

**Symposium**  
**Fortieth Anniversary of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library :**  
**Legacy of a Secretary-General**

*United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld Library, New York*  
*1 March 2002*

Afternoon session: **Panel "The changing role of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library –  
Bridging the information gap between developing and  
developed countries**

**Panel discussion (summary)**

Sommereyns: Does any of the panellists wish to make a comment?

Dickstein: Regarding comments made by Professors Mangla and Kisiedu about the depository library system and the UN Information Centres (UNICs) and the UN depository libraries in their countries -- they have presented us with some information of which we were aware but, really, coming from the field, they have given us more details. In managing the depository library system, we have an elaborate superstructure. We let the depository librarians know very clearly what their obligations are: they are to keep their collections in good order and they are to make them open to the general public. To ensure that this occurs we have questionnaires, we have a series of visits, and we rely on the UNICs. And yet, we learn that perhaps we could do more. We could get more information. Part of this is financial. We don't have a budget to send out librarians on our own regularly. If depository libraries could collaborate among themselves in this regard, we would be very grateful. In response to one of Professor Mangla's comments, I would like to note that we in fact discourage librarians from cataloguing UN materials. We generally suggest they arrange the documents by UN document symbol and rely on the tools that we produce to provide access. We also are increasingly relying upon the depository libraries to be our conduit, in collaboration with the UNICs, for getting UN information out. Our latest questionnaire has in fact focused specifically on outreach -- what are the depository libraries doing to publicize their collections, to publicize UN information? We try to help by sending out e-mail news alerts a couple of time a week, alerting the depository librarians, often in their own language, to the existence of new sites on the web or new documents that have come out -- sometimes we send them the material as an attachment; sometimes we send links. And we have tried to encourage the UNICs to work with the depository libraries, to use them as extensions of themselves to organize programmes. Because libraries reach ordinary, unaffiliated individuals, they are an important conduit to civil society. Finally, I would like to note that in our inter-agency library meetings we have discussed how to get the libraries in the field to collaborate more with each other. In some countries there are UN Houses now, where a number of agencies are under one roof. Sometimes they manage to build one library (for example, Islamabad); sometimes each agency still wishes to maintain its own turf. This is one of the issues we have to address more.

Mangla: The main point I was trying to emphasize was availability and accessibility. The people who are managing these libraries, they don't have to come to New York for training in organizing document collections; you don't have to send trainers from New York to different parts of the world. Once in a while you may do that, but there are people already in the developing countries who have expertise in UN documents -- they can organize such training programmes; they can serve as consultants in the field.

India has 15 depository libraries, known fairly well by scholars and students, but not by others. They need to publicize these collections, let people know they exist. The country is large, so perhaps you need a few more depository libraries. The main depository library is not our national library, which is located in Calcutta. The main depository library is the parliamentary library and not easily accessible to people. Wouldn't it be possible to designate a second library? It could be a university, even a public library. The accessibility, the availability of these documents should be a major consideration. Much has been done. It can be further strengthened.

Kawamura: I'd like to make a point relating to costs for the digital library or library digitization development. The UN system has the great advantage of being a publisher as well as a library system. The purpose of the production of documents is to supply member countries with a record, agenda, resolutions, etc.; also sometimes commercial publications. If we change the whole printing process to electronic publication, or virtual meetings or conferences, including the listserv type of document delivery, the whole chain of documentation could be electronic. The next step for the Dag Hammarskjöld Library will be the handling of such electronic files. It will be able to collect and organize electronic files, which will obviate the very painstaking process of scanning documents. The distribution system, from the source, could be completely changed. That will dramatically cut costs. Also, during that process, we can ensure accessibility for people with print disabilities. Probably we need to think about multimedia publications to support the activities of the UN, to reach out to the grass roots civil society. If the UN wants to involve those who are not literate, we should reach out with some kind of multimedia with accessibility features, so there will be a breakthrough -- of the barrier of language. There are languages that do not have a written form. With multimedia we can reach out to those people. That will reduce the cost of the whole system of handling documentation.

Kisiedu: With regard to expanded or extended services that the DHL can provide, I would like to suggest two things. The first has to do with making the collection accessible to those who cannot read in the language in which the publications are provided. In many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, there are nuclear literature bureaux where translations from English are commissioned by Governments, and so on. In the same way that you collaborate with member countries in identifying depository libraries, you should make it official for Governments to commission the translation of the very popular UN documents, like the *Chronicle*. My second point is with regard to extending your activities more for the benefit of youth. Youth are a problem these days in every country. They are disaffected, disoriented, and therefore fall into all kinds of vices. Getting them involved in the UN, making them know what the Organization stands for, is

important. I suggest that you have collections for youth in secondary school libraries or other institutions that serve youth. In the universities, most first-year students are very interested in external affairs and they join organizations, and so on. You must nurture that feeling at the secondary school level and give them access to documents that tell them about what the UN does, about its activities -- that will give the hope of a better future. If there are designated youth centres, it will make them feel their interests are being looked after.

Dickstein: The Library doesn't produce materials, other than indexes, etc. On the other hand, our Department does, and one of the areas our Department is involved in is precisely in producing materials, often in many languages, which take UN documents and UN ideas and put them in laymen's language. And create brochures and other types of things that ordinary people can understand. Often, the UNICs try to get things translated into local languages and they also produce websites in local languages. Perhaps this is another area where depository libraries could work with the local UNICs in getting materials for the websites or in brochures translated into the numerous non-official languages that exist. In fact, the UN has been working all these years as if only six languages existed, but finally Unesco has taken the initiative; they have created the Journée internationale de langue maternelle. If we want to reach people, even six languages are not enough.

Audience (DHL): I wonder whether the time has not come for the Publications Board to extend depository library service to public libraries. In developing countries, public libraries are widely used, librarians are motivated, they do tremendous work, and with those resources they could do a lot in the direction that most of the panellists have indicated.

Kisiedu: The public library headquarters in Ghana is a depository library. But it is not very active because it is itself in very bad straits. So this is not really a new idea, but it should be further strengthened.

Sommereyns: In fact, the status of depository library is open to any public library, if they request it and it is approved by the Publications Board.

Audience (International Council of Women): I would like to encourage you to stay together, to network together. The millennium development goals can only be helped by access to information. Also, going into [the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development] and looking at Agenda 21, I wonder whether this group, which deals with information and access to information, might get involved with the movement among NGOs to include a chapter on education in Agenda 21? In connection with the [International Conference on Financing for Development], I can only imagine the difficulty of funnelling funds into developing countries with the whole issue of transparency and corruption. I would like to suggest that a collaboration between public libraries and UN depository libraries would be a wonderful way for money to come funnelling into developing countries.

Audience (DHL): For those depository libraries that want to do their own cataloguing and classification of UN publications -- the DHL could provide them with the tools, the rules, guidelines, etc.

McKee: I agree it would be useful if we could stay together as a group and continue the dialog after today. What I want to pick up is a point Christine made about translation, multilingual activity and also young people. About 18 months ago, I was in Ramallah, talking to the chairman of the Palestinian writers' union. It was part of the alternate IFLA [International Federation of Library Associations] Jerusalem conference. We asked him what can we do as librarians to help the intellectual, cultural situation that he and his countrymen found themselves in. We were in his home with all his children running around. He said one problem we have is that we have no access to children's literature in our mother tongue, in Arabic. The reason is that we can't afford to pay the translation rights. When we look at intellectual property rights, and particularly translation rights, we should look at redressing some of the imbalances, particularly in things like giving multilingual access to material for children.

Carrier: When I see a librarian giving a book to a child, I feel this kid's life might change because of his having that book. Two days ago we had an event to celebrate the future opening of the Library of Alexandria. The Ambassador of Egypt told me something I want to report to you because it is so beautiful. She said when we look at children in the world, what they have in their eyes are images of violence. Many children in the world know nothing but violence. We have a duty to give our children a more positive vision. She is so convinced that libraries have to do something about it.

Mangla: The DHL should provide depository libraries with standards and norms and ensure that they are properly implemented. I spoke to quite a few people working in UN depository libraries both in and outside India and also the UN information centres. The problem they face is primarily financial. Among the depository libraries within a country, there is hardly any cooperation or coordination, except in Japan. The UNICs should function as the liaison between the depository libraries and the DHL; and the UNICs should ensure that there is cooperation, at least communication, between the depository libraries. Some such system has to evolve. Otherwise, I am afraid you are expecting many things from the depository libraries.

Audience (DHL): I would like to share my experience as a former UNIC librarian. The DHL provides us with adequate resources; it's up to the UNICs to make use of them. All UNICs have the same financial resources. We tapped the resources of the country; we collaborated with the state university, NGOs or the national language institutes to have the basic materials translated into the vernacular. And then we also tapped the resources of the media -- when we were starting to promote the theme of the rights of the child, we tapped the resources of a cartoonist. I'm very proud to say that. at least in the metropolitan Manila area, we had very close cooperation among depository libraries. We know what each one has, so when the need arises, the librarians call each other and we have inter-library loan.

Audience (DHL): I would like to repeat what my colleague, Mr. Carrier said, "share the light". This is a very important vision that we should have, but how should we share the light? What can we do to create a very small, simple infrastructure, what are the real problems that exist in developing countries? Networking to share knowledge, to give technical support, human resources, equipment. Why can't we find a way to give computers [to developing countries]? How can we bridge the gap?

Gharib: That was to be the topic of this afternoon's discussion. Unfortunately we didn't really get into that. The role of librarians is very important. If politicians or governments control the present, the librarians, with teachers, with mass media people, can control the future -- through children, through education. I can make one proposal for the DHL: to organize regional conferences, to meet with librarians in each region, discuss with them how you can participate in responding to this question. They can explain, they can suggest, they can ask your help, they can propose many things. This is a practical thing you can do, within a year, to organize four or five regional conferences. You have to go to the librarians all over the world.

Sommereyns: Having heard all the statements today, I am happy to report that Dag Hammarskjöld's vision of a library for peace is very much alive. For the DHL to continue this task and to live up to the very high expectations, it cannot do it alone. It needs to count on support all over the world. It is very heartening for us to see that by your presence here and by your participation in this Symposium, we have this support, the support of a very enthusiastic international community of libraries and librarians, and together we can further live up to the challenge that was given to us by Dag Hammarskjöld. A lot has been said here that is very useful, very useful for all of us, especially us here at UN Headquarters, especially at a time when the General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to review the activities of the Organization's libraries, the DHL in particular, and to see that it continues to fulfil the tasks and to respond to the challenges that the Organization has given to it. I am happy to say that we intend to publish the proceedings of the symposium. What has been said here will not be lost, but will be a very useful basis for our future work.