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Knowledge as a basis of development effectiveness: the automation/digitization of library services of Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), to enhance access to knowledge for development effectiveness

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Abstract

Development has many meanings depending on the context. In this context, it is the positive transformation/change of people's ways of living, attitudes and behaviours as a result of their exposure/access to relevant, adequate and timely information services, as a result of the prevailing digital age/revolution. Similarly, knowledge refers to wisdom, information and skills as exhibited differently by people's ways of living, habits, attitudes and beliefs among other things. It is embedded in various sources, both formal and informal. Libraries, archives, registries, museums, among other sources, form bases where such knowledge can be accessed to trigger people's development initiatives.

It should be noted that information, communication and development are inseparable for sustainable development.

The Islamic University in Uganda has been keen to support the role of information and knowledge in the development of communities and has therefore put in place structures and systems to harness the community's wisdom and knowledge through documentation so that these can be shared and used by a wider audience. The Library Services of Islamic University in Uganda has initiated and supported projects like the "Wednesday colloquium" where knowledgeable experts in different sectors are brought together and share their experiences, skills and wisdom which is in turn documented and preserved for access by others to trigger development initiatives. Of significance is that this colloquium attracts many participants, both students and staff, of multinational cultural identities because of the University's international nature and status. Impact assessment reports so far indicate that the beneficiaries of the colloquium, the majority of whom are youth, have implemented positive development initiatives back home when they complete their studies or during their holidays.

The Library has also harnessed indigenous knowledge as well as extended targeted library services to communities through mobile services, among others. Negotiations with owners of indigenous knowledge and subject experts across fields, brought together during the

Wednesday colloquium are geared to digitize such knowledge and contribute such community's local content to the national, regional and international information market.

The automation and digitization of the Library's current sources of knowledge, including books, journals, theses and reports, has also taken centre stage guided by the strategies that have been designed by the library automation/digitization committee.

Introduction

Definition of major terms used.

What is development?

Development has been defined differently by various scholars depending on the context in which the term is used. It has been defined as transforming people's ways of living and doing things for the better (Advanced Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2006). Development involves changing people's attitudes positively. It is also defined as a specified state of growth or advancement. In this context, development means positive transformation or change of people's ways of living, attitudes and behaviours as a result of their accessing relevant, adequate and timely information services because of the prevailing digital age.

What is knowledge?

This refers to facts, skills and information acquired by a person through experience or education (Advanced Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2006). It refers to the theoretical as well as the practical understanding of a subject. Knowledge is also awareness and familiarity gained by experience and exposure of a fact or situation (Abidi, 1991).

Knowledge, communication and development: the development trinity

Knowledge and information, communication and development form an "inseparable trinity" because the three have got to be appropriately combined for effective development to take effect (Abidi, 1991). None of the above factors can meaningfully stand on its own without its affiliated partners

For development to be realized, the invaluable role of access to relevant knowledge and information, at the right time and in the right format or package should be given due acknowledgement and appreciation. For people's ways of living to be transformed for the better, through improved living standards, education, good governance, harmonious co-existence through peace building and conflict resolution among others, they have to have access and know-how, and be aware of the skills, the rules of the game if they are to achieve transformation on a sustainable basis in this competitive global climate. Of importance to note is that such wisdom, knowledge and information is accessed in libraries, resource centres, registries and archives, among other places, where they are embedded in form of information resources (both electronic and other non- print materials).

Library services of the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) as a source of knowledge.

Library Services of the Islamic University in Uganda is as old as the University itself. It was set up in 1988 with 88 students and 1000 donated books from Makerere University.

Vision, Mission, Goal and Objectives:

Vision: "A state-of-the-art modern library service that meets the clients' changing information needs on a sustainable basis."

Mission: "To enhance maximum availability and access to information resources, in order to promote research, learning, teaching and community outreach endeavours."

Goal: The goal of the Library services of the Islamic University in Uganda is to:

"To enhance information access through equipping the Library with modern technological facilities, literature and partnering with other stakeholders."

The digitization of library services therefore blends well with the set goal initiative.

Objectives

The major objectives of the University Library are

- to support all the academic information needs of the University;
- To take charge of supporting the research, teaching and learning activities of the University.

All the above are expected to be achieved through the provision of relevant, adequate and timely information services to meet the needs of the University community. The automation and digitization of Library services was thus conceived as a timely intervention towards the realization of the above objectives.

Knowledge sources in IUIU- Library services

Knowledge at IUIU is embedded in the Library's collections, which include the following knowledge sources:

- published books (both print and electronic);
- reports (government & other vital statistical reports);
- research reports, theses and dissertations;
- documentaries in form of video tapes and CDs;
- e-databases;
- photographs capturing the institution's heritage, major events, ceremonies and other vital regional and international development aspects,

- Artefacts mostly on Islamic culture i.e. the Traditional " Mikalabanda" – wooden sandals for taking ablution as used by the early Arabs, "Njemeko" – first clay containers to take ablution.

Current status of IUIU Library Services

A brief review of the Library's current status should identify critical gaps that deserve priority attention through automation and digitization strategies among others.

This current situation is shown in comparison with the set of recommended standards according to the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). According to these standards, indicators of a good quality library should reflect the following;

- Student/book ratio
- e-Resource access/ Internet rates
- Student/library space ratios
- Level of ICT Integration in library services
- Relevance of stock with regard to currency of date of publication and content.

Item	Current position	Ideal	Good	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Interventions
Library space	6:1	$2.5m^2$ 1/3 of total users is the ideal	$2m^2$	$1m^2$	Less than $1m^2$ per 5 users	▪ The Qatar Fund is to build for us a state-of-the-art library ▪ Over 500 users access weekend & evening programmes
Student book ratio	1:13	1:40	1:30	1:20	Less than 1:10	▪ Are lobbying potential book donors ▪ Have increased our library fees ▪ To acquire more books online
Access to e-resources /Internet	Low	1:20 hrs	1:10 hr	1:5 hrs	None at all	▪ We are streamlining our internet connectivity problems ▪ To subscribe to more journals and databases, both print & electronic
Level of ICT integration into library services	Low	Fully automated	Most services	At least one/ two core functions	None at all	▪ Are right now automating our catalogue ▪ To acquire more computers & soft ware for full automation

						▪ To have our catalogue on-line (OPAC)

- At least 95 % of our Library stock is relevant to the needs of the clients. Most of our books were published less than 10 years ago. The Library recently acquired 17,000 new books courtesy of McGraw Hill, with dates of publication 2005 and later.
- To date our staff have contributed eight articles that have been published in international reputable journals.
- Some of our staff have won research grants or projects from I@MAK and IUCN, among others. Most of these are in their final stages of implementation.
- The University has received close to $60,000 in the last two years through research funds won by its staff.
- Of the publications of University staff, six have ISBNs, indicating that they are internationally recognized and accessed.
- The University encourages the use of ICT equipment in teaching, as well as projectors, TV, flip charts and other audiovisual aids, but still on a low scale.
- All the above efforts are expected to be enhanced through the Library automation / digitization project underway.

IUIU Library strategies (2006-2012)

As reflected in the Library's strategic objectives 2006-2012, the Library aspires to achieve the following major targets:

- To enhance access to electronic library resources;
- To equip the library with up to date literature and electronic information;
- To provide adequate library services to the university and the general community;
- To encourage community outreach programmes.

As evidenced above, the digitization and automation of the library services forms a major activity and undertaking on the basis of which most of the strategies are to be achieved. Time will tell as to how far the strategies have been or are to be attained through automation and digitization efforts.

Harnessing and digitizing knowledge at the Islamic University for development effectiveness.

The Islamic University in Uganda has endeavoured to tap, harness and capture knowledge that hitherto has been ignored, neglected or taken for granted in the region. It has been rightly argued that there is vital information in Africa that can uplift mankind from the social, economic and political upheavals afflicting him but the problem is that such wisdom and knowledge is always taken for granted and ignored (Zumdah,1997). Zumdah suggests that because in Africa

most of the means of living and survival is obtained free, including critical information for development, we rarely appreciate it and take advantage of it and no wonder we are poor!

At IUIU we have moved a step away from the above psychological mind set and thus made steps towards capturing, documenting, preserving and sharing indigenous rare knowledge for today's betterment and wellbeing and for posterity. Accordingly, pro- information and knowledge-harnessing and sharing initiatives have been made towards wider coverage and sustainable use through the following:

- **Contributing local and indigenous content to the world of knowledge**

The University through the Library Services acknowledges the need to participate in contributing relevant information and knowledge of local content to the global information flow. To this effect, the library put in place two projects to capture and document relevant information of indigenous content in order to document and preserve it and share it with others for development effectiveness on a sustainable basis.

1. **"Wednesday Colloquium" initiative.** This is a project that was specifically initiated to capture and document what important figures in society know or have experienced over time. These important personalities cut across all fields, e.g. business sector, academia, politicians, investors and farmers, among others. So far many knowledgeable personalities have been invited to give talks at the University where all their wisdom have been captured and documented. These knowledgeable people are brought together every Wednesday at 8:00-10:00 p.m. in what is termed at IUIU as a "Colloquium". This project has been supported with state-of-the-art equipment like PAs, voice recorders, digital cameras and similar devices. The documented knowledge from this initiative has added significantly to the Library's collections in the form of reports, manuals, video tapes and documentaries among others. Some of these personalities are being helped by the University to publish their expertise and wisdom into books for wider access across the globe.

   Efforts to digitize these initiatives to have them accessible by the international community for development are being lobbied through the "Makkah Summit Initiative 2007".

   At these "Colloquium" meeting points the majority of the attendants are multinational youth (as the University is international in nature). These youths share and are exposed to diverse knowledge, information and skills which are vital pre-requisites to trigger development initiatives in their respective countries.

   A tracer study conducted recently on the university's graduates in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, to establish where they are, what they are doing, how they are faring and the impact they have on the communities they serve and live with, so far indicates positive developments in this regard (IUIU Alumni, tracer study; A case study of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, 2000-2008 Report).

2. **Harnessing the local community's indigenous knowledge by IUIU library services.**
   The Library Services initiated another project, the "LIB COM-LINK" initiative, which has pioneered projects for harnessing the indigenous knowledge of the local communities in the neighbourhood. This project scouts for valuable indigenous cultural heritage that for time immemorial has been taken for granted and neglected. The University noted with concern the rapid losses of such valuable indigenous knowledge sources through the death of elders, herbalists and craftsmen without handing over such heritage and wisdom to the new generation for sustainable use and development. A recent study indicates the most of these sources of African wisdom are slowly but systematically migrating and relocating to South Africa, Europe and America where their services seem to be gaining recognition, respect and momentum (Indigenous Alternative Medicine, 2005).

   This project, pioneered by the Library, has documented knowledge in form of traditional cultural medicine of local communities around, e.g. on the treatment of malaria, measles, skin problems, ulcers and other problems; knowledge about post-harvest food storage; and indigenous knowledge and skills in community peace building initiatives (Kachoke Madit). This initiative has even been tried in Government talks with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel forces and Karamojong cattle rustlers, among others. Despite the challenges of funding gaps and some resistant communities who are secretive with what they think is their cultural heritage and prestige, the project is moving on well.

3. **Community mobile library initiative:**
   The project has also participated in the Provision of basic community information needs i.e. on basic home hygiene, adult literacy, civic responsibility and leaderships, early childhood nutrition among others. The library is doing so *through mobile library services* which it selectively does on specific target communities as scheduled. The projects boasts of a van, an LCD projector and metallic/aluminium boxes that are yet to be delivered courtesy of IDB. The project is also expected to tap the government Poverty Eradication Action Fund, The Bonna Baggagawale *" Let them all be rich initiative of President Yoweri Museveni"* through sensitizing the grassroots communities on how to eradicate poverty in their house holds and also how to support other government programs for development. Proposals have so far been made and submitted to the effect.

The case of automating / digitizing IUIU library services: challenges and prospects.

The main library's automation efforts that commenced in 2007, was aimed at:

- increasing access to the library's vast collections by means of electronic finding aids like OPAC;
- increasing and streamlining work flow processes, rendering faster and enhanced service delivery;

- co-operation and participation in the global exchange of information and networking with other similar service providers.

This has been a journey of achievements, challenges and prospects. When the main library started in 1988, it inherited the library structures of a former Nkoma secondary school and nothing was done to transform it into a functional library befitting a university status.

- Collection development efforts have not kept up with the increase in user population and to date it boasts of 38,000 volumes of books with 832 titles at multi-disciplinary levels to cater for the various courses offered by the university.
- The Library serves a client base of 3500, with a student/ book ratio of 1:13 students and about 320 staff. The library automation process and eventual digitization exercise was and is thus aimed to address this anomaly through resource sharing and wider access to vast electronic databases.
- It has a workforce of 16 staff that serves the main library and faculty of law library.
- The development of faculty libraries began with departmental book banks and has now taken effect with the faculties of law and education at an advanced stage.
- The main library at Mbale main campus (Eastern part of Uganda) is also charged to steer/supervise 3 other campus libraries, including one for the women's campus in Kampala, and Arua, located about 220 km away from the main campus in Mbale. Automation is seen as one of the solutions to network these libraries and make it easy to share the information resources and other pertinent management information.

Library automation and digitization strategies.

The strategies to automate and eventually digitize the library collection began with the following measures:

- The formation of the library automation committee to spearhead the automation and challenges, and consequently pave way to digitize the Library collection. This committee drew up an IT policy frame work for the way forward. It was also charged with the planning, budgeting and streamlining of the manual processes because it was cautious of the slogan "garbage in garbage out" scenario. The committee also formulated the vision, mission and goals of the automation and digitization project. The composition of this committee includes key library staff and some staff from the ICT department;
- A stakeholders' consultative workshop was held to solicit their views, and also seek support for the project as counselled by Lynch (2002). Notable participants in this workshop were other librarians from other campuses, university administrators, academic staff representatives, deans of faculties, ICT staff, representatives from the local public library and community library/ resource centres and students of the university, among others. By the end of the workshop, good will and support of the project was achieved;
- This exercise, which is an ongoing process, also involved an investigation and analysis of the library system requirements. A small committee of some ICT staff and the University Librarian was formed to undertake this exercise, which they did to their best;

- Recruitment and incorporation of some key IT staff with the library staff to kick start the project;
- Specialized training for the library staff to meet the tasks ahead was also carried out and is still being done as rapid changes in IT are coming up from time to time, with more user friendly systems;
- The automation efforts of the University Library Services were also enhanced with internally developed library software " Lib.Dat" (the work of library staff and the IT department with the help of some students of computer science and information technology). Of interest for noting is that since then, two other library software packages have been developed internally by IT lecturers and their students. We are yet to study them and determine whether to adopt/ incorporate some of their features into the one we are currently using;
- Negotiations with authors of books on local content, on Islamic related fields, for digitization are in process;
- Efforts to buy vital equipment such as scanners and computers have been boosted with funding from IDB, though other challenges still persist;
- All the university's student research reports, theses and dissertations have been documented as well as their bibliographic details; their consent has been negotiated and the theses are being scanned to be uploaded on our website for scholarly access. In a positive development many development partners with the University like SNN have promised closer cooperation with us in this initiative. They are particularly interested in getting ways of implementing the findings of such research reports in close collaboration with the original authors;
- All the above efforts seem to be yielding tangible results. Users, borrowing, clearance, overdue reminders, information ordering and processing have been or are being automated.

Also vital to note about the Library's digitization effort, are the negotiations with the owners of the documentaries and reports as recorded or compiled during the "Wednesday colloquium", as described above, who are brought together and their knowledge, experiences, skills shared, tapped and documented. Though some of such owners prefer not to be documented and publicized, others have embraced the project and consented to the University's request.

Now that the University has fully acknowledged, appreciated and supported the Library digitization and automation project, and since the vital prerequisites for success are now in place, the Library digitization road has been mapped and the journey will be travelled to its desired destination despite the challenges along the way.

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