Mainstreaming National Library and Information Services for the Attainment of MDGs: A Case for the National Library Policy in Zambia.

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Abstract

The Zambia Library Association has been pursuing the idea of establishment of the National Library Policy since 1985. The Ministry of Education through the Zambia Library Services embarked on a renewed effort to establish a National Library Policy (NLP) for Zambia in late 1998. As was the case with previous attempts, this effort appears to have been worsted or abandoned along the way to the extent that to-date, there still is no National Library Policy for Zambia. As a consequence library developments have been negatively affected in terms of numbers, collections, staffing and sense of direction. For this reason, Zambia has trailed behind library developments in other countries in the SCECSAL sub-region because it lacks a national policy. The task of attaining the MDGs requires that as a country Zambia possess basic information services as can be provided under a well articulated national library policy.

National Libraries have a national duty and obligation to provide needed information as underpinned by the NLP directions in order to alleviate illiteracy and poverty. Such empowerment comes from well-planned library services. The absence of a NLP has slowed down the development of libraries and the library profession in Zambia, thereby affecting the country’s preparedness to implement the MDGs. In basically all the MDGs, information or knowledge stand out as the primary commodity for empowerment.

The NLP guides the National Library on how best to harness, store and disseminate the national information resources in order to address the functional element of information, whether it be the eradication of illiteracy or the removal of ignorance. Zambia needs the National Library Policy to be adopted before information can effectively play its role in the attainment of the MDGs. Because of this importance of national library services, this paper seeks to argue that the establishment of the National Library Policy should be treated with such urgency and attention as to be considered the ninth MDG for Zambia.
**Information, Libraries and the MDGs.**

Information is a very important resource for any form of development. Availability of the relevant information depends upon either the physical existence of information services like libraries, or adequate access to information available world-wide through the Internet or other means. Libraries constitute the institutionalized organization and management of information in a manner that it can be logically collected, stored, documented and consulted by anybody needing it.

As storehouses of information, libraries constitute a reliable source of information for any planned development. Consequently the development of the MDGs cannot be entirely successful without the use of information as a factor in development. The development of MDGs is not exempt from the need for organized information services to support it. Thus libraries as organized collections of information are an important factor to the development of MDGs. When the UN designed the 8 MDGs in 2000, it must have assumed that either all countries in the developing world had adequate information resources to support the MDG development strategies, or were prepared to develop necessary information services to support the process of establishing the MDGs.

**The Significance of National Library Policies**

A National library policy is a plan adopted by an individual country defining how its information resources need to be organized. Basically NIPs are formulated to pool the full potential of the available national information resources through the optimization of certain library services at national level, or the capacity to develop such national information services. Since some types of libraries need to be recognized as national resource centres for the transfer of information and knowledge, and as agents of fostering friendship and mutual understanding among the nations of the world, their management needs to be enshrined in some form of national policy. It is important to recognize the fact that the services of some types of libraries go beyond the demands or needs of the parent institutions but instead focus on the needs of the country as a whole. Those libraries whose mandate is to manage the nation’s memory need to be guided by policies and strategies that support the overall development strategies of the nation.

The relevance of national information policies according to UNESCO as quoted by Niegaard (1999, 2) is that NIPs, including considerations of informatics and
telematics, are the key to coping with the challenges of the Information society. There has to be a complete re-examination of traditional information policies in the virtual, interactive, highly volatile reality of cyberspace, particularly in the framework of legal and ethical issues. UNESCO further observes that many developing countries are now struggling to ‘catch-up with the industrialized.’

A national library policy is a precursor to legislation that will define the establishment, organizational structure, funding arrangements, the services to be provided, and the clientele to be served by such libraries. National library development that is not planned or coordinated adds very little value to the information needs of any country. For purposes of meeting the MDGs, it follows therefore that countries still without NLPs will need to mainstream the development of such policies as a matter of urgency. It is imperative that the nation’s information resources are organized in a manner that is responsive to any planned development as enshrined in all the millennium development strategies.

**Basic Functions of National Libraries.**

The concept of national libraries worldwide evolved out of the need to preserve national literary achievements for the benefit of future generations. Collection and storage of such material was the original pre-occupation and distinctive function. The advent of scientific and technological research and achievements accentuated the need to conserve such records of the nation’s genius. Since such records increasingly became expressed in different formats, the conservation theory also included literature expressed in different formats (e.g. manuscripts, facsimiled on film, musical notation, and embossed characters on glyphs, maps, sound and electronic).

Other national library functions include legal deposit, coverage of foreign literature, maintenance of the National Union Catalogue and production of national bibliography, national bibliographic information services, planning and coordinating Inter-library lending services, and special services to disadvantaged groups. Additionally we even have special service national libraries such as national medical libraries or national science libraries, etc. Special national libraries usually specialize in specific subject collections, or focus on special groups of clientele such as the physically challenged. The bottom line about the identity of national libraries is that their clientele is the entire nation and not just the parent institution.
National Library Services in Zambia and policy implications

Zambia does not have a National Library as such (Lungu, 1981:91). What it has is a distribution of national library functions among a number of different libraries. The Zambia Library Service is, in effect, the national ‘Public and School Library’ service. This is because it is basically a network of public libraries distributed in provincial and district centres country-wide. It is neither a legal deposit centre for local publications, nor does it manage a National Union Catalogue; it does not publish a national bibliography, nor does it have any bibliographic control authority.

The University of Zambia is the de facto national ‘Reference Library’ because it is the largest library in the country. Though it was declared as a ‘National Public Library’ by the Ministry of Education in 1967, there is no legal backing to that declaration. It receives no special funding from Central Government to sustain the ‘national’ status. The National Institute for Scientific and Industrial Research Information Service is the de facto ‘National Science Library’. This is because it houses the largest collection of scientific publications in the country. It has no legal backing either. The National Archives is the ‘National Legal Deposit Library’. This is because it is the only library recognized under the ‘Printed Publications Act’, suggesting that copies of all local publications would be deposited there. However is pre-occupation is in managing government archives.

It is evident therefore that these developments evolved out of the activities of these institutions as they interacted with other forces either within or outside the respective parent organizations. They were not guided or influenced by any centralized national policy direction, or plan. Other than the National Archives which is guided by the ‘Printed Publications Act’, none of the remaining institutions is protected by any form of legislation.

The need for national library policy and library legislation therefore stems from not only this broad and unplanned distribution of recognizable national library functions, but also from the fact that these developments are not in any way centrally coordinated. Zambia needs a national library policy to create a roadmap for the development of nationally oriented library services. The current arrangement is that the principal loyalties of these libraries are to their parent organizations.
The History and Character of the elusive Zambia National Library Policy

Upon noticing the need for national library policies in Zambia, the library fraternity organized its first seminar in September 1985. The major purpose of this seminar was ‘to debate, at the national level, and suggest concrete proposals that could assist in the formulation and implementation of a national information policy in Zambia’. (ZLA, 1988: 3). During these early years, there was no distinction between ‘information policy’ and ‘library policy’. This conference did not go beyond recommending that ‘the party and its government (should) effect a national information policy, backed by appropriate legislation to guide the organization of our libraries, documentation and archival services so as to improve their utility to the nation’. (ZLA, 1988, 88). In other words, the conference presumed it to be the responsibility of the party and its government to both draft such policy and provide for its legislation.

The next conference on this issue was in 1987. This was influenced by a number of factors. First it was the realization that the job of drafting the policy had been wrongly expected to be that of the government. Secondly, there were some regional developments such as the UNESCO sponsored SADCC conference in Tanzania in 1985 to which some Zambian information experts had been invited to discuss the issue of information sharing. This was followed up by the appointment of a consultant to undertake a feasibility study to examine the nature of resource sharing activities in Botswana, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The SADCC conference and the appointment of a consultant by UNESCO inadvertently supported Zambia’s own efforts to develop the NIP this far.

Building on the 1985 conference, the main objective of the 1987 conference was ‘to prepare a document for the establishment of national information policy and library legislation in Zambia’. This effort was planned to have a three-pronged approach namely;

- ‘to sensitize national authorities on the need for and elements to be included in a national information policy for Zambia;
- to examine relevant issues on national information policy and the problems thereof with particular reference to Zambia’s own social, economic, cultural, political, scientific and technological context;
- to produce a draft document reflecting the thinking of information generators, producers, organizers, collectors and facilitators of information transmission as well as information users’. (ZLA, 1988, 4-5)
The major achievement of this conference was that it made an initial attempt of suggesting the basic components of the NIP. It is also worth noting that the two conferences included papers and participation from librarians, information scientists, and information users such as researchers, IT specialists, Broadcasters, as well as external participants from IDRC and UNESCO who sponsored the conference.

Between 1992 and 1993 the Zambia Library Association spearheaded the drafting of a Library Bill which was submitted to Cabinet. Although a committee of Cabinet approved the proposed Bill in principle, it was sent back to the formulators for further consultation and refinements. Discussions on the Bill continued throughout the intervening years until 1998 when another Draft Bill was made. However it was at this point when it was realized that the Bill needed to be supported by a policy document. Later the same year the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education tasked Zambia Library Service to come up with a library policy document for Zambia Library Service.

The ZLS subsequently organized the workshop to draft the NIP in December 1998. Participants at this workshop were drawn from ZLS, the National Archives (NAZ), National Institute for Scientific and Industrial Research (NISIR), The University of Zambia (UNZA), The Copperbelt University (CBU), and the Ministry of Education Headquarters. The distinction between ‘library policy’ and ‘information policy’ became necessary this time around because the journalists and computer experts had also joined the chorus for national information policies covering their professions.

This workshop formulated the National Library Policy whose mission statement was:

“To enable libraries contribute to personal and national development through planned and coordinated library services” (MoE.1999, v)

The policy document provided for the establishment of a National Library Service Council under the Ministry of Education whose major function would be to coordinate the development of library services in the country. The NLP provided for nine strategic directions as follows:

- **National Library Council**: To establish and legislate for National Library Service Council;
• **Access to Information**: To ensure that all categories of users in all locations have access to information;

• **Capacity Building for Library Services**: To build libraries, as repositories of information resources which are vital to all human activities, into effective instruments of national development;

• **Coordination of Library Services**: To coordinate library services in the country in order to promote resource sharing and provision of a cost-effective library service;

• **Information Resource Mobilization**: To maximize the availability of information resources through various methods of acquisition;

• **Library Service Delivery**: To facilitate availability of information resources through various specialized library services to meet the needs of various user groups;

• **Information and Libraries in Society**: To promote in society, an appreciation of libraries so that they are perceived as critical strategic institutions where information may be accessed;

• **Regional and International Cooperation**: To participate in regional and international programmes and activities which are conducive to the development of national information resources as well as facilitate the sharing of resources regionally and internationally;

• **Information Technology for Libraries**: To harness information technology for library applications to enhance library operations and resource sharing at local, national and international levels” (Ministry of Education. 1999, 15-22)

Since 1999 there has been no follow up and the Ministry of Education is no longer pursuing the process of formulating the NLP. However, in 2007 the Zambia Library Association submitted the 1999 policy objectives to the developers of the 5th National Development Plan through a petition by members of the Association both at home and in the Diaspora. Indeed few of the objectives have been incorporated in the 5th National Development Plan, but the major idea of establishing a National Library Policy still remains unresolved to date.

It should be noted that the MoE inspired attempt to develop a NLP actually fell short of covering the needs of the entire national library spectrum in the country. Not even the University of Zambia library which also comes under the same ministry was covered under this effort. For the four institutions that dispense national library services in Zambia there are three different parent ministries. There is the **Ministry of Education** for ZLS and UNZA, then the **Ministry of**
Home Affairs for the National Archives and the Ministry of Science and Technology for NISIRIS. The question has always been which is the most appropriate ministry to develop a national library policy, and provide the necessary legislation for it? Is it possible to have one policy for all national library services, or several policies according to number of parent ministries? In formulating the current draft NLP, it was considered that the National Library Council would address the needs and functions of the other national libraries outside the Ministry of Education as part of its mandate.

The Consequences of the absence of NLP in information management

Zambia has existed without a national library policy for over forty years now. As a consequence of not having relevant library development policies evidence of lack of meaningful development abounds. Below is a list of some of the consequences for dillydallying or procrastinating in establishing policy guidelines for development of national library services:-

- **No national library planning directorate.** Each line ministry plans for the development of its own library. The overall picture of such development at national level can never be even. A national library planning directorate would look at the entire spectrum of generating, publishing, disseminating, storage as well as bibliographic control of national information, and determining which of the existing or future organizations should take up which responsibility. The absence of the national library planning directorate has made even those institutions that are responsible for certain national library functions to become complacent. This is because there is no monitoring organization to assess progress, or the lack of it. The absence of the planning directorate has also denied those institutions performing national library functions to be accorded appropriate funding from the state.

- **No coordination of library services.** That national library services are distributed among no less than four institutions requires that such services be coordinated at some point. The current situation is that there is no such institution mandated to perform this job. The only attempts at coordinating any library services are those spearheaded by Zambian Library Consortium (ZALICO). The need for coordination in national library service provision is particularly essential since the existing national libraries fall under different ministries. Coordination generates cost-effectiveness in providing such dispersed national library services. The idea of the National Library Planning Directorate is evident, and this role can be defined in the NLP.
• **Slow, uncoordinated library structural developments.** One rarely hears about any new state library buildings coming up anywhere around the country. It is a fact that since independence in 1964 Zambia has produced thousands upon thousands of school leavers, college graduates, etc. It is this growing crowd of literate people that need libraries to obtain relevant information from. Yet there has been no corresponding development of such library and information services.

• **No jobs for new graduates from the Library Schools.** The Library and Information Science department at UNZA has produced hundreds of librarians since its inception in 1966. So has Evelyn Hone College as well as the Zamel College. The rate at which these graduates are being absorbed in employment is however, very low. It is even more saddening to note that even the upcoming educational institutions are opting to employ non-qualified (or insufficiently qualified) librarians. National library policies would ensure not only planned development of library services, but also influence the employment of qualified staff. Nationally planned library services would have in-built standards of operation including levels of staff deployment. Specialized functions in national library services would also create markets for specialized training requirements which would also have a feedback effect to these training institutions.

• **No Collection Development Policies.** Collection development policies are roadmaps indicating how and in which direction library collections should grow. Collection development policies for national libraries would provide guidelines on what subject areas to focus on. Where national library functions are distributed like in Zambia, collection development policies would guide these institutions on what areas to concentrate on to avoid unnecessary duplication, determine the individual institutional budgets, determine how such resources will be distributed, shared or accessed, and ultimately encourage institutional specializations. Collection development policies also guide in terms of what donations to either solicit for or accept. That Zambia has had no NLP has meant that collections in libraries shoulderling national library responsibilities have been developed by accident rather than by design. This explains the accidental nature of the establishment of these institutions as national libraries.

• **No Collection Development Budgets.** Where there are no collection development policies there will be no collection development budgets. The institutions performing national library functions have used own initiatives to develop whatever collections they are now associated with. The fact that national library status has been claimed by some libraries performing specific
functions makes such claims superficial as such developments were accidental and not planned for. Parent organizations performing national library functions have neither publicly sought for separate funding to sustain the national library functions, nor introduced separate budgets for sustaining these national collections. With this situation, these collections cannot truthfully be claimed to be either comprehensive, or up-to-date. A National Library Policy would have influenced the enactment of relevant legislation to guarantee collection development budgets.

- **Poor Access to (free) electronic information resources.** Access to e-resources as provided through either PERI or eIFL is very poor. Usage statistics from both these organizations attest to this low uptake by Zambian users. If on the other hand the national library network was properly and formally organized it would have been one obvious channel through which to administer such offers. Usage of such resources and maintenance of user statistics would have been some of the obvious tasks of these national libraries as such responsibilities would have been clearly articulated under a national library policy.

- **Decision makers not alert to role of libraries in development.** Since the role of national libraries in development has not been clearly defined in any policy document, there is no pressure or compulsion on major stakeholders like decision-makers, to provide any library services at all. There is nobody feeling guilty about the poor state of our ‘national libraries’ as they do not feature in any of the tasks or strategies assigned to them. Alemna (1995, 31-36) also identifies lack of awareness by government officials of information uses among other obstacles Africa in general faces in creating library policies. If the NLP existed such compulsion would have been there and someone would have been expected to deliver on them. Without this pressure there is no real political will to develop the national library services that would in turn support all development programmes, including the MDGs.

- **Nationwide Poor Reading habits.** Zambians generally are said to have poor reading habits. Reading is considered utilitarian, and only those who need to pass examinations have reason to read. This is a very poor synopsis of a nation as a lot of knowledge associated with all forms of development can be gleaned through reading. One of the tasks expected of national public libraries is the promotion of reading, especially among school children. The absence of a policy that would define such a responsibility makes the task impossible to achieve. Promotion of reading habits is especially essential in countries like Zambia where reading is not a natural pastime. The NLP
would provide for the identity of the institution(s) to manage and also provide for the financial scope within which to undertake the responsibility.

- **No information Mobilization through the NUC.** One of the important responsibilities of national libraries is the maintenance of a National Union Catalogue (NUC) of collections available in all national libraries. This function has not been possible in Zambia to date because of the lack of policy identifying the institution to carry out this task. Early efforts by ZLS never matured into anything purely due to lack of cooperation from some libraries who considered ZLS to have no mandate to demand such cooperation. The function of linking national library databases is now possible using ICTs. However, this remains a theoretical possibility as some of the national libraries still maintain manual records. That information available in current Zambian libraries cannot be accessed from one location is a problem that can be solved by appropriate clauses in the NLP.

- **No special focus on specific needs of specific user groups.** There is a special library in Zambia dealing with the special needs of the physically challenged. This is but one such institution in the country and can be said to be addressing the needs of only Lusaka-based users. Other national library services have no obligation to develop collections for such user groups. The NLP would remove this bottleneck and make it mandatory for as many libraries in the country as possible to address the needs of such groups as well.

- **Slow uptake of ICTs by libraries.** Zambian libraries have recorded a slow uptake of automated library services in general. To date there are only two libraries that have automated library databases. This problem restricts the amount of resource sharing that can be conducted among libraries. It is also expensive for readers to physically travel to these libraries when their databases could be searched online. The NLP would, among other issues, define the need for application of ICTs in the management of our major national libraries, as well as define acceptable parameters to facilitate the sharing of our library resources.

- **Poor Regional and International cooperation in resource sharing.** Zambia is not faring well in terms of resource sharing internationally and regionally. Part of the problem is due to the slow uptake of ICTs, other reasons have to do with coordination activities. There are so many services that have been developed in the region like the African Digital Library, as well as those available internationally that Zambia has not been able to benefit from. The availability of NLP will not only define such cooperation as a national library function, but will also delegate such a responsibility to relevant institutions.
Information management and the MDGs

In order for Zambia to meet the millennium development goals it will require a well managed, cost-effective and organized information base. The focus of all the MDGs is based on the assumption that there will be adequate information resources to guide the various countries in their quests for achieving the MDGs. This assumption is not only erroneous as has been illustrated by the Zambian situation, but also dangerous because no meaningful development can be planned on the assumption that relevant information to execute it will be available somehow. Somewhere in the proclamation of the MDGs there should have been a statement or statements alluding to not only the need for information mobilization, coordination, access, distribution and sharing among information services, but also elaborate plans for availing it where it did not exist.

National libraries constitute the collective memory of a nation. They need to be carefully planned for, and organized to ensure that the collection of this memory is systematic, that the collected memory is sustained, and properly preserved for posterity. National library policies ensure that these national memory banks are managed in a planned manner that will ensure the efficient collection, documentation, storage, distribution and dissemination of the nations’ accumulated memory. The media fraternity has been lobbying for the enactment of the ‘Freedom of Information Bill’. In a situation as Zambia is in, the bill will do little to make most information available. This is partly because national libraries whose mandate would have been to collect and store such information have no policy support to enable them to develop such collections.

Another point to make is that information will be necessary for the sustainability of the MDGs. When a country has a national library policy that is responsive to the needs of the MDGs sustainability is by design ensured. Achieving the MDGs is one thing, but it is not an end in itself. In order to sustain the MDGs that would have been achieved there is need for stakeholders to remain empowered by the knowledgeable on the sustainability of the achieved goals.

Way Forward – The ZNLP as the 9th MDG for Zambia

From the above discussions it is obvious that Zambia will need to ‘mainstream’ the establishment of the NLP not only to meet the MDGs, but also to sustain them along with other national development plans. In recent years, good governance, democracy, transparency and accountability have become the catch phrases for national development especially in developing countries. I dare sug-
Gest that libraries and information services constitute the most basic and relevant institutions for achieving these noble goals. National library services are usually available to all citizens, both rich and poor. Their collections are broad-based in subject coverage, thus covering the interests of everybody. Libraries neutralize ignorance and functional illiteracy, thus empowering the individual to interact with information to suit specific demands. However, just like a disorganized library is of no use to an information seeker because one cannot locate any specific information, the absence of national library policies is a recipe for a chaotic national library service.

The way forward for Zambia, and any SCECSAL member in the same predicament, is to mainstream the establishment of relevant policies for the development of national library and information services. For Zambia the situation is so critical that it needs to treat this assignment as the ninth millennium development goal.

REFERENCES


