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### Introduction

As a Social Scientist, I realise the importance of establishing what one can call - working definition of a concept, before any discussion in relation to the concept is attempted. So, before I talk about the functions of National Documentation Centres, I will explain what is meant by 'documentation'.

S.C. Bradford who is looked upon as the father of documentation in the English speaking world after his 'Documentation' appeared in 1948, conceptualises 'documentation' as 'the art of collecting, clarifying and making readily accessible the records of all kinds of intellectual activity ... the process by which ... is ... put before the creative specialist the existing literature, bearing on the subject of his investigation in order that he may be made fully aware of previous achievements in his subjects and thus be saved from the dissipation of his genius upon work already done'.<sup>1</sup>

Documentation is further seen as that aspect of bibliographic control of bibliographic organization which is concerned with the scholarly characteristics of bibliographies, indexes and abstracting services.

On this side of the Atlantic, Jesse H. Shera sees the essential task of documentation as the matching of two patterns:-

- (a) the pattern of all scholarly activities in which the use of primary graphic records play a part; and
- (b) the pattern of inter-mediary services which transmit primary recorded materials from the scholar - as - producer to the scholar - as - user.<sup>2</sup>

Shera concludes that documentation is that portion of bibliographic organization that is involved with the indirect communication of primary materials within and among groups of specialists, to the end that they will receive, in a manner as efficient as possible, the data which they require for the effective execution of their work. (Bibliographic organization being in contrast to the channelling of graphic records to all users, for all purposes and at all levels).

Documentation then should be regarded as an essential part of our modern system of graphic communication within the world of scholarship, an instrumental device to expedite the

the flow of recorded information within a group of specialists or between various groups of specialists.

In considering the functions of a National Documentation Centre or of Information Centres, one must look at the needs of the users and the types of materials which are needed to meet those needs.

Cde. Seymour outlined the needs of the users, and so without wanting to bore you with repetition, I will just briefly consider the types of material needed by the scientists and technologists.

The pure scientists (e.g. physicists, chemists, etc.) are primarily interested in literature - comprehensive and primary materials - which records the establishments of new facts, a new relationship among facts previously known or a new method for the manipulation of techniques or data already known. He needs not only single isolated facts but all facts of a given class for basis of a comparison, relationship and information on activities in related areas of research.

In addition, the scientist requires easy access to all established descriptive facts about one particular element, compound or substance - e.g. such as needing information on the physical and chemical properties of aluminium, and he needs access to the literature of all problems that have been approached through the application of a particular method or through a particular principle, hypothesis or law.

Because the research materials that the pure scientist needs are primary and unique and do not permit of substitution, his bibliographic requirements call for a comprehensive index of the entirety of the primary literature of research that falls within the boundaries of his subject field.

The other major group of users of documentation are the technicians, a group made up of engineers, mechanics, inventors and manufacturers. The needs of this group are quite a contrast to those of a pure scientist in that the technicians are primarily concerned with the results of research rather than the materials, methods or verifications of the experimental process.<sup>4</sup>

A National Documentation Centre should fundamentally be concerned with:-

- (a) the acquisition of appropriate materials; and
- (b) their organisation and interpretation for effective use.

And the social function of the documentalist being to provide maximum effective use of information with the task of supplying:-

- (a) physical accessibility to information needed; and
- (b) ensuring content accessibility.

## Functions of a National Documentation Centre

The functional responsibilities of such a centre should include, as P.J. Boyle in his paper on 'Planning and Designing National Information Systems', presented at the Arusha Conference - outlines. (p 15.7 - 15.8)

- (1) Implementation of policy decisions on national information services;
- (2) Coordinating and strengthening links among components of the national information system and monitoring system performance;
- (3) Acting as a referral point and coordinating link between the national system and regional and international systems;
- (4) Acting as the main national centre for information and consultation on the theory and practice of documentation and information. This would include responsibility for monitoring developments in methods and techniques of handling information on behalf of all units in the national system;
- (5) Standardising procedures and methods for handling information within the national systems and for developing maximum compatibility with international systems;
- (6) Acting as a clearing house for enquiries relating to the scientific and technological literature from within and outside the country;
- (7) Provision of information output of various types, e.g. the national bibliography, information digests, guides to information sources, abstracts, etc;
- (8) Coordination of input to such international information systems as AGRIS;
- (9) Training of personnel information work including organization of training courses for students and practicing scientists.

Besides those functional responsibilities, a National Documentation Centre - say for Science and Technology:-

- (1) Must become thoroughly familiar with the current situation in science and technology so that it can select the information most pertinent to local needs and supply it

through the most appropriate communication medium (i.e. the printed work, audio-visual media and personal contacts);

- (2) The Centre must be able to ascertain what information is available locally and what foreign sources can supplement the stock of the Centre to the degree required in the country;
- (3) The Centre before supplying information to the requester should screen the material, collate, summarise and translate where necessary;
- (4) The System must be prepared to educate the users in how to use information to its best advantage;

It is important for such a Centre to be able to communicate to the users and the public that because of the central position of the Centre, more sources of information can be tapped, especially know-how, and expert advice at the national and international levels.

- (5) As a National Centre, it should function in close cooperation with other 'information institutions' in the country (e.g. libraries and information units). It should play a catalytic role and stimulate the demand for and utilisation of information on Science and Technology;
- (6) The National Centre should aim to compile an inventory of national research and development projects;
- (7) The Service of a National Documentation Centre should aim to provide a continuing flow of information to meet the needs of a particular user through:-
  - (a) a SDI Service (Selective Dissemination of Information) based on a careful identification of clients, their requirements and their individual profiles;
  - (b) a competent reference enquiry or advisory service; and
  - (c) some minor publication at regular intervals supplying information on local and international developments in Science and Technology.

As I see it, whether it is a National Documentation Centre representing the broad spectrum of subjects or specialised for only Science and Technology, the functions of such a Centre lie in its aims, its users and in the concept, 'Documentation' itself.

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3. Shera p.8
4. Shera p.10
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