

**Christine Stilwell, Athol Leach, Simon Burton.** *Knowledge, information and development: An African perspective.* Peitermarizburg: School of Human and Social Studies, 2001. ix + 247 pp. R153.90, paper, ISBN 978-0-620-26639-0.

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In the wider context of African development, the issues raised in this collection are applicable to all African countries, though most examples come from South and Southern African, so for this reason the title is a little deceptive. The three major sections of the book are very pertinent to African development in the so-called information age.

#### Section One: Setting the scene

The first section sets the scene for later discussions. Sandra Braman looks at reinventing policy technologies and approaches to communications policy-making in post-1994 South Africa. She provides an important example of policy reinventions that can be of enormous use to others in Africa, the developing world, as well as countries in the North. The watchword here is adaptation of outside technologies to local conditions and needs. The chapter seeks to identify those policy innovations that have emerged in the South African communications arena that should be among its exports to the rest of the world. Three aspects of policy-making are explored: features of policy-making process; specific policy tools; and analytical concepts. The chapter could, perhaps, more appropriately be re-titled by substituting the word "telecommunication" for "information" since it is about telecommunications policy. The South African government is to be commended for efforts to bring the country fully into the glob-

al information economy by putting in place policies in all strategic sectors: industrial, social, educational, and communications.

Tracing the development of libraries from pre-colonial, colonial to the post-colonial era, Diana Rosenberg emphasizes the importance of libraries to socio-economic development and laments the state of libraries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Information is a vital national resource, but African libraries have been on the decline for 25 years. She attributes the decline in the provision of libraries of all types - academic, public, special, and school - to the fact that libraries are no longer financed by their parent bodies or institutions, citing specific examples (including Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone) of low levels of service in university libraries from a survey she conducted in eleven African countries in 1995-6. What is left of the libraries currently is due to funding and support received from donor agencies as institutional funding of books and journals continue to decrease.

In the search for sustainability and reversal of decline, Rosenberg suggests, among other things, the need for lobbying of decision makers about the importance and value of libraries, resource sharing, introduction and use of ICTs (information and communication technologies), training of librarians, local publishing, and cost-recovery for library services. The bottom line of

the state of libraries, however, remains the lip service paid by government and local authorities to the idea, need, and importance of libraries. Rosenberg also importantly raises the need to identify and meet the information needs of rural populations and provide alternative libraries as resource centers, classroom libraries, and decentralized academic library services. She suggests new approaches to information services provision that reflect the socio-economic conditions and culture of Africa.

Mary Nassimbeni examines the library and information services (LIS) policy fields in South Africa during the post-apartheid period by analyzing LIS policy and giving a historical account of this policy in its socio-political context. Reference is made to the two separate library associations--LIWO (Library and Information Workers' Organisation) and SAILIS (South African Institute of Librarianship and Information Science)--and how they could work together closely to achieve a coherent and coordinated national library and information system based on democratic principles. The formation in 1995 of the Sub-Committee on Libraries under the newly created Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology made possible important proposals concerning policies for libraries at national, provincial, and local levels. One major recommendation of the committee was for the new, unified national library established in November 1999, that merged the South African Libraries in Pretoria and State Library in Cape Town. The effect of these policy initiatives ran through the education sector, resulting in reviews of LIS provision at school, community and tertiary levels. At the tertiary level, the report of the Working Group on Libraries and Information Technology recommended the development of consortia as an effective means of contributing to the goals of "redress and enhanced services and efficiency" and urged the higher education sector to recognize the importance of information literacy programmes. Two such library consortia, CALICO (Western Cape) and GAELIC (Gauteng) are the

results of these policy recommendations. Nassimbeni further measures the impact of LIS policies and observes that expansion of library services has been curtailed due to resource constraints. The formation of a new body, the National Council for Library and Information Services, is imminent and should continue to provide policy guidelines for the development and coordination of LIS.

Christine Stilwell's review of re-packaging information is highly relevant to the African library student and to African libraries that serve predominantly rural and mostly illiterate populations. Recently, more attention is being given to indigenous knowledge systems, which need re-packaging for their effective use. Stilwell discusses the origins, theory, practice, and incidence of repackaging in the context of development information provision in high and low technology environments. Good models for adaptation to a range of circumstances are described and key factors for the future choice of media, sharing of repackaging experiences, training and evaluation of existing projects are identified. A comprehensive review of the literature on repackaging defined as processing and packaging is given to show that information must be converted into useful forms for the end-user, especially in the rural areas of the South, but also in the North. This chapter also presents case studies of repackaged information across a wide range of information provision situations, especially in community development programmes concerned with agriculture, forestry, natural resource management, human nutrition, health and disease. Valid points suggested for effectively improving on this mode of information provision are repackaging as a process, formats and channels for repackaging of indigenous knowledge systems and training for repackaging.

Christopher Merrett looks at the first freely elected South African government as providing a platform upon which to analyze the extent to which the country has changed under new condi-

tions generally regarded as democratic. He notes that apartheid era censorship via the educational systems was one mode of creating social inequities. He reports on the uncertainties of victory in post-apartheid South Africa and the facts of the transition, noting that much has not changed and a lot more needs to be done for a totally free South Africa. Fundamental human rights, when fully pursued, lay the foundation for development, he argues.

Merrett vividly recounts the political history of post-apartheid South Africa, outlining the legal foundation of freedom of expression and information in the new South Africa. These comprise the Constitution's Bill of Rights, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Archives and Films and Publications Act, and the Promotion of Access to Information Act. According to Merrett, all these initiatives show a degree of promise, but each in turn is open to subversion by various socio-political trends. To prove his point, he cites cases that have created a climate requiring South Africans to see the need for reassurances that true diversity of information and opinion is their right. A clear example is Section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act, in terms of which journalists can be forced to reveal their sources. He concludes by saying that South African laws are the most liberal in the world, having neglected the socio-economic and political context on which they operate. This pessimistic view is not shared by all, however.

#### Section 2: Learners, readers, women

Basically, libraries, publishing and education are inter-linked and interdependent. For the library professional reader, the chapter on new information technologies and learning in South Africa by Neil Butcher indicates what is possible in the current technology-based information age. He explains the roles that new technologies might play in accelerating social development, and outlines the debates about how their adoption and use can contribute to reducing the massive in-

equity that exists between different societies in the world. There are two basic divergent views: Africa can "leapfrog" stages of development as the result of use of ICTs; or Africa can be left behind due to the fast growth of ICTs. This chapter contributes practical solutions to problems encountered in the use of ICTs by focusing on education as a key example of development activity.

South Africa is among world leaders in terms of ICT use (the fourteenth largest user of the Internet), yet most rural areas where the majority of the population lives are without ordinary telephones. Education has been identified as the basis for the social transformation of the country that has been ravaged by many years of apartheid policy and international isolation. Yet an increasing number of students, in the face of dwindling funding, poses a real challenge and this is expected to be resolved through application of ICTs. To this end, educational policy developments have included the development of policy on technology-enhanced learning and the establishment of a framework of quality standards for distance education. Most educational initiatives that harness the capacity of ICTs usually draw on distance educating and resource-base learning methodologies, as is the experience of South Africa. Butcher uses education as a case study to explore some practical ways of harnessing ICTs to accelerate social development.

Ruth Ochieng and Jenny Radloff highlight the strategic use of ICTs for African women to be able to access information. They also present a collection of very useful online resources of networks for women's information. In terms of Africa as a developing region, some writers argue that the Internet has important educational, economic, and social benefits. If particular societies are excluded from Internet use, then current economic and political disparities can only worsen, because ICTs are critical for acquiring and disseminating development information. This chapter reveals how women's information organizations are using

new technologies to advance gender equity and promote social justice.

Ochieng and Radloff provide detailed examples of how women's information is being made visible, for example by the IDRC Gender and Information Working Group and African Women Information centres through such initiatives as AP-NET and the Zimbabwe International Book Fair. They trace the recent history of initiatives in providing women's information through international conferences, such as the Bangkok Global Women's Conference in 1994, the Beijing Conference of 1995 and the African Know-How Conference of 1998 in Amsterdam. Africa-based women's organizations have taken part in such meetings in order to critically look at issues of access and visibility of women's information. The authors recommend lobbying for the inclusion of more African women in the use of ICTs and the changing of their mindsets, for ICTs are not a "male" technology.

Joan Gallagher underscores literacy as the basis for sustainable development, making information literacy fundamental to any educational enterprise. Reading materials and supplementary reading play a central role in this. She quotes Hunter's [1] definition of sustainable development as "that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own". This definition is linked to two crucial elements in capacity building; education and information technology. For effective use of information, conditions such as print literacy, critical thinking skills, and information literacy have to be in place. The ability to evaluate and use information is an integral part of critical thinking and self-directed learning.

Gallagher identifies the provision of sufficient follow-up materials as crucial to the attainment of literacy. She sees indigenous materials as providing the best motivation for readers to develop their skills because they reflect experience, beliefs, values and attitudes with which readers are familiar. She stresses the role of popular English

fiction, popular story telling, and popular fiction, among others, as necessary for sustaining the reading habit and maintenance of literacy skills. She presents the results of a survey to investigate whether popular Western-produced fiction is relevant to the needs of black readers using libraries in KwaZulu-Natal. The evidence indicates that popular English fiction is strongly relevant to reading needs of adult black library users. This finding is consistent with research findings that if people are provided with sufficient quantities of appealing text, then they will teach themselves to become fluent readers.[2]

Thuli Radebe's chapter on children's literature presents written material as the means by which children experience their environment, helping them in the socialization process. The author presents an overview of trends in children's literature in South Africa in the 1990s, highlighting themes such as the child development paradigm, the children's rights paradigm, socialization, multiculturalism, and social realism. Multiculturalism enables the diversity of South African society to be seen as a source of national strength, as its children come from different cultures and backgrounds. Social realism emphasizes the need for books to portray the sadness of poverty and homelessness, and the inability to attain empowerment. On the basis that children's literature is international and children worldwide display similar behaviour, Radebe concludes that the cultural origin of a story has no relative effect on its enjoyment and the socio-economic background of settings in children's books does not exclusively influence reading interests. Genres such as folktales, humour and the picture book are identified as having a specific role to play in South Africa (especially at a time of reconstruction and development) for the purpose of fun and also for acquisition of reading, language and visual literacy skills. Radebe concludes with a call to develop a common Southern African cultural vision in chil-

dren's literature to transcend ethnicity and promote a national culture for the whole country.

Adult literacy or basic education is the theme of John Aitchison's article in which he details the current South African situation and outlines government efforts at providing equal educational opportunities for all. The situation is laid bare through ample statistical evidence. The author also provides a brief historical introduction to apartheid. He first discusses definitions of literacy and presents statistics that show clear and continuing educational disparities between the four racial groups of the apartheid era. He then deals with the history and policies of literacy and provision of adult basic education and training (ABET) until April 1994, followed by an account of ABET planning and implementation from May 1994 to 1997. He summarizes the state of literacy in South Africa under apartheid and in the first four years of the 1990s during which considerable expansion of programmes for black adult literacy were high on the agenda of many NGOs. The author blames the failure of the state to fulfil its promises to provide adult literacy programmes on understaffing and under-funding. The part played by such bodies as the South African Broadcasting Corporation, provincial libraries, and the community college sector in adult literacy programmes are acknowledged. Finally, Aitchison records the total collapse, in 1998, of the NGO literacy field despite better national and provincial co-ordination through the National Literacy Cooperation, and presents the ABET plans of the new Minister of Education after the June 1999 elections. Among his nine priorities were "to break the back of illiteracy among adults and youth in five years". The author affirms the role of NGOs in eradicating illiteracy and argues the need for mobilizing a social movement to bring reading, writing and numeracy to those who do not have it. The prospects, however remain uncertain as there has been a long delay in implementation and an apparent conflict between the National Department

of Education and the South African National Literacy Initiative.

### Section three: Applications and ideas

This section brings together the results of action research studies, which apply theory to the social conditions of information provision in Southern Africa. ICT application in the information society of the 21st century requires that future competencies be based on basic knowledge of how to identify an information need, and how to access and use information critically. Information literacy is defined in its narrowest sense as the ability to access, use and evaluate information.

Cathy-Mae Karelse's paper focuses on the IN-FOLIT project of the Western Cape, which underlines the relationship between information literacy and knowledge production. The project is also committed to information literacy education and life long learning.

Atol Leach's chapter is on information provision in a rural context. The information needs of rural Africa cover health, land, water, housing, etc. The mode of communication is predominantly oral, which must be complemented by other means such as audio, video, and print. For Leach, a basic question is the best format for information provision in the rural context. As Sturges and Neill note: the "nature of the packages into which information is placed is crucial in the provision of information services to the whole community".[3] He approaches this issue through a study of provision of information to rural adults by 22 NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal. Leach points to the over reliance on the printed word and the potential of audio-visual and oral modes of information provision for adults in rural areas. The findings of the study include proposals on subject coverage (including information on health, land, water, housing, agriculture, employment, the environment, etc.), literacy levels and gender, and the formats of information provided.

What emerges strongly from Leach's study is the predominance of use of oral media by the NGOs. Respondents repeatedly stressed that the information provision process is interactive and participatory and that the oral mode best lends itself to this process. Two major issues emerging from the study are the training of the rural library and information worker, and the suitability of the resource centre model to the African context. It is clear that skills required for working in the rural context lie beyond those conventionally taught in schools of library and information studies, and much could be gained from a closer look at this model when rural library and information services are being planned.

Andrew Kaniki's chapter entitled "Community profiling and needs assessment" concentrates on appropriate and meaningful library services dictated by community needs and special circumstances. His claim that library and information services, in Africa especially, have become increasingly elitist, Euro-centric and irrelevant to large parts of their communities is serious "food for thought". "Community librarianship" is seen as an alternative service for persons not reached by mainstream or traditional public library services. He stresses the importance of the study of information needs, noting that such needs change with time and therefore needs assessment must be conducted regularly. His article dovetails with what Christine Stilwell calls "Community resource centers".

In her chapter on community resource centres, Stilwell reviews community information services (CIS) in relation to their parent NGOs and the broader development context. CIS are alternative library services, which concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to traditional sources of information. Stilwell presents four essential differences between the traditional, and this alternative, mode of libraries, among them the greater degree of interaction between librarian and user. She traces the emer-

gence of the CIS concept in South Africa to the growth in voluntary associations, the liberation struggle, the emergence of participative development and the feminist movement.

For proponents of this type of service, the public library model is inappropriate, especially to Africa, and should be expanded to cater for the rural poor. This will ensure the provision of services that really change the lives of their users through the provision of "survival information" such as that related to health, housing, income, legal protection, economic opportunity, and political rights. This conclusion is based on the integrating role which information can play in the development process, because information and communication systems are crucial to the central objective of sustainable, people-driven development. Stilwell also points to problems of massive waste due to duplication and the ever decreasing resource-base among NGOs and the attempts to address them so that they can sustain their services.

Information and knowledge have grown into essential ingredients for development and this forms the central theme of Simon Burton's chapter on "Development Communication: towards a social action perspective". The chapter stresses mass media models--using daily newspapers, radio receivers, television receivers, and cinemas--in different regions of the world and their role in development. The mass media play a significant role in providing information about national developments, and especially in development projects, which affect the very lives of the rural community.

Kingo Mchombu's chapter about research into measuring the impact of information on rural development opens with the assertion that information is so central to finding solutions to society's problems that it should be regarded as a factor of production. He states that information is basic to all human needs and a critical resource in the economic development of the Third world, yet

it is accorded very low status because its potential value is yet to be fully recognized. Mchombu investigated the provision of information to support rural development and measured the impact of information activities on development. The research was based on findings from community information centres in Malawi and Tanzania, which provided development information in agriculture, health, education and income generation to villagers. Mchombu recommends a development information centre model based on information facilitators, a broad rural development information strategy, a multichannel approach for the flow of information, and the participation of rural groups in prioritizing their information needs.

### Conclusion

Together, the various chapters of this book present a very rich resource that reflects on the contextual, theoretical, and practical issues involved in information services provision for development in Africa in general and South African in particular. The collection should be the bible/blue book for any post-graduate study in LIS for the sub region. Each chapter has very good references, some extensive, that will be useful for further research. There is also a very useful index. A few minor typos are on pages vii, 22, 88, and 223.

The targeted audience of the book and development specialists should note the theme on page 70: as with all other African countries, the challenges faced by South Africa are a combination of problems shared with other countries and particular problems created by the country's unique history. Africa is not a homogenous continent in which the problems and hence the solutions are universal. What the rural majority in Africa needs most is appropriate library services, like the community information centre, which are more useful to their needs than the traditional public library. The training of the African information professional must emphasize this genre of library service. There is a close and intimate relationship between education and libraries, which should be

stressed and taught as part of an African tradition of librarianship.

### Notes

[1]. R. Hunter, "Managing sustainable economic development," in P. Fitzgerald et al., eds., *Managing sustainable development in South Africa*. 2nd ed. (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1997), 233-255.

[2]. C. S. Ross, "If they read Nancy Drew, so what?" *Library and Information Science Research*, 17 (1995):201-236

[3]. P. Sturges and R. Neill, R. *The quiet struggle: information and libraries for the people of Africa*. 2nd ed. (London: Mansell, 1998), 206.

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