



## **Supporting knowledge-based societies: developing national policy for libraries**

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**Abstract:**

*The recognition of the role that libraries can and do play in the information society, in bridging the digital divide and in their unique ability to support a country's development goals has led to renewed interest in the establishment of national library policies. This paper presents the findings from research being carried out 2010 - 2012 by a team of international and national researchers across Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa. Three components are included: desk research leading to preparation of a background paper; development of case studies to illustrate forward-thinking/innovative practice; and, development of a draft library policy framework. The full results can be found from [www.nida-net.org/activities](http://www.nida-net.org/activities)*

*This paper serves as a background to the presentation that will be given in Helsinki, which will primarily focus on developments in the field during 2012.*

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### **What is a national policy for libraries?**

In simple terms a policy is a plan of action or a statement of aims and objectives providing a framework for practice. A policy is developed with the intention to guide, influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters; it is a means to an end. A national library policy is then a framework for the planned and coordinated development of a country's libraries. It is a plan of action and a statement of ideals proposed or adopted by a government.

A national library policy differs from library legislation. The latter lays down statutory responsibilities. Any national library policy must conform to this law and any other relevant current laws. Changes in the law usually necessitate the updating of an existing policy. A national library policy also differs from manuals of procedures and guidelines that provide guidance on the best and most efficient ways of implementing policy. Regulations describe what must be done to support a policy.

National library policies may form part of wider policies, e.g. National Information Policies, National Information Technology Strategies, National Education Policies, and National Book Policies; their development and interconnection does not require the pre-existence of these wider strategies. They can also be developed, either additionally or independently, for specific types of libraries (e.g. public or university libraries) or individual library systems (e.g. of a specific town or regional authority). 'National Libraries' (which in many countries also have responsibility for public and other types of libraries) may develop policies covering these areas but they are not national library policies *per se*.

### **Trends post-WW2 to 2000**

In the period post-WW2, library development planning under the umbrella of a national policy framework became an idea much favoured and debated. In the UK, for example, the McColvin Report of 1942 and the Roberts Report of 1957 both stressed the necessity of setting up a truly national library service under central government control, with minimum standards and periodic inspections. In African countries, unlike in UK, Europe and USA, there were no pre-existing administrative library structures, so it was possible to set up really national library systems as part of independence settlements. In reality, national library systems tended to become public library networks.

From 1970 onwards UNESCO, through their National Information System (NATIS) programme, began to promote the idea of fully integrated library and information systems, planned through a national information policy. NATIS was swallowed within the General Information Programme (GIP), which aimed to achieve a world scientific United Nations International Scientific Information System (UNISIST) as well as creating national information systems in each country. IFLA contributed to the UNISIST programme by promoting Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) and Universal Access to Publications (UAP). In 1985, UNESCO produced its *Guidelines on National Information Policy: scope, formulation and implementation*. It provided a step by step approach to national information policy but left users to decide which parts of the concept were relevant to their situation.

The 1990s saw the development of information technology in facilitating access to information, as well as a growing awareness of the importance of information for development, the concept of the information society. IFLA (Niogaard) recognized that the information society generates and consumes enormous amounts of information and that IT made it easier to produce and access this information. New actions were called for from all types of libraries and also from authorities in the way that they include libraries in national planning. It concluded that national information policies (of the sort promoted by UNESCO in the 1970s and 1980s but also addressing IT strategies (including informatics and telematics) were required more than ever.

Of 135 countries surveyed by IFLA in 1996/97 55 replies were received: 34 had National Information Policies (NIPs) or National Information Technology Strategies (NITSs), 10 were discussing these and 11 gave a negative response. The positive responses indicated that libraries were seen as important instruments, as public access points to knowledge and information and as information centres towards national IT development. However many countries indicated that it was easier to adopt a policy than to implement it. The survey concluded that IT was forcing the agenda and left no nation untouched: NIPs and NITSs were definitely an issue of interest to the library sector and indicated that libraries should play an active role.

During these years the need for the library sector to contribute to other policies became a matter of discussion in Africa. There was a call for national book policies, to ensure that the book chain was recognized, supported, nurtured and maintained as a matter of national importance. This was discussed from 1996 onwards at many of the Indabas (e.g. McCartney), held at the Zimbabwe Book Fairs. In 1997 UNESCO published *National Book Policy: a guide for users in the field*. It was generally recognized that library development must be integrated into book policy development. However, at the same time, some commented that developing a national book policy required commitment from an enormous range of players. As a result very little came of these initiatives.

The trends of the 1990s were inconclusive as to whether or not it was productive to develop national library policies in the context of wider policies, like Information, Technology, Books or Education, or whether a national library policy should first stand alone, to be subsequently integrated into other policies.

### **Trends, 2000 onwards**

The early years of the new century saw emphasis placed on how ICT advances had brought about changes in knowledge management leading to the development of the global information society. This was evidenced by the holding of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in two phases, 2003 and 2005. Its objective was to establish the foundations for an Information Society and to put in motion a concrete action plan, both of which are still in progress. One result was the development of national ICT plans.

There was an obvious 'digital divide' between developed and developing countries, with the latter having low levels of human capital, local content creation, ICT infrastructure and ICT access. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) recognized this in 1996 with its adoption of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII), which encouraged African governments to embark on the process of developing national information and communications policies and plans. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the action plans of WSIS gave African governments further impetus in this direction. IST-Africa (ICT policies), a multi-stakeholder initiative focused on reducing the digital divide in sub-Saharan Africa, now compiles a repository of ICT policies in Africa and most countries have written and/or revised them between 2000 and 2010. The problem for the library sector is that most if not all the African ICT national policies give no role to libraries within the ICT framework. Technology is overemphasized and no mention of libraries is included in the issues addressed.

A similar situation exists in the other parts of the developing world. A meeting of the Asia-Pacific Information Network (APIN) in 2007 complained that libraries were missing from their countries' national information policies, agreed that the library component should be

spelt out in all NIPs and suggested that a set of standards for NIPs should be promulgated (Sin Joan Yee).

It is this lack of recognition of the role that libraries can and do play in the information society and in bridging the digital divide that has led to a renewed interest in the establishment of national library policies.

In Europe EBLIDA (European Bureau of Library, Information, Documentation Archives) Naples (National Authorities on Public Libraries in Europe) held a joint conference in 2009 to discuss the importance of a library policy for Europe. It has established guidelines on library legislation and policy in Europe (Mauritzen), which emphasize that national policy measures should recognize that libraries are essential bodies in sustaining and developing democracy. A number of European countries have or are in the process of formulating national library policies. In Finland the Ministry of Education is responsible for outlining national library policies and has an ongoing programme of policy statements and strategies, concentrating on state and public libraries (the subject of Barbro Wigell-Ryynänen's paper which follows). Latvia and Lithuania are countries at present in the process of formulating policies. Lithuania has a law on libraries, many regulations and a long-term programme for the modernization of public libraries. Government changes in strategic planning methods and guidelines for cultural policy issued in 2010 has led the library sector to review the content of existing documents and discuss development of a national library policy.

In South America, several countries are working towards national library policies, starting with an emphasis on public libraries. Colombia passed a law in 2010 through which the National Network of Public Libraries is to be organized (Colombia. Ministry of Culture). The Law defines all technical, financial and institutional instruments as well as the necessary planning and coordination spaces to do it. However, it is a national policy only for libraries operated by the state. It does not cover other public libraries or networks, community, school or university libraries. But other types of libraries are included in a technical committee stipulated by the law, to give advice and counsel. Chile is also considering passing a similar law.

In Africa, Namibia (discussed below) has developed an integrated national library policy, and Kenya and Uganda are in the process of finalizing public library policies. At April 2012, several other countries (including Ghana, South Africa and Tanzania have started discussions towards developing policies.

### **Three examples of countries who have completed national policies for libraries**

Examination and appraisal of current best practice led the research team to identify 3 cases studies, those of Finland, Namibia and New Zealand. Following a series of consultative workshops and discussions, a fourth, that of Colombia was added to illustrate particularly innovative national policy for public libraries in a developing world context.

#### ***Finland***

As mentioned above, Barbro Wigell-Ryynänen, Counsellor for Library Affairs of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland is also presenting in the NLIP SIG session and she will be best placed to summarize their work. However, for those who are interested, the case study on Finland within the NIDA research, prepared by Barbro, is available from <[www.nida-net.org/activities/policy/finland](http://www.nida-net.org/activities/policy/finland)>

## **Namibia**

In 2009, the National Libraries and Archives Service (NLAS) of Namibia solicited bids to assist in the renewal of Namibia's national library policy, as Phase 2 of a strategic assessment and economic analysis of the LIS sector. The previous policy had been written in 1997 (Namibia.Ministry of Basic Education) and in the intervening years far-reaching changes had taken place in the national and global information environment, not least the emergence of ICT. In addition Namibia produced Vision 2030, a new strategy for national development, which required the transformation of the economy, with the education and training sector, including continuing education and libraries, playing an important role. The ideas of Vision 2030 were incorporated into the latest national development plan and the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP). A new national strategy for libraries was required to demonstrate, guide and plan the contribution of the library sector to this vision.

The London-based consortium of MDR Partners and the Network for Information and Digital Access (NIDA) was chosen to work with NLAS. A consultancy team began research on the ground and its reports became the basis for a draft national policy document for the library and information sector, submitted to NLAS in 2010 (MDR/NIDA).

The revised national policy consists of four sections:

- **The context:** need for a new policy, national development objectives and major objectives of a strategy for Namibia's libraries;
- **Key strategic elements:**
  - Coordination, leadership and marketing: the roles and relationships of the Namibian Library and Information Council (NLIC), NLAS and professional bodies like the Namibian Information Workers Association (NIWA)
  - Legislation: need to renew the 2000 Act in the light of changes brought about by ICT and decentralization within Namibia
  - Human resources: meeting the needs of actual and potential users; adequate supply of skilled staff, including improvement of staffing structures and training opportunities
- **Resources:**
  - information resources for library and information services
  - Namibian content
  - information for development
  - funding
  - ICT;
- **Policies for individual library and information sectors:**
  - National Library of Namibia
  - National Archives of Namibia
  - specialized and research libraries
  - community libraries
  - school libraries/media centres, BIS and resources for teachers
  - higher education libraries.

NLAS is in the process of publishing the document. In the meantime a copy of the consultant's report can

be accessed from [www.mdrpartners.com/projects/namibia-library-strategy/](http://www.mdrpartners.com/projects/namibia-library-strategy/)

## **New Zealand**

At the time of research, the National Library of New Zealand provided NIDA with a case study based on their 2007 policy document; however since then there have been a number of significant changes within the public service in New Zealand, not least of which

is that both the National Library and Archives NZ were integrated into the Department of Internal Affairs (DIA) on 1 February 2011.

A copy of the original, but now outdated, case study can be found from [www.nida-net.org/activities/policy/new\\_zealand/](http://www.nida-net.org/activities/policy/new_zealand/) but papers being given by staff members of the National Library during this congress will be giving the latest thinking from New Zealand.

## **Colombia**

The two primary goals for Colombia are precisely those of the ideal public library: an institution providing basic and complementary services covering the full diversity and cultural, ethnic and social characteristics of every municipality and department of Colombia and a library with equipment and infrastructure in accordance with minimum technical requirements defined as per the legal character of municipalities in which services are free. A public library must have connectivity in its agenda and with conditions for the exchange of services with the National Network of Public Libraries and with other networks of libraries in the country and abroad. More than just a duty, this public library is obligatory and should be guaranteed by territorial and national administrations. The *Colombian Law of Public Libraries* defines all technical, financial and institutional instruments, as well as all the necessary planning and coordination spaces to provide services.

### ***The Context***

The *Law of Public Libraries* lays the basis for **National Policy** of the National Network of Public Libraries. To do that, it traces technical guidelines on the operation of all State Public Libraries in the country, their infrastructure, basic services they should provide free, and the profile of the personnel to fulfil them. The Law defines instruments for the sustainable development of public libraries with tax incentives for those supporting their operation, public resources, national and territorial coordination, institutional obligations, citizen's participation, management and performance measurement, etc. The provisions of the Law do not cover other libraries or networks, such as the Bank of Republic Network of Libraries, the Family Benefit Funds Network of Libraries, community libraries and school and university libraries, even though all of them have a place in the National Technical Committee of Public Libraries.

### ***Key Strategic elements include:***

- Public use and social interest, social investment and public service
- Public Library Operation
- Bibliographic heritage
- responsibilities: divided into National level; Departmental level and Municipal and District levels
- implementation instruments are required, such as the resources necessary to carry out services. There are many examples of these, e.g. a set of financing mechanisms; Incentives to the publishing industry.

### ***The network concept***

Throughout the 'Law of Public Libraries' the **National Network of Public Libraries** is the articulation of public libraries in the national, departmental, district and municipal spheres. Its equipment and heritage, bibliographic services, resources, infrastructure and personnel fulfil the mission of supporting the public, through users and communities. This is articulated through a set of standards, bodies, processes and resources aimed to prevent duplication of efforts; it promotes the unity of criteria and goals through principles and rules for the interpretation and application aimed at the development and transformation from

the contemporary concept of a public library. The network, as every institution, seeks constructive goals, which facilitates interaction.

The policy of the National Network of Public Libraries is to be integrated into economic and social development plans at all levels, with the following implications:

- the need to include within the National Development Plan, a Plan related to the promotion of the Network;
- the creation of departmental, district and municipal plans, taking into account policies and strategies of the National Development Plan;
- territorial plans developed into corresponding action plans.

## **National Library Policy Framework**

Following the research phase summarized above, two model policy frameworks - one for a fully integrated sector-wide and one specialized to the public library sub-sector - were developed through a consultative process of meetings and workshops in Europe and in Africa and mailings to NIDA's network and interested stakeholders. Copies of the frameworks can be found from [www.nida-net.org/activities](http://www.nida-net.org/activities)

Participants also drew up a few simple guidelines to aid those beginning to consider developing or renewing a policy. In brief, library policy should be seen within a process that includes:

- a) assessment of the present performance and infrastructure of the library sector or subsector based on the stated requirements for development of the country and the needs of its citizens. The assessment of libraries will therefore be based in the context of the government's development policies, usually articulated through 'Vision' documents, national development plans, economic plans, employment plans etc.;
- b) understanding and analysis of the realistic and achievable financial capability of government and complementary sources towards libraries (or the library sub sector);
- c) analysis and understanding of the potential future impact that libraries could and should contribute to the country's development;
- d) preparation of the library policy document;
- e) preparation of comprehensive and implementable short, medium and long term Action Plans for the library sector (or subsector). This should include annual plans developed in line with 3 – or 5-year rolling plans. The action plans should include both work plans and budget plans;
- f) development of strategies and instruments for ongoing monitoring, evaluation and feedback of results into the planning and policy implementation processes.

Responding to request, the latest follow-up action by NIDA includes preparation of complementary model frameworks for both sector assessment and financial analysis.

## Conclusions

From the above, we can conclude:

- National policies for libraries are part of a larger mosaic of both information-related and other national policies, e.g. education. They contribute and relate to these other policies but are not dependent on them. They may be developed separately and independently in the first instance. They will need to be updated as a country's conditions and policies develop and change.
- National policies for libraries arise out of the political, economic and social needs and conditions of a country. They grow out of the existing library infrastructure and practices. They reflect a country's library priorities.
- Library legislation authorizes the existence and responsibilities of a country's libraries. A national library policy ensures that libraries operate in accordance with this legislation and in the most effective way possible.
- National policies for libraries, once in writing and formally approved by government, provide a framework for the delivery of library services. Being underwritten by government is an assurance of financial support and subsidy.
- The existence of a body within government responsible for all library development within a country facilitates the formulation of a truly national library policy.
- National library strategies and policies give libraries credibility and political visibility, something that is often lacking for the library sector. The important role that libraries play in development and general well-being of society is recognized and incorporated in all government policies and projects.

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