MDGS, WSIS, UNESCO’S MTS AND IFAP: ALPHABET SOUP OR OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBRARIES?

Peter Johan Lor

Abstract

The United Nations Millennium declaration of 2002 set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. The MDGs are laudable and widely cited in other international documents. Library and information workers, seeking to make libraries relevant to national development, have asked themselves how libraries can contribute to the attainment of the MDGs. In 2003 and 2005, the two-phase World Summit on the Information Society took place. As part of a growing Civil Society movement, librarians, led by IFLA, participated and advocated actively in WSIS. As a result the WSIS outcomes documents contained positive language about the role of libraries in the information society. The action lines identified in the Geneva Plan of action are now being followed up by IFLA and other stakeholders.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is taking the lead in facilitating the follow-up of the WSIS action lines that are most relevant to libraries. This paper analyses the place of libraries in the “overarching objectives” and “strategic programme objectives” set out in UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for the period 2008-2013. The programme and budget of UNESCO’s Major programme for Communication and Information (CI) for the biennium 2008-2009 is also analysed, as is a draft strategic plan drawn up for UNESCO’s Information for All Programme (IFAP). The analysis focuses on the degree to which the role of libraries is recognized in these documents.

The findings suggest that librarians should not take UNESCO’s support for granted. It remains worthwhile for the library profession to engage with UNESCO, but intensive advocacy will be needed to ensure that libraries stake out the central ground in the information or knowledge society.

Keywords: millennium development goals, WSIS, action lines, UNESCO, strategies, IFAP, libraries
1. **Introduction**

At any given time several major summits, aiming to develop strategies to make the world a better place, are being planned, held or followed up. All of them end with declarations, goals, targets and/or action plans. The United Nations Millennium declaration of 2002 set eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. Not long after, in 2003 and 2005, the two-phase World Summit on the Information Society took place. For librarians the theme of this Summit was much closer to home. One of the outcomes of the World Summit was the *Geneva Principles and Plan of action* (WSIS 2003). This document included eleven “action lines”, several of which are very relevant to libraries.

The United Nations agency with which librarians most closely identify, and which has played a major role in library development worldwide is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO. UNESCO is taking the lead in facilitating the follow-up of six of the eleven WSIS action lines, including those most relevant to libraries. Can UNESCO provide the necessary international leadership to ensure that significant progress is made on these action lines? Will UNESCO’s activities in following up the action lines also highlight the role of libraries? What should the library community do to ensure that this role is recognized and that libraries are more centrally placed by the time the MDGs and the WSIS process are evaluated in 2015? In an attempt to answer these questions I review the place of libraries in the “overarching objectives” and “strategic programme objectives” set out in UNESCO’s Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for the period 2008-2013 and in the programme and budget of UNESCO’s Major programme for Communication and Information (CI) for the biennium 2008-2009 before focusing on the potential role of UNESCO’s Information for All Programme (IFAP).

2. **The Millennium development goals**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are based on the eight chapters of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (United Nations 2000), adopted at the United Nations Millennium Summit, held from 6 to 8 September 2000. There are eight goals:

1. Eradicate *extreme poverty* and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce *child mortality*
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

For each of the goals one or more specific targets are set, 21 in all. For example, under goal 5, there are two:

5. Improve maternal health
   • Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.
   • Achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health

The MDGs are laudable and widely cited in other international documents. Library and information workers, seeking to make libraries relevant to national development, have also paid attention to them, asking themselves: how can libraries contribute to the attainment of the MDGs? This is a difficult question. While information is clearly relevant to the attainment of such goals, it is difficult to separate the contribution made by libraries from the many other factors that contribute to success. An example is reducing the maternal mortality ratio. Community libraries can contribute to the attainment of this target by providing health information and conducting awareness-raising activities, but many other factors have to be put in place for the target to be attained. If the target is attained, it will be very difficult to quantify exactly what the library’s contribution will have been.

The last of the six targets cited under MDG 8, appears most directly relevant to libraries:

“The World Summit on the Information Society

In 2003 and 2005, not long after the MDGs were launched, the two-phase World Summit on the Information Society took place. The first phase was held in Ge-
neva on 10-12 December 2003 and the second phase in Tunis on 16-18 November 2005. During the Geneva phase the broad themes concerning the Information Society were discussed and two documents, a Declaration of Principles and a Plan of Action were prepared and adopted (WSIS 2003). For librarians the theme of this Summit was much closer to home. As part of a growing Civil Society movement, librarians, led by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), participated and advocated actively in WSIS. Their exertions were rewarded by the inclusion in the outcomes documents of positive language about the role of libraries in the information society. In the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (WSIS 2005), the key concluding document of the Tunis Summit, there is a strong statement on the role of libraries. In par. 90 the document reaffirms a commitment to “providing equitable access to information and knowledge for all” and to using ICTs as development tools by:

k. supporting educational, scientific, and cultural institutions, including libraries, archives and museums, in their role of developing, providing equitable, open and affordable access to, and preserving, diverse and varied content, including in digital form, to support informal and formal education, research and innovation; and in particular supporting libraries in their public service role of providing free and equitable access to information and of improving ICT literacy and community connectivity, particularly in underserved communities;

But the difficult part only begins after the delegations have made their final speeches and the exhibitors clear their stands. Following up positive statements made about libraries in the action lines requires patience and perseverance. From IFLA’s perspective there are currently two main lines of follow-up of the WSIS summits. One concerns the Internet governance issue and the setting up of the Internet Governance Forum. Initially IFLA’s approach was to lend its voice to other Civil Society groups that stand for a transparent, accountable, multi-stakeholder approach to Internet governance. More recently it has become clear that the Internet Governance Forum has become the focal point for a more dynamic and comprehensive process. IFLA is now playing a more active role here. However, the main thrust of IFLA’s advocacy has concerned the eleven action lines described in the Geneva Plan of action (WSIS 2003:16-27).

Briefly, the eleven action lines are as follows. For each of the action lines a set of actions has been identified. Those most relevant to libraries are summarised or cited here:
C1 The role of governments and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICTs for development. This covers such aspects as the development of national e-strategies for the Information Society through participation by all stakeholders, public/private partnerships, ICT policies of international organisations, and finance and investment policies to promote ICTs.

C2 Information and communication infrastructure: an essential foundation for the Information Society. This covers such aspects as the roll-out of ICT connectivity to schools, libraries and other agencies, developing broadband networks, and access for disadvantaged groups.

C3 Access to information and knowledge. This action line is highly relevant to libraries. It covers policies relating to public domain information, legislation promoting access to information, research and development to facilitate accessibility of ICTs, community public access points (including such access in libraries), alternative software models (proprietary, open-source and free software), open access journals and books, open archives for scientific information, encouraging research on the Information Society, and supporting research and development on different software models and licences. One of the actions envisaged (par. 10 (h)) is the development of digital public library and archives services, to which end national library strategies should be reviewed, a global understanding of “hybrid libraries” is to be promoted and worldwide cooperation between libraries is to be fostered.

C4 Capacity building. This covers skills needed for the Information Society, including literacy and “ICT literacy”, the use of libraries in e-literacy work, removal of gender barriers, training of ICT staff, empowerment of local communities as well as nomadic and indigenous peoples to use ICTs, the use of ICTs in education (e-learning), developing distance learning, and the use of ICTs in the training of such groups as librarians and archivists.

C5 Building confidence and security in the use of ICTs. This concerns such issues as data and network integrity and security, combating cyber-

1 All the action lines are listed in Section C of the Geneva Plan of Action. This has led to them being referred to as C1, C2, C3, etc. The numbers alone will do, but the practice of prefixing them by the letter C is now so ingrained internationally that it is followed here.
crime and spam, promoting awareness of online privacy, consumer protection, and secure online transactions.

**C6 Enabling environment.** This includes actions that governments should take to create an appropriate environment to maximise the social, economic and environmental benefits of the Information Society, including the development of a “framework for the secure storage and archiving of documents and other electronic records of information” (par. 13(h)). It also includes the Geneva Summit’s request to the UN Secretary General to set up a working group on Internet governance (par. 13(b)).

**C7 ICT applications: benefits in all aspects of life.** This proposes actions in relation to e-government, e-business, e-health, e-employment, e-environment, e-agriculture and e-science. (E-learning is covered by C4.)

**C8 Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content.** This action line is concerned with policies and actions to promote respect for cultural identity, traditions and religions and dialogue among cultures as a factor in sustainable development. Libraries feature quite prominently in several actions, including the role of libraries in providing access to content and indigenous knowledge. By implication there are also roles for libraries in respect of other actions, for example in preserving documentary heritage, promoting cultural diversity, supporting local content development, acting as content providers, and enhancing the capacity of indigenous peoples to develop content in their own languages.

**C9 Media.** This covers various aspects of the role of the media (print, broadcast and new media) in the development of the Information Society, including the combating of illegal and harmful content.

**C10 Ethical dimensions of the Information Society.** This covers actions intended to promote the common good (respect for peace, freedom, tolerance) and the protection of privacy and personal data, and to prevent abusive use of ICTs.

**C11 International and regional cooperation.** This deals with aspects such as the priority of ICT projects in development aid, the mainstreaming
of ICTs in the programmes of international and national aid agencies, and development of public/private partnerships.

The eleven action lines provide the main focus for attempts to give concrete effect to all the well-meaning rhetoric of the WSIS process. For each action line a UN organisation (e.g. ITU or UNESCO) has been appointed as “facilitator” or “moderator”. Various “facilitation” and consultation meetings have taken place to set the follow-up activities in motion. IFLA has allocated priorities to each of the action lines, and is concentrating on the action lines that it has prioritised, namely:

Highest priority:
- C3 Access to information and knowledge

High priority:
- C1 Promotion of ICTs for development
- C4 Capacity building
- C8 Cultural diversity & identity, linguistic diversity and local content
- C10 Ethical dimensions of the Information Society

Medium priority
- C7 ICT applications (some of these are allocated a high priority, e.g. e-Science)

Some of these action lines have been subdivided into sub-groups or sub-themes, each with its own sub-moderator. IFLA has been appointed as the moderator of the sub-theme “Libraries and Archives” in Action Line C3, and the sub-theme “Memory and Heritage” in Action Line C8.

In 2006 IFLA set up a working group, designated as the President-elect’s Information Society Working Group (now the President’s Information Society Working Group), to keep abreast of progress in respect of the action lines and other important issues (such as Internet governance) arising from WSIS, but not limited to it. The Working Group met at the 2006 and 2007 IFLA congresses and has set up a discussion list to enhance information sharing and networking among its members.

3. The role of UNESCO

The United Nations agency with which librarians most closely identify, and which has played a major role in library development worldwide is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO. UNESCO
is taking the lead in facilitating the follow-up of five of the eleven WSIS action lines, including those most relevant to libraries (C3, C7 e-learning, C7 e-science, C8, C9 and C10). The rest of this paper is devoted to an analysis of the place of libraries in UNESCO programmes.

3.1 Background on UNESCO

To understand what follows, it is useful to have some background on UNESCO. UNESCO’s general policy and strategies are set by a biennial meeting of all its member states, known as the General Conference. An Executive Board of 58 member states is elected by the General Assembly. It is responsible inter alia for overseeing the management of UNESCO between the General Conferences. These bodies, as well as the Intergovernmental Council and Bureau that are referred to later, are made up of persons serving not as individuals but as accredited representatives of their governments. Many are career diplomats.

The staff establishment of UNESCO is known as the Secretariat and is headed by a chief executive known as the Director-General, currently Koichiro Matsuura. UNESCO is organized into five “major programmes”, also referred to as “sectors”. Each major programme is headed by an Assistant Director General. For each of the major programmes there is a Commission which meets during the biennial General Conference:

I Education (ED Commission)
II Natural Sciences (SC Commission)
III Social and Human Sciences (SHS Commission)
IV Culture (CLT Commission)
V Communication and Information (CI Commission)

Each of the major programmes has a number of divisions. One of these is of particular interest to librarians: the Information Society Division, which is part of the Communication and Information major programme. In addition to the major programmes there are also some specialised units, such as the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

UNESCO has a six-year strategic planning cycle. A Medium Term Strategy (MTS) is approved every six years by the General Conference. Within the six years of the MTS there are three budgeting cycles of two years each. For each two-year period (known as a biennium) a programme and budget is drawn up for approval by the respective commissions and the General Conference.
UNESCO’s Medium Term Strategy (MTS)

UNESCO’s MTS for 2008-2013 (UNESCO 2008b) should be considered in its broader strategic context, which I have recently described elsewhere (Lor 2007). For our purposes it is important to note that UNESCO sees itself as a laboratory of ideas, standard-setter, clearing house, capacity-builder in member states, and as a catalyst for international cooperation. These are considered to be UNESCO’s five established functions (UNESCO 2008b:7).

For 2008–2013 UNESCO has prioritised Africa and gender equality in all its fields of competence. In Africa UNESCO will support the implementation of the action plans of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). During this period UNESCO will also prioritise youth, the least developed countries (LDCs), and small island developing states (SIDS).

For the period of this MTS UNESCO has identified a number of “global challenges and opportunities for UNESCO’s action” that affect UNESCO’s strategic priorities. The most important in our context is globalisation, which implies inter alia contributing to:

- the MDGs of the 2000 Millennium Declaration, the themes and languages of which are constantly echoed in all of UNESCO’s current policy and planning documents
- the recommendations of the World Summit on the Information Society
- the Education for All (EFA) goals. (The EFA was an outcome of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. UNESCO is responsible for coordinating this movement (UNESCO 2007b).)

Of particular relevance to our profession is that UNESCO has identified “building knowledge societies based on the principles of freedom of expression, universal access to information and knowledge, promotion of cultural diversity, and equal access to quality education” as one of its global challenges in the strategic context for this MTS (UNESCO 2008b:11).

There is also more emphasis on the coordinated action of United Nations agencies, and greater accountability and effectiveness. Accordingly, the MTS adopts a “programme-based approach”. Five strategic “overarching objectives” are used to structure the strategy. The overarching objectives are translated into 14 more concrete “strategic programme objectives”, all but one of which are sub-
sumed under an overarching objective. The overarching objectives and the corresponding strategic programme objectives (UNESCO 2008b:16-31) are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: UNESCO’s “Overarching Objectives” and corresponding “Strategic Programme Objectives”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching objectives</th>
<th>Strategic programme objectives</th>
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| Attaining quality education for all and lifelong learning | 1. Strengthening UNESCO’s global lead and coordinating role for EFA and providing support for national leadership in favour of EFA.  
2. Developing policies, capacities and tools for quality education for all and lifelong learning as well as promoting education for sustainable development. |
| Mobilising scientific knowledge and policy for sustainable development | 3. Leveraging scientific knowledge for the benefit of the environment and the management of natural resources.  
4. Fostering policies and capacity-building in science, technology and innovation.  
5. Contributing to disaster preparedness and mitigation. |
| Addressing emerging social and ethical challenges | 6. Promoting principles, practices and ethical norms relevant for scientific and technological development.  
7. Enhancing research-policy linkages on social transformations.  
8. Fostering research on critical emerging ethical and social issues. |
| Fostering cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and a culture of peace | 9. Strengthening the contribution of culture to sustainable development.  
10. Demonstrating the importance of exchange and dialogue among cultures to social cohesion and reconciliation in order to develop a culture of peace.  
11. Sustainably protecting and enhancing cultural heritage. |
There is a fourteenth strategic programme objective which transcends the five overarching objectives, namely “Support through UNESCO’s domains to countries in post-conflict situations and post-disaster situations” (UNESCO 2008b:31-32).

The five “overarching objectives” correspond more or less to UNESCO’s five major programmes. Cynically one might say that in spite of the elaborate conceptualisation, not much has changed.

### 3.2 Libraries in the MTS for 2008-2013

A detailed analysis of how libraries feature in the MTS (cf. Lor 2007) is beyond the scope of this paper. Librarians would argue that not one of the 14 strategic programme objectives can be successfully pursued without support from library and information services. However, in some of the strategic programme objectives libraries are barely mentioned, if at all. This is generally true of strategic programme objectives 1 to 8, which happen to fall under the first three overarching objectives. For example, in the context of Education for All (EFA) in strategic programme objective 1 no mention is made of school libraries or of the role of libraries in literacy. There are many more examples of a failure to see libraries as part of the solutions that are being sought.

Libraries are generally more relevant to the remaining strategic programme objectives 9-13, which fall under the last two overarching objectives, Culture, and Communication and Information. In some of these strategic programme objectives libraries are explicitly mentioned, in others they are not. For example, in strategic programme objective 9: Strengthening the contribution of culture to sustainable development, the Memory of the World programme is mentioned in the context of “capacity building to create, preserve and provide access to diverse cultural contents” (UNESCO 2008b:26). However, libraries as such are mentioned neither here nor in strategic programme objective 11: Sustainably protecting and enhancing cultural heritage. This is concerned with immovable
heritage and movable cultural property but, while reference is made to the role of museums, neither libraries nor archives are mentioned.

Under overarching objective 5, *Building inclusive knowledge societies through information and communication*, mention is made of UNESCO’s aims to “consolidate and put into practice its concept of knowledge societies that are inclusive, pluralistic, equitable, open and participatory” and to ensure “broader access to scientific and technical knowledge” (UNESCO 2008b:29). Libraries are highly relevant to these aims, which are developed in two strategic programme objectives, numbers 12 and 13.

**Strategic programme objective 12: Enhancing universal access to information and knowledge** is the most relevant to libraries. A number of themes are featured which are of great interest to our profession:

- the provision of equitable, appropriate and affordable access to information
- freedom of expression and the right to information
- building the capacities of information professionals to create, disseminate and preserve information and knowledge
- building the capacities of users to access, analyse and evaluate information,
- building information-literate communities
- increasing opportunities for marginalised and disadvantaged groups
- promoting diversity of information sources in all languages
- preservation and dissemination of various forms of cultural expression

The Information for All Programme (IFAP) is referred to here, but although at the country level “community access facilities, including community media” are envisaged, the L-word (library) does not occur. Rather, the emphasis is on “media and information networks” (UNESCO 2008b:30).

In strategic programme objective 13: *Fostering pluralistic free and independent media and infostructures* there is again much emphasis on media and ICTs. However, library and information services are specifically referred to in the context of building infostructures:
UNESCO will enhance its emphasis on establishing infostructures, including the promotion of library and information services, with a focus on building digital libraries and the role of archives and records management services. Such mechanisms contribute to democratic practices, accountability and good governance, providing citizens with access to official information. (UNESCO 2008b:31).

While it is gratifying to see a specific reference to libraries and information services here, it must be noted that UNESCO’s focus is very much on the more glamorous development of digital libraries.

Generally it is disappointing that not much is said in the Medium-Term Strategy about libraries as central agencies in the coming knowledge societies. When libraries are mentioned, it is often incidentally. The only time libraries generate any sort of excitement is when digital libraries are mentioned. There is also not much about open access. Generally, in spite of a declared intention to follow up the WSIS action lines for which UNESCO has assumed ownership, the strategic programme objectives show insufficient evidence of serious engagement with these action lines.

3.3 Programme and budget for the Major Programme for Communication and Information

When it comes to giving practical effect to the MTS, we need to consider the programmes and budgets for the five major programmes. These are prepared, debated and implemented biennially. Since the MTS is for six years, during this period there will be three programmes and budgets, for 2008-2009, 2010-2011 and 2012-2013. Here I briefly consider UNESCO’s programme and budget for the biennium 2008-2009 (UNESCO 2008a). It translates the overarching objectives and strategic programme objectives of the Medium-Term Strategy into biennial sectoral priorities for each major programme. The biennial sectoral priorities are then developed into a limited number of main lines of action (MLAs). In an effort to concentrate and focus on UNESCO’s core strengths the programme and budget has significantly reduced the overall number of MLAs for the period 2008-2009 compared to earlier years. Although, as indicated earlier, all five major programmes have relevance for libraries, this discussion is limited to the Major Programme for Communication and Information (CI)
For 2008-2009 two biennial sectoral priorities were set for Major Programme V, Communication and Information (CI):

1. Fostering free, independent and pluralistic communication and universal access to information (principal priority)
2. Promoting innovative applications of ICTs for sustainable development (priority 2) (UNESCO 2008a:157-158, 165)

In an earlier version of this document (UNESCO 2007a) six MLAs appeared, four for Biennial Sectoral Priority 1 and two for Biennial Sectoral Priority 2. However, in the version as approved, these have been conflated, leaving four MLAs shared between the two biennial sectoral priorities. For each MLA a set of “expected results at the end of the biennium” is stated, and for each of these a set of performance indicators is given. In Table 2 the MLAs and their expected results (UNESCO 2008a: 168-172) are listed.

Table 2: Main lines of action for Major Programme V and corresponding expected results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main lines of action (MLA)</th>
<th>Expected results</th>
</tr>
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| 1. Promoting an enabling environment for freedom of expression and freedom of information | * Awareness of freedom of expression as a basic human right increased and related internationally recognized legal, ethical and professional standards applied  
* Public service broadcasting enhanced, and editorial independence and diverse and responsive programming fostered to facilitate good governance |
| 2. Fostering universal access to information and the development of infrastructures | * UNESCO policy frameworks for universal access to and preservation of information established  
* International multi-stakeholder partnerships for enhancing universal access to information fostered  
* Information management structures to support sustainable development strengthened  
* Strategies and practices for ICT in support of knowledge creation, acquisition and sharing in |
Main lines of action (MLA) | Expected results
---|---
the field of education, the sciences and culture developed in consultation with the media

3. Promoting the development of free, independent and pluralistic media and community participation in sustainable development through community media

* Development of free, independent and pluralistic media fostered, particularly by increasing capacities of media training institutions to offer high-quality training
* Community radio and community multimedia centres fostered as catalysing tools for community “voice” and people-centred development
* United Nations inter-agency collaboration in communication for sustainable development strengthened
* Media literacy and civic participation in media enhanced

4. Strengthening the role of communication and information in fostering mutual understanding, peace and reconciliation, particularly in open- and post-conflict areas

* Assistance provided to create an enabling environment for free and independent media and to build the capacity of media and ICTs in countries in transition and post-conflict situations within the perspective of fostering governance and democracy
* Media and ICTs encouraged to contribute to building peace, facilitating dialogue, fostering cultural diversity and safeguarding intangible memory

Since Africa is regarded as an “overarching global priority”, there is an additional section entitled “Addressing the needs of Africa”, for which the following expected results are listed:

- Information policy frameworks for universal access to information established, and advice given for the adaptation of media laws to international standards
- ICT competencies of teachers at all levels, and capacities of media and training institutions to offer high-quality training increased, including through intersectoral cooperation
• Community radio and community multimedia centres fostered as catalysing tools for community “voice” and people-centred development

• Capacity of free, independent and pluralistic media to report according to professional standards, as established by journalists themselves, enhanced in post-conflict environments (UNESCO 2008a:159).

The General Conference resolution 34 C/Res.48 for Major Programme V authorises the Director-General to implement the plan of action. It makes a very positive statement about MLA 2, which is to:

foster universal access to information taking requisite measures, given the fact that the growing concentration of ownership of media and information and communication technology tools could jeopardize the actual implementation of universal access, and to that end: assist in the formulation of national information policy frameworks, in particular within the framework of the Information for All Programme (IFAP); support the preservation of analogue and digital documentary information through the Memory of the World Programme; establish policy frameworks and international standards to increase information literacy; monitor developments and foster the exchange of best practices with regard to the ethical dimensions of the information society, building on the priorities of IFAP; foster international partnerships for enhancing universal access to information; encourage the development of knowledge societies (UNESCO 2008a:157)

All this is very relevant to the library profession, especially the themes of access to information, preservation and information literacy. However, in the chapter dealing with Major programme V libraries are mentioned only twice, once in the context of digital library services (UNESCO 2008a:166) and once in the context of information management. In MLA 2, one of the expected results is: “Information management structures to support sustainable development strengthened”, and here libraries and archives feature in a performance indicator:

Strategies and action plans established for libraries and archives to become key actors for building knowledge societies:

-- Benchmarks: 5 national strategies formulated to strengthen the role of libraries and archives; 5 digital library services established (UNESCO 2008a:170)
The intention to strengthen the role of libraries and to make them (with archives) key actors for building knowledge societies is encouraging. But again, there is an emphasis on the development of digital libraries. How the establishment of five digital library services can be seen as a benchmark when digital library products, services, collections and facilities are springing up like mushrooms all over the world, is hard to understand.

MLA 2 is to receive the lion’s share of Major Programme V’s budget for 2008-2009: $10.7 million (33.7%) of the regular budget and $36.5 million (86.4%) of the extrabudgetary funds (UNESCO 2008a:154) but it is not clear how this amount will be distributed to the various activities covered by MLA 2. The general emphasis in the Programme is on media and information, with very little attention being paid to libraries. A word count of the text of the chapter on Major Programme V (UNESCO 2008a:154-172) illustrates this (Table 3).

**Table 3: Frequency of key words in the section on Major Programme V in UNESCO’s Approved programme and budget 2008-2009 (34 C/5 Approved)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>media</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT, ICTs</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multimedia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>library/libraries/librarian</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFAP</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>archive/archives/archival/archivist</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

In the debate in the CI Commission in October 2007 libraries and archives were said to be active partners of IFLA. It was stated that libraries are central to UNESCO and UNESCO will continue to work with them to promote them as sources of information for the people. However, on the evidence of the programme and budget document the implication is inescapable: libraries hardly
featured in the thinking of those who developed the programme and budget for UNESCO’s major programme for Communication and Information.

4. UNESCO’s Information for All Programme (IFAP)

4.1 Background

The Information for All Programme (IFAP) was established by UNESCO in 2001 with a mandate to

…be a key participant in the fulfilment of UNESCO’s mandate to contribute to “education for all”, to the “free exchange of ideas and knowledge” and to “increase the means of communication between peoples”.

It was also expected to “contribute to narrowing the gap between the information rich and the information poor”, to work on “all aspects of access to and management of information”, to work with all UNESCO sectors and to cooperate with other United Nations bodies (UNESCO 2007c:76).

IFAP was in effect the result of the merger of two existing UNESCO programmes—the General Information Programme (GPI) and the Intergovernmental Informatics Programme (IIP) (Gurstein & Taylor 2007:6). The Programme is governed by an Intergovernmental Council composed of 26 UNESCO member states elected at the General Conference. Every two years the Council elects a Bureau composed of eight members. The work of the programme is supported by a small Secretariat (one officer and a part-time secretary) provided by the Information Society Division of the Communication and Information Major Programme. IFAP has encouraged the creation of IFAP national committees in member states. The national committees provide a mechanism for two-way communication between IFAP and the national stakeholders in the member states.

4.2 External evaluation of IFAP, 2006

By 2006 it was clear that IFAP was not fulfilling the high expectations that had been held when it was launched. An external evaluation (Gurstein & Taylor 2007) was commissioned. The evaluators found that IFAP had achieved some successes, including:

- the establishment of the intergovernmental framework of the Council and Bureau.
• fund raising (with limited success)
• the selection, funding and implementation of projects in the IFAP priority areas of information literacy, information preservation and information ethics
• the establishment of National Committees (some very successful but most of them inactive)
• publications in the IFAP’s field of expertise
• providing support for the development and implementation of policy and standard setting instruments
• the organization of thematic debates with governmental, NGO and other representatives (Gurstein & Taylor 2007:6-7)

On the other hand, the evaluators found that IFAP faced a number of key challenges:

• IFAP’s mandate “lacks clarity and focus and does not readily lead to clearly identifiable outcomes and achievements”.
• IFAP lacks the necessary financial and human resources.
• IFAP lacks a capacity to monitor the projects it funds and to evaluate their outcomes
• IFAP’s governance structure is cumbersome: its Council meets only every two years and the IFAP Bureau lacks the resources to carry out substantive activities.
• IFAP lacks the capacity to respond to the rapidly evolving policy, institutional and technological framework within which it has to operate (Gurstein & Taylor 2007:7-8).

The evaluators concluded that, while IFAP had achieved some successes, its impact had been limited. In particular, its visibility during the process leading up to the World Summit on the Information Society and at the two summits had been minimal. However, the evaluation report also recommended that IFAP align itself with the activities in the follow-up and implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action. This could include developing a Programme responsibility for carrying through on the areas of involvement and responsibility assigned to UNESCO in the WSIS follow-up and Plan of Action (Gurstein & Taylor 2007:42)
4.3 The IFAP strategic plan

The report on the evaluation of IFAP was submitted to UNESCO’s Executive Board, which responded by asking the Director General to prepare a results-based strategic plan for IFAP, relating it to the Geneva Plan of Action. The proposed strategic plan was drawn up by the IFAP Bureau under time pressure, using electronic consultation and teleconferencing, and version 17 of the draft (IFAP 2008) was sent to Council members for discussion at its meeting in April 2008.

The draft reaffirms the global goal of IFAP as “information for all”. This goal should be as prominent in UNESCO as “education for all”. In this connection the document recognises the role of libraries, stating that:

Community libraries, public archives, telecentres, community multimedia centres and other community-based centres where people can get access to information, have many of the key functionalities required to build information literate communities… Libraries, archives and community information centres are good examples of how “information for all” could materialise within a community (IFAP 2008:8-9)

“Information for all” is such an ambitious aim that it is beyond the resources of UNESCO alone. It is necessary to focus on what UNESCO can do. Therefore an achievable mission has to be chosen for IFAP. Hence in Section 6 an “overarching goal” is proposed for IFAP:

To help Members States to develop and implement national information strategies and knowledge strategies in a world increasingly driven by digital technologies (IFAP 2008:11)

IFAP should concentrate its efforts on preparing resources for use by all member states in preparing their own national policies and strategies, in five priority areas:

- Information for development
- Information literacy
- Information preservation
- Information ethics
- Information accessibility
For each of the priority areas a strategic programme objective is identified and elaborated:

Table 4: IFAP priority areas and strategic programme objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Strategic programme objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information for development</td>
<td>Mainstreaming the importance of information in national development plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information literacy</td>
<td>Fostering information literate societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information preservation</td>
<td>Identifying and promoting cost-effective technical solutions for information preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information ethics</td>
<td>Raising awareness on ethical issues related to information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information accessibility</td>
<td>Enhancing universal and multilingual accessibility to information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these is briefly discussed and for each a number of activities is listed (IFAP 2008: 14-18). Surprisingly, libraries do not feature here, although in the section on Information Preservation the Memory of the World programme is mentioned, as is collaboration with international NGOs including IFLA.

A set of eleven “expected outcomes” is proposed. The strategic plan recognises that most of the outcomes are at the level of member states and outside the direct control of UNESCO. The outcomes relate to the following:

1. Parameters for national information policy frameworks to help governments to develop comprehensive information policy frameworks or strategies.
2. Information for development: IFAP will fund and publicise (using an online “success stories” platform) projects that illustrate practically how communities use information for development.
3. Information literacy indicators: IFAP will develop indicators that will enable member states to measure their progress in building information literate communities.
4. Information literacy strategies in national education policies: IFAP will encourage member states to integrate information literacy into national education curricula.
5. Cost-effective technical solutions for information preservation, particularly digital information.

6. Ethical issues of emerging technologies: IFAP will encourage every country to establish an “info-ethics advisory board” or “info-ethics council”.

7. Clarification of the role of free and open-source software (FOSS): IFAP’s role here is somewhat ambivalent, since unreservedly championing FOSS runs counter to the interests of powerful member states.

8. Creation of multilingual digital content: IFAP will encourage member states to develop a “digital content strategy” encompassing the creation of new content as well as the storage and preservation of digital content.

9. Making digital resources accessible to people with disabilities.

10. Enhancing the capacities and competencies of information professionals: “IFAP’s vision is for every community to have access to a library or a library-type facility with digital access.” These centres need competent information professionals. For librarians there is a worrying subtext here: an acceptance that it is not possible to have community libraries everywhere and that other forms of community centres will do in developing countries.

11. Development of measures of the effectiveness of information infrastructures in improving the lives of people: IFAP will collaborate with agencies such as the UNESCO Institute for Statistics to develop such measures, starting with information literacy indicators (IFAP 2008:19:26)

The outcomes are rather a mixed bag. Some are quite specific and may be measurable, others are little more than lofty statements, leaving it unclear what, if anything, IFAP could do to help bring them about. There are rather too many outcomes, and it seems that the sense of focus that is imparted by the five priorities has not been maintained.

Section 10 of the draft presents a table comparing the eleven IFAP outcomes with the objectives set in UNESCO’s Medium Term Strategy 2008-2013 and the WSIS action lines (IFAP 2008:26-28). The table shows that there is considerable alignment between the IFAP outcomes and WSIS action lines C3 (Access to information and knowledge; IFLA’s high priority) and C10 (Ethical dimensions of the Information Society), where libraries are mentioned several times. However, no mention is made of other action lines which are equally relevant to the development of Information Societies and which are very relevant to libraries, for example C1, C4, C7 and C8. This reflects the limitations imposed by UNESCO’s silos. C1, C4, C7 and C8 fall within the domains of other UNESCO major programmes and hence outside the scope of IFAP.
The draft stresses that progress towards knowledge societies is only possible in a “multi-stakeholder collaborative environment” and that UNESCO needs to engage with the other stakeholders on a more equal footing.

The most controversial part of the draft is found in Section 12, which presents a proposal for “a phased approach to mainstream the programme [IFAP] and eliminate the need for a separate IFAP Council” (IFAP 2008:32-44). The rationale for this is that information for all should be an integral part of UNESCO’s regular Programme and Budget. It should so thoroughly permeate the work of UNESCO that no separate structure for it should be necessary. The proposal provides for three phases, corresponding to the three biennia of the Medium Term Strategy. By the third phase (2012-2013) the formal IFAP structures (the Council, its Bureau and the IFAP Secretariat provided by the Information Society Division) are to be disbanded and all “information for all” activities integrated into UNESCO’s regular programme. However, evaluation of progress in each biennium would make it possible to opt out of this drastic step.

Although inadequate resources have been a major cause of IFAP’s unsatisfactory performance in the past, no additional funding is proposed, only a reallocation of IFAP’s existing budget over the three phases.

In the Council debate on the draft Strategic Plan in April 2008 there was a chorus of opposition to the proposal to phase out the Council. Questions were raised about whether the Council can operate virtually, and concern was expressed that “mainstreaming” will result in loss of focus on information as a UNESCO priority. The lack of a clear plan for funding the programme was a further concern. After much debate the resistance to the phasing out proposals in the draft plan led to a postponement of its adoption. The Council requested its Bureau to revise the draft plan in light of the discussion and to arrange an online consultation on the revised draft. It agreed to adopt it in a virtual meeting six months later, after which it would be submitted to the Executive Board for endorsement, six months after the Executive Board’s deadline.

At time of writing it is not yet known how the Executive Board will respond to this outcome, but it is unlikely to convey to the Executive Board a positive image of a dynamic programme and Council. It also illustrates the structural weakness of IFAP already pointed out by the external evaluators: it is a programme in a rapidly developing field, but its policies are decided by an indecisive Council that meets only every two years. The Council’s unfortunate failure to endorse the IFAP Strategic Plan casts doubt on the future viability of IFAP.
There is no easy road to library development. Libraries do not feature in high level declarations such as the Millennium Development Goals. Libraries are not visible and relevant enough to the politicians and diplomats who craft such statements. Librarians themselves have to make and demonstrate the connections between these goals and the contributions that libraries can make to achieve them. As the presidential theme of IFLA’s current President, Claudia Lux, suggests – the theme is “Libraries on the agenda!” (Lux 2005) – librarians have to demonstrate the relevance of their institutions to society.

The WSIS process demonstrated that this can be done. Energetic and focussed advocacy during the WSIS process yielded positive results in that language favourable to libraries was included in the outcome documents. However, if these gains are not exploited, the effort will have been wasted. Thus the WSIS action lines have to be followed up painstakingly and systematically, through constant monitoring, patient networking, the formation of partnerships and being seen to contribute. This has to be done not only at the international level, where IFLA as an international NGO recognised by international intergovernmental organisations can take the lead, but also at the national level.

Librarians have long looked to UNESCO as a source of support for library development. Because of its leading role in following up the WSIS action lines that are most relevant to libraries, UNESCO still offers the best opportunities for inserting libraries into national development plans, national information policies and national knowledge society strategies. However, an analysis of the UNESCO medium term programme for 2008-2013, the programme and budget of the Major programme for Communication and Information for the biennium 2008-2013, and the draft strategic plan of the Information for All Programme, suggests that librarians should not take UNESCO’s support for granted. Amid the lofty verbiage in the UNESCO documents and the repeated, obligatory references to currently fashionable themes such as SIDS, LDCs, gender equity, youth, vulnerable segments of society, and Africa, one is hard-pressed to find text that implies a significant role for libraries in the development of knowledge societies. This is frustrating for librarians: it is so obvious to us that libraries are essential to UNESCO’s goals and objectives, but libraries seem constantly to be overlooked.

Colleagues in Africa are familiar with the term “Afro-pessimism”. Among colleagues working in international NGOs there is something analogous:
“UNESCO-pessimism”. Some are tempted to give up on this slow-moving, labyrinthine organisation. However, I believe that there is still much to be gained by engaging with UNESCO. This has to be done at various levels. For example, at the international level there is a major challenge for IFLA to break out of the “Information Society” pigeonhole in which it has been placed in UNESCO, and to build relationships with other UNESCO divisions in the other UNESCO major programmes, to each of which libraries are relevant. IFLA is working on this, and is also working to build stronger relations with other international NGOs in related fields.

Here are some opportunities at the national level:

- Participate in the work of your country’s national IFAP committee. If there is no such committee yet, help set one up, if applicable in collaboration with other IFLA members in your country. Use the IFAP Committee to disseminate the concept of “information for all” in your country, to network with colleagues in related professions, and to communicate your country’s experiences and needs to IFAP.

- Participate in the work of the National Commission for UNESCO, to ensure that information and library matters are addressed there, and that the representatives of your country who go to attend UNESCO meetings in Paris and WSIS action line meetings in Geneva, are properly briefed about the role of libraries. The National Commission also offers a means of connecting with other UNESCO major programmes.

- Work through contacts in the National UNESCO Commission and relevant ministries to insert library issues into the regional consultations of member states of UNESCO that are being held every two years to discuss the draft programme and budget for the next biennium. At time of writing such meetings were being held to discuss the programme and budget for 2009-2010. Librarians in developing countries should gear up for participating in the next round of consultations, for the biennium 2011-2012.

It will not be easy for librarians to stake out the central ground in the information or knowledge society. The library community will have to invest significantly in the building of partnerships and in the conduct of effective advocacy. This is tough, but not impossible: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”
References


