

**Towards appropriate, accessible  
information networks in developing  
communities:**

an assessment of selected information literacy projects  
and programmes in South Africa and Namibia.

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## DECLARATION

This work has not been accepted in substance for any degree nor is it being submitted in candidature for any degree other than the Masters Degree in Library and Information Science of the Department of Information and Library Studies at the University of Cape Town.

Candidate

Signed

## STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that, except where otherwise indicated, the concept, organisation and writing of this dissertation is the result of my own independent investigation under the supervision of

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Supervisor

Signed

Prof. P.G. Underwood

## ACRONYMS and ABBREVIATIONS

AALAE	African Association for Literacy and Adult Education
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific (countries)
ADB	African Development Bank
AVU	African Virtual University
AFRILOVE	Namibian based project promoting reading skills
AGRIS	Agricultural Information System for the Agricultural Sciences and Technology (FAO)
ARCAT	Database of the National Archives of Namibia
BIS	Basic Information Science
CABx	Citizens advice bureaux
CALICO	Cape Library Cooperative
CASE	Communication and Study Skills for Education
CD-ROM	Compact Disk-Read Only Memory
CDS-ISIS	Computerised Documentation System-Integrated Set of Information Systems
CLDC	Community Learning and Development Centre
CT	Cape Technikon
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GATE	German Appropriate Technology Exchange
GOV	Cooperative database of Ministerial Information Services in Namibia. Replaced by NAMCAT
H/IGCSE	Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education/International General Certificate of Secondary Education
HRDP	Human Resources Development Project
IIRC	Information and Instructional Resource Centre
IK	Indigenous Knowledge
ITK	Indigenous Technical Knowledge
INFOLIT	The information literacy component of CALICO
LIS	Library and Information Science/Services
MBEC	Ministry of Basic Education and Culture
NAMCAT	Namibian database initiated by the MBEC. Records include all holdings of ministerial libraries as well as some NGO's
NAMCOL	Namibia College of Open Learning
NAMLIT	Namibian Literature-Comprehensive database of materials produced in Namibia as well as all available material produced internationally on Namibia
NAMIDEF	Namibian Internet Development Foundation
NDPI	First National Development Plan of Namibia
NEWS	Database of newspaper clippings in the National Archives of Namibia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NISER	Namibian Institute for Social and Economic Research
NIWA	Namibia Information Workers Association
NNB	Namibia National Bibliography
PIN	Periodicals in Namibia
PHOTO	Database of photographs in the National Archives of Namibia
POSTERS	Database of the poster collection in the National Archives of Namibia
PT	Peninsula Technikon
SABINET	South African Bibliographic and Information Network
THESES	Database of theses in the National Archives of Namibia
TRC	Teacher's Resource Centre
TV NEWS	Database of news videos from the National Broadcasting Corporation of Namibia
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNIMARC	Universal Machine Readable Cataloguing
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNIN	United Nations Institute for Namibia
URICA	Universal Real-time Information Control Administration
US	University of Stellenbosch
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WWW	World Wide Web

## ABSTRACT

The central theme of this study revolves around information delivery in a developing community. The notion of appropriate, accessible information networks is scrutinised.

The Okavango region in Namibia is used as a case study of a developing, rural community. The region is underdeveloped in important spheres such as health, agriculture and education. Library and related information services are either underdeveloped or undeveloped. The region has a favourable rainfall pattern and a viable agricultural resource base. This is important for Namibia, because the country has large areas of semi-desert and desert.

Although the Okavango region is vast (some 4.6 million hectares), the majority of the population (137,000 at the 1991 census), are settled in a narrow 5-10 kilometre strip along the south bank of the Okavango river. This in itself offers challenging opportunities to improve connectivity and access to appropriate information for community development.

The current situation with regard to information delivery and information literacy levels in Namibia is sketched and a detailed description of two projects striving towards appropriate, accessible information delivery given. Both projects are based in a tertiary environment, one at the University of Namibia and the other at five Western Cape tertiary institutions in South Africa. Although, essentially these projects aim at improving information delivery at a tertiary level, community outreach components are woven into the long term vision of both projects. The information literacy components of the projects described are of special significance.

The concept of information literacy and the potential of information literacy projects and programmes to facilitate the delivery of appropriate, accessible information to developing communities are probed.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Research question**

The research question which prompted this study concerns the delivery of appropriate, accessible information to all information users or potential users in developing communities. Within this, information literacy is highlighted as an essential component of appropriate, accessible information networks. By assessing selected information literacy projects and programmes, the primary purpose of the study is to measure the adaptability of these projects and programmes to developing communities. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- What constitutes a ‘developing community’?
- The concept and characteristics of community information in general and in the context of developing communities.
- What is an appropriate, accessible information network?
- What is information literacy and how can it improve the delivery of appropriate, accessible information?
- How does connectivity help with the attainment of information literacy?
- Can existing information literacy projects and programmes be adapted and be useful even in those communities where information services are poorly developed or non-existent?

## **1.2 Work programme and information gathering**

The work programme, which was inherently multi-faceted, included the following stages:

- field trips to the case study region;
- involvement in the planning of information literacy projects and programmes in Namibia;
- course work, which included an analysis of user groups within a particular developing community, researching theoretical aspects of the concept information literacy as well as the need to establish information literate user communities to answer to specific information needs;
- an internship which provided a strong practical component during which time the information literacy component (INFOLIT) within the Cape Library Cooperative (CALICO) was researched;
- a study of selected information literacy projects and programmes in Namibia to establish the potential of adapting such projects to serve the information needs of developing communities in Namibia.

The work programme thus contained a strong theoretical basis as well as practical experience through the internship. This in accordance with the set intention of the study which was to gain theoretical and practical knowledge of selected information literacy projects and programmes in order to attempt an assessment of the potential of these projects and programmes to improve information delivery in developing communities.

The study relied strongly on the following work method:

- gathering primary information regarding information delivery as well as information literacy levels in the case study region. This was done through discussions, visits to information and community services in towns and villages and through observation;
- interviewing roleplayers concerned with the information literacy projects and programmes as presented in the study;
- collecting relevant documents and reports regarding information literacy projects and programmes presented in the study;
- extensive reading to substantiate the theoretical aspects of the study.

The analysis of concepts such as appropriate, accessible information networks, community information, developing communities and information literacy relied on published material which was mostly written in the last ten years. Sources were chosen in the context of the region in which the study was conducted.

With regard to presenting an overview of information delivery in Namibia, extensive use was made of reports emanating from a comprehensive research project initiated in 1989 by the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of Namibia (UNAM).

Apart from the experience gained from the internship, information regarding information literacy projects and programmes was gained from published articles as well as relevant reports and documentation.

The procedures followed in this investigation was generally satisfactory. However, one of the two main projects described, encountered problems associated with project management and other technicalities some time after the commencement of this study, which hampered progress reporting about this project to a very large extent. Information relating to information literacy projects and programmes covers the period up to 1999.

### **1.3 Theoretical framework and assumptions**

The theoretical framework of the study includes the following aspects:

- an analysis of the concepts 'developing communities' and 'community information' in general as well as in the context of the regions presented in the study;

- a discussion of the notion of appropriate, accessible information networks;
- reference to networking and indigenous knowledge systems as important facets of community information in the context of developing communities in Africa ;
- an analysis of the concept of information literacy;
- a description of information delivery in Namibia with the Okavango region of Namibia as a case study of a developing community;
- a profile of one project in Namibia and one in South Africa as models of projects striving towards appropriate, accessible information networks. The information literacy components of both are comprehensively described;
- reference to connectivity and access as basic necessities for information literacy;
- a description of information literacy in Namibia which refers to other selected projects and programmes in Namibia;
- an assessment of the potential impact of the presented information literacy projects and programmes on information delivery in a developing community.

Underlying assumptions of this study are:

- the effective use of information networks and services are closely related to an appropriate, accessible information delivery environment;
- internal knowledge systems are still evident and used in community information in developing communities in Africa;
- most developing communities in Africa are rural, that is agricultural activities dominate the day to day existence;
- information literacy is inherent to an appropriate, accessible information delivery environment;
- selected components of planned and existing information literacy projects and programmes could be adapted to address the information needs of developing communities;
- the success of information literacy projects and programmes depends to a large extent on connectivity and access.

## **1.4 Community information-the concept**

In an attempt to define the concept 'community information', Usherwood (1992:19) refers to the fact that there are at least 90 definitions of the concept 'community' and probably as many views as to what is meant by 'information'. He cites the definition which appeared in the Library Association's seminal paper 'Community information services - what libraries can do' as the most quoted and generally accepted definition:

[Community information services] assist individuals and groups with daily problem-solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance and on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights. (Usherwood, 1992:19)

Usherwood (1992:20) stresses the point that community information is not only, or even primarily, a library function. 'It is an activity which involves a wide range of organisations and many different forms of communications media'.

In Britain the concept can be traced back to the Settlement House Movement in the 1890's which recognised the need for skilled information services in extremely deprived neighbourhoods. Relatively little happened until 1939 when the first Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) were set up to help people cope with the problems of war-time Britain (Usherwood, 1992:21). It is interesting to note that during the war the number of these services escalated to 1060. This escalation points to the value of community information in terms of solving the most pressing problems of the day. Today there are 1346 outlets operating throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Usherwood, 1992:21).

They provide a service of information, advice, referral, counselling, advocacy and feedback on social policy. In 1990/91 the CABx dealt with over seven million cases; they are staffed by a mixture of paid managers, trained voluntary interviewers and organizing and support staff. (Usherwood, 1992:21)

In the United States, community information services developed during the 1960's as part of the war against poverty and urban decay. These services were neighbourhood bases and attempted to link the enquirer with appropriate sources of help in the community (Sibanyoni, 1998:72).

Sibanyoni (1998:72), refers to two types of information relevant to 'community information':

- survival information, such as that related to health, housing, income, legal protection, economic opportunity and political rights;
- citizen action information, needed for effective participation as individual or as member of a group in the social, political, legal and economic process.

Tötemeyer (1995:64) points out that it is a 'fallacy that a poor, illiterate person needs only coping and survival information'. Community information workers increasingly acknowledge the fact that cultural and recreational activities should form an integral part of any community information service.

Giggey (1988:viii), notes the following activities which relate to the use of community information:

- finding information about subjects of interest;
- taking part in learning activities;
- discussing and sharing knowledge, information and concerns with extension and other community workers, planners and administrators;

- finding materials to help retain literacy and numeracy skills;
- meeting to organise and work together on community projects;
- using equipment to produce their own informational materials;
- enjoying culture and leisure activities.

## **1.5 Defining a developing community**

‘Development’ can be viewed from different perspectives, and has been defined in different ways. The very nature of the concept is subjective. What is perceived as being ‘developed’? Does being ‘developed’ relate to economic indicators and ‘modernisation’? Are development models like the ‘modernity model’ found in Anglo-American development theories pertinent to communities where development projects are implemented? Should the cultural environment in which ‘development’ takes place be considered? In Arabic Moslem communities the full realisations of women and men might be seen differently, whereas in Western European communities they might be the same (Kotze, 1980:4).

However, it is widely accepted that ‘development’ in most poor countries is seen to be part of the consumer society (Kotze, 1980:4). Alternative values which place less emphasis on material achievement are suggested by various authors in the field. The ‘culture of poverty’ (Radhakrishna, 1974:149) puts higher evaluation on achievement of spiritual values like loving and understanding fellow human beings, the environment and the community. Individual interest is subjected to those of the community.

Although Radhakrishna's view of the culture of poverty is essentially socialistic, it contains one universal truth, viz. that the developmental efforts of poor communities will have to make the best of their own circumstances. (Kotze, 1980:4)

Goulet (1974:42), expresses the view that development should lead to a more human society, where 'human' means 'to be more' rather than 'to have more'. This view is universally underwritten by the importance attached to education which remains the top priority in most countries of the world.

'Underdevelopment' implies a degree of development. Underdevelopment assumes increasing gaps between 'more developed' and 'less developed' depending on criteria used to measure the state of 'development'. This gap could be (amongst others) between rich and poor, literate and illiterate, educated and less educated or having power and being powerless. Underdevelopment theories make much of the characteristic of 'being vulnerable'. (Kotze, 1980:8)

Development and thus development policies moved into a changed environment with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of communist systems in Europe.

This impacted significantly on the developing countries and development theories. The wind of change towards democracy and market economics emanating from Eastern Europe was the main cause. (Holtz, 1995:4)

The successor states to the Soviet Union have been acknowledged as developing communities and now compete with traditional developing countries for a piece of the aid cake. A more focussed approach on development policy objectives is essential (Holtz, 1995:4).

The current development environment opened up an extensive debate revisiting traditional development theories which have been the basis of development strategies for a long time.

Some are saying, somewhat prematurely, that all the big theories have lost their value. However the fact remains that a country is underdeveloped when large parts of its population suffer hunger and poverty, cannot live with dignity and cannot satisfy their basic needs or only inadequately. The International Labour Office, in its still relevant 1976 report listed in its concept of basic needs such things as food, clothing, drinking water, health, housing, education, employment, healthy environment, independence, self-confidence and individual freedom. (Holtz, 1995:4)

Apart from the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, five international events have contributed greatly to the rethinking of the concept development:

- in 1987, a new development concept, 'sustainable development' emerged with the presentation of the report of the World Commission for Environment and Development entitled 'Our Common Future'. In this report sustainable development is defined as 'that which satisfies the present generation's needs without endangering the possibilities of future generations of satisfying their needs and choosing their lifestyle'. The 1992 UN conference on environment and development in Rio endorsed 'sustainable development' as a leading concept in the environmental action programme for the 21<sup>st</sup> century equally valid for North and South;
- in 1990 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) came out with a new definition. In the first report on 'human development' it is defined as a process of expanding people's choices. Three areas are highlighted as essential: a long and healthy life, education and a decent standard of living;
- in 1993 the world conference on human rights in Vienna agreed on the universality of human rights and rejected attempts which make human rights relative to cultural conditions;
- the first world summit on social development in Copenhagen in 1995 called for the allocation of 20 percent of all development aid to priority social purposes such as basic education, clean drinking water and basic health services;
- at Beijing in 1995 the world's women conference underlined the hitherto neglected special role of women in the entire development process (Holtz, 1995:5).

A developing community is thus seen in the context of this new development paradigm (and corresponding development strategies) which is multi-dimensional and contains elements such

as peace and satisfaction of basic needs which means a secure life for all in dignity and freedom from need and fear. Cultural realities must be taken into account to make room for cultural growth (Holtz, 1995:26).

The three socio-political principles of freedom, justice and solidarity are the guidelines on which this new perception of development is based. The compass should point to the realisation of the various types of human rights. (Holtz, 1995:4)

## **1.6 Information delivery in developing communities**

In the developing communities which are presented in this study, community resource/information centres mostly grew from an attempt to deal with the most pressing problems facing people in their day to day lives. Most of these problems were linked to the political situation of the day. Many different community, civic and political organisations were started as part of the resistance to the apartheid system. As these organisations became popular, the need to deal with local and national problems arose.

Slowly we began to build resource and information centres. Sometimes they were small, with just a few books in a box which was taken to meetings for people to borrow. Sometimes they were bigger. If a church gave us a room, we started a small bookshelf library. Soon the resource centres grew so that we were able to offer the community solutions to many more problems. We were able to develop literacy and education programmes. We provided media training and facilities. We collected information to help solve our community problems. (Dreyer & Karlsson, 1991:15)

Since these resource centres grew from within communities they were run on principles valued in the community. The fact that they were independent of government and its funding was fundamental to all activities and policies.

We included the community in making decisions about the way their resource centres were run. Everyone could use the resources (free of charge) and nothing was secret. (Dreyer & Karlsson, 1991:15)

In Namibia a number of these kinds of resource centres saw the light during the struggle for political freedom. The Council of Churches of Namibia Resource Centre is well known in this regard. Some of these have since adapted to the situation after independence and with a number of post-independence resource centres, such as the Bricks Resource Centre and Sister Namibia Collective, respond to problems currently uppermost in Namibian communities.

Inappropriate or non-existent information services led to a unique rural information service initiated by Father John Metcalf working in the Northern Andes, Peru. As director of the rural library scheme, Father Metcalf initiated a project to 'break the cycle of isolation' (Metcalf, 1982:391) and do something about the 'real tragedy of thousands of campesinos (peasant farmers)' (Metcalf, 1982:391) who have acquired reading skills through literacy programmes only to find that their efforts had been in vain. 'With little or no opportunity for reading practice, they end up once again virtually illiterate'. (Metcalf, 1982:91) Metcalf presents an interesting comparison between the cost of rural and academic information services. The latter costing the state \$16 000 per day for 3000 students (Technical University of Cajamarca, 1982) and the rural library scheme which has approximately 60 000 campesino readers costing only \$20 per day.

Once again one sees the difference between the typical state-run educational project which imitates western models and the 'poor' educational scheme like the rural libraries which seeks to adapt itself to the geographical, historical and cultural ambience of the Northern Andes. (Metcalf, 1982:391)

His harsh criticism of the education system and the success of his experiments were so 'controversial' (Metcalf, 1982:391) that he was deported as a possible subversive element.

Any attempts slavishly to imitate European models of education are doomed to failure. Not only is a western model wrong for the Third World, but it is a massive and intolerable expense. (Metcalf, 1982:391)

### **1.6.1 Knowledge systems in developing communities**

In an extensive research project entitled 'Information needs and seeking patterns for rural people's development in Africa', Mchombu (1993:164) states that the rural community 'is the meeting point of two disconnected knowledge systems, namely, the exogenous knowledge system and the indigenous knowledge (IK) system'. Apart from these two systems the findings of his research indicates a third knowledge system which is composed of the data and experiences of rural community generated by the rural development process.

At present, this knowledge resource is poorly kept and not yet fully understood by the majority of people in the rural community. One of the results of this lack of awareness is that the rural community is left uninformed about its own performance, its problems and its successes. Apart from the obvious fact that lack of such vital information makes it difficult for a community to manage and control the implementation process of rural development, one of the serious outcomes of this lack of information about itself, is that, quite often, the rural community underestimates its capabilities and potential economic power. (Mchombu, 1993:164)

Mchombu (1993:169) comes to the conclusion that indigenous knowledge (IK) 'is embedded in the cultural structures of the community'. He furthermore argues that colonial governments, the post-independence ruling African elite and Christianity have undermined traditional structures which inhibited the development potential of indigenous knowledge. This resulted in a 'knowledge vacuum because external knowledge structures are too weak to supply the rural community with a "basic minimum" of its information and knowledge requirements'.

(Mchombu, 1993:169) Respondents who took part in his survey made a number of suggestions for the revival of IK, including the 'inclusion of key IK components in the primary school syllabus, and the revival of the powers of the chiefs, or passing on these functions to their equivalents in the modern state apparatus'. (Mchombu, 1993:169)

Töttemeyer (1995:61), points out that oral communication in the form of speech, singing, dance, drumming and playing a variety of musical instruments, art (including drawing, painting, sculpture, pottery, woodcarving and tapestry), drama, mime and other non-verbal sign languages such as the manual sign systems of the deaf, is still the preferred mode of communication in many societies. According to Töttemeyer ethnocentric Western viewpoints would classify these forms of communication as 'preliterate' and therefore deficient.

These views should be replaced by a wider perspective which acknowledges that understanding our human experience can be communicated in many ways. Most librarians, including African librarians, suffer from a script or print bias which I consider the main reason why traditional public libraries in Africa have failed to make an impact on African society in general. (Töttemeyer, 1995:63)

IK components which are still strong and functioning in rural communities are:

- curing sick people;
- curing sick animals;
- oral literature e.g. story telling, proverbs and sayings of the wise;
- agricultural knowledge;
- environmental knowledge;
- culture and family life. (Mchombu, 1993:153)

From the above it is quite evident that any community information service would have to take into serious consideration the indigenous information systems within the community when planning a community information service. Dick (1992:108), suggests that a more holistic

approach, which acknowledges that there are 'different ways of knowing', is necessary. Librarians should be more concerned with learning and knowledge than with retrieval and information (Dick, 1992:110). 'Recorded as well as unrecorded information should be considered as of equal importance for the human knower'. (Dick, 1992:119) Osborn and de la Tour Landorthe also suggest that priorities should change within the information delivery context:

...there still remains much to be achieved in terms of optimising content as well as carrier, and matching supply and demand. The priority, in terms of resources and attention, still seems to be more on the production of information rather than its transfer and distribution. (Osborn & de la Tour Landorthe, 1996:153)

Sturges and Neill (1998:220) state that it is reasonable to anticipate 'a growing synergy between an immediately achievable paradigm of oral delivery and an "exotic" paradigm of information technology-mediated delivery in a more long term future'.

## **1.7 The notion of appropriate, accessible information networks**

Networking is integral to human nature, albeit in the family or a specific community, or in more formal structures like business and education.

In an African context networking is viewed as a process through which members can, in a decentralised and democratic way, develop and implement programmes. The African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) consistently describes networking as

a process by which individuals, groups and institutions are put in contact in a manner which enables them to learn from each other, strengthen their work, supplement each other, take joint action and mobilise and deploy latent resources for people's advancement. (Nyirenda, 1998:104-5)

Rugumayo (1994:56) describes latent resources as the 'the free space' available to members of a network for their effective work. They include both human and material resources. Nyirenda perceives a network as:

A mechanism in which individuals share information, knowledge and experience and maximise the use of 'free space' in order to do or achieve more. Further, the individuals, groups, or institutions who form a network should have similar interests and should already be engaged in similar activities which reflect their interests. (Nyirenda, 1998:105)

Networking and networks as presented by the AALEA and Nyirenda are perceived as extremely flexible and could take place through various media, that is oral (by word and mouth), audio (telephones, community radio and cassette tapes), audio-visual (television and video cassettes), mass media (community newspapers and newsletters), printed media (e.g. brochures, pamphlets and magazines) as well as electronic media (computer networks).

The sophistication that is found in modern telecommunication and information structures offers an almost limitless expansion of 'traditional networking' on a scale that surpasses most earlier forecasts and expectations. The most recent example of development in the delivery of information over networks - the World Wide Web (WWW), offers the chance to explore and be part of countless global networks.

In an article called 'Spinning a web: the Internet', Underwood (1998:1) refers to the following statistics to enforce the tremendous potential impact of global connectivity:

Internet users (May, 1998)

Canada & USA	70	Million
Europe	24	Million
Asia/Pacific	17.5	Million
South America	7.25	Million
Africa	1	Million
Middle East	.75	Million

WORLD TOTAL 120.5 Million. (Underwood, 1998:1)

The figure for Africa, as a developing continent, indicates the tremendous potential for increased participation in and benefit from the Internet. The relatively small percentage of Internet users on the continent is indicative of the fact that some factors exist which reduce opportunities for participation in the development of the global information community by people in Africa.

The factor which is most often quoted as critical to global information exchange and accessibility is that of the tremendous cost of technology and being electronically connected. Other factors such as censorship, attitudes and prejudice also contribute to obstructing the free flow of information. Further obstacles are the shortage of professional and technological expertise which hamper efficient and sustained information and knowledge management as well as political unrest in large parts of the continent.

However, inadequate or non-existent information literacy skills remain the most crippling factor. The most sophisticated information network, administered and managed by the best professional experts with unlimited access to global information networks, operating in a peaceful environment, will be rendered useless if users are not trained to find and use appropriate information, process information into meaningful relationships which could be presented and

generated to become part of a dynamic, interactive global information network. To quote Osborn and de la Tour Landorthe:

In telecommunications, there is a concept of 'the last mile' which refers to the simple fact that the most shining network in the world has no use at all if it does not cover the final steps to the user. In the information chain, the 'last mile problematique' is becoming more and more evident, and pressing. (Osborn & de la Tour Landorthe, 1996:154)

Further, although modern technology has made it possible to integrate networks and pool together vast collections of information, the potential usefulness and success of these networks depend heavily on the information being appropriate and accessible to the specific client they serve. Appropriate, in the sense that perceived and unperceived user needs and levels of education are considered by information service providers at all times. Accessible, meaning that all citizens of a community who want it, when and where it is needed, irrespective of levels of education, will be supplied with information.

Osborn and de la Tour Landorthe (1996:154) state that great effort should be made to understand the information needs and realities of developing countries. Weak links in the information chain like those between research centres, development agencies, the media (press, radio) and information and extension services should increasingly be strengthened.

Information networks could improve information flow and facilitate increased access but this possibility will go unrealised if potential users do not have the ability to access, evaluate and use appropriate information according to needs they themselves identified.

## **1.8 Information literacy-the concept**

Information literacy has been widely accepted as a vital element of the post-industrial society or information-processing society (Balle, 1991:83).

As the 20th Century draws to a close, there is an increasing awareness of, and awe at, the overwhelming volume of information being generated. This awareness has created a fair amount of psychological pressure or stress which has been described in terms such as 'infoglut' and 'information overload'. (Cummings, 1996:7) The immense advances in information technology can only add to this stress. This need not be so. Information literacy offers skills that vary from accessing a variety of information sources to fluency in using these sources to suit specific needs.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a literate person as being 'acquainted with letters or literature, educated, instructed, learned'.

Kanawati points out that literacy is mainly defined in two ways:

Part of the literacy phenomenon is due to the nature of the word literacy. It has, and always has had, two distinct meanings: one is the familiar 'able to read and write' definition; the second is 'command of a body of knowledge'. The use of literacy in this second sense has expanded exponentially in recent years and accounts for many of the literacies in circulation. (Kanawati, 1997:39)

In this 'plethora of literacies' she goes on to identify 197 different kinds of literacies (Kanawati, 1997:43).

The following description was put forward for the International Literacy Year (1990) : ‘...an integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking. It includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations’. Skrzeczynski, 1995:6)

From the above it is evident that the concept of literacy is multi-faceted and consists of various kinds of literacies.

Information literacy includes observation and communication skills, using auditive and visual senses and technologies to access environmental and human sources, as well as a variety of visual, audio and audio-visual sources; reading skills to access printed sources and electronic/technological skills to access information technology and computers.

McClure (1994), adds another dimension which illustrates the dynamic development of the notion of information - and computer literacy viz. network literacy. The interdependence of information and literacy skills is quite clear. Information is an essential ingredient of listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking. Sayed and De Jager (1997: 6) reach a similar conclusion: ‘Information literacy is therefore part of other literacies and for some parasitic on others such as reading and writing’. The authors quote Makhubela and Koen (1995:14) to further enforce the idea: ‘...information literacy contributes to a higher level of literacy!’

Skrzeczynski (1995:11), portrays information literacy skills as receptive skills which involve the whole range of location, reading, looking (observation), and listening skills; reflective skills necessary for internal processing, resulting in the coordination of isolated bits of information into

meaningful relationships and expressive skills enabling students to organise and communicate knowledge gained through the receptive and reflective skills. Personal and social skills are forms of expressive skills which tend to have some influence over the other processes, like manipulative skills, interpersonal skills and community participation skills.

Thus the acquisition of information literacy skills enables the information literate person to find and use information, process information into meaningful relationships and generate knowledge through expression.

The American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989), as quoted by Breivik, Senn and Senn (1994: 9), captured the essence of the notion of information literacy: ‘Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn...because they can always find the information they need for any task or decision at hand’.

However simplistic this definition might seem, the essential components as identified by various researchers are there. These are the ability to identify a specific information need, to find information in different formats and to evaluate and use information to ‘solve problems, accomplish tasks and generate new ideas’. (Sayed & Karelse, 1997:1)

## **1.9 Summary**

This chapter serves as an introduction to the study which examines possible routes towards appropriate, accessible information delivery to all citizens of a developing community who want it, when and where it is needed, irrespective of levels of education and differing information needs.

Apart from referring to the set research questions, the introduction describes the work programme, the information gathering process, the theoretical framework of and assumptions made in the study.

Concepts basic to the research question namely, community information, developing community, information delivery in developing communities, appropriate and accessible information networks and information literacy are probed and discussed.

Namibia serves as the setting for the case study region, the Okavango. The coming chapter gives a detailed discussion of library and related information services in Namibia. The situation in the Okavango region is described with regard to information delivery as well as in general terms.

# CHAPTER 2

## NAMIBIA-THE CASE STUDY REGION.

### **2.1 Overview**

This background information was drawn from Part 1 - *OVERVIEW OF NAMIBIA* as found in the First National Development plan (NDP1) of the Government of the Republic of Namibia (1995:3-6) and is intended to serve as a setting to illustrate the environment in which information services in the country developed and function.

The Republic of Namibia has a land area of approximately 825 000 sq.km., and is the 12th largest country in Africa. Namibia is bounded by two major deserts, the Namib, lying along the whole of the west coast, and the Kalahari, on the southern and central eastern border with Botswana. The only perennial rivers are to be found on the country's borders: the Orange River on the southern border with South Africa, and the Kunene, Okavango, Kwando and Zambezi Rivers on the northern borders with Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. The Kunene river in the north-west of the country bordering Angola has potential for hydroelectric power generation.

Namibia is the most arid country south of the Sahara Desert. This climate means that the potential for arable agriculture is generally limited to the north of the country where water is less scarce.

The 1991 Census recorded a population of 1.4 million which is growing at over 3% a year. Namibia's population structure is relatively youthful. In 1991, some 42% of the population were under 15, and only 4.8% were over 65. Population densities vary enormously. Although the average population density is extremely low (1.7 persons per square kilometre) considerable variation exists. Almost two-thirds of Namibians live in the northern regions, whilst fewer than one tenth live in the southern regions. The country borders with Angola and Zambia to the north, Botswana to the east and South Africa to the south.

Namibia is still a mainly rural society. A large proportion of Namibians derives their existence from the soil. Fewer than one third of the people lives in urban areas. Communities are spread over vast areas thus increasing the problem of accessibility.

The Namibian economy has a dualistic structure. The country was effectively divided into two distinct parts by a veterinary cordon fence, known as the 'red line' separating the communal agricultural area of the North with its poor transport and communications infrastructure, from the commercial agricultural area of the central and southern regions, where the urban centres which are linked by modern transport and communication infrastructure, are found.

The restricted movement of people during the apartheid years led to a contract labour system which saw the temporary migration of predominantly male workers from the communal areas to the commercial farms, mines and manufacturing sectors and the fishing centres. These labour patterns created a large number of female-headed households. Since independence there has been more permanent migration to urban areas.

The modern sector of the economy is predominantly export-oriented and made up of commercial agriculture, mining and manufacturing activities. There is a lack of employable, trained personnel especially in technical and professional skills. This lack is felt across all productive sectors of Namibia's economy (Bongjoh et al., 1995:1).

A paper delivered at the 1993 seminar - 'The coordination of information systems and services in Namibia' by the then Minister of Information and Broadcasting, stressed the importance of increased knowledge and skills for development:

Namibia is widely applauded as an example of a good democratic beginning and a country which is enjoying a measure of peace and stability in a world rocked by many political, ethnic and racial strife...But because of the cruel colonial neglect from which this country has just emerged, the bulk of Namibian workers did not receive any training in productive skills. This lack of productive skills is one of the major obstacles to the country's development effort...it is only through increased knowledge and skills among citizens that any society, ours included, gains greater control over its environment and enhances social change (including greater equity, freedom and other valued qualities) and material advancement for the majority of people. (Hamutenya, 1993:31)

## **2.2 Library and related information services in Namibia**

During his opening address delivered at the 1995 Seminar entitled- 'Educational responsibilities of libraries and information services in Namibia', the Honourable Minister of Basic Education and Culture (MBEC), John Mutorwa stated:

Yes, I knew the dictionary or theoretical meaning of the word library. Honestly speaking, it is not too far fetched to state today here, that I did not appreciate the practical meaning - the practical value, let alone the educational responsibility of a library. These facilities were, and I believe still are, non-existent at most of our schools and communities, especially in the rural areas, the former 'homelands' where in fact roughly 75% of the population live. (Mutorwa, 1995:8)

The above statement illustrates the fact that there are 'crying needs' (Marais, 1995:132) with regard to the 'harsh realities' (Marais, 1995:132) of the state of information services and structures in Namibia, particularly in historically disadvantaged communities.

A team of consultants, appointed to draft a policy framework and legislation for libraries and related information agencies in Namibia, introduced a discussion document as follows:

The state of libraries in Namibia has been thoroughly researched by Professor A-J Töttemeyer and her colleagues of the Department of Information Studies at the University of Namibia (UNAM), and the findings of these studies have been published in a series of thought-provoking reports. (Lor et al., 1996)

In a summary of the main findings of the reports, Töttemeyer comes to the conclusion that the new government in Namibia has inherited a number of fragmented, uncoordinated, in many cases inadequate, and geographically unequally distributed library and information services in Namibia. 'Some progress has been made within certain services since Independence, some services have more or less stayed the same, while others have deteriorated'. (Töttemeyer, 1993:12)

Töttemeyer's research revealed sobering statistics. At independence only 23% of all Namibian schools kept a book collection of some sort. There were practically no school libraries in the far North where more than half of the Namibian population lives. Apart from the former white schools with a ratio of 13,6 books per pupil, 0,3 library books per pupil were spread between the other ten former ethnic authorities. This situation has improved considerably since independence. All schools teaching grades four to twelve now have basic book collections which include fiction, encyclopaedias and subject related-materials (Republic of Namibia, 1997a:7).

The research done by Töttemeyer showed that as far as public libraries were concerned, 670 000 Namibian citizens (more than half the population at that time) were without any libraries in the vicinity where they live with 0.27 library books per head of the Namibian population at independence (Töttemeyer, 1993:14). This picture has changed slightly in that the number of public libraries at independence has increased by seven (Watson, 1997:84). All public libraries are situated in Windhoek and the main towns. In the absence of any kind of mobile or semi-permanent service, most rural communities are without any form of public or community information service except for very basic school library collections or mass media in the form of radio or television.

At independence, ministerial libraries had, on average, 5 000 books in each of the thirteen departments with information services (Töttemeyer, 1993:15). This picture has also improved somewhat in recent years. Most of these services are concentrated in Windhoek.

Research Report 6 (Töttemeyer & Jacobs, 1993:93), indicates that the fourteen Namibian tertiary and pretertiary training institution libraries that existed at independence had an average of only 9,5 books per student instead of the internationally recommended average of 75 volumes per student. 'Some training college libraries keep as few as 3 to 4 books per student'(Töttemeyer, 1993:16). This situation has since improved in some services, notably the UNAM library.

At independence it was estimated that more than 60% of the population could not read or write (Töttemeyer, 1993:17).

The following factors are seen as the main reasons for the situation as outlined above:

- a) Fragmentation of information services due to the fact that before independence these services were managed separately by the different ethnic authorities (Töttemeyer, 1993:12).
- b) Lack of understanding by policy-makers of the importance of relevant library and information services (LIS), resulting in inadequate funding for these services or the non-establishment of necessary services:

It is rather a question of information services getting a few crumbs falling from the table. In the 1991 Annual Report of the Ministry of Education and Culture, information services hardly feature. As far as the future is concerned, things look even more bleak with a new budget not even making provision for the buying of one single new book. (Töttemeyer, 1993:18)

This attitude is not unique to Namibia. In his evaluation of the prominence given to Library and Information Services (LIS) in the African National Congress's Reconstruction and Development Programme policy framework, Lor (as quoted by Marais, 1995:132), found no evidence of any appreciation of the potential role of LIS in this process. He found that libraries and information are never referred to in the same context.

- c) Shortage of professionals to establish, manage and sustain information services. The Namibian Information Workers Association (NIWA) reports 44 paid up members. 31 of these are professional (NIWA, 1997:9).
- d) Inadequate visibility of profession : 'The struggle to get funding for various activities which NIWA cannot finance from its own means, was not always successful. The lesson was learnt that NIWA has to develop more of a public profile to attract interest and funding'. (NIWA, 1997:11)

Windhoek, the capital, and only city, has modern telecommunications networks (including satellite communication), national and international road, rail and air linkages and information technology. Computers are found in most business enterprises, national and local government, educational institutions and private homes. Libraries and information centres in Windhoek have the latest networking capabilities and information technology. Access to the Internet is available through various providers. Mass media is well developed in the form of various radio stations,

which include community radio as well as private commercial stations, and television, which apart from the national service offers pay channels and satellite TV.

The ministerial information infrastructure in Windhoek, though small and subject to budget constraints, is well managed and innovative. Most ministries have libraries or resource centres which total 24 (Republic of Namibia, 1997a:44). Collections are computerised and were initially connected through the GOV database (Morgenstern, 1993:167). GOV has since been replaced by NAMCAT which has gone beyond representing ministerial libraries by including the holdings of some NGOs. Libraries using CDS/ISIS software and the UNIMARC format are easily included in NAMCAT.

In 1997 NAMCAT had 71 000 records (some of these with multiple holdings) reflecting the holdings of 25 libraries and resource centres mostly in Windhoek. NAMCAT can be accessed at the National Archives server on the Internet. A NAMCAT working group has set, as a priority task, the incorporation of two major collections in Windhoek, namely the National Library (presently listed on SABINET) and the UNAM library (using URICA software) into NAMCAT. An open invitation has been given to all interested libraries in Namibia to join NAMCAT (Morgenstern, 1997a:32).

Ministerial services further utilise international connectivity through subject specific database networks like AGRIS from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, making it possible for Namibian researchers to benefit from and contribute to the latest global information in their fields of research.

The National Archives has been computerising its holdings since 1979. Databases on offer include NEWS for newspapers indexed with summarised articles, THESES for Namibian theses and dissertations, POSTERS for the poster collection, PHOTO which gives access to a photo collection of more than 14 000 photographs, TV NEWS and other databases which include its own ARCAT plus NAMCAT and NAMLIT (a CDS-ISIS based database of all Namibiana held in the country and elsewhere in the world) (Kutzner, 1997: 77).

Previously known as the Estorff library, the National Library of Namibia, which fulfils the role of a legal depository, offers a comprehensive collection of Namibiana. It also acts as a national reference service offering SABINET (which includes the National Library holdings) NAMLIT, the Namibian National Bibliography (NNB) and 'Periodicals in Namibia' (PIN).

Educational information services are far less developed. The UNAM came into being with the enactment of the University Bill on the 1st of September 1992. The university library was inherited from the former institution, the Academy, which served mostly students in the field of education. Library holdings were totally insufficient for an academic institution (40 000 volumes for a student population of 1 700 university/college, 2 000 polytechnic and 200 teaching and research staff). 'Also, most of the collection is at sub-university level with some subjects like Christian Theology over-represented while the sciences and material on African studies are grossly under-represented'. (Avafia, 1993:115)

University management, realising the importance of upgrading the library to answer to the highest academic standards, accorded the university library top priority status. The collection has grown to 113 498 volumes in 1997 (University of Namibia, 1998:33). It holds special collections

of historical value such as the United Nations Institute for Namibia (UNIN) Library (Lusaka) collection. The university library is computerised using Universal Real-time Information Control Administration (URICA) software and has the Internet, SABINET and CD-ROM facilities. Other institutional libraries in the educational sector in Windhoek include college and school libraries as well as teacher's resource centres. These libraries need to see considerable development to fulfil their responsibilities towards an educational system which has, for many years, been moving towards resource-based learning and learner-centred education (De Klerk, 1995:94). The introduction of the Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education/International General Certificate of Secondary Education (H/IGCSE), as well as the implementation of a new, post-independence Namibian secondary school curriculum, bring an exciting if daunting challenge to information provision at schools, colleges and teacher's resource centres (West, 1995:124). The change to English as medium of instruction adds to this challenge.

The majority of public library and community information services in Windhoek, with the exception of internationally funded ones like the United States Information Service and the community information centres supported by the Rössing Foundation, offer traditional public library services, with little exposure to new technology and alternative information formats.

Various parastatal, NGO and private information services are found in Windhoek. These range from very small, one staff member concerns, in modest premises, to well developed collections, with the latest technology, served by several staff members.

Apart from the official television service, Windhoek (and other major towns) offer pay channels which include digital television. Various radio stations (national and private), in the majority of

indigenous languages, exist. There are a number of daily newspapers, as well as bookshops, and publishing houses. Oral information transfer plays an important part in all levels of the community. Cellular telephones have done much to overcome limitations of the official telecommunications network.

As far as Namibian towns are concerned, a clear distinction exists between towns favoured by 'Library Apartheid' (Tötemeyer, 1993:9), and towns outside the development plan of the Administration for Whites, the controlling body of library services in Namibia from 1980 until shortly before independence. Library and related information services in these 'colonial' towns can be likened to that of Windhoek, though on a smaller scale, depending on the economic status of the town.

The picture in towns not administered by the Administration for Whites, is startlingly different. The years that elapsed since independence have seen some improvement in literacy skills through literacy programs, but on average library and information services in general, have not shown any dramatic change.

To embark upon the subject of libraries in the Caprivi region is indeed shocking and embarrassing. Many schools existed without the support of libraries. Many high school learners graduated in the seventies and eighties without any form of association or relationship with books, except those prescribed by the education system. I bear testimony to this form of learning and I am very sincere in exposing the disadvantages of learning without references. The state of affairs changed slightly after independence. (Kamwi, 1995:161)

This statement is echoed by district workers in most regions of Namibia (Caley, 1995:154; Nakakuwa, 1995:152 and Tjozongoro, 1995:157). Since independence a well-sponsored Teachers Resource Centre (TRC) network has been put in place in the main educational regions of the country. These TRCs are doing much to increase information literacy levels in rural communities through enabling teachers to improve their skills by being exposed to various kinds of information technology associated with teaching. The centres are open to the community and although the small resource collections in some centres are computerised, no on-line network exists.

Also situated in most main regions are the outreach centres of UNAM which mostly serve UNAM students but provide general information services to the broader community. Most of these university centres are underdeveloped. UNAM is busy with the development of a Northern Campus in Oshakati, in the Omusati/Oshana region (formerly Owamboland). Plans are on the table to merge the university library on the new campus with the community library of Oshakati as well as the northern archives service. Similar plans are in the pipeline for Rundu in the Okavango region.

Colleges of Education are found in three of the main towns in the Northern Region- Oshakati, Rundu and Katima Mulilo. Library collections in these colleges although small, offer good potential to strengthen the information structure in the North in the near future.

Namibia being a vast, sparsely populated country, has some very remote communities, seemingly forgotten throughout Namibian history. These communities suffer from very bad connectivity and in many areas, the only link with the outside world is gravel roads which range

from fair to very bad. Telecommunications and electricity services are seen as luxuries. Postal services are extremely patchy. Radio services in local languages are available but, in a large percentage of most communities, the possession of a radio is limited to a select few. Official information services are poorly developed. Those that exist are mostly concentrated in schools and limited to small basic libraries or book box collections.

Oral information transfer is strong and embedded in well developed traditional social structures which flow from the chief, through headmen to advisory councils and village committees (Yaron et al., 1992:21). Information supporting basic survival to do with health, food production and water engineering is mostly transferred through local experts, elders and extension workers.

Literacy programmes have been implemented in some villages but progress is slow. In some cases these initiatives have come to an end. This is due to a variety of reasons, the main being poverty and an existence based on basic survival. The lack of trained literacy workers, a weak communications infrastructure and limited access to electricity further complicates the issue (Jacobs, 1996:102).

International organisations from countries such as Sweden, Finland, Norway, Britain and the United States, are active in some communities where assistance is mainly focussed on educational, health and agricultural programmes. A few small resource centres for mainly oral and visual information transfer, but also including small printed collections, have been set up by these agencies.

The Namibian Cabinet approved the policy framework for Libraries and Allied Information Agencies- 'Information for Self-Reliance and Development' on 2 September, 1997. The document was developed and compiled by a committee appointed by the Minister of Basic Education and Culture and an international consultant. All stakeholders workshopped the draft document in April 1997.

The drafting committee used the First National Development Plan (NDP1) of the Government of Namibia as part of its terms of reference. Overall development objectives for the period covered by NDP1 are:

- reviving and sustaining economic growth;
- creating employment opportunities;
- alleviating poverty and
- reducing inequalities. (Republic of Namibia, 1995:2)

Within this framework developmental principles for Namibia's libraries have been set out in the policy. These are:

- access;
- equity;
- quality and
- democracy

Access to information will be extended to the entire population. This is recognised as a basic right. All citizens will have free and equal access to the information they need to take control of their lives. In particular, citizens have a right of access to Government information. (Republic of Namibia, 1995:2)

The concept 'information access' is broadly perceived, indicative of new trends with regard to pro-active, competitive library and information services which venture into the general 'marketplace' and do not 'reside' within the walls of a library.

...the development and use of information technology is encouraging the view that the information held by libraries should flow out to its users - the concept of the library 'without walls'... In practice this means that the roles of the library are being extended and that they are also being complemented by external sources of information such as commercial databases made use of over data communications networks. (Underwood, 1994:1).

The following policy proposal has been formulated for community information services:

Community libraries are the critical interface between communities and the nation's information services. Such libraries serve as community learning centres, cultural centres, information dissemination centres and centres for recreational reading, which enable newly literate persons to consolidate their reading skills. It is imperative that community libraries be democratically managed. (Republic of Namibia, 1997c:6)

As for legislation, a draft of the Namibian Library and Information Bill has been workshopped (April,1996) and distributed for comments. The bill is currently with legal advisors for final comments.

### **2.3 The Okavango region of Namibia**

The Okavango region of Namibia has been chosen as a case study because this region is severely disadvantaged. This situation stems from a complex set of factors, as will be seen from the description that follows. Appropriate (to the specific needs and levels of education in the region), accessible (when and where it is needed) information delivery is almost non-existent. Alternatively, the Kavango, especially the Rundu area, is a dynamic, developing community that has tremendous potential and could serve as an ideal pilot project area for information literacy projects. Geographical features of the region lends itself to project work as the region lies in a narrow strip next to the river and distances are manageable. These facts impact positively on the development of the telecommunications and other information technology infrastructures.

The information that follows is based upon an extensive assessment of needs, opportunities and constraints regarding rural development in the Okavango region of Namibia, conducted by the Namibian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER)(Yaron et al.,1992).

The vast Okavango region, which covers some 4.6 million hectares, is known for its beauty. The river, which is the lifeblood of the region, is estimated to carry 26 % of the water of all the rivers in South Africa (Yaron et al.,1992:14). The majority of the population are settled in a narrow 5-10 kilometre strip along the south bank of the river. The lack of accessible water constrains more development to the south.

The population of the Okavango is one of the fastest growing regional populations in Namibia, and with an estimated 137 000 people, 86% of whom live in rural communities, it constitutes 10% of the national population. In Rundu, the principal town, the population has more than doubled in the past decade, from 7 300 to 16 000. This increase has in part come about through the steady influx of a fair amount of refugees from Angola (Yaron et al., 1992:15).

These significant increases in the regional population have not been accompanied by any marked progress in development. Despite a favourable rainfall pattern and viable agricultural resource base, Okavango, perhaps more than any other region of the country, appears to have suffered from administrative neglect. Having avoided most of the independence war, it lacks even the basic infrastructure which the occupying forces installed in Owambo and to a lesser extent in Caprivi. (Yaron et al., 1992: 6)

In their report, the authors come to the conclusion that the existing social structures are often not ideal for stimulating community-based development. Women are generally under-represented (often to the point of absence).

Given the fact that women are engaged in most of the village activities ranging from raising children, looking after the household, ploughing and harvesting to attending to festival and funeral matters, nearly every development project affects and is affected by women. Community-based structures which are the focus for development projects must, therefore involve women. (Yaron et al., 1992:21)

The Okavango region seems 'dislocated' from the rest of Namibia because it is relatively self-sufficient in agriculture, primarily millet and livestock production, which has limited the role of migrant labour.

Problems identified by communities interviewed in the region were (in the order of seriousness): Lack of rain, lack of income-generating activities, inadequate transport, shortage of food, low return on hard work, lack of educational facilities, poor housing or lack of building materials, lack of shops in the area, poor medical facilities, inadequate water supply, lack of markets for crops produced, small size of available land, poor quality of available land and lack of entertainment in the area (Yaron et al., 1992:6-39).

This list would suggest that the most pressing needs fall within the areas of water management and engineering, creating jobs and markets, transport and communication, food security and health matters, education and culture, land suitability and agricultural practices.

The Okavango, not featuring in any colonial development that took place, is extremely disadvantaged with regard to connectivity and information delivery. The town of Rundu and the surrounding district reflect the situation as found in towns not favoured by 'Library Apartheid' (Töttemeyer, 1993:9), while the rural communities are extremely underdeveloped and neglected.

Existing library (and related information services) in the region include:

- a College of Education library (Rundu);
- a Teacher's Resource Centre (Rundu) with a small resource collection;
- small collections at schools unevenly scattered throughout the region;
- small specialised resource collections run by NGOs or government extension services;
- an underdeveloped community library.

A further constraint on information delivery in the region is the fact that information services are working independently of one another with limited informal co-operation. Standardisation of library processes such as classification, cataloguing and physical processing of sources is not in evidence. Computerisation hinges on individually chosen or 'homemade' software packages and the choice of hardware varies considerably (mostly Apple Mac). There is also an acute shortage of professional staff (Jacobs, 1995:103-104).

On the positive side, the Okavango region with its rainfall, which is higher than in most other parts of Namibia, has definite agricultural potential for the cultivation of a variety of crops, as well as organised forestry and agro-forestry, which could stimulate furniture-making (a well known craft in the region) and related industries. Fishing could be extended on a sustainable commercial basis in order to supplement local incomes. The promotion of tourism, perhaps in conjunction with the Caprivi Region, also deserves attention. This would stimulate local art and wood carving (Tötemeyer, Tonchi & Du Pisani, 1994:56).

## 2.4 Summary

'Namibia is a country of fascinating contrasts'. This is an often quoted slogan in publicity material promoting the country's stunning scenery. In library and related information services sharp contrasts exist between the more progressive urban centres and rural communities. These differences are mainly due to historic reasons and resulted in fragments of the country being well developed as far as information delivery is concerned. However, most regions in Namibia remain underserved or unserved with regard to library and related information services. Citizens of Windhoek and some other urban centres are 'well connected' and are favourably compared with inhabitants in the 'developed regions' of the 'global village'. The other side of the picture reflects a spread of 'local villages' where the 'sophisticated' world of modern information technology and communication has yet to arrive. The Okavango is one such region. This region offers a challenging potential for projects and programmes which set out to test possible ways and means to deliver appropriate, accessible information as an essential tool to enhance further development.

## CHAPTER 3

### **TWO PROJECTS STRIVING TOWARDS APPROPRIATE, ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION NETWORKS**

Although a number of selected information literacy projects and programmes (with an emphasis on Namibia) are described in this study, two projects striving towards appropriate, accessible information networks are treated more extensively. These projects were designed within the framework of specific user communities which are mostly higher institutions of learning. However, elements of community information delivery are to be found in the vision and objectives of both these projects. The potential impact on and adaptability to developing communities are thus probed and discussed.

#### **3.1 The African Development Bank (ADB)-Namibia-Human Resources Development Project (HRDP)**

This project was initiated by UNAM, with the primary objective of procuring a new university library. However, this objective was not immediately attainable because of the policy of the African Development Bank (ADB):

It emerged from the discussions, that the ADB could not finance the building of a university library for a variety of reasons, prominent among which is the ADB policy to support primary education and investment in the area of human development or in projects that would create jobs and improve the lot of the underprivileged and the poor. The ADB policy happens to concur with the Government of Namibia's national development objectives. (Bongjoh et al., 1995:1-2)

The project was eventually structured to feature the following components:

(i) An information and instructional resources centre (IIRC) established at UNAM which would accommodate existing and new instructional material with the emphasis on textbooks, journals, electronic media, audio-visual material, applied research publications, especially in the areas of science and technology, instructional techniques for enhanced literacy and productivity in rural areas. The centre will be furnished and equipped with the latest information technology which will make it possible for all geographic locations in Namibia to access the resources of the IIRC. The same technology will enable the IIRC to link with the other information resource centres worldwide; for example direct link to Internet.

(ii) An IIRC user training capacity which will address the use of the IIRC and the instructional and information technology it provides through the training of trainers and of users. (Bongjoh et al., 1995:19)

The procurement of the loan included strong emphasis on access to information which implies that the library or IIRC, would also have to play a leading role in the development of information literacy in Namibia and finding ways in which the population may be served through the supply of information, from its own resources and elsewhere, through electronic and other forms of networking.

### **3.2 The Cape Library Cooperative (CALICO)**

This description of CALICO is based on information found in a package of documentation kindly supplied by the Chairperson of the Council of Directors of CALICO. Where pertinent individual sources have been referred to.

CALICO is only one of the projects falling under the umbrella of the Western Cape Tertiary Institutions Trust (WCTIT), now called the Adamastor Trust. The Trust, registered in August 1993, was a response to decreasing resources and increasing demands within the universities and technikons of the Western Cape. The reality of decreasing resources to answer increasing demands began to impress itself more and more on the South African landscape in the late 1980's and early 1990's. CALICO encompasses the five tertiary institutions in the Western Cape and in part its brief is to promote regional co-operation in post-secondary education. The primary aim is to find ways cooperatively to move to student-centred learning and develop scholarship.

In response to this vision three universities- University of Cape Town (UCT), University of the Western Cape (UWC) and University of Stellenbosch (US) and two technikons- Cape Technikon (CT) and Peninsula Technikon (PT) in the Western Cape have agreed to work together to create a single, pooled library system. With a shared information system in place, this will not only provide a shared library but also level the information playing-fields within the five member institutions. These advantages will later flow to the colleges and schools in the region (Leatt, 1996:2).

The information literacy component of CALICO (INFOLIT), aims to teach people how to source information easily and use it appropriately, in order to be better equipped for decision-making in all spheres of life.

A 'connectivity platform' linking the members of CALICO is the enabling mechanism for putting a shared information system in place. This platform will take the form of microwave or fibre optic links. Document delivery will take place through electronic means or a daily express delivery service.

A further component of CALICO is to bring full text electronic serials on line as well as work towards incorporating 300 identified Western Cape libraries into the project. These libraries include schools, colleges, community libraries, state institutions, national depository libraries, and libraries in commerce, industry, NGOs and community advice bureaux.

The main objective of the two projects as described above, is to improve access and to create a bigger pool of available information and sources for user communities at higher institutions of learning. However, both projects contain strong elements of support for the development and improvement of community information structures and expertise. The ideal of establishing a student-centred approach to learning will filter through to the communities in which the institutions and their products serve, thus creating an ethos of life-long learning. Communities will be able to share in the improved information service offered through the networks of both projects. Some components of both projects directly facilitate improved community information delivery. The information literacy component (INFOLIT) of CALICO offers a community based training of trainers programme. INFOLIT projects such as BioEd and Africa:1300 AD have been designed to include user communities well outside the higher institution environment. The ADB-Namibia-HRDP User Training Capacity includes training of trainers in all the main regions of Namibia and the repackaging of sources into more accessible

formats for community consumption. Communities will have the opportunity to be better informed and take responsibility for their own development.

### **3.3 Information literacy components of ADB-Namibia-HRDP and CALICO**

The consulting team of 'library consortium specialists' from America and the South African proposers of the CALICO-project were in perfect accord with the view that the development of a successful cooperative library system would depend entirely on a programme to promote information literacy in the student body at the participating institutions. This would ensure that the library was a principal agent and integrated resource in academic development and support in the future. To this end a project on information literacy was proposed, with the intention, inter alia, of developing rotating multi-media collections in a number of curricular areas, which would reflect the wide spectrum of information sources available as learning material. Planning for comprehensive and system-wide information literacy training is now the most important user-focussed aspect of CALICO.

The User Training Capacity of the ADB-Namibia-HRDP mainly focus on the training of trainers and users. This component features strongly in all phases of the project and has strong backing in the projected budget. The repackaging element of the project further promotes information literacy in that resources will be made available in appropriate, accessible formats to all users in the communities served by the project.

### **3.3.1 The User Training Capacity of the ADB-Namibia-HRDP**

Information literacy components in the ADB-Namibia-HRDP are referred to as the User Training Capacity of the project. A core management team to run the envisaged information and instructional and resource centre (IIRC) will be established and trained.

Such persons will be trained not only to handle high level information technology, but also to model or repackage available resources (textbook and other print materials) into usable manual modules and packages for use at even grassroots level. (Bongjoh et al., 1995:4)

Training will also be provided for resource persons in charge of existing university outreach centres, as well as at other educational focal points such as college libraries, teachers resource centres, school libraries and community libraries. A selected group of users of the system, who will be able to train further users, will be trained. The trainers will be selected in such a way that they represent the following areas of priority:

- basic education teacher training;
- vocational and technical training;
- non-formal education;
- public service training;
- training in industry, agriculture and fisheries;
- science and technology education.

(Bongjoh et al., 1995:19)

### **3.3.1.1 Analysis of needs and problems**

The planning of the ADB project was based on statistics and information found in official reports and appraisal interviews with key role-players. This survey culminated in a planning seminar.

Two issues enjoyed top priority in the planning of the project. These were the impact on women and its contribution to the alleviation of poverty. Facts and statistics given in the ADB aide-memoire (Bongjoh et al., 1995) serve as an indication of the project's commitment to these two priorities.

Women were involved in the design of the present project and a quota of 30% of women will be applied when selecting candidates for the various training programmes in the project. The present enrolment of girls (50% of the total at the primary school level and 55% of the total at secondary school level) leads to the assumption that the improvement of instruction through the optimal utilisation of IIRC resources will be of substantial benefit to girls, whose repetition and attrition rates are relatively lower than boys. Also, more than half of the teachers in Namibia are women, most of whom are unqualified. The integrated approach of the present project is therefore justified in that females form a large portion of those who are eligible and will take full advantage of IIRC resources.

The planned packages which will be disseminated, especially among the rural poor, would include information manuals and modules on health care, family management, improvement of productivity in agriculture and other activities, hints on how to manage micro enterprises and

projects and how to provide services more effectively and efficiently, especially in the information sector. The IIRC system will play a major role in disseminating information on how to deal with problems stemming from the harsh seasonal climatic conditions (drought, storms etc.), that frequently afflict the poor in remote rural areas (Bongjoh et al., 1995:26).

### **3.3.1.2 Programme and progress**

The ADB project is managed by two committees. These committees are based on the two main components: the building of the IIRC and the User Training Capacity. The User Training Capacity committee was formed at the UNAM in the last quarter of 1996. The then Head of Department of the Department of Information Studies at the UNAM chaired this committee. The committee was representative of the major role players in the project and included the project manager, representatives from the university library, the Faculty of Education, the Multi-disciplinary Research Unit at the UNAM, the office of the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Administration, the Bursar's office and eventually the Centre for External Studies. Work done by this initial committee included the procurement of training equipment and project vehicles, awarding one of the twelve fellowships for study abroad, as well as the appointment of the three consultants.

An awareness/consultative management seminar which was aimed at creating an awareness of the project and its aims and objectives, as well as open channels for consultation with the management staff of the various sectors targeted by the project, was held in May, 1997.

This seminar was followed by a 'Train the trainers' course, lasting four weeks, which took place in Windhoek during June 1997. Participants of the 'Train the trainers' course were expected to conduct at least one training activity in their own region, for a further five persons. The same group was scheduled to return for another three weeks of training which would have been advanced and would have included discussions and evaluation of their own training experiences (Clyde & Morgenstern, 1997:3). At this stage the activities of the User Training Capacity committee came to a halt. The chairperson left the employment of the UNAM and the services of the project manager was terminated. This last fact caused delays in the progress of the entire project until the second half of 1998. The original committee dealing with the User Training Capacity of the project was dissolved and all activities put on hold until the main component of the project, namely the building of the IIRC got under way again. A new project manager was appointed and the construction of the IIRC started in the last quarter of 1998. The foundation stone ceremony took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, 1999.

Topping the list of priorities is the establishment of a management team for the IIRC. The composition of this team is crucial to the realisation of the overall mission and objectives of the project. Representation of all role players concerned with the project in the management team, is optimum.

A new committee was appointed to deal with the training component. The chairperson of this committee is the current Head of Department of the Department of Information and Communication Studies at the UNAM. Advertisements have gone out for two national and one

international consultant for the User Training Capacity. The two national consultants are required in two main areas- information technology and the repackaging of educational material. Initiatives started by the first committee have to be coordinated with a new plan of action. The information technology acquired through the original committee will have to be evaluated and supplemented with more up to date technology (Underwood, 1999).

As far as the actual training is concerned, top priority should be given to staff appointed to run those activities of the IIRC aimed at realising the broader, national objectives of the project (servicing national outreach centres throughout the country with accessible, appropriate information). These persons will have to be the first to undergo renewed training on how to handle high level information technology as well as repackage information. Resource persons in charge of the university outreach centres are a further priority of the training schedule (Avafia, 1999. Mchombu, 1999). It seems evident that while the appointment of the three consultants can facilitate and speed up the process of finalising the new training schedule and other preliminaries (procuring new or updating the existing equipment) during 1999, actual training might only be feasible at the beginning of the year 2000 (Mchombu, 1999). Applications for the research fellowships available through the project will be considered in the near future (Mchombu, 1999).

A further development is the location of a network servicing point for the African Virtual University (AVU) on the campus of the UNAM. The IIRC will network with the databases of the AVU which will then be available throughout all national service points in Namibia.

The User Training Capacity of the ADB-Namibia-HRDP takes up 25.9% of the total project cost. The remainder is divided between the IIRC 70.6% and project management 3.5%. This distribution of available funds is an indication of the essential nature of the project as a whole.

The IIRC project appears to be couched in language that can be referred to as camouflaging the building and equipment of the future UNAM library. However, the principle of this building serving the entire country particularly the rural areas, is accepted by all parties. (Avafia, 1995:122)

### **3.3.2 The information literacy (INFOLIT) component of CALICO**

Information used in the following description of CALICO/INFOLIT is mostly based on information found in sources supplied by the project director and project leaders.

Where pertinent specific sources have been cited.

The INFOLIT project hinges on the following key aspects:

- it will follow a phased approach over five years, in which a thorough needs analysis is the starting point, combined with pilot projects which popularise the theme of the project;
- the project should upgrade the skills of the most disadvantaged students as first priority, so that all students are equally empowered to gain the maximum benefit from their tertiary education;
- it should create information literacy training processes that would become a permanent feature of the academic programmes at the five institutions;
- information literacy training should be integrated into the course work of all students, so that it becomes an empowering part of the learning experience of every student;
- the information literacy training should enable students to be more than just better learners - it should improve each person's ability to use information to greater advantage in everyday business decisions and in civic life;
- the project should lay the foundations for an outreach programme, which would impart information skills to secondary school pupils- the future students - in the Western Cape;

- the project should be based on the most recent successes in information literacy development world-wide, but should be developed with full regard to the local needs of students, the needs of employers and those of the general communities in the Western Cape;
- the librarians of the five institutions, being the information management specialists, will play a key role in information skills transfer by virtue of the libraries being multi-dimensional 'laboratories of the mind'. Lecturers, on the other hand, would integrate information-skills teaching into the curricula and evaluate the outcomes of institutional efforts in promoting information literacy. (CALICO, 1993:4)

The INFOLIT project has advanced well into the goals set for years 1 to 3. A management system has been established and the needs analyses completed. Various pilot projects have been set up and are running.

The implementation of the schedule for year three, which involves subject librarians and academics in the fields of Library and Information Science in structured information literacy teaching programmes, as well as integrating training in these skills into their daily interaction with library users, is well under way. This phase will also see a delivery system implemented to move parts of the information literacy infrastructure between the five campuses. Furthermore, CALICO will begin preparation for the transformation of the project from a needs analysis and pilot project base to full integration with academic programmes across the campuses. Modules providing formal training will be developed and further learning collections will be established at all institutions (CALICO, 1993:2).

Planning for the fourth and the fifth year includes development of full academic content and outreach, final implementation of full programme plus a final evaluation. The

outreach component is earmarked for teacher librarians and school librarians, both at schools and on the campuses by means of workshops and training.

### **3.3.2.1 The needs analysis**

The needs analysis of the INFOLIT project formed an integral part of the project plan and schedule. This analysis utilised a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. A questionnaire survey was conducted of a representative sample of students at the five higher education institutions. The questionnaire, a self-reporting instrument, asked students questions relating to a number of aspects of information literacy such as their levels of confidence, their abilities and needs.

Focus-group interviews provided an opportunity to discuss aspects of information literacy with key informants at the five institutions. The purpose of the first round was to arrive at an understanding of information literacy. The second discussed the preliminary findings obtained from the questionnaires regarding students' information literacy abilities and needs.

For the questionnaire, a number of key variables related to student information literacy abilities was selected. The variables were race, gender, language, year group, disciplinary domain, academic performance and age.

Close on 6 000 students across all five institutions (Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and the Western Cape; the Cape Technikon and Peninsula Technikon) received the questionnaire. The realised sample used in the report on the project was 5 629. A number of students were chosen across the year levels and from the disciplines of Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Science, Engineering, Education, Economic and Management Sciences and Health Sciences (Sayed & Karelse 1997: 2).

Three key variables, namely, race, institutions and disciplinary domain explain most of the variance in the responses to most questions. In particular 'race' explains the differences of responses for 40% of the questions and 'institutional location' accounts for 28% of the responses.

The findings of the needs analysis have been presented in a summary report by Sayed and Karelse (1997). Highlights of the summary report are:

- a) As far as the indexes on confidence and motivation are concerned three key features emerged:
  - white students are more confident than black (African, Coloured and Indian) students about acting as leaders and taking initiative;
  - black students and students at the two technikons are more confident to engage with lecturers in and outside the classroom;
  - white students report that they rely more on their life experiences and they prefer to work on their own compared to black students.
- b) Further, the competence of students in respect of three areas of information literacy, namely reading and writing ability, library usage and computer competence suggest that at least a third of all students express reading and writing difficulties. Specific problems that were identified are the ability to express

writer's ideas in their own words. Black students experience more difficulties than white students in respect of understanding and coping with the amount of readings they are given.

- c) Computer competence is strongly related to race and disciplinary domain. In general black students are less familiar and competent with computers than their white counterparts. Students in the Natural and applied domains (for example Engineering) indicated that they are more competent. An interesting feature was the issue of access to computers and facilities such as email and the Internet. The results showed that students at the UWC and the PT, because they have less access to these facilities, generally rely more on institutional facilities.
- d) As far as library usage is concerned, black students and those at UWC and PT report positively on most aspects relating to library usage. Thus, more black than white students engage in library activities such as finding sources of information that are not prescribed.

A comparative analysis of results by institution reveals a strong relationship between performance and the various indexes of information literacy. The indication is that improved performance might be related to better information literacy skills.

Gender differences also emerged in that females indicate less competence and greater need than their male counterparts. Thus, for example, more female students in the sample report lower levels of confidence and less competence in computer usage.

From the findings it is evident that information literacy, especially computer usage and independent learning, are strongly related to disciplinary domain. Further interesting indications are that no obvious relationship between year group and information literacy abilities and needs was reflected. The results tentatively suggest, however, that senior students (third and fourth year students), are less competent computer users than the junior undergraduates.

In the summary report Sayed and Karelse (1997:17) identify four characteristics of information literacy in the Western Cape region:

- a) Race features strongly in students' information literacy abilities and need. In general black students express less competence in aspects of information literacy and consequently greater need.
- b) Institutional location is an important variable which is related to access to information sources, forms of pedagogy, patterns of library usage and information needs. There are differences between universities and technikons and between the UCT and US and the CT, UWC and PT.
- c) Disciplinary domain is a key factor which suggests that teaching and learning approaches within specific domains shape information literacy characteristics in learners.
- d) Students who report high academic performance also indicate greater competence and consequently less need in aspects of information literacy identified in the study.

### **3.3.2.2 INFOLIT pilot projects**

Several pilot projects were running by the end of 1997 throughout the five participating institutions:

- Access course- practical library orientation situated in the School of Design, CT, aimed at promoting visual literacy for design students;
- Arts Infolit Package developed by the UWC Academic Development Centre with the aim of creating a portable set of materials which would include lesson plans designed for lecturers and tutors, and materials to be given directly to students in the Arts faculty;
- building WWW-based Internet Resources to improve Biological Information literacy which concentrates on developing information bases to be used at both secondary and tertiary levels to ensure that IT is used in a way that promotes effective learning. The project has two prongs: an Internet BioEd project which has determined the needs of Biology teachers and students to develop appropriate learning materials, and the Bioinformatics Institute which seeks to promote 'Web Biology'. The project is located in the Biochemistry and Botany departments at UWC;
- development of Africa: 1300 AD. This is a joint project between UWC and UCT. It is a multi-media project - the core format will be CD ROM supported by

printed material which could introduce all students in South African universities to information about Africa;

- development of an Information Laboratory for the Department of Electrical Engineering, PT. A series of multi media information sources, including an information base developed in a WWW environment to assist students in handling information in Electrical Engineering;
- INFOPAC for first and second year undergraduate students at the US. This entails the development of information packages in conjunction with lecturers from the Arts, Economic and Management Sciences, Education and Science Faculties;
- Information Society : Tools and Skills course situated in the School of Librarianship at UCT. This single semester course in the Social Science Faculty is delivered to undergraduate students to equip them with transferable learning and information skills. A web-based course pack, accessible to the undergraduate students of library schools at other CALICO institutions, has been produced;
- Integrated Academic Literacy programme of the PT. This academic literacy course, which replaces a previous Communications course in the School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, investigates various ways of developing information literacy among students with a special subject focus;
- the Integrated First Year Experience course developed by the Academic Development Unit of the CT, includes an information literacy/retrieval component. An evaluation of the effectiveness of this course is currently in progress in order to revise the current module which is portable and which could be introduced at other institutions;
- Search engines of the Internet is a project developed by the Computer Support for Education Unit at UWC. The project is developing a set of hyper-media modules to familiarise and assist students as well as academic staff to find their way around the Internet within specific knowledge domains. (INFOLIT Annual Report, 1995-96:3)

### **3.3.2.3 Programme and progress**

Thus, the INFOLIT programme, as planned initially, consisted of the needs assessment study, the various pilot projects and the conceptualisation and spread of information literacy (Karelse, 1998:14). A series of workshops were run offering information

literacy skills to participants from the five partner institutions. Skills offered concentrated mainly on electronic information retrieval, network literacy using the Internet, as well as web page design.

INFOLIT has begun to explore issues relating to the development of

- coalitions and partnerships of academic and information workers in delivering value-added programmes;
- content which advances information literacy appropriate to the needs of learners;
- CD and web-based materials which can be used across the region;
- collaboration across institutions to deliver foundation -type programmes. (Karelse, 1998:14)

The INFOLIT experience thus far raises the following challenges:

- the need for effective evaluation studies which will allow for adaptation of programmes;
- replication of projects : materials which are flexible and versatile should be designed by cross-institutional groups of developers in accordance with their local needs and conditions and with the needs of the 'secondary' audience in mind;
- integration and mainstreaming of projects : converting from a pilot to a programme which involves careful negotiation with educational managers and institutional bureaucracies. New ways of approaching learning as developed in the INFOLIT pilot projects should not only be portable but responsive to the needs of a changing user base and society;
- sustainability : responsibility rests with institutions to ensure that investments made in pilot projects become part of continuing process of quality education;
- endorsement of pilot projects by senior management : this will ensure that educational managers are prepared to invest in new ways of advancing learning;
- collaboration and partnerships : overcoming barriers to collaborative teaching and learning in order to promote programmes which are globally competitive;
- interactive learning : creating multi-media type learning environments;
- continuing needs assessments : apart from providing a substantial base for motivating the need for information literacy interventions to both senior management and other facilitators, these provide inroads into

- institutions and groups surveyed, allows focus-group interviews and surveys to create a platform for interaction;
- promotion and marketing : promoting practical ways of advancing information literacy education. The development of real models which can be critiqued and adapted has proved important;
  - human resource development : INFOLIT has responded to the need for training of library and teaching staff. Support is also being provided for the development of development teams or coalitions to further extend the base of activities;
  - inclusion of all players in pilot project formulation to avoid errors as a result in lack of collective ownership and enhancement of initiatives as well as alienation from and disuse of resources;
  - understanding learning : the INFOLIT experience has highlighted the importance of developing a closer understanding of learning and how this takes place since it is through contextual learning that information literacy is acquired;
  - development of higher order cognitive skills and structured domains of knowledge : the various INFOLIT initiatives have concentrated on the development of generic information literacy education and have not yet addressed the structuring of domains of knowledge. The latter would support the development of higher order cognitive skills and a more advanced understanding of information flow and knowledge production in various discipline areas. Such proficiencies allow learners not only to access more diverse information sources, but also encourage a critical appraisal of and induction into the world of knowledge;
  - school and community information literacy models : INFOLIT has recognised the importance of not only expanding operations to schools but also to develop community models which bring information literacies to citizens outside of formal education so that they are able to utilise these competencies in their daily lives for purposes of making more informed decisions. (Karelse, 1998:14-16)

The original project director of CALICO (INFOLIT) has since left the project and the project is currently contracted out to the Department of Information and Library Studies at the University of Cape Town. Planning and proposals for the second phase of CALICO and INFOLIT are now being formulated. Additional funding needs to be secured.

INFOLIT was originally funded by the Reader's Digest Association for what was to be a 5 year period from 1995 to the year 2000. A budget of US\$1 000 000 was proposed for this period but, in late 1998, Reader's Digest Association withdrew its support because the strategic priorities of its parent company had changed (Underwood, 1999).

### **3.4 Summary**

Two projects striving towards creating appropriate, accessible information networks for specific user communities have been described in this chapter. This sets the scene for assessing the adaptability of such projects to developing communities. The information literacy components of both projects were highlighted in the context of the theme of this study which focuses strongly on the role of information literacy in the delivery of appropriate, accessible information to developing communities. In view of the fact that Namibia serves as a case study region, the next chapter will focus on other information literacy projects and programmes in Namibia.

## CHAPTER 4

### INFORMATION LITERACY IN NAMIBIA

Information literacy levels vary considerably in Namibia. Those learners emerging from schools served by 'Library Apartheid' (Töttemeyer, 1993:9) have had excellent exposure to multimedia collections in school media centres with a well structured 'Book Education' programme in place. On the other hand a large majority of learners have gone and still go through school with little or no exposure to a school library or media centre. Statements quoted earlier in this study bear witness to this (Mutorwa, 1995:8 and Kamwi, 1995:161). Further, as seen above, the severe inequalities that still exist in information delivery to the majority of the people of Namibia, limit access and thus the acquisition of information literacy skills. However, the growing awareness of the value of information in what is increasingly becoming an information society in Namibia, has led to a wider acceptance and realisation that information literacy empowers users and potential users to utilise available information in a selective and confident way. The brief description of selected projects and programmes other than ADB-Namibia-HRDP User Training Capacity which follows, serves to provide a more complete picture of information literacy in Namibia.

## **4.1 Information literacy training in Namibia**

### **4.1.1 Primary and secondary education**

The following description is based on various draft syllabi and reports which flowed from the work of curriculum committees and working groups appointed by the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture to develop or revise syllabi to suit the Namibian educational environment.

Prior to independence, 'Book education' was part of the curriculum in those schools that did have a library or book collection of some sort. More recently, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture, in collaboration with the Department of Information and Communication Studies at the UNAM, developed a new syllabus for information literacy training in Namibian schools called Basic Information Science (BIS).

BIS moves away from 'Book education' in that it considers the world of information in a holistic way and teaches learners the complete spectrum of information literacy skills from observation (the environment), audio (listening to elders, experts and the radio) through to computer literacy and skills related to the use of modern information technology (IT).

It is unique in the sense that it can be taught at those schools where there are no library or book collections of significance, because the environment and community are emphasised as being very important sources of primary information.

Module themes in BIS include :

- a) The full spectrum of information sources : people, the environment, textbooks, religious books, electronic mass media, newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, fiction, non-fiction, reference works, audio-visual and electronic media. The allocation of a separate module each for textbooks and religious books is an indication of the fact that this kind of printed source is found in most communities, while other printed sources are relatively scarce.
- b) Library orientation.
- c) The history of recording.
- d) A study of the world of information.  
(Republic of Namibia, 1997b)

Four Namibian teachers have pooled collective experience and written a manual for teaching BIS. The book is highly innovative with numerous suggestions for lessons. The lessons, which are aimed at learners of various ages, are graded in levels and are flexible and interchangeable to suit learners in different milieus and at different levels of skill and experience (Goosen et al., 1997).

Unfortunately the full implementation of the new syllabus is hampered by lack of funds to establish at least one good media centre in each district of Namibia. Furthermore, school management tends to write this non-examination subject out of their timetables in favour of examination subjects. Another impediment is the lack of trained teacher-librarians/media teachers to explore and implement the syllabus to its fullest potential.

### **4.1.2 Tertiary education**

Information literacy training has been in place at the UNAM for at least five years. This training was initially part of the Communication and Study Skills for Education (CASE) course, developed for students in the Faculty of Education, and included components of English communication, study and research skills (information literacy). The information literacy training, presented by the Department of Information and Communication Studies, ran parallel to the library orientation programme, given to all first year students by university librarians. Since the UNAM adopted a four year degree programme, which includes University and Faculty Core Programmes, the CASE curriculum was adapted to the university core, which extends to all first year university students. It is fully integrated into the library orientation programme presented by the university library as university librarians are part of the lecturing team. Lectures include practical exercises which are undertaken in the university library. There is an awareness of the need for an integrated subject-specific approach and a movement away from teaching information skills in isolation. Modules are adapted for the various faculties. Subject specific examples are used in practical exercises and subject librarians play a major role in this integration.

### **4.2 The Community Learning and Development Centres (CLDCs) project**

The main benefit of this programme, which was approved by the Namibian Cabinet in September 1994, is the creation of lifelong learning opportunities for a community to

develop and improve their circumstances through self directed learning and their own efforts. The concept has been thoroughly workshopped by a representative number of citizens from all Namibian communities (Ellis, 1995:14).

CLDCs envisage offering a range of learning opportunities to the community, in terms of the development needs and interest of the community (Ellis, 1995:111).

Information literacy is inherent in all the envisaged centre activities. These are :

- a) Cultural and educational activities (from oral tradition and knowledge to access to TV and video for all ages).
- b) Adult education at all levels (literacy through to tertiary, with study and library facilities).
- c) Economic skills training (agricultural, business enterprise, marketing, planning).
- d) Group skill training (leadership, consultation and decision-making, advocacy).
- e) Social awareness programmes (crime prevention, primary health care and general information on current affairs, nationally and internationally).
- f) Developing and maintaining networks that enable resources and expertise existing locally and further afield to be made available to the CLDC district (CLDC programme planning workshop, 1996).

CLDCs are based in schools and make use of school facilities after school hours (other communal facilities such as clinics, extension centres, community centres etc. could also be used). Practicalities of this sharing of state facilities, rest on formal agreements or contracts. The centres are managed by a committee elected by the community from representatives from the school and the community. The committee will be trained to run

the centre by staff of the Department of Adult Education, Libraries and Culture of the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (Ellis, 1995:112). The main objective of the programme is to create lifelong learning opportunities in the community.

As the country becomes more literate through improved basic education and adult literacy programmes, the centres will provide opportunities for citizens to use these basic skills for the economic, social and democratic development of the country. The human infrastructure created for literacy might gradually be utilised for lifelong learning. (Ellis, 1995:112)

This project is now in the third phase which is that of selecting 50-100 communities as the first centres in the programme. Expansion of these centres will be based on 'supply and demand'. Monitoring and evaluation will be continuous, with a comprehensive internal and external evaluation at the end of each year (Ellis, 1995:114).

At a seminar held in Windhoek in March 1998 entitled 'The role of community information centres in the educational development in Namibia', the following reference to the project was made by Ellis:

We also have an ongoing process for the establishment of community learning centres and community skills centres that we are developing with the Ministry of Higher Education. At such centres, learning groups will be formed around concerns of the community, and the staff will seek to provide access to relevant information. We hope that communities will also be able to gain access to information through the telephone, fax, television, computers and the Internet, depending on what is technically feasible at the centre. These centres will also serve distance education students. (Ellis, 1998:12)

An education officer of the Directorate of Adult and Basic Education, interviewed in August 1999, gave the following progress report regarding the project:

- 19 centre coordinators have received training;
- 13 locations have been identified to serve as CLDCs;
- 3 of these identified locations will serve as pilot projects in or near the rural towns of Khorixas, Rundu and Ondangwa. These pilot projects will run for three months. (Tjijenda, 1999)

### **4.3 Other initiatives**

The increasing awareness of the importance of information literacy has almost spontaneously led to smaller projects being initiated. A project called AFRILOVE, which is administered by a trust appointed by donors (project leader- Prof. A-J Töttemeyer), aims at supporting literacy projects in Africa by providing suitable reading material in the form of large print, illustrated booklets to sustain newly acquired reading skills. Another objective of this project is to supplement mother tongue reading materials in primary schools.

The booklets are made from one A3 leaf, printed in large print text, illustrated in black on white, folded, stapled and cut. Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Ghana, Kenya and Angola have been selected for the first phase of the project and booklets in approximately 40 languages will be prepared. A study tour undertaken by the project leader (Töttemeyer) and other members of the trust in November, 1997 to Ghana,

served as a needs assessment exercise. Identified needs correlate with the findings of other community information experts. Cheap, illustrated, mother tongue booklets and posters in large print on subjects such as health, agriculture, economic skills, legal rights, education, culture, social welfare, local government and current affairs are much sought after. The project is a private, Namibian initiative which relies on private funding and donations. Plans to supply masters of the booklets to the identified countries, as well as offer workshops on the production of the booklets (editing, layout and illustration), are in the pipeline. An innovative idea that emerged from the study tour to Ghana is the establishment of a 'reading/information kiosk' which could virtually be a grass or thatched roof structure on poles. AFRILOVE aims to supply the contents of relevant booklets in the form of a large, laminated A2 poster which is nailed to the poles. These kiosks should be placed in central focal points in the community and the community should be involved in setting up and running the kiosks themselves (AFRILove, 1997:1-2). Prof. A-J Tötemeyer is responsible for the operations of AFRILOVE and reports to the trust.

The project by Father John Metcalf in the Northern Andes serves as an interesting comparison. No money was available to spend on library buildings, so in 1972 a parish committee experimented with a system of 'house libraries'. A town was chosen as the main centre. 'Branch libraries' were in peasant farmers' houses in the villages. Each village had a volunteer librarian in charge of a set of 20 books, each book stoutly bound and covered with cellophane and finally put into a plastic bag. Neighbours went to the house of the volunteer librarian to borrow a book. 'The effects of this unassuming

operation are more far-reaching than would appear at first, in breaking the circle of isolation in which farm workers live'. (Metcalf, 1982:391) At the end of the month, the village librarian returned the 20 books to the main library. After ensuring that the set of books was complete and in good condition the librarian then received another set of 20 books. In this way the community took responsibility and, besides having had access to books, became aware of the need to preserve books. In 1982 the central library had a total of 10 000 books. The number of small branch libraries had risen to 490, with 20 to 50 books each (Metcalf, 1982:391).

A writing skills training course was recently offered for selected staff members of the National Assembly and the National Council of Parliament in Windhoek. The course was aimed at upgrading information literacy skills such as listening, reading, speaking and writing. These skills could assist course participants to translate information input (either through listening or reading) into meaningful output (speaking/presentations and writing/reports) (Writing..., 1998:1).

The two Namibian projects described in this section are examples of a scattering of smaller initiatives mostly undertaken by professional librarians in their own services. Trainers working on projects and initiatives in this regard should be commended. However, information literacy skills should not be taught in isolation. A holistic approach to information and the use of information is essential to create an awareness of and the ability to make full use of the complete spectrum of information media/formats through a comprehensive portfolio of information literacy skills.

Further, the described initiatives are a clear illustration of the value of language skills in information literacy training. In the AFRILOVE project the focus is on reading skills in the mother tongue and the course for parliamentary staff has as a stated objective 'to improve the English language skills of the participants so that they can execute their duties more confidently and effectively'. (Writing..., 1998:1)

At the Cape Technikon in South Africa, information literacy is taught in the School of Teacher Education through the LIS department. This institution is fortunate in that the programme leader wears two hats because she is both a lecturer in LIS and a specialist in communication in English. The programme uses 'Communication in English' lectures and exercises which are integrated with library and information user skills in the library, as well as information sources outside the library, and is supported by media in various formats (Van Aswegen, 1997). This direction is followed by (amongst others) the 'Information society: tools and skills' course at UCT, which is a collaborative effort by the School of Librarianship, The Writing Centre and the University libraries. Different sectors within the UNAM have been collaborating in the same way since 1990 in that information literacy skills were offered by the Department of Information Science, the English Department (currently by the Language Centre) and the University library.

Another basic need echoed by most information literacy trainers is that information literacy training should be fully integrated with relevant subject materials and offered in the context of the purpose that should be served. The course for parliamentary staff in Namibia answers this need in that information materials, typical of what staff would

have to use in their day to day work routines, are used for practical exercises.

At the Peninsula Technikon in South Africa, first year Electrical Engineering students are taught information literacy skills in the formal curriculum through the joint effort of the Educational Development Centre, the Library, the Electrical Engineering Department and the Languages and Communication Department (Communication...,1997).

As far as evaluation is concerned, it is felt by most trainers that participants should reap concrete rewards for their efforts in attending such courses. In formal education, information literacy components should be compulsory and credit bearing. As to other initiatives like AFRILOVE and the Parliamentary Writing Skills Training Course, this reality is more complex. Project leaders and employers would have to think creatively about motivational aspects and concrete rewards.

The work done by the Namibian Children's Book Forum bears mentioning. This organisation is run by a small number of dedicated individuals and has been promoting a culture of reading in Namibia for the last ten years. Highlights of their programme are the annual 'Readathon' and 'Book Award Ceremony' which apart from promoting reading in Namibian schools, encourage the writing of children's literature in the indigenous languages of the country.

#### 4.4 Summary

Accepting the fact that the concept 'information literacy' includes

- receptive skills which involve location, reading, looking (observation) and listening skills;
- reflective skills necessary for internal processing skills which bring the isolated bits of information into meaningful relationships;
- expressive skills which facilitate the organisation and communication of knowledge gained through the receptive and reflective skills;
- personal and social skills which are forms of expressive skills tending to have some influence over the other processes, like manipulative skills, interpersonal skills and community participation skills (Skrzeczynski, 1995:11),

information literacy skills vary considerably in Namibia. While in Windhoek and some of the bigger towns information literacy levels have become very sophisticated and varied, rural and remote users in Namibia are mainly skilled in oral, audio and visual information literacy. Reading and writing skills are limited and the use of information technology and computers almost non-existent in most remote communities.

The development of information literacy in Namibia is hampered because :

- a) The lack of relevant community information services deprives a lot of Namibians of exposure to information sources and technologies that require or foster the development of information literacy.
- b) The national language, English, is a second, third or even fourth language for most Namibians, which inhibits the use of most information sources whether visual, audio or printed.

- c) Even though the new educational system is moving towards being resource-based, learners, students and citizens are products of the traditional textbook oriented teacher-centred education system which disregards multi-media type learning environments 'in which learners are encouraged to interact with concepts and information resources to develop their understanding of a subject'. (Karelse, 1998:15)
- d) Owing to historical disadvantages most Namibians lack the confidence and motivation to explore the world of information on offer. Exposure to libraries, electronic databases and computer networks has been very limited, resulting in a low library and computer literacy rate.
- e) Information literacy initiatives should be coordinated and taught in an integrated and holistic way, so that those who stand to benefit from these programmes and projects perceive information and the use of information in the broader context of a complete portfolio of skills and media/formats.

Although all information literacy initiatives in Namibia stand to be commended, a lot more should and can be done. Projects such as those described thus far can pave the way towards appropriate, accessible information delivery to facilitate the further development of the country.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **TOWARDS APPROPRIATE, ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION NETWORKS IN DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES**

### **5.1 Background**

In the proceedings of a 1995 international seminar called 'The role of information for rural development in ACP countries: review and perspectives', it is stated that the population growth in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries will double in the next 30 years. During this period, developmental or 'transitional' aspects that will have to be dealt with simultaneously are:

Technical change, to attain the increases required in productivity in agriculture and industry. Economic change, to develop a market economy and private enterprise, and to create employment. Social change reducing poverty and inequality. Cultural change, to consolidate shared commonalities and to avoid excessive and potentially divisive, insistence on cultural specificities and political change, to complete the democratisation process, and to make development an issue shared by all, with a place for all. (Role..., 1995:11)

Mchombu, in his study 'Information needs and seeking patterns for rural people's development in Africa' (1993: 171) found that the most common information needs in the rural communities surveyed by him, were:

health care; basic economics which include concepts such as profit and loss, marketing, supply and demand; self-governance, leadership and community, self-management; environmental renewal and literacy.

These findings correlate with the findings of most researchers in the information delivery field in Africa. Sturges and Neill (1998:51) refer to the work of Aboyade, Kaniki and others which confirm these needs. Additional needs, emerging from 'quite a good number of other surveys, should not be ignored'. (Sturges & Neill, 1998:51) These are mostly concerned with religious beliefs and 'the acute information problems' that women have to cope with in the rural areas where they carry 'a disproportionate load of the economic responsibilities in addition to their usual home and family concerns'. (Sturges & Neill, 1998:51)

Osborn and de la Tour Landorthe (1995:129) identify various factors that have led to quite distinct trends in information delivery for rural development in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Owing to the evolution in technology, especially in the fields of electronic media, information technology and telecommunications, faster movement of considerable amounts of data have led to a demanding new kind of professionalism.

The marketplace has arrived. This has led to greater efforts towards achieving some degree of financial viability in the production and dissemination of information. (Osborn & de la Tour Landorthe 1995:129)

Greater emphasis is placed on the quality of information and on adapting information more and more to the needs and demands of the users. There is a move towards 'applied' rather than 'scientific' information. Among 100 databases and information services on agriculture surveyed by the German Appropriate Technology Exchange (GATE) programme in 1993, a typical collection of between 6 000 and 10 000 titles shows an overwhelming portion classified as 'applied' rather than 'scientific'. A notable share of the collections surveyed, between 20% and 80%, was defined as 'grey literature'. The rural population is increasingly becoming involved in the production and dissemination of information for development.

There is an underlying need to involve rural people in the information gathering process and to encourage their participation in both information dissemination and monitoring and analysis of its implementation. (CTA activities,1995:9)

The transition from passive library to outreach - from librarian to 'new information professional' - has become vital. The call for librarians and documentalists to move away from being guardians of information storehouses to professionals who actively offer information and assist people in accessing and selecting appropriate information is echoed time and time again. The stress should not be on offering ready-made information products but more emphasis will have to be placed on communication processes. In the information chain, the so-called 'last mile problematique' - not covering the final steps to the user - is becoming more and more evident, and pressing. Further poor links in the information chain such as those between research centres and development agencies, between the media (press, radio) and information and extension

services are increasingly overcome by creating partnerships, strengthening networks and through decentralisation (Osborn & de la Tour Landorthe, 1995:154).

Osborn and de la Tour Landorthe state that although the last ten years have seen a diversification in the tools available for information transfer, this has not necessarily improved the communication process. There is a lack of matching between media and message and the associated adaptation of information. This leads to information being under-utilised and not achieving its potential level of impact; a case of 'more tools, less focus'. Information literacy skills are vital to facilitate the communication process and cover the last steps to the user.

The 'rural development information support system' as identified by Mchombu (1993:181) needs to be strengthened. He stresses the importance of 'people participation' in the creation, development and maintenance of a rural development information strategy. Information literacy skills are vital for this kind of participation. People should be trained on how to collect, use and maintain data and records for village planning programmes. In addition, the task of coordinating the incorporation of data held in alternative knowledge systems, needs to be carried out. Mchombu (1993:177) suggests that the best approach for demonstrating to the rural community the advantages of using information as a resource is to 'counter attack the trend of rural people to discount and disparage the indigenous knowledge system'.

Sturges and Neill point out that it is a mistake to assume that the information needs articulated by surveys go unmet.

A high proportion of people solve problems from basic knowledge which they attribute to family and other community members, or indeed to their own exploration of solutions and experimentation...they are actually very often tapping the reservoirs of orally transferred indigenous knowledge that we have already identified as retaining the utmost significance in the African information scene. (Sturges & Neill, 1998:51-52)

The complexity of the African information scene should at all times be brought into play when planning or evaluating information delivery projects and programmes aimed at 'developing' community information services in Africa.

Apart from a comprehensive needs analysis survey designed for a specific set of conditions, which would necessarily dictate the nature of information delivery in rural areas, some other qualities are vital for appropriate information delivery and access. Mchombu (1993:175), mentions that information has to be location-specific and impact-bearing. Rural user characteristics and information seeking patterns are important. In communities where the level of education dictates information formats, specific note has to be taken of acknowledged 'information gatekeepers' (Mchombu, 1993: 175). These individuals, who might be part of the authority structure, elders, extension workers, teachers or religious leaders, are very important and could form the 'grassroots foundation' (Mchombu,1993:197) basic to any information dissemination process.

## **5.2 Improving information delivery in the Okavango region- Namibia**

### **5.2.1 Establishing a realistic community information needs profile**

Murray, Oherein and Sycholt (1995:42) found in a baseline survey of on-farm trial programmes in the Okavango that 41.1% of farmers interviewed reported that information gained from extension workers was of benefit for their farming practices. Family members, neighbours and the radio featured strongly as important information sources. Apart from information contained in specialised reports such as the one cited above, no comprehensive needs analysis regarding information delivery in the Okavango has been undertaken thus far.

The drawing of an information needs profile for the Okavango warrants a thorough needs assessment survey. Research conducted by Mchombu (1993:7) in Malawi, Tanzania and Botswana highlights the complexity of the needs assessment process.

It was also found that the villagers exhibited a perception gap between expressed needs (demand) and 'real' needs, for example, a high rate of infant mortality, malnutrition and endemic diseases were accepted as a necessary part of life, hence this situation did not lead to a high demand for information on how health standards can be improved. (Mchombu,1993:7)

Sturges and Neill (1998:49) warn that most surveys on information needs have to be read 'with a highly critical and questioning attitude'.

They do tend to start with the solid assumption that everyone, wherever they might be, has information needs. It also seems to be a basic assumption that some fixed and rather formal institution (very much like a library if it is librarians carrying out the survey) will provide effectively in those needs. (Sturges & Neill, 1998:49)

However, although respondents find it difficult to 'articulate information needs in very specific terms' (Mchombu, 1993:173) surveys do 'genuinely show information needs'. (Sturges & Neill, 1998:50)

When considering a needs assessment model, all indications from researchers in rural appraisal projects show that participatory appraisals should take precedence over 'deductive' reasoning (Mchombu, 1993:7) drawn from broad surveys and official reports. Taking low levels of education into consideration, interviewing and group discussions (as opposed to questionnaires), are deemed more suitable. More recently Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) are favoured as they are conducive to a dynamic, interactive process where researchers go into the rural areas, as learners, convenors, catalysts and facilitators. In this appraisal process 'Indigenous Technical Knowledge' (ITK) is increasingly seen to have a richness and value for the practical purposes of outsiders (Chambers, 1995:4). This correlates with Mchombu's findings.

### **5.2.2 Adaptability and potential impact of information literacy projects and programmes on information delivery in the Okavango**

The Okavango is a vibrant, developing community. The fast growing population has intensified the negative impact of inherited disadvantages. However, the region has exciting potential through the abundance of water, fertile land and its people known for their creative talents. Okavango wood carvings are sought after commodities throughout the continent and internationally. Underdevelopment is a fact of life. In the school, where the water pump is broken and learners drink from a bucket of water fetched and carried over a distance which consumes too much time and energy, the brand new overhead projector stands idle. Electricity is available but unaffordable. The district clinic is a tiny, one roomed, tin roofed construction...the heat intolerable. The health worker struggles valiantly, working his way through a seemingly endless queue of patients. A large part of the great river flows away...mostly unharnessed. Tourists are there, but many more would come if the roads were more accessible and health risks such as malaria less threatening.

Sturges and Neill point out that it seems perfectly reasonable to argue, as has sometimes been done, that the rural population and the urban poor of Africa do not have information needs but have resource needs (Sturges & Neill, 1998:49). Resource needs can however be directly related to practical information needs. There is a need to know about health, agriculture, housing and employment. In a world swamped with information people need to be taught to make use of this resource to the optimum. Information literacy is the crucial link between question and

answer. People in all communities need to find answers to their own unique problems and questions and take responsibility for their own development. They need to make informed decisions and not merely do what 'well meaning' experts tell them to do. To be able to do this, they need to access relevant information in appropriate formats. The information literacy projects and programmes described in this study are there, some already in existence and others at various stages of planning. Time, effort and money have been invested in these projects and programmes and the potential exists for utilisation and adaptation to suit a variety of conditions and circumstances. This is especially crucial in Namibia, where the 'crying needs' and 'harsh realities' with regard to library and related information services still prevail in large parts of the country.

#### **5.2.2.1 The ADB-Namibia-HRDP-User Training Capacity**

With the construction of the IIRC building on the Windhoek campus of the UNAM and the plans for an upgraded university outreach centre in Rundu, the main town of the Okavango, well advanced, the ADB-Namibia-HRDP is poised to impact on that region early in the year 2000. This would mean on-line access to the resources of the IIRC in Windhoek and other databases through Internet connectivity.

The User Training Capacity will have to be resumed in early 2000 with information literacy training on how to use IIRC information technology, thus gaining access to its resources and the Internet. Although these facilities will be situated in the UNAM outreach centre in Rundu, the project dictates that the entire community should be able to access resources available through

the IIRC. In fact the proposed new university outreach centre in Rundu, includes spaces for community use which would mean daily contact with the centre and the resources and services on offer through the centre. However, initially the collection of the IIRC will primarily be university oriented and mainly scientific. The vision of the project to repackage applied research publications into more accessible formats, especially in the areas of science and technology, is aimed at addressing specific community needs. This aim necessitates a high level of community involvement and specific needs will have to be thoroughly surveyed. Further, the increased connectivity on offer through the project to the community of Rundu and surrounding districts, should be extensively discussed and negotiated with all players in the information delivery scene in the Okavango. The recommendations of participants at the awareness/consultative seminar and management seminar conducted in May, 1997 by the User Training Capacity of ADB-Namibia-HRDP underline the urgency of extended and coordinated connectivity:

[Participants of this seminar recommend that] every effort be made to ensure that community libraries, school libraries, teachers resource centres and college libraries are equipped with basic requirements (hardware, phone line), training and ongoing support for online access/networking. (Clyde, Morgenstern & Orford 1997: 7)

In Rundu the network should include the community library, the teacher's resource centre, the Rundu College of Education Library and the Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL). NGOs, government agencies and selected, established school libraries could also be included.

This cooperative effort could be the basic foundation of an appropriate, accessible information network in the Okavango. Staff of these agencies and institutions, trained by the User Training Capacity of the project on how to use IIRC technology, will be able to contribute their own collections to the network.

The repackaging of information should be done cooperatively as the mentioned local institutions and agencies deal with the community on a daily basis and the staff understands the needs and information seeking behaviour of the communities they serve. The IIRC network would thus reflect local collections as well as other alternative sources of community information and knowledge.

As far as reaching communities outside the district boundaries of Rundu are concerned, this could be accomplished by networking with identified CLDCs and community information workers such as teachers, health workers and agricultural extension officers. The Shinungwe Cultural Centre, which is one of the three pilot CLDCs identified, should certainly feature as a network partner to extend the services of the IIRC to outlying communities.

Further recommendations from the User Training Capacity seminar held in 1997 included 'that training experience and materials developed within the project should be seen in the context of longer-term, more formalised training, both residential and by distance learning'. (Clyde, Morgenstern & Orford 1997:7) This is a realistic if logical recommendation. Training experience and materials could be incorporated into the formalised training already offered at the

UNAM and made available to other institutions and agencies. The development of portable and electronic formats of information literacy materials is an accepted route, which is fast gaining ground. Henning and Oosthuizen (1998:67) found in a recent survey that although not much has been written about 'decentralised information user education', it is a basic requirement in any distance education programme and that institutions involved in external studies are increasingly integrating it into their course materials. This is in keeping with a learner centred approach, which is the essence of external studies. The information literacy component of the UNAM University Core and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science Core courses, plus the work done thus far in the User Training Capacity of ADB-Namibia-HRDP as well as extracts from BIS, could serve as a basis for developing portable or electronic packages and formats for decentralised use.

A further resolution is a recommendation that 'a marketing strategy be devised to popularise both information technology and information use, directed at policy makers, users and stakeholders'. (Clyde, Morgenstern & Orford 1997:8) Long term effects of a good marketing strategy could see a more favourable attitude to the implementation of the BIS curriculum in schools, support for school resource centres and community centres, improved visibility of the profession, more support for information literacy training programmes and more financial support.

Also listed as a resolution was the following request:

...the seminar participants recommend that the IIRC Management Team address and clarify its responsibility in terms of the goal outlined as follows: 'The IIRC will also function as support for the work of the wider community'; and as ' a centre of expertise in information handling'. (Clyde, Morgenstern & Orford 1997:9)

This resolution implies that a clear cut policy/strategy to realise the stated objective of the IIRC to serve all Namibian communities and act as regional information literacy experts, is not yet in place. The need for policies and strategies are thus emphasised.

Also recommended is the creation of an electronic mailing list by the training component to

...facilitate communication among information professionals and other stakeholders in order to implement networking, resource sharing and problem solving. This function could be carried on by the Namibian Information Workers Association (NIWA) after the project. (Clyde, Morgenstern & Orford 1997:10)

An electronic mailing list called 'NAMINFO' has been created. This was a collaborative effort by staff at the National Archives and National Library of Namibia. Much groundwork for this was done by the consultants of the ADB-Namibia-HRDP. This type of coordination has long been overdue and promotes standardisation and collaboration which is another long term benefit for remote regions such as the Okavango, where limited resources makes it crucial to cooperate and share resources. NAMINFO has been widely praised by researchers in various fields of research in Namibia for the current awareness listings and other library and information service news thus circulated.

A final resolution recommends 'a referral database be created of experts and specialists in Namibia on various subjects and topics, as a basis for coordinating research and sharing expertise'. (Clyde, Morgenstern & Orford 1997: 10) The need for 'applied' information coupled with personal contact and oral information transfer as primary sources of information, makes this type of database crucial to the country's developmental needs.

### **5.2.2.2 CALICO INFOLIT**

The South African project serves as a good model as it is nearing the end of its first five years and has shown measurable outcomes. The needs analysis was a sound, scientifically based exercise which could be used as a guideline to plan a needs survey for the Okavango, especially for user communities similar to those served by CALICO INFOLIT. These users include teachers, UNAM students, students at the College of Education in Rundu, NAMCOL students, learners and other users of educational material. Although CALICO/INFOLIT is based in a tertiary environment, it has as a long term vision the development of an information literate learning community in the broadest sense.

The Bio-Ed project of INFOLIT is an example of an outreach initiative which offers possibilities for use in developing communities. The enriching dimension which is added to the subject, as well as giving support to teachers and pupils, could be adapted to other subjects. Seen in the present Namibian context, the scope is limited because of the necessity for computer facilities at participating schools. A further prerequisite for on-line participation in the project is that of being part of a schools' network. School and community libraries in most regions of Namibia are nowhere near such sophistication.

The Ministry of Education is planning its own data circuit to the northern rural area and is likely to share the circuit with the Namibian Internet Development Foundation (NAMIDEF) which has this particular area as a main target for school related activities. Attempts to support local schools have been not very successful to date, mainly because of lack of interest on the part of principals (Lisse, 1997:4).

However, the technology which is available through the ADB-Namibia-HRDP at the UNAM centres makes it possible to access useful components of Bio-Ed through the Internet. The transfer of certain components of the project onto CD-ROM further enhances accessibility.

Similarly, the second phase of the Africa: 1300 AD project has been developed for extensive use outside a tertiary environment. Apart from the Internet, it is also available on CD-ROM and in booklet form aimed at schools. The fact that functional literacy is a prerequisite for using this information package limits the potential audience. The repackaging facility envisaged in ADB-Namibia-HRDP could make good use of material found in this project.

The pilot project situated in the School of Design of the CT which promotes visual literacy offers exciting dimensions to improve this facet of information literacy. Improved levels of visual literacy (enhanced observation skills and the ability to verbalise visual concepts), are important, especially in an environment where other literacies like reading and writing are underdeveloped.

Other basic information literacy components found in the INFOLIT pilot projects which concentrate on reading (comprehension), writing (assignments, creative writing), presentation and communication skills, are fundamental to information literacy and serve as a basis for more sophisticated user skills like using catalogues, indexes, CD-ROM, searching databases and surfing the Internet.

The Integrated Academic Literacy programme of the PT School of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering, is an excellent example of establishing information literacy skills in users groups specialising in specific subjects. Users working in specialised fields in developing communities (such as health and agricultural information) could find the approach in this programme highly practical and useful.

The Information Society : Tools and Skills course, developed by the School of Librarianship at University of Cape Town within the INFOLIT project is available in a web-based course pack which could be utilised for decentralised user education. Information literacy skills imparted through this kind of course lead to establishing a core of information literate users who can teach and motivate others in the community.

### **5.2.2.3 Other projects and programmes in Namibia**

The development of the BIS syllabus is extremely important because it promotes a holistic approach to information and establishes an information literacy culture early on in the educational programme of the learner. Information literacy as taught through BIS creates an awareness of the world of information even in those communities where formal information services are extremely underdeveloped. It has a realistic approach to the African information environment in that oral information transfer is seen as an essential source for community knowledge and wisdom. BIS also stresses the importance of alternative information literacy skills such as observation, visual and audio literacy. It is in this context that it is an essential part

of information literacy training in all communities in Namibia teaching young Namibians to use information to solve problems and take responsibility for their own development. It is also a crucial support to the learner centred approach adopted in Namibian schools. Without the support of appropriate, accessible information offered through cooperative networks such as the network offered by the IIRC and information literacy skills offered through BIS, learners will struggle to complete their primary and secondary education successfully.

At the moment the information literacy component of the University Core at the UNAM fulfills the role that BIS will eventually take over as it is more widely offered at Namibian schools. The UNAM core is aimed at those students who arrive on campus without much exposure to libraries and other related information services. Thus lecturers and librarians find it necessary to impart quite elementary information literacy skills to first year students. This core has been and will be offered in the regions. Information literacy thus stands to be improved in those communities facilitating improved access to information available in the community as well as external sources through the IIRC network.

The smaller initiatives in Namibia mentioned in this study can and have played an important part in promoting information literacy in all regions of the country. An example is Readathon which takes place in most schools in all regions of Namibia with excellent results. The reading culture promoted by this and other projects such as AFRILOVE opens up the world of printed information giving the children of all Namibian communities the opportunity to get on the information superhighway and access the great collections of the world.

### 5.3 Conclusion

In spite of many positive factors regarding the delivery of appropriate, accessible information for development, many Namibians do not have access to appropriate information sources.

Namibians do not have the:

time in many rural and remote areas the better part of the day is spent hauling water and producing food;

means bad or no connectivity with the majority of information suppliers;

ability lack of information literacy skills;

inclination lack of awareness about the scope and inherent value of available information sources

to become proficient information users.

This information distribution reality, means that we are dealing with two Namibias, and two Africas, one which is comparatively information rich, and another which is found in rural Africa and rural Namibia, where there is little or no access to information, be it in published or electronic format. How shall networking deliver information to the voiceless tillers of the soil, the school children who get poor school grades, not because they are stupid, but because they have never had access to a school library in their life, ... and what of the rural woman, with her baby tied to her back, and a load of firewood on her head? (Mchombu 1997:9)

Programmes and projects as described in this study create a forum to discuss the concept of information literacy and plan strategies to promote information literacy. Stakeholders and policy makers are sensitised and made aware of the importance of information literacy. The conclusion drawn by Lisse (1997:4) that school principals showed a lack of interest in Internet connectivity is a pointer to that fact that all players should be involved in information literacy planning and training.

Further, the planning and consultative stages of projects and programmes, force players to look at problems and needs and do extensive needs assessments. This leads to strategies to find solutions and plan relevant programmes.

A direct advantage of projects like ADB-Namibia-HRDP and CALICO is that connectivity, on a national and international level, is improved. This facilitates better communication and creates improved access, which are vital for the upgrading of information literacy skills. Experience is gained, thus creating information literacy models, programmes and initiatives which could be adapted to local conditions.

Information literacy training packages, in various formats, are developed and could be replicated across the region. The core of trainers trained in formal information literacy courses will contribute to building a learning community by applying their skills and training others.

However, the two main projects surveyed have definite limitations seen in the context of improving information delivery and access for rural and community development. Rural and

community development embedded in the vision of both projects are secondary to the primary objective of upgrading information delivery and access at a tertiary level. Information literacy training is primarily aimed at users of information sources in the IIRC at the UNAM, or, in the case of INFOLIT, users at the five participating institutions, although this in itself creates a learning and information literacy culture which must have long term benefits.

The efforts of both projects to reach the larger community at this early stage are to be commended. These models could be used for a more ambitious outreach programme when initial structures and skills are in place and can be sustained. There is a need for continuous evaluation of the various components of the projects, to ensure defensibility and viability within the framework of the objectives and the long term vision of each.

Any decision to extend projects into meaningful models to improve information delivery and access for community development would have to be preceded by further intensive needs assessment surveys and research.

Sturges and Neill (1998:139) conclude:

A truly democratic information service needs to build on the basic assumption that whilst not every citizen is either literate or computer literate, all have some equivalent set of skills which enables them to function in society and the economy. The precise form that the provision of information services to specific communities must take, would then follow from the balance of skills available in those communities.

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