currency. To ensure effective & efficient ILL in developing countries, these countries will have to adopt the new Information Technologies. They will have to develop local databases of marine & aquatic information which should be networked to ensure faster service. In addition, the use of CD-ROMs is appropriate as it is cheaper than accessing on-line databases. In this respect developed countries have a role to play in supporting the developing countries in ensuring access to information. The RECOSEIX-WIO is an attempt in this direction.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a marked growth in education and research in developing countries as a result of the growth in population accompanied by the growth in literacy. This has resulted to the generation of more publications and expansion in readership. It is also widely accepted that scientific and technological research plays a major role in development. This is reflected in a country like Kenya by the inclusion of research in her development plans.
As scientific and technological research develops in developing countries the demand for Scientific and Technological Information (STI) is on the increase. The need is felt more in specialized areas like marine and aquatic sciences where in addition to the demand in published literature there is also a lot of interest in the unpublished or grey literature. Such a demand can only be met through inter-library loan (ILL).

THE NEED FOR ILL

It is now widely accepted that access to information is more important than possession. No one library is self-sufficient in information and hence the need for ILL. Although the problems that have brought ILL are universal it is in developing countries like Kenya that they manifest themselves acutely. In Kenya for example, 90% of the published books and journals are acquired through importation from abroad. On the other hand the cost of these materials goes up every year by approximately 15-20%. The libraries are poorly funded and the situation is aggravated by the falling foreign exchange reserves in the country. As Umbima\(^2\) puts it “books and journal budgets simply exist on paper”. As a result, self sufficiency is an illusion and access to material in other libraries is therefore vital if the user’s information needs are to be met adequately.

INTER-LENDING

Although the foregoing paints a gloomy picture of libraries in developing countries, there exists in some countries like Kenya a well established (STI) infrastructure. At the university/research level which is where almost all the library provision in the country is concentrated, Kenya could be regarded as a model in East Africa. There are currently four public universities namely the University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Moi University and Egerton University. There are government research institutes which include the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KEMRI), the Kenya Trypanosomiasis Research Institute (KETRI) and the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute (KIRDI) among others.

In addition to these are the International Research Organizations based in Nairobi which include ICIPE, ICRAF, ILRAD, UNEP and HABITAT.

Kenya has a tradition of inter-lending dating back to the colonial days of the East African Community when the library at Muguga, now KARI, operated one of the best schemes on record. Today lending is practiced between various types of libraries and between libraries of the same subject coverage informally on a gentleman’s agreement.

In the area of marine and aquatic information a lot of inter-lending is effected via the Dispatch Centre of the REOSCICIX-WIO project based at KEMFRI, Mombasa. We at Kenyatta University have been using this facility since 1989 and we have found it to be very useful to the researchers.
OBSTACLES TO ILL

Although some form of inter-lending exists in developing countries, there are quite a number of problems that restrict effective inter-library lending. A study carried out by Line\(^3\) reveals a number of common problems. In Kenya in particular these problems are well articulated by Ng'ang'a\(^4\). The main problems of ILL in developing countries include:

(a) **Lack of union catalogues**, bibliographic tools, etc., which would be used as location tools.

(b) **Communication** - The commonly used means of communication, the postal system, tends to be slow and unreliable. Sometimes items are lost in the post. For this reason, libraries employ other means of transport to collect materials personally. The latter however is only applicable within short distances.

(c) **Lack of adequate resources** such as manpower, equipment, finances and materials. Most libraries lack proper photocopying equipment. Even when machines are present, there may be shortages of paper and other materials, unavailability of spare parts, poor servicing arrangements and frequent power failures.

(d) **Copyright restrictions**

Libraries tend to restrict use of certain types of material such as theses, research reports, Africana, yet these are the type of material mostly requested for an ILL. It is difficult to get photocopies of these due to copyright restrictions.

(e) **Document unavailability**

Due to financial limitations already noted, most developing countries are unable to acquire materials for subsequent provision. The issue of journal subscriptions in Kenya is critical. University libraries which should be well stocked to support research are unable to update their journal subscriptions. Lack of up-to-date materials particularly in science has a negative implication on the much needed research in developing countries and the only remedy could perhaps be co-operative acquisition. materials for subsequent provision. The issue of journal subscription in Kenya for example

(f) **International Loan Service**

Inter-lending at the international level is subjected to the same problems of acquisitions from abroad. The cost of the British Library Document Supply Centre services is increasingly becoming prohibitive in most developing countries.
CO-OPERATIVE ACQUISITION

The problem of document unavailability can be remedied if libraries in developing countries agreed to have cooperative acquisition schemes. Libraries would agree on the key journals that each library should acquire so that unnecessary duplication is avoided.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Although IT is not an instant solution to the obstacles of ILL it can ease ILL procedures and reduce some of the delays. Use of IT would definitely enhance the production of information locating tools such as the Union Lists of Periodicals, Union Catalogues and other bibliographic guides. IT also provides flexibility and speed of access to information. To ensure an efficient ILL system, developing countries will have to adopt the new IT. This may include the use of appropriate technology such as CD-ROMS as this is cheaper than accessing on-line databases. To ensure speedy access to marine and aquatic information these libraries should develop local computer-based databases which ultimately will be networked. Unfortunately lack of adequate funding is a limiting factor. In Kenya for example, libraries of international organizations were the first to be computerized. Local libraries which have acquired computers have done so recently through donations. One interesting observation is the almost universal adoption of the UNESCO sponsored software package, CDS/ISIS perhaps because it is available free of charge.

It is therefore apparent that libraries of developing countries need some form of support from the developed world in order to ensure availability of information through ILL. In Kenya we are happy to note such support from two projects namely:

(a) Law of the Sea Project - a cooperation project between the University of Nairobi and the University of Gent (Belgium).

(b) RECOSCIX-WIO Project- which apart from providing documents through the despatch center in Mombasa, organized a training workshop in August, 1992 on the use of a common database structure, MBIS, for all the cooperating institutions in the western Indian Ocean region and provided each institution with a micro-computer which we are currently using to develop local databases of marine and aquatic information in our institutions. Finally the co-operating libraries should be able to exchange diskettes in order to determine each others’ holdings and so enhance inter-lending.

STANDARDIZATION

As libraries in developing countries adopt IT, the issue of standardization becomes critical. The interconnection of one system with another can only be achieved by
adherence to standards. Co-operating libraries will therefore have to ensure compatibility of their systems at various levels i.e. hardware, software bibliographic records and record format levels.

In Kenya, libraries have started thinking about standardization. A support user group of CDS/ISIS users known as KENISIS (Kenya User Group of CDS/ISIS) held a workshop in Nairobi on standardization from 9-10 April 1992 and resolved that all ISIS users in Kenya should adopt the Common Communication Format (CCF) for their record formats in addition to having compatible hardware. Kenyan University libraries also held a seminar in Nairobi from 11-14 May 1993 on library computer systems for Kenyan University libraries and resolved to adopt compatible systems and formats. Even at the national levels, there have been workshops to discuss coordination of information systems in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania respectively.

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4 Ng'ang'a, J.M. Inter-library lending in East Africa. Presented at the IFLA General Conference, Nairobi 1984. p. 5-7.