

with the world of books. Although he did not live to see through the execution of his vision for the Library, the first Symposium² that was part of the launching of the DHL in November 1961 clearly demonstrated that he had infected his excellent staff of the

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and university/research libraries, and they were selected on the basis of expected use that would be made of the documents in their care.

The deposit libraries in the countries of Africa have provided information not just on the UN but also for research purposes to scholars, people in academia, politicians, policy makers in government, international officers, industry and commerce. In a continent that has always suffered from insufficient access to information, the system has been of invaluable help. At the Balme Library of the University of Ghana, the “UN Document Library” has offered this type of assistance since 1961. I also know for a fact that the Addis Ababa University’s UN Collection is a model in terms of its organization and also of its heavy usage.

Some of the UN agencies also have deposit arrangement with some deposit libraries. In Ghana, for example, which hosts the regional offices of the FAO, three main Universities i.e., the University of Ghana, the University of Cape Coast and the University of Science and Technology, which have large Faculties of Agriculture have received FAO documents for a long time. The FAO documents are housed in the deposit libraries with

The Depository Libraries have so far received DHL's Services based largely on conventional manual methods of dissemination and in a somewhat reactive manner in that deposit docum

the result of lack of the resources required for connectivity – the technology, the appropriate skills, political will- and ignorance. These have international dimensions like the unequal global economic order, which has long placed developing countries at economic disadvantage and plunged them into a cycle of poverty.

The bottom line in all this is lack of the types of information required for effective research, decision- making and development. It is my opinion that the DHL can assist in capacity building to improve the situation by shifting emphasis to interaction with depository librarians who have been largely invisible collaborators all these years.

The DHL could adopt a more proactive approach in its relationship with the depository libraries in the developing countries in general and Africa in particular. What is being suggested here is that the staff of such should be assisted to upgrade their skills in information management techniques such as indexing/abstracting, or other information storage/retrieval programmes in which the DHL possesses acclaimed expertise. This could be done in collaboration with the other UN agencies involved in the depository system through exchange of staff between the DHL and the UN agencies on the one hand, and the libraries of the Member countries on the other.

Such programmes would expose librarians from the depository libraries to the excellent practices and the automated environments of the DHL and the various UN information systems, upgrade their skills and empower them to design bibliographic tools that will improve access and information flow for their communities, and for the world at large. Staff from the DHL and the other libraries of the UN system would also experience at close range the cultural milieu for which they have been collecting or disseminating documents and other forms of information, and the problems and aspirations of its peoples. This kind of arrangement will give the DHL and its collaborators a more sympathetic understanding of these concerns.

Electronic Networking is an effective method of resource sharing which could and should be encouraged among the libraries of Africa, beginning at the country level. Some

African countries have taken the first steps in establishing networks to enhance the informational resources available to them through sharing. Exchange of staff would identify this as an important area to focus on, considering the DHL's experience in the area with the UN agencies, and its immediate (American) neighbours.

The DHL is also in a position to play a more visible advocacy role in the number of project initiatives that have been launched globally and also in parti

research journals, for example, in collaboration with other African libraries. This is an area of great need where DHL could also make a more or less direct input by way of assistance in the training of librarians and information workers from African countries in indexing and other retrieval techniques, and how such activities could be made sustainable.

I appreciate the fact that the DHL is a special library and that being an international library as well, it has its own peculiar rules. But I think the time has come for the Library to de-emphasize its special nature and focus more on its international, global responsibilities, particularly to developing countries, where such assistance is urgently required. Besides, the DHL has expressed the aspirations of mankind. I believe this is why the depository privilege has been extended to all types of library authority- national, public, special and academic libraries. This fact explains the diffuseness of the DHL's areas of specialization, and justifies its adoption of a more universal outlook in its mission of promoting information flow worldwide.

These tasks should be undertaken in collaboration with the UN agencies some of whom, like the FAO and the WHO, have excellent libraries at their regional offices in Accra and Congo Brazzaville respectively. The WHO library has tackled the problem of access to Africa's medical information resources with its **African Index Medicus Project**. FAO could match it with a similar project on an aspect of agriculture, and so should the UNHCR's Africa office, for a continent with the largest refugee population and some of the most acute accompanying problems. A database on refugeeism in Africa would be a mine of information for keeping track of and managing the continent refugee crises.

These are a few of the challenges I would like to present to us all for consideration. The logistical implications of such an expanded area of responsibility will be quite considerable. The General Assembly is being urged to consider making appropriate provision in its budgetary allocation to the DHL.

REFERENCES

1. The Library Symposium, 17 November 1961 In: The Dag Hammarskjold Library; Gift of the Ford Foundation: [Proceedings, Dedication and Symposium] New York: United Nations, Pp 51-53
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p. 90, col.1
4. African Information Society Initiative (AISI) is an action framework to build African information infrastructure adopted in May 1996 by the Un Economic Commission of Africa (UNECA) Conference of Ministers. AISI is also the principal activity within the United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative on Africa Programme on Harnessing Information Technology for Development (HITD/SIA).

[URL:http://www.bellanet.org/aisi/](http://www.bellanet.org/aisi/)
5. DATAD- Database of Africa Theses and Dissertations Project- was mooted at a planning meeting organized by PIAC (Project for Information Access and Connectivity) in Nairobi in January 1998. The viability of the project was discussed and a feasibility study was agreed on as first step. PIAC in collaboration with AAU carried out the study to determine the viability of a pilot project between March and December of the same year. A Pilot Phase set up soon thereafter and involving eight (8) universities, is nearing a successful conclusion.