



IFLA  
2005  
OSLO

## World Library and Information Congress: 71th IFLA General Conference and Council

### "Libraries - A voyage of discovery"

August 14th - 18th 2005, Oslo, Norway

*Conference Programme:*

<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/Programme.htm>

July 18, 2005

**Code Number:** 162-E  
**Meeting:** 147a Women's Issues

*"Women and world peace"*

#### **How information managers and librarians can make a difference**

**Ms Wambui P. Wagacha**

Head of Library Division

Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analyses (KIPPRA)

Nairobi, Kenya

#### ***Abstract***

The author develops the view that as long as information managers, librarians and libraries guard, keep and hold on to information, there will never be peace. Women issues are still a "taboo" in many cultures in Africa, and librarians and information managers seem to embrace the condition in a surprising professional complicity. Yet women issues are *all the people's* issues. As information managers become immune to information development on issues that concern women, they help deduct from world peace. Women issues especially in Africa need to be addressed seriously, whether on rape of young children especially the girl child, female genital mutilation, the recruitment of boy soldiers, poverty, the HIV/ AIDS scourge that has destroyed the family, environment degradation, or education for women. The author also examines whether there are formally trained information managers in Kenya who can address the issues.

## **Introduction**

This paper will try to demonstrate how information development and provision on women, through libraries and information people- librarians and information managers- is important in world peace. The availability, development and dissemination of this type of information are scanty to date. The gap is relatively wide in Africa, and the paper draws some examples from Kenya. The paper discusses woman as the rock on which a society is built, and therefore its attitudes and contributions to peace. Libraries and information centers, as the custodian of information and with librarians and information managers as the vehicle for information development and dissemination, could “make a difference” to the gap in information identified in this paper. Use of information technology could hasten the development and dissemination of the types of information suggested.

After the introduction, the rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section II sets out the information development and dissemination problems that beset the subject of women’s condition in Africa. Section III gives a definition of the contribution to world peace that the identified information development and dissemination on women would make. Section IV sets out the sources of what the author hypothesizes as the “peace-women link” in Africa. Section V outlines the current Library information services setting, using examples from Kenya. Section VI identifies the possible roots of current failures of library and information systems to address the gap. Section VII explores possible uses of information technology in closing the gap. Section VIII discusses information users’ education, and Section IX makes some conclusions.

## **II Problems**

The following problems impede the development of the library and information systems of many African countries:

- Poorly developed infrastructure
- Lack of information policy
- Lack of vision, an obsession with a foreign library ethos.
- Tendency to focus attention on the immediate day to day problems, which has tended to exclude the contemplation of longer day to day problems and possibilities
- Too many solutions have either been sought through conventional library methods, which have been found wanting, when applied in an African context or through ideas that are at least one step removed from the struggle to provide services which meet actual need
- Too many features, which are characteristic of Africa’s information environment, have either been ignored or perceived as obstacles that must be eradicated before libraries can flourish.

### **III What can development and dissemination of information on women contribute to world peace?**

World peace combats its opposites, the law of the jungle, violence, theft and savagery, and selfishness, and scant regard for fellow human beings. Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It means protection of human rights, democratic ideals and protection and prudent governance of economic resources in an increasingly corporate world, and the fight against social freedoms and inequalities. For peace to prevail it must start at home and within oneself. Like other human development skills - reading, writing, mathematics, drawing and enlightenment that are learned to improve our knowledge, maturity, health, happiness and longevity, so must peace be learned. It is favored by inborn gifts but must also be cultivated. For peace, compassionate people are inspired to help others. Librarians and information persons must have that professional gift of providing information for peace to make a difference.

Lack of peace often leads to poverty. Building peace and cultivating democracy prevents conflict and instability, improves governance, and strengthens the rule of law. When citizens are empowered, they use their voices to influence policy, protect human rights, and hold their governments accountable. In the development of these skills in women, I am looking at the following points in relation to world peace

- Human rights- basic human rights
- Development -economic and social for the empowerment of women
- Democracy and political recognition that promotes the rule of law

### **IV Sources of the peace-women link in Africa**

In almost all societies, women occupy key positions: as mothers and bearers of the race, as primary teachers of culture, social and survival values to children. The woman is of necessity the very center of her society's existence: she is the bridge between the father and the children: she is the perpetuator of the family tree: the seed that gave birth to the community" (Mugo 1978). Women issues are those issues that touch on human life, on human rights, on women directly and or, on family. The social and economic issues, that reduce vulnerability to disease, hunger and disaster and are a key to eradicating poverty. For librarians and information managers to advance the cause of world peace in relation to Africa, they must address the following injustices through the professional development and dissemination of new tools that society can use in research and social identification of shortcomings to peace.

#### **Culture**

Culture, which is the common beliefs, knowledge, behavior and interests of a certain community, nation, even men and women, has been more harmful to African women than men in many ways ,for example:

**Education-** Access to education. Majority of women in Africa still lag behind in educational development. They are offered no education or very little education. They

have to combine education with looking after their siblings as young girls and their own children and family later in life. There is need to reduce the time women spend on domestic work searching for fuel and water and to make education, including remedial education, a lifetime pursuit for such members of African societies. In most developing countries, women are disadvantaged in terms of scientific and technological literacy, in terms of opportunities for education and training for the acquisition of technical skills, and in terms of real access to information and knowledge.

**Marriage** –Bride price and dowry, wife inheritance. Marriage brings people together, builds a family and allows children to grow with their father, mother and the community. In Africa it has brought untold suffering. Women in many communities in Kenya and indeed in Africa are given away in exchange for money or goats/sheep or cows. In un-reformed societies often unaware of the impact of their practices, women become a property that carries uncountable negative aspects contradicting human rights. In some cultures, a woman can be inherited after the death of her husband.

Today, this has become a death warrant where the cause of death is HIV/AIDS, or where an un-infected woman is inherited in a HIV/IDS environment. Aids death have left over 8 million orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. In Kenya by the end of 1998, 14% of Kenyan population was living with the HIV virus. Lack of education and information perpetrates the scourge, hence the very high incidence of HIV/AIDS and related sickness and death among African communities. It has however declined to 10.2 % in 2003 (Nyaga 2004) and again this is because of improvement in information dissemination among other things. Coupled with the inability of women to make important decisions concerning themselves and their families, this is a pointer to the need for women to be empowered with new types of information. There is need for information developed and disseminated for the purposes of research and education of women in ways that can help remove legal and customary constraints.

**Initiation rites-** Female Genital Mutilation, (circumcision, excision and infibulation) is still practiced in many parts of Africa, Kenya included. It not only leads to death through massive bleeding but also causes other complications during childbirth. Furthermore the lack of clean, sterilized environment and medical equipment, leads to serious infections and death.

**Communication-** the silence on domestic and sexual violence. Women issues are still a “taboo” in many cultures in Africa. Women have remained silent even when their lives have been threatened. Rape of women and girls and even young boys is common. Since children are sexually abused by someone they know, such as family members, neighbors, teachers and other people in position of authority, especially in the rural areas, this makes the child abused and the family even more silent. Women can be empowered to become the rock on which such societal abuses are crushed. Prophet Mohammed is known to have said “a country will be peaceful and stable if it is possible for a woman to walk from one end of its border to the other without any man casting a lustful glance on her.”

### **Economic injustices**

The prevalence of poverty in Kenya was estimated at 53%,(Welfare Monitoring Survey WMS III of 1997). Most of the poor are women

World peace means that unless the social economic political rights and issues of the status of women are dealt with together with economic productivity enhancement, the poverty of women will remain a critical problem and hence peace is threatened..

**Land ownership** – inheritance. In many societies, women cannot inherit land. They depend on the husband or family and when the husband dies, the wife can be disinherited. One indicator of this inequality is that lack of land for collateral is seen as the main obstacle to increased income for women. It can be addressed through the removal of legal and customary constraints. Women are viewed as un-deserving of simple rights like housing, unless by virtue of their husbands' positions. There is need to increase incomes for women.

**Income and expenditure**- Sometimes if a woman is a worker her husband can assigns himself rights to her earnings, which is in most cases used for personal interest rather than family interests; often the income is misused.

**Labor**- Women's labor is overused compared to that of men. Working conditions, wages, maternity leave, and taxation has not improved in many countries in Africa. Some women are denied equal pay for equal work. In some countries a woman is almost a second-class citizen and must define herself through her husband or her family, not her personal identity.

### **Democratic aspects**

In Africa, though the situation is improving, women do not have a voice. Women are hardly consulted or their organizations. There is need to set specific standards to ensure that women are adequately represented. Information has a great potential of promoting development, democracy and good governance, it is a potential that remains almost totally unrealized.

## **V Library and Information**

The background given above indicates that the services that researchers and African women need from librarians and the information managers are those geared towards the development and dissemination of information specific to factors that reduce the degree to which women can enjoy their democratic and political rights, their economic rights, and socio-economic developments that impinge on their human development and relative inequality. Information containing new indicators, new categories and incorporating new realities such as HIV/AIDS need to be developed, stored and disseminated. This may often call for creating a library model that is less formal, less book oriented, more locally rooted and more precisely targeted at Africa's library profession. Library service that is needed is the one that will address Africa's information environment.

In Kenya most of the libraries that would have material on women issues and peace belong to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). But the materials are scattered in different organizations. Existing libraries, most of them university libraries are ill-equipped for the challenges cited above. In most cases, they do not even have up to date books, reports, journals and articles or other information sources. The available resources are confined to a single, perhaps a cluster of subjects, with little direct relationship to the persons they serve or national development priorities. The services offered are rarely matched to actual user needs.

In the face of the above gaps in information development and dissemination, librarians are defensive, cautious and conservative, and continue to do what they know best: acquisition, cataloguing and classification and keeping library resources in safe custody. The information collections upon which these libraries are based are marginal, inadequate and over-emphasize bibliographic and referral information at the expense of resources that could provide quick, accurate and direct answers. Major problems exist, with these collections in terms of availability, awareness of their existence, accessibility, selection, and utilization, as well as the application of information technology.

Bibliographic databases or guides to the existing records relating specifically to women of Kenya and Africa at large do not exist. Where they exist, they are scattered in libraries and information centers in the country. Hopefully, with computerization, this will be a valuable source in generations to come. Yet such records are essential sources of data for systematic and specialized studies and are needed now, not in the future, by researchers, policy makers, national planners and social workers.

Information is a very important and powerful tool. A person who is informed has knowledge and “Knowledge is Power”. If a person is informed, he has learnt, he knows more than he knew before, so has the confidence in him and even courage. He has peace with himself “Through knowledge, Peace will evolve” and Knowledge promotes opportunities. Information makes one have that sense of security. This person will make a difference in his own life and may be others. For to make a difference you need to be informed. Information and knowledge can help create a level playing field for all, and therefore peace.

Information gives you the opportunities to understand issues and give your views; it also helps one to take an active interest in key issues, and give practical suggestions. There is a saying in my language, which says “Kwaria ni Kuiguana” Which means to communicate is to build peace. Information encourages you to become more involved and share your skills in the life and work of others.

Information makes it easier for us to raise concerns quickly. Information is not like most resources. It is not depleted through use. But it can be created, established, processed, expanded, shared, transported, substituted and stored. The more globally information is disseminated and utilized, the more valuable it becomes for more use (Khamadi 2000). Information can therefore make a difference in all aspects of our lives. It can change any course “peace” included.

Information is essential for the management of a country and thus of increasing significance in any modern society. In decision making for example, information is required to define objectives. Kenyan people need basic environmental data system to be able to make informed decision regarding their investment, economic and commercial policies

## **VI Library and information managers in Africa- roots of current failures and approaches to corrective actions**

A family who visited Guatemala, a country in South America, found school children in desperate need for books to read. They decided to build a school for the community where they were. Following is a quotation from a discussion the family had.

"If we could build a library for them, they could become better educated, get better jobs and help their families.

Barlow said the ability to read should help people make better decisions when deciding whom to vote for and what leaders to support.

"It would help with world peace," he said.

"Otherwise someone could take advantage of them," added Reese. "Whole families would become more educated. They can teach (other family members) how to read."

"In her school they read more and find out about a different culture," he said. "In Guatemala, it gives the children a chance to read and a chance at life."

Since Kenya's independence in 1963, the library profession has been poorly perceived. Except at the university where the library profession is parallel with the academic profession, the profession is hardly recognized. The professionals have been poorly remunerated. Local librarians have never been involved in national planning even in planning national information systems. Hence the failure of National information System (NATIS) in the 1970/1980s. The problem has been the perceived low esteem of librarians as being less important mostly because of the fact that the library profession is not near money power, like law, finance and accounting, banking, police, etc., where corruption thrives, as well as the lowly stature of their profession. Others are simply disillusioned and do not contribute much to the welfare of the national library system. Like teachers, they lack the professional enthusiasm that one would have expected and have either switched careers in midstream or engaged in other activities.

It is a fact that library work is misunderstood. Many people have the curious notion that anyone can run a library and therefore this task can as well be given anybody, whatever the qualification or lack of them (Wakuraya). This has happened in many organizations; budgets rarely cater for the library and information and do not even feature as an item in the budget. This is so especially with NGOs whose collection has rich resources but not organized and therefore not used.

Thanks to the advent of Information technology, a few enterprising librarians have entered the market. This crop of professionals include information managers who include librarians, documentalists, information scientists, resource managers etc. Kenya

has a good number of professionally trained librarians. Most of them serve at the universities. Kenya has 24 national and private universities. A number of them are doing good work sometimes in the face of many obstacles. School libraries and librarians are out of the picture. This is one of the reasons why the profession has not made any great impact on the national library scene.

The librarians and information manager are charged with the heavy responsibility of

- Identifying information needs
- Identifying the information sources
- Searching for the information
- Acquiring the information
- Processing the information
- Keeping the information
- Evaluating the information
- Disseminating the information

For years, libraries have focused on the first six activities among the eight above. Libraries have for centuries been the sources of information and knowledge in developed countries. In these libraries, whose collections span numerous fields of study, including women and gender, there is tremendous volume of pertinent resources available to facilitate research. The material and hence the information has been kept intact. It is well organized using proper standards. Take for example the Library of the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex. They have the best collection in the world on development studies since the 1960s. Developments in information technology found them ready. To date, the institutes librarians repackage information and do book delivery world wide using modern technology. Developing countries have benefited from this initiative and this has indeed supported world peace.

Other examples include OECD –Development Centre in Paris, France. Its initiative to prepare information in directories of Ongoing and completed Research, Researchers and Research Institutes in the 1980s for Africa, Asia, Europe, South America was a way of promoting World Peace. To date the EALD database, which resulted from this initiative, is another source of information for all.

My proposal is that African librarians and information managers need to now go to the libraries and disseminate the information and make a difference. For one, this information will help especially in less duplication of information and research. It will help improve on what has been done before instead of using the scarce resources to carry on the same. “We do not have to re- invent the wheel”. We can use the available technology to acquire process and disseminate information for peace. Though the situation is different in poor, undeveloped and developing countries where libraries are not well equipped, there is need for new type of librarian who will be able to provide a more direct challenge to Africa’s information provision through the use of technology.

These information specialists will implement some elements of marketing of libraries and information services. Libraries will have to run like any other business, otherwise they

will not be perceived by users to be of value. This marketing process may in fact be unconscious and not be done in any formal way.

Sharing information is a way of promoting peace. Women world over have experienced discrimination, especially in the corridors of political power and decision-making. These positions are dominated by men, leaving women out of policy making even, in developed countries. Women have remained poor because of the social ascribed gender roles and lack of access to education, lack of information and knowledge, hence control over resources. Women in developing countries need to share information with women in developed countries. They need to understand that they have experienced the same but different types of discrimination. This will encourage them to share information and encourage peace.

Information must be timely. It must be disseminated as soon as possible. Keeping information is no doubt good but for archives. Information that can make a difference now should be made available. People in developing countries do not yet appreciate archives. They are too poor to see the importance of such. They want to have information that can make a difference to their lives now so that they can live a decent life. Timely access to information services and markets can create real opportunities for poverty alleviation and wealth creation. Information and knowledge can help create a level playing field. Information managers need to understand that information technology is not an unnecessary luxury for especially rural women in poor countries, but rather a tool to help them meet their needs.

Librarians should turn information and new relations into new knowledge by repackaging information. Libraries have a rich collection of research information. This information cannot be used by ordinary persons because of say the economic jargon, medical jargon or simply because it is above a certain level. This information needs to be repackaged in a way it can be used, making the information user friendly. Health information and information which touches on mother and child, HIV/AIDS, agricultural and environmental information are good examples. The more globally information is disseminated and utilized, the more valuable it becomes for more use. And this promotes peace.

Government officials, planners and decision makers exhibit an extremely low threshold of awareness with regard to the utility of information, and remain stubbornly unconvinced of its efficacy as a factor in the development process. Neither is information taken seriously at the second tier level administrators and professionals. This category rarely utilizes information in their day to day operations and more importantly infrequently urge their employers to provide new and improved information services. Even on planning or policy document, it is no more than a declaration of good intent that is never followed through or supported with the allocation of resources. In Kenya, for instance:

1. Very few comprehensive national information plans and policies have ever been prepared.

2. National development plans mention library and information on passing but deal mainly with information technology

## **VII Use of Information Technology**

According to UNESCO, women enrolment for science and technology education lags far behind the figures for male enrolment. In 1990, the percentages of women enrolled in science and technology at the university level in Africa were 10%. Latin America 40%, Western Europe 32% Eastern Europe 30% and in Asia/Pacific region 34 % ( UNESCO, 1996).

Information technology has become an important tool for empowering the women who are the rural and urban poor. African women are being remarkably innovative, entrepreneurial and courageous in engaging information and communications technologies, in spite of limited access to resources and infrastructure. This has been demonstrated by such initiatives as the “Hafkin Prize”. This is an initiative that demonstrates the work of women in many parts of Africa through the use information technology. It is as much about promoting African capacity and creativity in the information technology sector as it is about recognizing specific initiatives.

However, we know that technology alone may not be the answer if culture and identity are not at the heart of the situation. When a new technology is introduced to a different social setting, what is transferred is not only the technology passé but also the social use of it. Librarians, more than the information managers, need to build capacity and be capacity builders especially in content development. Internet, if it is linked to existing communication and information experiences, has a better chance as a tool for development.

Information managers must recognize that computers are machines operated by humans. We do not require information technology to elect good leaders; we do not require information technology to assert our rights as human beings. Information technologies are for good or evil depending squarely on our own political values and willingness to stand by those values and hence peace (Ombaka 2000). World Peace means that public information is protected. It is free from manipulations that may cause fear and oppression and that there is greater transparency and accountability on the part of the information managers and users

For world peace, good record keeping is another activity that librarians and information managers can influence (Musembi 2005). When citizens cannot get prompt services because the relevant documents are missing, ( water bills, law court files, etc), which encourage corruption, there cannot be peace. Good governance requires that records are kept and efficiently. In an environment in which records are poorly kept, proper audit is practically impossible. “ Many developing countries have so poorly managed that they have directly undermined any efforts to achieve good governance”.

## **VIII Information users' Education**

When information is available, there is need to educate users so that they exploit available information resources that can benefit them, for individual gain or to assist others gain from the same. Librarians and information managers should be at the forefront of user education with the following objectives:

- To enlighten the potential users about the availability of information
- To show users research facilities that exist
- Educate news users on rules and regulations governing the use of the facilities
- Educate users of new technologies that exist, including the internet
- Educate and facilitate the use and manipulation of, the various sources of information.

In this respect, users from all levels will have the skills and ability to use information. They will not only be able to retrieve, interpret, disseminate, communicate and make use of information at all levels. There is lack of interest in the information sector leading to the present poor situation of information literacy. There is therefore need to educate women on the role of information in our society. This calls for adequate resources to be set aside for user education. Library staff should embrace modern information technology. There should be comprehensive national information policy which includes user education and information policy for all categories of libraries, schools, public and academic libraries.

After many attempts to come up with an information policy, Kenya is in the process of preparing one.

## **IX Conclusion**

Africa's librarians and information managers should shift the emphasis from business as usual- service to the literate minority- and develop a new area of service priorities- development and dissemination of the conditions of women and how changes can contribute to peace. Information technology should be used as a tool and opportunity to gather, repackage and disseminate information to serve this objective. This means that some treasured aspects of service must be temporarily scaled down and temporarily abandoned and relegated to the status of long-term planning possibilities. In their place, enhanced versions of existing services will be necessary and new services will be developed using, if possible, information technology. The services to emerge must be Africa's own resources and will relate more directly to the continent's real information needs

There is need for a new type of modern librarian and information specialist who will be able to provide a more direct challenge to Africa's information provision, and creating a library model that is less formal, less book -oriented and more locally

- rooted to make a difference. Making a difference will entail giving information managers a more attractive, satisfying and rewarding remuneration.

But the real test for World Peace will be to strengthen education and training for women, in all areas so that they can overcome the cultural inhibitions and discrimination, overcome poverty, earn income and dignity for World Peace.

## References

1. ECA-WIDNET. Women and Justice: resource book. Nairobi, Pauline's Publications Africa, 2002
2. J.R. Neill. The marginalized workforce: Africa's library and information profession need for new types of librarian that will be able to provide a more direct challenge to Africa's information provision.
3. Kenya. Ministry of Finance and Planning. Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for the Period 2001-2004. Nairobi. September 2001
4. Khamadi, S.I.D. Environmental information for sustainable rural development in Western Kenya. Paper presented at 14th Kenya Library Association Annual Conference Safari Club, Nairobi, 27-29 November 2000.
5. Ombaka, D.M Governance for Kenya in the information Age: SEREKALI Or SILIKALI?. Paper presented at 14<sup>th</sup> Kenya Library Association Annual Conference, Safari Club, Nairobi, 27-29 November 2000.
6. Pala, Achola ed. et. al. The participation of women in Kenya society Nairobi, Kenya Literature Bureau, 1978.
7. Programme APC-WNSP 1990- gathers and works together with women and women's organizations in Africa and all over the world, focusing on African women's empowerment through information facilitation.
8. The economist March 12, 2005. The real digital divide
9. UNESCO. World Communication and Information Report 1999-2000
10. Wanjohi, G .Wakuraya The right information to the right person at the right time: present day challenges to librarians in Wajibu, vol 19, no 4, 2004
11. Were, Maureen and Kiringai, Jane Gender mainstreaming in macroeconomic policies and poverty reduction strategy