

From “Outreach” To New Models of Library Service

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Abstract

South Africa is aligned with other emerging economies, like Brazil and India, whose voice is growing stronger and who might in future improve their position in the global knowledge economy. But surely the biggest hurdle must be the huge gap in South Africa between rich and poor – claimed by some to be the biggest in the world. More than 48% of South Africans live below the poverty line. Other speakers at the symposium will provide evidence of the role of information in the sustainable development required to narrow the poverty gap. The developed countries of the so-called “North” have systems for easy and wide access to information – by means of e-government, e-medicine, e-education, and, so on. However, less than 10% of South Africans have access to the Internet. This paper will examine the contribution, real and potential, of public libraries to sustainable development.

The point of departure is the developmental model of library services proposed in the recent Library & Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter, a vision document emanating from the National Council of Library and Information Services. The Charter suggests that UNESCO’s eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) might provide a framework for developmental library services. However, the Charter’s country-wide investigations, as well as the speaker’s own research since the late 1990s, have uncovered some of the daunting challenges ahead. The paper will report on two ongoing case studies, which might throw light on how the Charter’s vision could become a reality. One is of a group of dual use school community libraries in a remote rural region and the other focuses on two sister libraries in Cape Town. The argument is that what are often viewed as “outreach” programmes point the way to new models of library service which will be meaningful to far more than the present tiny minority of South African library users.

Prof Genevieve Hart is Associate Professor in the Department of Library and Information Science at the University of the Western Cape. Before arriving at UWC in 1995, she had many years experience as an English teacher and librarian in academic, public and school libraries. She was awarded a PhD at the University of Cape Town in 2005 – her dissertation title being “The Readiness of Public Libraries in South Africa for Information Literacy Education: the Case of Mpumalanga Province”. Her teaching and research interests include: information literacy education in schools and libraries; the impact of educational change on South African public libraries; the role of libraries in social inclusion and social capital; and the transition of South Africa towards a knowledge society. She has published several papers and spoken at several local and international conferences on her research in schools and public libraries. Over the years, she has taken an active interest in the South African LIS profession. For example she was Chairperson of LIASA’s School Libraries and Youth Services Interest Group, 2000-2002. She chaired the Programme Committee of the international IBBY Congress held in Cape Town in 2004; and initiated and piloted its Schools’ Programme, which brought collections of new books to over 50 schools. In 2008 she was appointed to the Technical Team of the Library and Information Services (LIS) Transformation Charter.

