THE GLOBAL INFORMATION NETWORK REALITIES AND PROBLEMS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT: This paper is an analysis of the real barriers that mitigate against participation in a public library system or regional network. It studies what might prevent developing countries from joining international networks.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to discuss on international information transfer and communication and focus my talk on library networking in developing countries and factors affecting its implementation.

How to face the different barriers in library networking? I do not know if there is a right solution to this problem nor if I am the right person to talk about this. However I am going to share some thoughts drawn from my experience as a librarian from a developing country.

THE REAL BARRIERS

Whether they are termed the third world, the underdeveloped countries, or the developing countries, they share common problems which the growth in telecommunication can exacerbate as much as ameliorate.

The most significant phenomenon in the development of information services in developing countries over the last decade has been the emergence of information networking and the exchange of information and experience.

National networks have emerged as well as regional ones, but many factors are affecting their implementation. They are as follows:

- A shortage of expertise in available human resources.
- Documentation units are not always able to meet the prohibitive cost of certain equipment and the charges which have to be paid for connection to database interrogation systems.

Added to this are the problems regarding access to primary documents identified in an online search,
- the lack of fund allocations to libraries and documentation centres.
- The strength of foreign currency against local currency makes it even more difficult to purchase books and subscriptions to journals.
• In certain cases the wish to introduce new technology poses a number of problems which information services are not always able to resolve in view of their structural weaknesses and their lack of resources.

• The lack of understanding of the potential value of networks by librarians, policy makers and by the public.

• A fear of loss of autonomy if the library joins the network.

• Personality problems: mistrust, jealousy and desire of power and leadership.

• The key central library is “lukewarm” about accepting responsibility to serve as hub of network.

• The temptation of some groups to form local, regional, or special-purpose networks.

• Problems of personnel shortages and lack of network-oriented professional staff.

• The language of scientific research and development is often not the native language of the country.

• The poor telecommunication structure.

The important social, technological, political and structural factors could be summarized as follows:

In developing countries, decision-makers and user groups perceive libraries as secondary services and, consequently the attention or support libraries receive from them is very limited. As a result, information centres remain fragile.

Perhaps this is tied to the present information officers’ perceptions of themselves as bookkeepers rather than as disseminators of information.

One might wonder if this perception is not also tied to the value scientists, extension workers and trainers attach to information they receive free of charge. Another cultural issue is the fact that users undervalue locally available information and data in decision-making, planning, monitoring and production of technical information, training or extension material. Because they don’t have confidence in the local documentation centres, potential users prefer to send their requests to European, United States or international information centres etc.

The situation described above militates against the strengthening of local information services, for even if centres receive support from donor agencies and facilitating organisations (bilateral or multilateral cooperation), there is no real guarantee for support for the centres at the end of the project.

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Another problem in libraries is the stealing or mutilation of library material which is a constantly encountered problem. Deficiencies in user’s education and orientation, and difficulties in obtaining enough reading material for consolidated learning, explain why the theft of books is on the increase in the documentation and information centres in developing countries.

WHAT SOLUTION TO TAKE?

One of the suitable responses to these problems is that developing countries would include the development of suitable local personnel and resources, which could provide appropriate input and output, sensitive to the country’s conditions and traditions while being compatible with existing systems and information structure. The method of information transfer needs at the same time to be suitable for the local environment and responsive to different levels of users. To encourage such activities national Information policies are required to provide a strong and effective base for both public and private investment. Without the stimulation of such an environment, developing counties will suffer an information imperialism. These issues are complicated further by the nature of the solutions which may be found, none of them being susceptible to a definitive answer, but requiring resolution by balance and often by those who are the most advantaged being prepared to concede some advantages for the benefit of the society.

CONCLUSION

Information services in developing countries suffer from some weaknesses and threats.

To improve the dissemination of information in developing countries a great deal of improvement needs to be done particularly in :

- The understanding of the environmental factors mainly the cultures prevailing in these countries.
- A better communication between the developed countries and the developing countries, particularly in formulating national regional and international information programmes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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