Facilitating Grassroots Development: The Role of ALP in Division VIII Countries

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Meeting:	**155 Division of Regional Activities** with **IFLA/ALP**
Simultaneous Interpretation:	No

Third World is a northern concept.
We are less developed and this is good.
We sustain ourselves and this is good.
We have little waste and this is good.
We are not third rate.

- Peace Corner (2007)

Background

IFLA has taken a special responsibility for its members in developing countries by creating a core programme, Advancement of Librarianship in the Third World – ALP, – through which financial and administrative support to regional activities is channelled. The name was changed to Action for Development through Libraries Programme in 2004.

ALP was launched as a new core programme at the IFLA conference in Nairobi 1984. The programme was at the beginning managed by IFLA HQ. As a result of intense discussions

within IFLA in the late 80s, the Nordic countries offered to find a host for and finance the ALP IFP. In 1989 Sida, the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency, offered to fund a pre-study to reformulate the programme. ALP was re-launched at the Stockholm IFLA conference in 1990. Sida also funded most of the programme during the following start-up period 1990-91.

After these preliminary phases ALP is since 1992 fully operational with an international focal point hosted by Uppsala University Library. It is financed by Uppsala University, Sida, IFLA and 20 Nordic library associations and institutions. Sida is funding most of the projects but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland is also giving support through the Finnish Library Association. Up to 2001 Danida, the Danish equivalent to Sida, was one of the donors who contributed most to ALP.

Learn from the Fisherman

One day a fisherman returns home from his canoe and is met by a foreign expert who is working in this developing country. The expert asks the fisherman why he is back so early. The fisherman explains that he has already caught enough fish to feed his family that day.

'So what will you do with the rest of the day?' the expert asks.

The fisherman's response: 'Well, I do a little fishing. I play with my children. We have a siesta when it gets hot. In the evenings we eat together and visit friends.'

The expert interrupts: 'Look here, I have a university degree and have studied such matters. I want to advise you. You should stay out fishing longer. You would earn more money and be able to afford a bigger boat and soon you would be able to invest in a fleet of trawlers.'

'And then?' The fisherman inquires.
'Then, instead of selling fish through a middleman you could deal directly with the factory. You could leave your village and move to the city, New York, or London and run the company from there. You could even put your company on the stock market and earn millions.'

'How long would this take?' the fisherman asks.

'About 25 years,' the expert says.

'And then?'

'That's when life gets interesting. You could retire and move to a small village away from the pollution of the city.'

'And after that?' the fisherman asks.
'Then you will have time to relax, do a little fishing, play with your grandchildren and visit friends.'

What Is ALP's Philosophy?

Like the fisherman, we do not accept development for the sake of development – this is pointless for those most in need of development assistance, and is generally a vehicle for international 'expert consultants' to advance their own status. However, we do believe in development as a means of empowerment – the empowerment of individuals, communities and cultures, on their own terms.

Likewise, we cannot countenance development as something done by experts to the inexpert; but we do condone development that arises from a need expressed by the local community, and that is undertaken by the local community (with a little help from their friends).

In view of this development philosophy, the ALP standard takes a holistic approach to the needs expressed by people in countries that make up the bulk of the world's population. ALP works at the local level through community and professional development, and through the personal empowerment of those who become involved with us. The key, in other words, is grassroots involvement.

What Is Our Grassroots Framework?

'Grassroots', according to *The Free Dictionary* (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/), has two principal meanings that are relevant to the work of ALP:

> 'fundamental', as in 'the grassroots factor in making the decision'

> 'basic - 'of or involving the common people as constituting a fundamental politico-economic group', as in 'a grassroots movement for nuclear disarmament'

Grassroots development is driven by the members of a community. The term implies that the genesis of the development is natural and spontaneous, unlike development that is orchestrated by traditional power structures. Thus ALP works closely with those partners who are most closely attuned to local needs: the International Focal Point of ALP and IFLA's Regional Offices, IFLA's Division VIII and its three Sections for Africa, Asia and Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Results are of critical importance. They can inform decisions, signal challenges, confirm achievements and indicate topics for further research. The premise of grassroots development is that results are tangible at three levels: individual, organisation. Therefore, a pyramid best portrays the potential dimensions of the impact of grassroots development, progressing from individuals and families, to organisations, to the community or society at large. In grassroots development, a project must generate material improvements in the quality of life of the poor.

A development project is a special kind of investment that should produce tangible and intangible benefits, and ALP seeks to measure and document both. ALP's experience has demonstrated that each project can plant a seed for change and that grassroots development produces results not only for individuals but also for organisations and society.

ALP has been able to support 3-4 projects per year in each region. That means that, since 1991, 181 projects has been carried out, 78 persons have received in-service training, 49 training scholarships in ICT and Information Literacy have been offered, and 196 persons

have received travel grants. A total of SEK23,048,813 (approximately US$3,157,370) has been spent on projects during this period.

A Grassroots Development Framework

ALP's grassroots development framework is expressed in terms of its Strategic Plan, which in turn is based on the strategic plans of the three regions and has been the guiding principle behind the selection and implementation of projects. The projects are initiated from within the regions and are also carried out by colleagues in the regions. That is the grassroots strength of ALP.

The objectives in the Strategic Plan are:

- To provide opportunities for education and development of LIS staff
- To facilitate the establishment of new library associations and the implementation of IFLA Guidelines on the management of library associations
- To promote the function of libraries: information literacy and lifelong learning, and to combat functional illiteracy
- To promote the use of ICT and the creation of local electronic resources
- To increase publishing activities and the dissemination of information to the communities, with special attention to marginalized groups

Thus it can be seen from the Strategic Plan that ALP aims at supporting basic human development issues: literacy, lifelong learning, bridging the digital divide and sustainable development. And it does this at the individual, organisational and societal level.

Supporting the Three Pillars of IFLA

ALP's work also supports the three pillars of IFLA: The Profession; Society; and the Membership.

With respect to the Profession Pillar, ALP works with colleagues and local library stakeholders in developing countries to assist in capacity building for the library profession, library institutions and information services. Promoting the development of quality in library and information service is an essential task for ALP and many activities and projects that have come out of the ALP Strategic Plan cover these issues. Some examples include:

- In-service training for librarians in Asia and Oceania,
- Training programme for Para-professionals to promote reading,
- International Workshop on Library and Information Management Education for Countries in the Greater Mekong Region of South East Asia,
- International workshop on information literacy in Bangladesh,
- Scholarships to attend training programmes in information literacy education, and
- a Workshop on information literacy in Indonesia.

The last thee projects mentioned above are all related to information literacy, so they are also part of the Society Pillar, to promote reading, information literacy and life long learning which are keys to participation in the information society.

In support of the Membership Pillar, ALP has, as one of its priorities, to make library associations more effective. The associations in developing countries have an important role to play in the improvement of library services and advocacy, and for the democratic, effective and efficient governance of the associations.

What is a 'Good project'?
ALP works mainly by supporting activities such as conferences and seminars, scholarships and attachments (in-service-training) and pilot projects. Most projects have involved participants from more than one country. It should be of relevance to several countries in the sub-region or region, or, if it is national, it should lend itself to development as a model or pilot project, able to be repeated. The proposal should come from an institution in the region and have the support of relevant authorities/organisations. The outcome should be measurable in a good project. Expected effects could be that a number of people have improved their skills/knowledge in a special area. The improved skills will not only give the beneficiaries better self-esteem and maybe better job opportunities and/or better salaries, it also help them to give better service, and the community will benefit. And of course the institution where they work.

In the reports ALP receives and the evaluations we can read how many people and who/which target group have received training and what they have learned. Unfortunately ALP does not have the means to follow up all the projects before, six months after and a year after, to see what has changed for the beneficiaries. However, ALP also receives reports from librarians who have received in-service training or scholarships in information literacy. These reports shows that they have learned and gained new knowledge and that they will be able to do a better work.

Some Examples of Good Projects

To put flesh on this somewhat theoretical discussion, it is appropriate to look at some examples of well-managed, effective projects in the regions. We have selected three such projects, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

Preservation of African Photographic Collections Workshop

The workshop on the Preservation of African Photographic Collections was aimed at curators, librarians and archivists who were directly involved in the day-to-day care of the photographic collections in heritage institutions in Southern Africa. The workshop was advertised on the IFLA web site so that participants and their institutions could to apply. Fifteen candidates out of 34 applicants were chosen. After the workshop an evaluation was done and it revealed that the workshop was relevant and useful as it directly related to the participants' daily practical challenges at their own institutions; it provided them with practical examples of preservation, care and storage of photographs; the workshop methodology was aimed at keeping things simple in order to facilitate the transfer of skills; the activities were an eye opener for the participants who promised to improve the management and care of the photographic collections. Although it is difficult to know for sure what people do with knowledge and understanding acquired through the training, participants promised to train others and raise awareness on care needed to maintain photographic collections. Participants were also requested to give written feedback after six months.

Managing Digital Libraries Workshop

Another well-structured and successful project was the Managing Digital Libraries Workshop. The selection procedure here was different. Delegates were required to demonstrate their interest and their personal commitment by submitting a proposal outlining a digital library project for their own institution and support for it had to be sought from a superior officer in that institution. A further level of accountability was added in the requirement for a progress report from each delegate at six months, one year and two years following the workshop. In this manner, a sense of urgency was instilled in the workshop proceedings and an expectation of tangible evidence of applied knowledge gained on the workshop. Evidence of the success of this strategy was reflected in the high level of enthusiasm displayed by participants. Practical exercises were aimed at building capacity in technical areas of expertise, while interactive sessions provided an opportunity for participants to share ideas and develop their project proposals on a practical level to ease re-entry into the workplace. The 20 participants came from Southern Africa.

Lao Information Literacy Education Workshops

The decision to fund the Lao Information Literacy Education Workshops was based on its close relationship with Goal 3 in ALP's Strategic Plan: To promote the function of libraries: information literacy and lifelong learning, and to combat functional illiteracy.

A preliminary research project funded through Victoria University of Wellington was conducted in 2006 by Dr Dan Dorner from Victoria University of Wellington and Dr Aree Cheunwattana from Srinakhawinarot University in Bangkok. The researchers interviewed teachers and students at four schools (including a rural high school) plus the Deputy Director of the Lao Ministry of Education. This work has provided a basic understanding from which a general model of information literacy has been developed and which will form the basis of workshop discussion in the Lao Project.

The Project Manager for the Lao Project is Mr Chansy Phuangsouketh, University Librarian at the National University of Laos. Mr. Phuangsouketh learned about the ALP projects as a participant in an ALP project held at Mahasarakham University in Thailand in 2003 and 2004 about library and information management education in the Greater Mekong Region of South East Asia.

The Lao Project will consist of two workshops – the first one will cover two days devoted to establishing the sustainability of the project through raising the consciousness of 15 principal stakeholders (Ministry of Education officials, policy makers, head teachers, principal librarians) who are able to serve as 'champions' of information literacy in Laos. The aim is for the final outcome of the first workshop to be a draft information literacy policy for Laos.

The second workshop will cover three days and is intended for teachers and librarians. Participants will include practising teachers and trainee teachers, as well as librarians in various organisations likely to be able to implement information literacy instruction for their constituents.

Over the three days the participants will be introduced to information literacy, examine the generic model of information literacy education in Laos and the contextual factors that affect it – and will revise the model if needed. They will also be introduced to needs assessment for

ILE as preparation for developing an ILE programme. Curriculum planning, programme implementation, ex post evaluation and revision, will all be covered.

A report will be prepared at the end of each workshop and translated into the Lao language to serve as guidelines for policy development and information literacy implementation. A final report and final budget reconciliation will be prepared in English and submitted to ALP by the Project Manager, with assistance from the Project Advisers. Twelve months following the second workshop, the Project Manager will report on the current situation with regard to the further implementation of information literacy programmes in Laos, possibly supplemented by a visit from one of the Project Advisers to review progress.

The intention of the Lao project, as well as the two projects from Southern Africa, as one can see, is to ensure that there is grassroots involvement right from the their conception, through their implementation and their evaluation.

Where to in the Future?

ALP has recently conducted a self-assessment, and an external peer review has also been carried out. These reviews show that ALP is very important to library development and the visibility of IFLA in developing countries. Core human development issues such as literacy, lifelong learning and bridging the digital divide (all supported by IFLA/ALP) remain the most important areas of development. When ALP started more than 10 years ago, we thought that it would not be needed for so many years. But today it seems as if the need is even bigger.

However, a problem area is the financial base that needs to be broadened. Efforts have been made, but the result has not been very successful. With the Sida contract, ALP has support until 2009, but after that funding from other sources has to be found to complement the Sida funding. We hope that with the help of our friends we will succeed in finding new sources.

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