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UNIVERSAL AVAILABILITY OF PUBLICATIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Although the desirability of Universal Availability of Publications and Universal Bibliographic Control has been accepted by several developing nations its application presents considerable difficulties. Two of the main problems are that publishing is often done by authors, and the legal deposit systems are not always administered by the organisation compiling the national bibliography, therefore bibliographic control is very difficult. Basic library collections must satisfy a country's particular needs, and interlibrary loan systems should be used to complement them. Various political and currency problems also need to be overcome.

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) has initiated a new programme designed to complement the programme of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC), which has now been in existence for several years. This new programme, known as Universal Availability of Publications (UAP), is intended, as the name indicates, to make material, either in the original or in the form of copies, available to users everywhere, regardless of the place of publication, or the actual location of the material. These programmes have been accepted by developing countries even though their application in these areas presents innumerable problems; many of these are also common to developed nations, but many are present only as a consequence of cultural, social and economic underdevelopment.

Possibly no one else will benefit as much from the Universal Availability of Publications as the countries of the Third World. The difficulty for these nations lies in making accessible material produced in the countries themselves, and in the majority of cases librarians cannot solve this problem, since they do not have direct control over many of the factors involved.

The desirability of Universal Bibliographic Control has been accepted by various developing nations. It should be emphasised, however, that even today no country, whatever its level of development, has been able to catalogue all published material, owing to a number of problems,¹ the most important of which will be analysed in the following pages.

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In developing countries the author of a book is often also its publisher, a fact which makes it hard to keep track of books when they appear, since no adequate distribution network exists. Though this is not the general rule as regards published works, it exemplifies how the control of publications may be complicated, and their availability to readers impeded. Another factor is the publication of certain works by public agencies, either federal or state, which then distribute them as gifts, which are not subject to the control of the institution charged with compiling the national bibliography. Developing countries often do not have a centre for the distribution and sale of all government publications, although efforts have been made in the past to establish them.

Although it is true that the maintenance of bibliographic records of the works produced in a country is generally accepted as necessary, it is also true that not all countries have an institution equipped to do so. Moreover, often the directorships of such institutions are filled by writers or historians who know little or nothing about international cataloguing rules, as can be seen from the works they publish.

Not all developing countries have legal deposit laws to ensure that a library, and especially a national library, receives published material. In addition, the office entrusted with registering copyright and the national library are frequently two separate entities, between which little or no communication exists.

The concept of Universal Availability of Publications does not, however, include only those works published in the country itself, but comprises all works existing in the libraries of a country. It is possible that certain

works, such as the Pre-Hispanic Mexican codices, are to be found primarily outside the country itself.

While adequate cataloguing of publications according to international standards, and the existence of convenient systems for distributing information are necessary to facilitate the availability of materials from collections, they should be complemented by an extensive interlibrary lending system which would permit the originals, or barring this, xerographic or microfilm copies, to be used by individuals for non-commercial purposes.

In order to achieve this, efficient communication systems are needed.² The utilisation of substitute materials can be of great value, as original material is preserved from the dangers implicit in transit. With this system, especially when microfilm is used, the cost of transport is minimised and material need not be insured against loss or damage.

This system is of great value for developing countries, which frequently request material on interlibrary loan from large libraries in all parts of the world. Personal experience shows that the British Library Lending Division, which offers such a service, can make material available with a considerable saving of both time and money.

The goal for a developing nation should be to have a library that has at least the 5,500 or so titles that satisfy 80% of the serial requests received by the British Library Lending Division.³ The remaining 20% could be divided between various libraries according to regional or local criteria, and with the strictest co-operation between libraries. The percentage, as well as the titles that are included in the 5,500, should be varied to meet local needs.

It is also important to determine whether developing nations should follow the example of the British Library Lending Division. This library has clearly shown that such a centre, organised for the sole purpose of interlibrary lending, can serve this end more efficiently than can a library that has to organise its collections and services for direct service to its patrons. The organisation of the Lending Division is dedicated to the interlibrary supply of original materials on loan or of photocopies, and not to serving individual users on its premises. It is important that developing countries take into consideration the need expressed in the Medium Term Programme of IFLA for the creation in each country of a national centre for interlibrary lending and for the international supply of photocopies, and the need for the organisation of these centres into an international network.⁴

In the previously cited paper by Maurice Line, one of several possibilities suggested is that 'it is possible, for

example, that South America or Africa could be served (for interlending) by a library covering the whole continent'.⁵ It seems to me that such a plan would be very difficult to implement. The deficiencies in national collections should receive priority. I do not believe that any one institution has the resources that would be required to provide a complete collection of all that has been published on these continents. Moreover, the distances between countries on these continents are much greater than those on the European continent; and to this problem must be added the inadequate communications systems that exist between individual countries, which would make the implementation of such a possibility even more difficult. Aid could be solicited from certain international organisations and foundations, such as Unesco or the Organisation of American States, to cover the costs of the initial stages; but it must be kept very clearly in mind that this aid would be only temporary, and that in the long run all costs would have to be met by the countries themselves.

Another factor is that commonly known as the language barrier. In recent years it has been more or less common practice for nations that have achieved independence since the Second World War to return to the use of their native languages. That is to say, they have stopped using European languages which are more widely used in the publishing industry, in order to adopt a native language which, from the national point of view, would appear to be adequate but which, from the point of view of the availability of information, creates problems, since published works can only be understood by those who speak a local language, one which is little used in cultural and scientific spheres.

Interlibrary lending is often affected by problems of book-keeping. Libraries are often not prepared to keep adequate accounts or, as in some countries, limitations on the exchange of currency exist which make the exchange of materials more difficult.

It appears reasonable to say that the costs of an interlibrary loan should be met by the requesting library. Free service cannot be expected, as the libraries with large collections do not have funds available to subsidise the information needs of other libraries. On the other hand, if a country or library is not able to pay these costs, either because they are very high, or because there is no allowance made for them in the budget, perhaps it is not yet ready to utilise on a general level the information available from other libraries, especially those of worldwide importance. An example of how developing countries are dealing with this problem can be seen in the *Código de Prestamo Inter-bibliotecario de la Asociación de Bibliotecarios de Instituciones de Enseñanza Superior e Investigación de México* (Interlibrary Lending Code of the Mexican Association of Librarians in Institutions of Higher Learning and Research), Article 19 of which says, 'The

requesting library assumes responsibility for the costs incurred by the loan, including those of reproduction, transportation, insurance, and postage'.⁶

Another frequently encountered case is that in which the library is not prepared to keep adequate records of the costs of interlibrary loans. In such cases the coupon system, as used by the British Library Lending Division, is most useful, as it does not present difficulties of book-keeping for either the requesting or the supplying library.

In this period of economic instability the problems in establishing foreign exchange credits to allow for interlibrary loans of originals or copies have increased. Some countries have such complicated requirements that the time needed to obtain materials has been greatly increased.

A problem not directly related to the library itself, but one that must be taken into account when establishing a general program for the Universal Availability of Publications, is that of censorship, which some governments impose, and which prevents the free exchange of ideas and restricts the right to receive information. Although this is not limited to developing countries, the governments of many of these nations do not permit the import or sale of certain books or periodicals for either 'moral' or 'political' reasons. This affects the availability of publications in libraries and complicates interlibrary lending, since no library wishes to risk the possible seizure and destruction of material by Customs officials. It must be insisted upon that information be received freely by those who request it, especially those working in the social sciences and humanities.

Conclusions

1. The developing countries accept the UBC and UAP programmes even though there are innumerable problems involved in establishing them.

2. In developing countries not all publications are released through commercial channels. This factor limits their general availability.
3. The laws governing legal deposit are not always administered by the institution which is in charge of compiling the national bibliography.
4. An adequate interlibrary loan system must exist, as well as an efficient communications system.
5. Developing nations must ensure that their basic collections satisfy their particular needs, and must rely on collections outside the country to complement them.
6. The nature of problems in developing countries is such that it would be almost impossible to establish regional libraries.
7. Some countries have intensified the problem presented by the language barrier through their adoption of languages of limited general use.
8. Requesting libraries must cover the costs incurred by loans.
9. It is very difficult to obtain foreign currency for the purchase of information.
10. Censorship for political reasons is a problem that affects the free exchange of ideas and information.

References

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