	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 07/06/2007</p> <p><b>Creating Library Partnerships: The United Nations changing role in disseminating information and knowledge</b></p> <p><b>Linda Stoddart, Ph.D</b>  Head, Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre;  Chair, Task Force on Knowledge Sharing, United Nations, New York</p>
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**Abstract**

*This paper will discuss the role of the United Nations (UN) Headquarters Library in New York– the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre - in providing access to the UN’s vast array of information and documentation. It will explore the relationship the Library has developed with over 400 depository libraries around the world and propose ideas to promote better access to information produced by the UN and the UN system with these institutions. Technology and organizational change within the UN have provided opportunities for the Library to move from an independent repository, to embrace a new role as a coordinator of a community of Partner Libraries; moving from collections to connections, by supporting new approaches.*

**Introduction**

Libraries are learning to adapt to the new imperatives of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and have recognized the role that partnerships and the importance of communities are playing in their new focus. The traditional role of libraries as centres for learning and knowledge is not challenged, however, their methods are under scrutiny, and skills required for information professionals are evolving as a result.

The United Nations Headquarters Library in New York called the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and Knowledge Sharing Centre (DHLink) is no different. The United Nations itself is undergoing a major reform effort in order to adapt to the new operational and political realities in the world today. The positioning and activities of the Library are being rethought as part of this overall organizational change process.

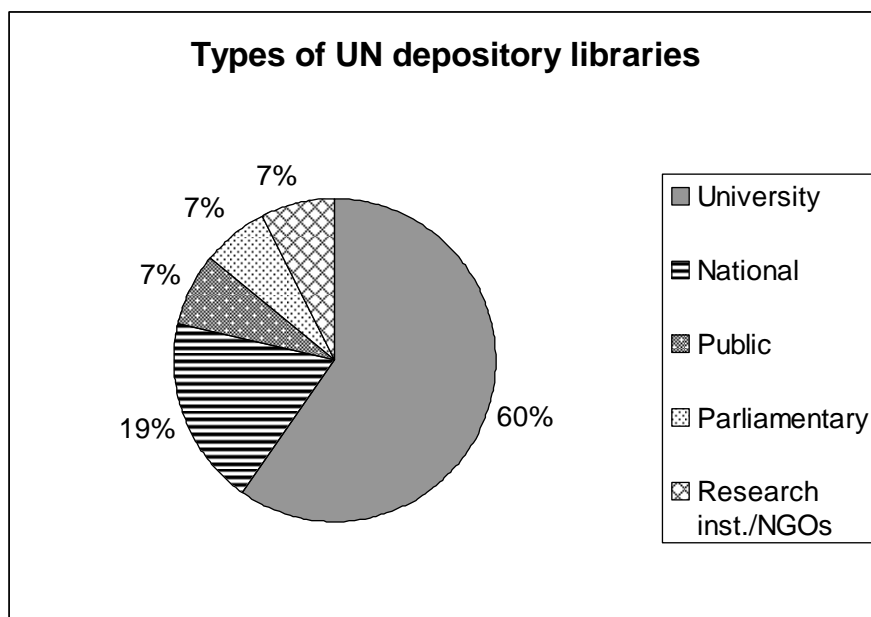
“Moving from collections to connections” is the new slogan for DHLink, depicting not only the evolution to electronic information, but also giving a new focus to the promotion of communities, encouraging and facilitating networking, and bringing people together. In

launching the new strategy for the United Nations libraries in 2005, a General Assembly document, (A/AC.198/2005/4) describes the transition from independent repositories to embrace a new role as facilitator of a network of knowledge-sharing communities. This evolution entails a move from building and maintaining book and periodical collections to facilitating a knowledge-enabled environment and the exchange of information among stakeholders. Web 2.0 tools are increasingly being used throughout the world, enabling the creation and access to information and an enormous range of materials. These trends have a profound effect on the role of the UN in disseminating information and knowledge and on the role of libraries.

This paper discusses the changing role of the UN Depository Library Programme (the Programme) of DHLink and proposes a new approach for the development of partnerships with member institutions.

### Outreach: depository libraries

The UN depository library programme, which began in 1946, was the primary outreach activity of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, since the focus of the Library had been to service clients in the UN Headquarters in New York. Currently, the Programme has 406 libraries world-wide which receive documents from all the major duty stations (New York, Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, and Santiago). Among them are 242 university libraries, 77 national libraries, 29 public libraries, 28 parliamentary libraries and 30 libraries with research institutions and non-governmental organizations.



DHLink administers the Programme which provides depository libraries with reference assistance and training. Periodically visits to these libraries are organized in conjunction with other official business or when staff happen to be in the proximity; there is no specific budget for these advisory visits. DHLink undertakes a survey of all depositories every two years to identify problems, collaboration opportunities and to update contact information at each library. The Outreach Support Unit of DHLink keeps the depository libraries up-to-date by providing information primarily through e-mail.

## Roles and needs of depository libraries

Since the beginning, the objective of the Programme has remained unchanged: to make UN documents and publications available throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> In order to meet this objective, depository libraries maintain archival collections and educate users about online and print information on UN activities. The data collected from surveys conducted by DHLink show that the libraries have been active in disseminating UN information by organizing exhibits, creating web pages with links to UN resources, preparing information guides, organizing training classes for their users, and developing curriculum in cooperation with faculty members using UN material as textbooks.

In response to the DHLink survey carried out in 2004 to ascertain if the depository libraries were able and willing to use the Official Documents System (ODS) which provides internet access to UN documentation, libraries in Germany<sup>2</sup>, Japan<sup>3</sup> and the United States<sup>4</sup> strongly urged the UN to keep print deposit available even when the ODS access became free. These libraries valued highly their archival UN collections and advocated their users' preference for print materials, especially

Official Records and documents with lengthy or tabulated content. They were also concerned about the incomplete coverage from the ODS, as well as the absence of a mirror site in case the ODS temporarily went down. For these libraries, guaranteed availability of UN material, online or print, was of utmost importance.

By contrast, many libraries in developing countries were keen to revert to electronic access to documents, despite in many cases, problems of access to the internet and computers. Anecdotal data gathered during visits to these libraries showed that collections maintenance and management, as well as a lack of knowledge about the documents themselves were an even bigger problem.

The UN is developing plans to enhance the ODS with a more intuitive system to facilitate searching for documents since it is recognized that the present system is not easy to use. As older UN documents are digitized they will be included in the ODS, making it more comprehensive and reliable.

Depository libraries are required to maintain all the deposit items in good order. Most of these libraries attach high prestige to being a UN depository library and strive to perform their depository functions well. Most, if not all, of the depository librarians wear many hats and are unable to spend adequate time on UN deposit. The baby-boomers who have expertise in UN deposit are retiring. Some libraries have personnel rotation policies imposed

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<sup>1</sup> ST/AI/189/Add.11/Rev.2 of 18 August 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Individual responses received from Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin - Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Freie Universität Berlin, Hamburg Institute of International Economics, Max Planck-Institut für Ausländisches Öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht, and Universität Potsdam.

<sup>3</sup> A petition dated 20 Apr. 2004 to USG/DPI signed by: Chuo University Library; College of International Relations, Nihon University; Kanazawa Izumino Library; Aichi Prefectural Library; Kyoto UN Depository Library; Research Institute for Economics and Business Administration, Kobe University; Hiroshima UN Depository Library; Kyushu UN Depository Library; Seinan Gakuin University Library; and University of Ryukyu Library.

<sup>4</sup> A letter dated 8 Apr. 2004 from the Chairperson, ALA Government Documents Round Table, addressed to the UN Depository Libraries Officer.

by their parent institutions. They try to overcome this challenge by forming online groups for information exchange and by contacting DHLink for guidance.

Generally, libraries in developing countries face a more difficult situation. Library staff is often overwhelmed when faced with the large amount of UN documentation arriving at their doorsteps. Processing and shelving, not an easy task, let alone using this material for dissemination and research is often beyond their capacity. As a result, the collections are poorly organized, and boxes of deposit are sometimes unopened, piled up or even discarded.

Four years ago, a UN survey showed that twenty per cent of depository libraries in developing countries did not have internet connectivity. This situation has changed significantly over the last few years; however, telecommunications infrastructure and access to technology remain problematic.

### **Opportunities: thinking out of the box**

When the UN depository library programme was set up, information was scarce and available only through libraries: today information is ubiquitous, and in many cases, free, especially on the internet. As a result, the role of libraries and librarians has changed dramatically. Technological innovations and mobile devices are having an increasing impact on information professionals who are expected to know how to utilize the latest technological tools, understand taxonomies, evaluate new information sources, and be knowledgeable on information policy development. Libraries everywhere are redefining their roles and services to better respond to these new imperatives.

The UN is proposing a change of focus and name for the depository library programme, to reflect a new approach to information access and dissemination. Depository libraries would become "UN Partner Libraries." Rather than only receiving printed copies of UN documents and other publications, a more targeted relationship would be forged with these institutions, especially those in developing countries, to provide training and guidance on how to retrieve and access UN online information and documentation. Part of the programme would also focus on providing support to libraries in reaching out to their community of stakeholders and develop partnerships in order to disseminate information about their collections and access to information far more widely. Many have the potential to transform themselves into "information nodes" for their local communities where people can come to learn, exchange views, knowledge, and meet with others with similar information interests, and collaborate on various issues.

DHLink plans to help identify funding sources that would assist in the acquisition of necessary technology and training to become an information node. The Partner Library would ensure that it plays a vital role in disseminating information to their stakeholders. To this end, the Partner Library would work closely with schools, teachers, local government offices, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and UN offices. With UN local offices, the Partner Library would actively create opportunities for their constituents to interact and learn about UN activities relevant to their local issues. DHLink would provide the Partner Libraries with extensive training in UN information, information management, and public outreach techniques. Information professionals in charge of Partner Libraries would be eligible to participate in training organized in different regions. The Partner Library would function as an advocate for the UN and for attainment of the Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) as well as an educator in information management and knowledge sharing in their local community.

While the mandate of the depository library programme would remain unchanged, the involvement of future UN Partner Libraries would be refocused. Activities would include:

- ⇒ Promoting public awareness of the work of the UN on the issues of importance to the international community;
- ⇒ Mobilizing support for the United Nations activities at the local level (in local languages);
- ⇒ Publicizing the United Nations documents and publications to a wider audience;
- ⇒ Assisting in strengthening outreach efforts of the United Nations.

A new opportunity for UN Partner Libraries would be to involve them in becoming advocates for some of the global themes, in addition to MDG issues, based on their own local, national or regional agenda. These might include the following:

- ⇒ Conflict prevention
- ⇒ Disarmament
- ⇒ Human rights
- ⇒ Humanitarian relief
- ⇒ Combating terrorism
- ⇒ Dialog among civilizations
- ⇒ Culture of peace

New outreach activities would be developed in collaboration with future UN Partner Libraries, and involving United Nations Information Centres (UNICs):

- ⇒ Launching exhibits;
- ⇒ Posting information about new UN publications and events on internet or intranet sites;
- ⇒ Giving briefings on the UN collection during student orientation sessions, involving UNICs;
- ⇒ Preparing brochures and user guides about the UN collection;
- ⇒ Organizing round-table meetings and seminars on United Nations-related issues;
- ⇒ Conducting training on the use of the UN website and UN databases;
- ⇒ Promoting the use of United Nations documents/publications for teaching.

Plans are being explored to launch the Partner Library Programme in one region as a pilot to test and evaluate the model. Based on lessons learned and depending on local prerogatives, the initiative will be modified to produce the maximum possible impact both for the local community and UN outreach efforts. A regional workshop in Asia will be held in Bangkok in October 2007 to discuss this initiative and develop plans for its development.

DHLink would provide support through the creation of an expert network of information partners from other UN Partner Libraries which would help:

- ⇒ Undertake an assessment of stakeholders' requirements;
- ⇒ Develop a plan for new activities and products to disseminate information on UN activities and information relevant to their communities, countries and regions;

- ⇒ Facilitate the collaboration with United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) and other local UN offices to organize events and other networking opportunities.

More formal relationships would be established with UNIC knowledge sharing centres and the UN Partner Libraries in order to encourage the development of common outreach activities to disseminate information on UN themes. In addition, closer collaboration will be facilitated with UNESCO and the other specialized UN agencies.

KnowledgeNet, an electronic newsletter will be established for Partner Libraries, accessible through the UN Web site, giving guidance, tips and news about other Partner Libraries and training opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

The UN has a unique role to play in the dissemination of information and knowledge. New models are required in order to move beyond the present approach of simply expediting UN publications and documents and hoping that they will reach the right audiences at the right time. Maintaining complete collections of UN documents may remain a priority for some libraries; others do not need or want to retain archival collections, however, they would like to have access to current materials published by the UN of interest to their constituencies. This meeting provides an opportunity to discuss these ideas and have an exchange of views. The UN would like to work with its partners to explore and experiment with new approaches, to help disseminate the wealth of information that is available. Information will only be of use to our stakeholders if they know about it and can have easy access to it.

Building a community of partners will help us to develop new ideas, services and tools to make this happen. Adequate financial support however will be a key to making this initiative a success. Working together – being more than the sum of our parts – will help us to identify funding opportunities to make this new approach a reality and build a community of UN Partner Libraries around the world.