
21 PLANNING NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION SERVICES

A McMurdoch

Introduction

If you have ever experienced difficulty in discovering recorded information relative to your work or other activities you will be interested in a system which provides easier access to information. For the next ten minutes I shall attempt to tell you something about a national information system and of the way in which one part of the network - the documentation and information services - could be planned.

In every country there are several types of libraries - national, government, university, public, special, school or college - each serving a different clientele. There are also documentation centres and archives services. For some time the need has been felt for an interrelated network of libraries, documentation centres and archives services to ensure that all those engaged in political, economic, scientific, educational, social or cultural activities have access to relevant information to enable them to make their optimum contribution to the community. More recently governments have recognized the importance of access to information by all sectors of the community, especially those responsible for making decisions and formulating policy at the national level.

UNESCO is playing a significant role in the development of national information systems by initiating and supporting several regional and international conferences on this theme. Guyana participated in two of these - the Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures held in Paris in September 1974 and the Workshop on the Planning of National Information Services (NATIS), Library and Documentation Networks for the Caribbean Area held in Jamaica in November 1975.

From the recommendations of the regional meetings guidelines have been established for planning national information systems:-

1. A central co-ordinating body should be set up to advise the Government on the formulation and implementation of a national information plan. This co-ordinating body should be composed of representatives of all appropriate government departments, various state bodies and semi-official institutions and of representative specialists from the information field.

2. A national plan should be formulated in accordance with an established information policy, taking into account the priorities of national and sectoral planning. The plan should describe the present situation based on comprehensive surveys of libraries, archives and documentation services.
3. Legislation should be enacted to provide a secure legal foundation for the system.
4. Adequate financial provision should be made to ensure the effective implementation of the system.
5. Provision should be made for the training of manpower to perform at all levels - information specialists, librarians, archivists, technical personnel.
6. Adequate provision should be made for the application of information technology in the various components of the system with the aim of achieving maximum utilization of existing resources and of reaching compatibility and standardization.

In Guyana a central co-ordinating body has not yet been set up, nor, as far as I am aware, has a plan for a national information system been formulated, but recommendations have been made by professional staff for the coordination of resources within a subject area, for example in Economics, Law and Medicine. A union catalogue of the various collections in each subject area, with locations, would provide easy access to the material and avoid unnecessary duplication of titles.

About two years ago the National Library received a request for document on Agriculture in the Rupununi. We did not have a copy nor could one be traced in the Central Agricultural Research Station Library or the University Library. A senior member of staff had occasion to visit one of the libraries with a collection on Economic Development and by chance saw a copy of the required document on a shelf. It was a research paper published by McGill University. In a well-organized network of libraries we would not have had to rely on chance.

Many difficulties will have to be overcome before well-organized networks could become a reality, not least among these is the human problem - resistance to change. In some libraries the staff know their stock and are able to retrieve material instantly without the aid of any record and are not yet convinced of the usefulness of an index for the user.

Documentation and Information Services

While libraries and archives services have existed in Guyana for many years documentation centres are comparatively new. As mentioned before documentation centres are one of the components of a national information system. Some people are uncertain about the difference in function between a

library and a documentation centre. In a documentation centre publications are "received, processed, preserved, summarized and indexed; bulletins relating to such material are prepared for distribution to those interested; research is undertaken, bibliographies prepared and copies or translations made." A documentalist or information officer is concerned with the collection and dissemination of knowledge, with assembling information contained within documents together with data from other sources to form a new compilation, whereas a librarian is concerned with the techniques of handling records of knowledge, making them available and possibly exploiting them.

Accommodated adjacent to the research institution it is designed to serve, each documentation unit should aim to build up a library which can meet the needs of research workers.

These units should be co-ordinated through a national documentation centre covering all fields of knowledge - the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Science and Technology. This centralized organization would house the union catalogues, the computer terminals, act as a referral centre, arrange for the training of personnel. The setting up of national documentation and information services within the national system will be a gradual process; priority in establishing them will be determined by the priority programmes of the government.

One of the first tasks of the documentalist is to assemble a significant collection of research material in the area of specialization covered by the service -

- material published in the country or which deals with the country. An examination of existing collections in the country should reveal items; a perusal of catalogues of institutions in the region would also be helpful;
- establish links and conclude exchange agreements with regional institutions, e.g. the research centres of the University of the West Indies, the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI) in Trinidad;
- establish links with international agencies set up within the framework of the World Science Information System (UNISIST), e.g. the International Information System in Agriculture (AGRIS);
- provide a representative collection of current periodicals, indexes and abstracts;
- extend the resources through computer links with data banks;

In organizing the stock the use of international standards for cataloguing, classifying and indexing will allow the national

system to key into and take advantage of valuable information in other national and international systems. These standards are already in use in Guyana in some libraries and in the preparation of the Guyanese National Bibliography and are applicable to both manual and mechanical systems.

Experience has proved that it is necessary to insist on the provision of adequate premises equipped with shelving, furniture and fittings, reprographic and other equipment.

One of the most acute problems to be overcome would be the recruitment and retention of the services of qualified personnel - documentalists, librarians and technical staff - able to accept the responsibility of making the fullest contribution to national development.

Although financial resources are limited Government could formulate plans for a national information system and integrate these plans in the national plans for economic and social development. UNESCO is willing to assist Member States in carrying out their national programmes in planning and implementation of the system, the application of the new technology and the professional education and training of manpower.

Conclusion

Each of us has a contribution to make towards the goal of making information available. In our private/official collections, are important research documents that would be useful to researchers available to any of the major libraries or documentation centres in the country? If there is no record of its existence and location, access to the information contained therein is impossible. Your cooperation in the building of a national information system is vital.

REFERENCES

UNESCO Bulletin for libraries, Vol. XXIX, no. 1, January - February, 1975. p. 2-14.

d'Olier, J.H. and Delmas, B., Planning National Infrastructures for Documentation, Libraries and Archives. Paris: UNESCO, 1975.