



## **The empowerment of women in the library and information services sector and the impact of globalisation**

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### **Abstract**

*Women, especially those in developing countries, have inherited a legacy of discrimination and oppression which manifest in poverty, health issues, violence, limited access to basic needs, resources and employment. The challenges facing women in the areas of economic empowerment, access to land and access to science and technology are still a barrier to women's development and it remains a challenge to level the playing fields.*

*This paper will discuss some of these issues, using the findings of a case study to evaluate access and use of information, with special reference to women, in rural communities of Kwa-Zulu Natal, a province of South Africa, some African countries and a snapshot of other countries worldwide. The results are compared to results from Australian case studies on developing areas and good practices are recommended. Additionally, partnerships with developed countries and their experiences with the empowerment of communities will be discussed. This will include examples of partnerships between South Africa and Germany, UK and the USA.*

*The main recommendations include:*

- ✿ The importance of partnerships with developed countries;*
- ✿ Addressing the language barrier;*
- ✿ Empowering women to access information;*
- ✿ The effect of globalization on Library Information Services.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

For purposes of this paper, empowerment will be viewed as the power to create new possibilities, the power to tackle problems together, As well as self-empowerment (Carolyn Hannan: Transforming Empowerment & Gender Mainstreaming at the International Symposium on a new Vision for Gender Policy – 17-18 April 2003)

Globalisation will be viewed as universalisation. ‘Global’ will be used in the sense of ‘worldwide’ and as the process of spreading various objects and experiences to people at all corners of the earth([www.infed.org/biblio/defining\\_globalisation](http://www.infed.org/biblio/defining_globalisation) ). Reference to the use of technology will be associated with globalization.

The paper will refer to the empowerment of women as discussed during the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women. This Conference was convened under the auspices of the United Nations and was attended by 17000 people. “Its goal was to review progress on women’s issues since the Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985” (Online Newsletter of Baha’f International Community – [www.onecountry.org](http://www.onecountry.org)). At this conference, strategies for the advancement of women were brought to the fore and twelve critical areas of concern were identified.

This paper is informed by one of these areas viz.: “mechanisms to promote the advancement of women. This has been a focus area for other conferences in other fields. The LIS sector, through IFLA. established Women, Information and Libraries Discussion Group during the 2007 IFLA Conference in Durban. In 2008 the Group continued its task of finding ways to empower women in the LIS sector.

### **The group’s mission is:**

*– “ the promotion, development and support of library and information services  
for the benefit of women, and society as a whole”*

This mission drives the focus of the present discussion. Linked to the mission will be a focus on two of the Group’s goals i.e.

- *the empowerment of women through education and information*
- *advancement through new technology*

The discussion will also draw attention to the Group’s aims, especially by referring to barriers to access to information. It will suggest methods of establishing ties or partnerships as well as , networks that would lead to access to information and empowerment of LIS workers. The issue of globalization will be addressed and made relevant to the many challenges experienced in the LIS sector.

A link between the 2007 and 2008 discussions of the **Women, Information and Libraries Discussion Group** will be referred to and linked to the strategies envisaged, as tools that can be used in the path of empowering women in the sector.

The Discussion Group is reminded of the 2007 Conference in Durban, where the Group was founded and goals were set. These were:

**Goals:**

*These are based on the 8 United Nations Millennium goals to:*

- ✿ *Eradicate extreme hunger and poverty*
- ✿ *Achieve universal primary education*
- ✿ *Promote gender equality and empower women*
- ✿ *Reduce child mortality*
- ✿ *Improve maternal health*
- ✿ *Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases*
- ✿ *Ensure environmental sustainability*
- ✿ *Develop a global partnership for development*

At the Quebec Conference in 2008, the focal point of discussions was **New connections and partnerships: seeking and finding collaborations.** (Lorien Roy: University of Texas at Austin).

We are now called upon to find common ground between the mission of the Group, the goals and the partnerships and/or collaborations, in our effort to empower women in the Library and Information Sector.

The Goals cannot all be met through this discussion. However it is established that like everyone else in society, we in the LIS Sector, are affected by the environment. The global meltdown has an impact on the service we extend to people in our libraries; the position of women in the LIS Sector is no different from the rest of the World. Women in the private sector, industry, the financial sector and the public sector face similar empowerment challenges. In addition to the normal challenge of influencing boardrooms, women in other countries have cultural and religious issues. This discussion cannot ignore the impact that such restraints have on the empowerment of women in this sector.

The paper will only focus on the empowerment of women (the third goal) as well as global partnership and development (goal 8). It will also refer to an empowering technological development associated with the availability of netbooks that can be used to extend global information to less affluent libraries.

The empowerment of women in all spheres of development has been discussed in LIS, Business, Politics, Socio-Economic spheres and others; but there needs to be ***political will*** for this empowerment to occur. Such empowerment is experienced in the Nordic countries which are “characterized by strongly liberal societies, protection of minority rights” (Women’s Empowerment: Measuring the GenderCorp). These countries occupy the top of the ranking scale. At the bottom of the scale are societies with deeply conservative attitudes towards integration of women into the world of public decision-making (World Economic Forum Report 2004). However

other countries have learnt from these two extremes and are defining methods of empowering women.

South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality that was prepared by the Office on the Status of Women has, as one of its principles, the need to:

***“ Develop effective collaborative strategies to enhance relationships between formal political structures such as the Cabinet, Ministries, Government Departments, the Commission for Gender Equality, the Office of the Status of Women....” (piv)***

In 2009, the South African President established a *Ministry of Women, Children, Youth and the Disabled*. Through the creation of this Ministry, the Government has shown political will. This move could be viewed as providing an enabling environment for South Africans. Issues such as the empowerment of women could be attended to in this Ministry. LIS Women in SA should use this platform to engage the ministry on empowerment matters.

Globally, some instances of women empowerment initiatives have resulted in women becoming Presidents of Countries. We refer to cases such as that of Margaret Thatcher in the UK; Sonia Gandhi in India; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Africa. This indicates that women can reach the upper echelons of power normally occupied by men. Similar heights can be reached by women in Library and Information Services (LIS).

On the other hand, it is often difficult for women to be thus empowered. Susan Vinnicombe, Director of the International Centre for Women Leaders at Cranfield University in the United Kingdom says: “What we have shown time and time again is that its not human capital that holds women back from boards - its social capital. It has nothing to do with their degrees – as most have degrees equalivent to men and diverse experience.” (Carol Lewis: Business Times March 15, 2009). Levelling the playing field becomes difficult since the socialization issues, coupled with the many other challenges facing women in general and LIS women in particular, have not been addressed.

Globalisation comes with its own challenges. In the context of this paper, the impact of globalization on the empowerment of LIS women will be addressed as a system of opening international doors of system networking; of human networking and of giving access to information not normally available to the deprived due to infrastructure inhibitions, poverty etc. Women in LIS need to be exposed to methods of engaging in the global community for purposes of self-empowerment and the empowerment of others.

## **LANGUAGE BARRIERS AS A CHALLENGE TO EMPOWERMENT**

Several countries including South Africa, have more than one language. According to the South African Constitution, the country has eleven (11) official languages. Of these languages only two - English and Afrikaans, were used as official languages prior to 1994. The challenge facing the country is the recognition of all eleven languages and the implicit requirement that all documents, and interactions, should be made available in all languages. This is not only a challenge for the government but also for Libraries. How do libraries render access to all information in the eleven languages? This would be a mammoth task and would be extremely expensive.

The middle route taken by the country has been to try to improve competency in English since it is still the preferred language in education, business and other sectors.

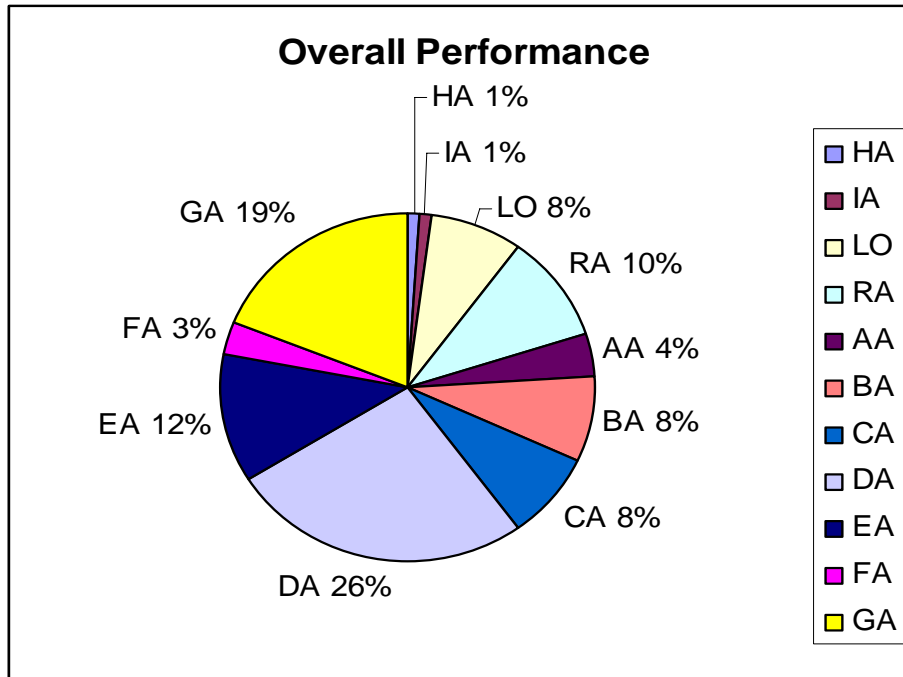
The Mangosuthu University of Technology has realized the need to improve the reading and comprehension levels of first year students. It realized that if these areas are improved, the learning material that is in English would be better comprehended and this would have a positive impact on the students' pass rate and lead to effective employment of graduates.

The Institution uses the Learning 100 system which is an integrated instructional and management system that diagnoses, instructs and provides practice and reinforcement of reading and language competencies' (Report on Language Proficiency 100 System: Mabaso M –MUT)

The Learning 100 System is divided into 10 reading levels.

LO	=	Neutral - Not done enough to be rated
RA-CA	=	Poor – Students are expected to read at a higher level than this
DA	=	Fair-Borderline cases
EA-FA	=	Good-Acceptable level of competence
GA	=	Very good-High independent reading level
HA-IA	=	Outstanding reading level

In 2009 overall performance at this institution was:



The outlined student performance indicates the challenges of competency in English among our students. It is a challenge that calls for different interventions, even by the Library. It is in such situations that Librarians should be empowered so that they are able to deal and support such ventures. Without a high level of reading and comprehension ability, the global world which operates mainly in the English language is closed to this group. To be effective in global interactions, these learners are empowered through the improvement of their reading skills.

## Australia

Different multilingual countries have dealt with the language challenge in various ways. In Australia, English is the most common language, but there are a total of two hundred and sixty seven languages. The Hansford 67 describes the Country's languages as follows:

Total number of Languages	=	267
Living Languages	=	234
2 <sup>nd</sup> Language	=	2
Extinct	=	31

## India

India has several languages the most commonly used are:

Indo- European ca	=	74%
Dravidian ca	=	24%
Austro-Asiatic ca	=	12%
Tibeto-Burman	=	0.6%

Further divisions indicate other languages spoken by an additional 40 million people.

Language challenges such as those in South Africa,, India and Australia impact on the services that libraries extend to the various language groups. If empowerment issues are addressed in one language, a great percentage of library users would be excluded. The challenge for the LIS sector is firstly to acknowledge the challenges posed by language barriers to information. For most people to benefit and engage in the advantages of first world cyberspace such as new technologies like Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, Chatrooms, and the more advanced information databases found in Libraries, the language barriers should be addressed.

Lack of knowledge of a language is disempowering and prevents access to information. An example of this is the disempowerment an English speaking person would feel in China, where everything is in Chinese and the language is not written in an alphabet that is familiar to most countries. Therefore, it is important that through the translation processes, the empowerment of women in the LIS sector is extended to other language groups that are not necessarily English, French, German or Russian speaking.

It is important to note that language becomes a barrier not only as a result of lack of education. If one is educated in a language that is least used in a particular area or field, one is disempowered. Therefore, for LIS workers from all groups to be adequately empowered and for access to information to be extended to all, there ought to be a balance between a largely spoken language and the least spoken language.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

### **European Union and the South African Department of Education Partnerships**

Often Governments contribute to the upliftment of libraries. South Africa has benefited from a huge contribution from the partnership between the European Union and the SA Department of Education. This intervention was meant for the empowerment of libraries of the previously less affluent Universities and Universities of Technology. Training in the following fields was offered:

- ✳ Project Management
- ✳ Performance Management
- ✳ Influencing Skills
- ✳ Managing ICT Strategically
- ✳ Policy Making

Further to this intervention, books, PC's, subscription to electronic journals (EBSCOHOST) were donated. This whole exercise was meant to be sustained by the respective institutions' budgets. Needless to say, in most cases this did not happen since libraries failed to receive a substantial share of the institutions' budgets. Nevertheless,, this intervention led to the empowerment of the LIS sector in areas that might have taken longer to be addressed.

## United States of America and Higher Education South Africa

An empowerment drive occurs through the partnership between the United States of America and Higher Education South Africa. Middle Managers are identified and are engaged in a programme for executive managers. The aim of this programme is to:

*“enhance the capacity of participants to contend with the global realities of change...”*

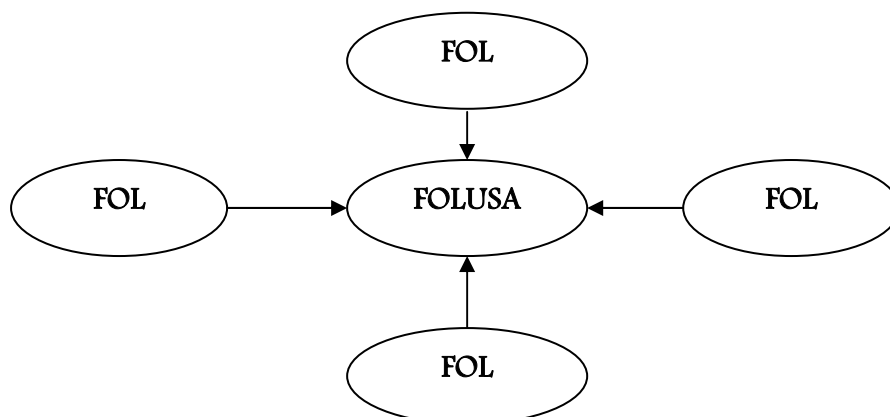
*Thus addressing leadership challenges, choices and capacity.*

Participants in workshops organized through this partnership come back prepared to influence their environments and to be better leaders.

In the South African LIS sector there is currently a Carnegie Library Leadership Academy which targets middle to senior library managers from academic, community and national library services. The Academy was established with the help of the Carnegie Corporation of New York which awarded the University of Pretoria a grant that enabled them to establish the Academy for LIS Workers. The grant extends to 2011. It is through this intervention that the leadership needs of LIS workers will be addressed. It is hoped that those that receive training will cascade it to their libraries and the consequence of this will be the empowerment of all librarians.

## Friends of the Library

For decades Libraries, especially community libraries, identified persons or groups and established them as friends of the library. In the USA this practice was formalized to the level of a national ‘friends of the library’ initiative known as FOLUSA - Friends of the Library United States of America. At the local level, libraries work within their communities engaging government structures and influential local people and organizations. The idea is to educate the ‘friends’ on library issues and to gain support for library programmes. Each state has its own FOL and these form the national FOLUSA. FOLUSA is an organization with sufficient clout and support from various sources.





LIS organizations from all over the world can form similar organizations of FOL and focus on the empowerment of women in LIS. The friends would support training programmes and infrastructure development, including the ever present challenges of bandwidth that is experienced by many countries. Innovative methods of reaching areas with inadequate infrastructure to access the fast developing technology that is normal in developed countries, could be found. A strategy to engage telecommunications companies and government departments as friends of the library would lead to support of library projects and the empowerment of LIS workers. Examples of these could be:

FOLUSA	(United States of America)
FOLSA	(South Africa)
FOLCA(NADA)	(Canada)
FOLASIA	(Asia)
FOLINDIA	(India)
FOLDEN	(Denmark)
FOLGHANA	(Ghana)

The impact of the Global economic crisis is that libraries cannot target familiar sources of funding such as established Library sponsors as they may be facing their own internal financial challenges – like retrenchments, bailouts, closures etc. A possible strategy for us could be to ‘follow the money’ by identifying those sources that are least affected by the currency shrinkage, such as those on the Forbes lists of richest people – Billionaires like Mittal from India. It would be best to have him as a *‘Friend of the Library World’*. From this relationship, sponsorship for Libraries could emanate - . The same could happen from forming partnerships with other super rich persons. In SA there is Patrice Motsepe – the only Black Billionaire, Mike Shuttleworth and others.

### **Socio-Economic Clubs (Stokvels)**

Stokvels are used for activities such as contributing towards burials; groceries; and monetary savings at a bank. At the end of a chosen term, contributions are divided and members receive a sum of money for personal use. A percentage of the savings is kept in the account and the following year’s contributions are added to this amount.

Women in LIS could follow the same idea of a stokvel. However, instead of groceries, burials, savings at a bank, they could collect what is no longer used in their libraries e.g. computers, books, multimedia materials e.g. DVD’s, TV’s etc. Librarians from the same region could bring these to a common area and have a ‘fair’ where less privileged libraries would receive these items for their use.

Furthermore, in partnerships with suppliers of computers, suppliers of multimedia, and with the telecommunications industries, matters of bandwidth and wireless connectivity could be negotiated and extended to areas that lack these facilities. This way these areas would be able to participate in the fast-moving, technological global world.

## **Global Networking**

Empowerment drives extend across distances as evidenced by the teleseminars and workshops provided by Stacy Barr on performance measurement. Such empowerment drives may provide opportunities for women in LIS to engage in step-by-step workshops that occur online. Thus they could be part of the interactive learning, empowering process. All that is needed is for one to visit sites such as Stacy Barr's at <http://www.stacybarr.com> or [stacybarr@stacybarr.com](mailto:stacybarr@stacybarr.com). Stacy Barr's workshops deal with matters such as:

- The dilemma of Measuring People's Performance*
- The point Performance Culture Change Management Plan*
- The 5 Basic performance metrics*
- Ten tips to get those performance measures in place*
- *And many more*

Although the connection is from Australia, the teleseminars extend worldwide. If one cannot engage in the live event, there is an option of accessing a recording of the teleseminar. In addition, there is a time converter, given the difference in time zones. It is one of the best methods for LIS leaders to address the measurement issues facing them on a daily basis

The purpose of engaging in these exercises interactively with Stacy Barr is to learn and in turn to teach others. Thus the notion of *'lift as you rise'* would be realized. Understandably, not everyone would have access to this online service, hence women with this access should use it and convert what was learnt into a format that others who are less fortunate can access. Jointly we could all benefit and be equally empowered  
(*Stacy Barr, Performance Measure Specialist, Samford, Queensland Australia*)

## **The Technology Strategy – The Netbook**

Alternatives to unaffordable devices should be found. Globally, information seekers use various devices from desktop computers to various types of laptops and notebooks. As the world uses skype, facebook, twitter, blog, electronic information from various sources such as the Internet, electronic journals and books, there are those left behind because of various hindrances, mostly financial. This leads to difficulties with broadband, cabling and access to various other forms of engaging in this fast-paced world. However the idea of reaching this world, comes with the advent of the ***Netbook*** which could be as small as 10.3 x6.77". This device has Windows applications (XP), Internet access, Wireless Connection. On it one can view photos and videos; listen to music; play games and it can be expanded for additional capabilities.

The LIS sector can empower the communities they serve through this device. Libraries could purchase these and issue them out to borrowers who would then access information from any area where there is an Internet hotspot. This ameliorates connectivity issues and broadens access to information that would have been unattainable without access to the Netbook.

## **Leadership**

**Lumanaries** inspire organizations with the power of an idea. They are visionaries. They set the focus of an organization. The vision of a library is thought through by Luminaries.

The implementation of the vision is the responsibility of the **Entrepreneurs** in the organization –whose responsibility is to sell the products and services; they “move resources from areas of low to high return... what matters is turning them into results” (Johnson Brett, 2009)

**Managers** engage in the planning and process. They are excellent implementers of the Vision. The “ make things happen predictably again and again” (Johnson Brett, 2009). They build teams that build systems.

**Organizers** are fire-fighters, are highly intuitive. They are good at short term goals; they care about the when, not why. They are highly people orientated. ‘They have the ability to emphasize with those in need’ (Brett, 2009).

**Networkers** are a ‘a critical component of the makeup of any organization’ (Brett, 2009) Networkers care about ‘who’ – who can help accomplish something, an agenda. Who can help realize the Vision. Libraries could adopt the LEMON model for empowerment and success.

## **BUSINESS SECTOR EMPOWERMENT**

The need for the empowerment of women was communicated by Lorte Jackson at the June 2009 Economic Forum held in Cape Town, South Africa. She is in the ‘Educating Women and Girls Initiative – which is an African Women’s Business Network. Gender issues addressed through this initiative are the unique situations of women. The initiative establishes global networks in Africa and formulates synergies with the Middle East, Asia and other countries. Those involved in it learn the best practice from each other and connect with other women worldwide. Thus it offers opportunities for moving to the next level of development. New girl graduates learn from experienced women in Business and the latter learn from peers in and outside their countries in the established networks.

Women in LIS could take a page from this Business Initiative and empower themselves through interaction with women in other countries and in turn influence the development of younger women who are coming up in the ranks.

## **CONCLUSION**

We echo the United States President Obama’s belief that ‘YES WE CAN’. The issues discussed in this paper indicate that Women in LIS can be empowered. The strategy should be to take one piece at a time – Like Africans say: To eat an elephant, take one

piece at a time. Librarians should use what they know such as the 'Friends of the Library' practice that has been used over decades and extend it to local networks and be empowered. As Meg Munn, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of the State says, '**the future is female**'.