

# Mapping the fit: library and information services and the national transformation agenda in South Africa, Part 1

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*This article, the first of two parts, is an update of one which appeared in the IFLA journal in 2007 (Stilwell 2007a). Progress since 2007 is mapped in terms of the fit between the library and information services available and the national transformation agenda. It reviews information policy and describes information sources, systems and services in South Africa as part of the wider national information system. It stops short of describing the situation pertaining to school libraries, archives, record centres and museums, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), embassies, commercial database industry and indigenous knowledge which are covered in Part 11. The sectors concerned with the dissemination of information and information technology are also described in Part 11, as well as the library and information education and training sector and the organised profession. This overview is based on literature retrieved from the available, mostly electronic, databases.*

**Keywords:** Library and information systems and services; access to information; South Africa

## Introduction

Access to information is a global concern but the problem of access is most acute in less developed countries. To address the information, or digital divide it is necessary to create in libraries and information centres an environment that allows for free and fair access to information as well as freedom of expression and participation in the knowledge society (Raseroka, 2003). The *IFLA Internet Manifesto* (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2006) adds to this recognition when it states that "unhindered access to information is essential to freedom, to equality, global understanding and peace". Dick (2006) has reminded library and information workers in South Africa how much has yet to be achieved in terms of freedom of information in this country and region.

This article, together with Part 11, which will follow, provides an overview of South African library and information services (LIS), embedding them in the wider national information systems and infrastructure. The article is based on a review of materials retrieved from the available, mostly electronic, databases. This review is descriptive rather than analytical but it does map the sector and its services and reflect upon the fit between the national transformation agenda and achievements in the sector.

Opening with a review of information policy, the article describes information sources, systems and services in South Africa. It stops short of describing the situation pertaining to school libraries, archives, record centres and museums, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), embassies, commercial database industry and indigenous knowledge which are covered in Part 11. The sectors concerned with the dissemination of information and information technology are also described in Part 11, as well as the library and information education and training sector and the organised profession.

## 2. Information policy, legislation and implementation

The apartheid government largely left the development of library and information services to market forces. Progressive library and information workers contributed to initiatives to transform and restructure library and information services (Darch, Rapp and Underwood 1999:25). This process of change has continued but many of the challenges of the last decade remain today.

At the national level, policy ultimately facilitates cheaper access to ICT and related services by libraries. National, provincial and local policy and its implementation impact on the ability of libraries to provide and sustain such services to users. 'Enabling' policies at higher levels generally facilitate the provision of such initiatives, for example, most European countries have a library policy at national level which specifies that public libraries have to provide access to Internet services (Pors, 2002). Public libraries serve the general public, rather than specific groups within it, and are therefore key players in access to information for all. However as use of the Internet by all sectors of library and information services increases, librarians in Canada, for example, have encountered a need to strike a balance between open access for all and

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appropriate access for minors and children which poses particular policy challenges (Internet Access Policy Project 2007). Hamilton argues that the final criterion for creating 'real access' for users in a given country lies in political will and, specifically, "to do what is needed to enable the integration of technology throughout society". This recognition should move the debates concerning access to the Internet "some considerable distance from simple questions of a computer and a network connection" (Hamilton, 2005).

A good example of legislation other than library specific legislation facilitating the access of library users to the Internet is the "E-rate" by which public libraries (and schools) in the United States obtain discounts ranging from 20 to 90 percent on telecommunication services, Internet access and other closely related costs: "with more than \$350 million dollars in discounts since 1998, the E-rate has helped change the public library's information technology landscape" (American Library Association, 2006).

By contrast it is generally acknowledged that telecommunication costs in the South African context are high (SouthAfrica.info 2008). For Schimper (2004:93) and the Free State provincial public library service local costs are "the biggest threat" to library-based ICT services. The Mpumalanga provincial library service has investigated the possibility of lower inter-connectivity rates for public libraries (Hendrikz and Smit, 2004:100).

The South Africa Foundation (2005) reported on the basis of a survey of the relevant company and regulator websites, that South African Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL), the technology which is used to provide broadband Internet connections over standard telephone lines, was the most expensive of the 15 countries surveyed both in terms of US\$ and Purchasing Power Parity<sup>2</sup>; was eight times as much as the cheapest product surveyed and was 139 percent higher than the average price. Despite the high cost ADSL and 3G access has enhanced Internet connectivity with South African Internet browsers by 121 percent from May 2005 to May 2007 (SouthAfrica.info 2008). To provide some relief, Cabinet passed legislation early in 2008 enabling the formation of Infraco, a state owned company that will provide broadband capacity through fibre-optic cables to other telecommunication operators in the country. Infraco will supplement the role of Sentech, the state-owned signals provider which supplies connectivity to the public sector via wireless systems (SouthAfrica.info 2008). SouthAfrica.info (2008) reports that some major cities such as Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria have public-private initiatives to enable them to build their own broadband networks in order to provide residents with cheaper voice and data services. There are other developments planned to improve access, for instance the use of submarine telecommunication cables.

Many measures have been directed at freedom of expression and access to information; for example, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*) has a Bill of Rights which addresses the right of access to information held by the state. Lor and van As (2002) take a critical stance in summarising the major changes regarding access to information since 1994. Nassimbeni and Underwood (2007), on the other hand, argue that "the thirteen years since the onset of democracy in South Africa is insufficient time to have restructured the education system and adjusted the library system in order to provide or improve access for all...South African society is still a society in transition and [is] presently reflecting the effects of many of the divisions that so marked its past".

Among the positive changes are the reorganisation of government printing and the restructuring of the government's public information services, which made government information accessible on the Internet, and extended Internet access and telephony to poor communities (Lor and van As, 2002). To make government information accessible the South African government launched in 2004 its 'People first' Internet gateway ([www.gov.za](http://www.gov.za)) which provides a single entry point to government services and information. Its organisation has been planned to match "user needs" and user's life events such as a place to live, and so on, "rather than government structures".

Other measures for enabling access are the extension of services to poorer and more remote areas via public information terminals in post offices and through the government's network of multi-purpose community centres. The e-government strategy is lead by the Centre for Public Service Innovation (CPSI), the Department of Public Service and Administration and the State Information Technology Agency (SITA) (SouthAfrica.info, 2004). In 2004 Accenture included South Africa among the top 22 countries in its annual global e-government survey (SouthAfrica.info, 2004). South Africa continues to lead in Southern Africa in this regard (United Nations 2008:26).

Korsten and Bothma (2005) recommended that government websites should be improved to address "the needs of a wider audience, to communicate government news, policies, projects, programmes and events, and to provide a tool for interaction between government and the citizen". They needed a "more consistent and unified message, thematic feel and structure, and government image and branding". A recent United Nations survey expressed praise, however, for the

2. Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is an exchange rate that reflects the cost of purchasing a basket of goods in the country in question and is a good reflection of domestic purchasing power (South Africa Foundation, 2005:v).

Department of Labour's website (<http://www.labour.gov.za>) as one that is "well tailored to the needs of its stakeholders" (United Nations 2008:26).

The *Promotion of Access to Information Act* (PAIA - 2000) seeks to ensure access to information held by the state and public bodies (Lor and van As, 2002:104). The Open Society Justice Initiative (2004: 4, 10, 16) which submitted 96 requests to some 18 institutions found that only 23 percent of the requests resulted in the supply of the requested information with 52 percent receiving no response at all. All the requests submitted, for example, by the critical *Mail & Guardian* journalist were met with mute refusals whereas the more neutral *Business Day*, and non-governmental organisations, received answers to about 40 percent of their requests. This "generally cavalier" attitude to the PAIA reflects a lack of understanding of the role of government accountability and transparency. *Freedominfo.org* (2004) reported similarly on a survey which found that the level of compliance as compared with a similar survey in 2003 had in fact dropped.

A cornerstone of the South African information system is The *Legal Deposit Act* (1997) which provides for official depositories for publications. The Act is intended to ensure the preservation, collection, bibliographic control and availability of the national intellectual and cultural heritage (Behrens, 2000) in a variety of formats. The legal deposit libraries include the National Library of South Africa, the Library of Parliament in Cape Town, the Msunduzi Public Library in Pietermaritzburg, the Bloemfontein Public Library and the National Film, Video and Sound Archives in Pretoria. The Department of Arts and Culture designated two new legal deposit sites as official publication depositories in 2006, the Constitutional Court Library in Braamfontein, Johannesburg and the Phuthaditjhaba Public Library in the Free State. There are seven legal deposit sites in total (National Library of South Africa, 2006). Schedule 5 of the Constitution lists "libraries other than national libraries" as "functional areas of exclusive provincial competence" (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996) which, in the words of Lor and van As (2002: 104), makes it "difficult to develop national policies for library and information services, including policies on facilitating access to government information".

The Government Communication and Information System (2007) was introduced in 1998 (Government Communication and Information System, 2000) and in 1999 the government's new website South Africa Government Online (2007) was launched to facilitate access to information on the Internet. The website was to be updated regularly by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), however, in 2002 Lor and van As (2002:109, 112) found that the information available was "uneven and fragmented".

The GCIS seeks to provide development information through the establishment of multipurpose community centres (MPCCs). The idea is to enable people on the ground to take advantage of socio-economic opportunities (Government Communication and Information Service System, 1999). The Universal Service Agency (USA) was tasked with establishing and servicing telecentres (Strydom, 1998, cited in Lor and van As, 2002:107). The USA, in turn, has the key role of promoting the extension of telephone services to rural and other areas where such services were lacking.

By 2003 a total of 54 MPCCs had been established (SouthAfrica.info, 2003). Impediments reported by the Universal Services Agency (2002) are the result of a lack of ICT infrastructure in rural areas and the monopoly on telecommunication services held by the South African provider, Telkom, which also leads to the high costs described above. SouthAfrica.info (2008) reports on new developments in this regard. Telkom's fixed-line monopoly expired with the licensing of Neotel (in which Telkom, however, owns shares) as a second national operator, licensed to provide the range of telecommunication services with the exception of full mobility. South Africa has the fourth fastest growing mobile communications market in the world with the cellular operators, Vodacom, MTN and Cell C providing to over 39 million subscribers or 80 percent of the population. Virgin Mobile is a new virtual network provider that is in partnership with Cell C (SouthAfrica.info, 2008).

In 2003 a National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS) was appointed by the Minister for Arts and Culture<sup>3</sup> (*National Council for Library and Information Services Act*, 2001; Walker, 2005:35). It was to serve as a focal point for co-ordinating policy in the field and was tasked with advising the two separate departments which oversee libraries, the Department of Arts and Culture and the Department of Education (Ledwaba, 2002:5). The Council is to finalise the development of a Charter initiated in 2006 this year (Department of Arts and Culture, 2008; Walker, 2006). Meetings to gather input for the Charter were held from May to July, 2008 (National Library of South Africa, 2008).

Lor and van As (2002) suggest that government has found it difficult to translate principles into practical implementation. Underlying this problem is a failure on the part of policy makers to grapple with the crucial role to be played by libraries in all these initiatives. These authors commend the government for its style of decision-making which reflects greater transparency and public participation. They (Lor and van As, 2002: 101,113) conclude, however, that the

3. In 2002 the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) became two departments, Arts and Culture, and Science and Technology (Ngulube, 2003:15).

government has not developed a clear policy framework within which the various initiatives can be co-ordinated, and it is far from clear whether the government is prepared to establish and fund the mechanisms to implement its policies on access to government.

Van Audenhove (2000) identifies an underlying problem as the government's "rather complex vision on the information society ... based on a central belief in the possibilities for ICTs for social change. But this vision is not set out in a formal policy document, nor is there a broad strategic policy plan to arrive at the information society". Many of the Cultural Laws linked to library and information provision and referred to above are undergoing amendment in 2008 and public comment in the form of submissions has been solicited (Nicholson, 2008).

School library policy is addressed in Part 11.

### **Information sources, systems and services in South Africa**

The South African government is a major producer, publisher and processor of information (Behrens, 2000). Numerous sources produced by governments are grey literature, which poses special challenges of bibliographic control and accessibility (Mostert, 2005:51). In facilitating access to services and information, many local government departments have developed websites and these are discussed below.

Boon's four broad categories (1992) for the information sector are used for structuring much of this article. There is some overlap between categories two and three in terms of systems and services.

#### **Sector concerned with inventing, generating and collecting knowledge**

This sector comprises units that invent, generate and collect knowledge and hence describes scientists, other knowledge workers and various 'collectors' of data. (Mostert, 2005:52). South Africa has many research organisations and information brokers specializing in a range of fields. In addition to the universities, South Africa has three major research institutions which lead the creation and dissemination of original and current research: the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and Markinor. Government commissions these units to do research (Mostert, 2005:55). The National Research Foundation (NRF) is another key entity tasked with the promotion of research, particularly in building capacity in the designated groups<sup>4</sup>.

The LIS sector's research capacity is based mainly in the higher education LIS departments. The availability of funding through foundations such as the NRF for research projects, as well as for more applied projects funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York, stimulates such research and innovation.

#### **Sector concerned with packaging, storage, organization, recall and duplication of information**

##### *Publishing, printing and bookselling*

The *Directory of South African Publishers* (1998/9) listed 2,951 publishers as active in the given year, while a perusal of the *Europa World Yearbook* (2001) reveals the variety of subject areas covered in the official languages of the country. A comprehensive study on the print industry, funded by the Print Industries Cluster Council, established that the industry has an estimated annual turnover of R1,5 billion, pays royalties to some 8 300 authors/other parties, and employs more than 3 000 people (South African Yearbook 2006/07).

The Government Printer of South Africa is responsible for publishing the official publications of government and of provincial departments and local authorities, and its scale of operation is seen in its handling of some 6,000 plus print orders in 2000 (Mostert, 2005:55).

The LIS sector has four local library and/or information management journals (Stilwell, 2006a) as well as those covering the archives and museum sectors. Journals and newsletters aimed at practitioners, such as those of the provincial library services, serve both practitioner and academic constituencies. Monographs devoted to specialized topics as well as published proceedings from annual and occasional conferences add to the store of local publications. In addition most international publications are relatively easily accessible for those served by well equipped and resourced libraries.

South Africa also enjoys a variety of local online bookshops such as Kalahari.net (2007) as well as access to online international suppliers. Hendrikz (n.d.) reports that more than 180 retail outlets are reflected in *Braby's Commercial Directory* (2000) for Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, while the former township areas have very few (Mostert, 2005:55).

4. While discrimination by race, gender and sexual orientation is outlawed by the 1994 Constitution the old racial categories, black, coloured, Indian and white continue to be used in an attempt to address inequities in terms of the Employment Equity Act, for example (Darch, Rapp and Underwood 1999:29).

## Libraries and information centres

The mid-2006 population of South Africa was estimated at 47,4 million according to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) cited in the South African Yearbook (2006/07) with the majority of the population being under 18 (Scholtemeyer 2002). South Africa has eleven official languages. Zulu is the most widely spoken and English the most widely spoken second language (Scholtemeyer 2002). Taking as the broad definition of being 15 years of age and older and able to read and write, IndexMundi (2007) cites a 2003 figure of 86.4 percent, with males at 87 percent and females at 85.7 percent. This then is the broad profile of South Africa's public.

Lor, van Helden and Bothma (2005:269) articulate a common perception that in the 1990s, during South Africa's transition to democracy, reliable statistical data on the libraries responsible for serving the public was difficult to obtain. A further complication in the case of public libraries is confusion in reporting between libraries per se and service points, which may be branches.

South Africa has one national library, 1,253 public or community libraries (Lor, van Helden and Bothma, 2005:270), 456 special libraries (Witbooi, 1997:4), 90 government libraries and 36 university (Darch, Rapp and Underwood, 1999:25) and university of technology libraries (Mostert, 2005:22). In addition there are college libraries. Of the public and community libraries, ten are independent but enjoy grants from the province. The National Library for Blind in Grahamstown serves the visually impaired.

Ledwaba (2002:12), using the figures from the *South African School Library Survey* (Department of Education and Human Sciences Research Council, 1999:iii), states that of the 22,556 schools in South Africa, 25 percent have a centralized library, while an additional 17 percent have a library collection or book box collection of some sort. Some provinces were better served in this regard than others.

An estimate of the aggregated figure for the nation's total number of libraries by mid-2003 was 11,373 (*South African yearbook 2006/7*). The national book stock approximated 47 million items<sup>5</sup> in 1999 (Darch, Rapp and Underwood, 1999:25).

The new constitutional dispensation (noted earlier) presents particular problems for provincial and local authorities in seeking to fund school libraries and public libraries (Dominy, 2003; Leach, 2006; Lor, van Helden and Bothma, 2005). In the province of Mpumalanga, for instance, the lack of public library infrastructure is "one of the biggest challenges facing library authorities" (Le Roux and Hendrikz, 2006:626). In addition, the restructuring of local government has serious financial implications for public and community libraries in the light of new funding priorities.

## National libraries

The National Library of South Africa (NLSA) has sites in Pretoria and Cape Town. The collection comprises rare and contemporary materials, donations reflecting the country's indigenous and colonial heritage, as well as special collections (Burger, 2002; Mostert 2005:56). The Library's website (National Library of South Africa, 2007) provides access to the online public access catalogue, to the services of a reference librarian and a document delivery system.

The Pretoria site of the NLSA co-ordinates the Southern African Interlending Scheme (SAIS) making it possible for some 700 Southern African libraries and organisations affiliated to the scheme to share resources. Participating libraries contribute to a union catalogue, SACat. Contributing libraries can request items via the NLSA or, if they subscribe to the South African Bibliographic and Information Network Online (SABINET Online, 2007), online requests can be made through the ReQuest service (Behrens, 2000).

In 2005 the NLSA was tasked with reporting on digitization activities on the African continent (Tsebe, 2005). Such digitization is not without controversy (see Peters, 2001 cited by Kaniki and Mphahlele, 2002) and Britz and Lor (2004) have invited reflection on the moral and access issues involved in wide scale digitization.

SABINET Online (2007) has digitized more than 180 online versions of South African journals formerly available only in hard copy. Access to these is provided through SA ePublications. SABINET is also digitizing South African government publications (Tsebe, 2005).

National co-operative initiatives are promoted and supported by the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLIC). Committed to the promotion of access to information and training and capacity building, its particular foci are the SACat, interlending agreements and national initiatives such as the development of site licensing (South African National Library and Information Consortium, n.d.).

The South African Centre for the Book, a unit of the National Library, commenced its operations in 1998. In 2004 the Centre won a major award from the International Board of Books for Young People (IBBY) for its First Words in Print

5. The number of unique titles could be estimated at 2 million.

project which provides picture and story books in all South Africa's languages to young children and their families (Cole 2004).

#### Government libraries

Thirty seven libraries support the work of various government departments and can be regarded as special libraries (Witbooi, 1997:4). Constable, Mabena and Minishi-Mjanja (2007) surveyed these libraries to see whether they conformed to the principles of *Batho Pele* or People First which is the public service policy for service delivery. While some libraries had implemented the principles, very few had a system for monitoring implementation. Furthermore some consideration was needed prior to the introduction of service delivery improvement plans. As it was expensive, time-consuming and extremely staff-intensive to supply information in all 11 official languages, these authors recommended the use of the "six language formula" whereby one language from each group (for instance, the Nguni or Sotho groups) could be published in rotation along with non grouped languages, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans (Constable, Mabena and Minishi-Mjanja (2007). Information obtainable from the various government websites is covered below and in Part 11.

#### Parliamentary libraries

The Library of Parliament situated in Cape Town boasts a book stock of approximately 96,506 items. The collection includes all official publications dating back to 1910, audiovisual materials, newspapers, journals, and legal deposit items. The library provides access to various online and CD-ROM databases and the Internet (Mostert, 2005:56).

Parliamentarians in the Provincial Parliamentary Legislatures are served by libraries containing small book collections, journals and newspapers and a variety of information sources (Mostert, 2005:56).

#### Public, community and provincial libraries

Positive socio-political change in the local LIS sector has been evident since the mid-1990s but the impulse towards change has also been subjected to many setbacks. Leach (1998) identified barriers to such public library development post-1994.

To address deficiencies in the reliable reporting of public library data, a geographic information system was used to plot the distribution of public and community libraries for the Public and Community Libraries Inventory of South Africa (PaCLISA) project (Lor, van Helden and Bothma 2005:269). In addition this project produced the *Public and Community Libraries Directory* (2002). Lor, van Helden and Bothma (2005:268) state that South Africa's public libraries face "huge challenges" because the "distribution and impact of these libraries have been skewed by the inequalities of the apartheid system".

Lor, van Helden and Bothma (2005:272) refer to De Jager and Nassimbeni's (2005:43) efforts to arrive at performance measures for South African public libraries. For them the PaCLISA project and its research was "only the beginning of a culture of assessment".

Lor, van Helden and Bothma (2005:268) saw as one of South Africa's public library challenges the realigning of libraries in the new democracy. Some public library managers have renamed their services 'community libraries' (Lor, van Helden and Bothma, 2005). There has been considerable expansion of service points into formerly unserved areas (Lor, van Helden and Bothma, 2005:269).

Commentators (Stilwell, 2006b; De Jager and Nassimbeni, 2007) have welcomed the positive indication in Arts and Culture Minister Pallo Jordan's announcement in February 2006 of an injection of ZAR 1 billion as a "massive, massive intervention" to revitalise the country's deteriorating public libraries (R1bn boost for libraries, 2006). Jordan (2005) is a powerful champion of libraries viewing them as "one of the most cost effective and individually empowering tools to create community upliftment and effect social transformation". A research project of the Department of Arts and Culture should resolve some of the pressing issues about responsibility for funding public libraries (Department of Arts and Culture, 2006).

Arko-cobbah (2006), Stilwell (2006b) and Fourie (2007) raise issues of social exclusion in relation to public libraries, while Ocholla (2006) similarly points to a lack of capacity for provision to marginalized communities because of the libraries' location, information content and format that largely favours information rich environments.

For Arko-cobbah (2006) public libraries play a key role as part of civil society in promoting the public sphere and the pursuit of good governance. Some of these challenges have been taken up and examples of innovative projects which address social exclusion include the Smart Cape Access Project which used the public library as a base from which to target groups which had been excluded from access to ICTs in the Western Cape (Valentine, 2004). Focusing on the areas of Wesfleur, Brooklyn, Delft, Grassy Park, Guguletu and Lwandle, this project had some 26 000 users by October 2005 and access to the Internet in all of Cape Town's 99 public libraries was planned for the end of the same year. Using open source software and a Linux-based operating system, the project's main expense is the high Telkom charges (SouthAfrica.info, 2005).

Another example of an innovative project is that of the Library Business Corners (2006) project whereby small business developers use the existing public library system for their information needs. In some nine years the project has established 89 outlets in public libraries in the Western Cape.

De Jager and Nassimbeni (2007) sought to address issues of information literacy and the promotion of the public library in remote rural areas by determining whether the approach used for the Maphotla project (see Part 11) could be extended to other similarly small, rural libraries. De Jager and Nassimbeni's project drew on UNESCO's Information for All programme, targeting some 30 public library workers in the same province. These workers were enskilled and encouraged to improve service delivery and raise the profile of the public library. Later, reflections on the project suggested that this had in fact happened. The library workers had indeed been encouraged to engage with "what they perceived as the most important needs in their communities and to deal with them using their libraries as a focus". They had learnt to forge important partnerships with government and community agencies and had developed new political and communication skills. Most importantly, they had attracted new users to libraries.

Gauteng province boasted some 23 multi purpose community centres in August 2006, with the Kwa-Thema centre being the first to offer free Internet access in 2006. The Centre houses a library, offices of the Departments of Labour and Home Affairs, Government Communications, and a post office. Feedback from local residents including those needing disabled access is positive (SouthAfrica.info 2006). Atteridgeville is the home of another community information resource centre initiative sponsored by the Human Sciences Research Council in co-operation with the Atteridgeville-Saulsville Resident's Organisation. This community was especially disadvantaged in terms of access to information, services, and opportunities for literacy acquisition. Called *Legae la Kitso* or Home of Information, the project is owned by the community and provides access to survival and other community information. The project is undergoing evaluation but the indications are that it is a success (Community Information Resource Centre South Africa, n.d.).

In March 2008 a R14 million library in Jabavu, Soweto was opened on the site of a former one roomed library from the 1950s. Funded by the City of Johannesburg, the Department of Public Works and the Vodacom Foundation the facility is the largest and best equipped library in Soweto (Soweto opens first state-of-the-art library, 2008).

The ZAR1 billion funding from Minister Pallo Jordan has made South African public librarians extremely aware of the "governments' gaze on their reach and operation" (De Jager and Nassimbeni 2007). A KPMG survey of library needs country-wide established that KwaZulu-Natal, the Western Cape and the Free State had done well with their funds and were hence allocated more of the Conditional Grant. If provinces spend their funding appropriately, on the third year of their conditional grant their portion might be included in their annual budgets but for non-core costs. With its share of the money, the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial and Public Library and Information Services intend to provide Internet access, build a depot and library in Mbazwana to serve other libraries, and equip a bus for promotional use in this area (Slater 2008).

### Special libraries

Special libraries have subject-specialised collections and many of them are attached to private companies, to government departments or to private individuals and are not generally open to the public (*South African yearbook*, 2006/7). The majority is found in the private sector, in mining houses, financial institutions and large law firms. Some major special libraries are attached to parastatal structures such as the research institutions referred to above, the CSIR and HSRC (Witbooi, 1997:4). Many participate in SAIS, thus making their materials accessible to external borrowers (Mostert, 2005:55).

South Africa's Library for the Blind targets some 700 000 blind or visually impaired people in the country. Blindlib is a statutory organization located in Grahamsown. It is partly state funded but has to solicit further funds from the private sector and the general public (*South African yearbook*, 2006/7:125). Blindlib has embarked on collaborative partnerships with some public libraries in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng to acquire assistive reading devices which will help to accelerate delivery to this group (Jordan 2008). Located in Johannesburg another service, Blind SA, an organization of the blind governed by the blind, provides a variety of services and support (*South African yearbook*, 2006/7:125).

### University, university of technology and college libraries

University or academic libraries serve their institutional clientele and the wider community, the latter usually by special arrangement. All of these libraries participate in SAIS (Mostert, 2005:56) and hence share their resources with a wider public.

South Africa's higher education institutions are governed by a new *Higher Education Act* (1997). Most of the higher education institutions have undergone radical restructuring and extensive mergers in the last few years in terms of this act and the *National Plan for Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001). This process of restructuring reduced 36 University and Technikon libraries to 21 institutions (Ledwaba, 2002:14).

The mergers were intended to redress disparities between historically disadvantaged institutions and their better endowed, usually urban, counterparts. Many of these institutions still have inadequate campus networks and low-grade bandwidth.

Mergers have also impacted on higher education libraries. Many libraries have to provide resources and services on budgets that fall considerably below the 5 to 6 percent of the institutional budget recommended by Willemse (2002). Ironically the merger processes entailed additional expense and mammoth amounts of extra work, usually without an increase in the temporary staffing budget.

Prior to the mergers, in order to address some short- and medium-term problems, university libraries established consortia. An important driver was the decline of the South African currency (Darch, Rapp and Underwood, 1999:25, 28). South Africa has five higher education consortia with a library focus (Thomas and Fourie 2006). Two major consortia are found in Gauteng and the Western Cape. Consortia have benefited from funding from abroad, for instance, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation allocated funding to the Cape Library Cooperative (CALICO) to implement a single flexible online library system.

Thomas and Fourie (2006) review the successes of consortia which include "using donor funding to promote best practices, improving interlending and document delivery among members, implementing staff skills development programs, establishing committed leadership and staff in member libraries, ...and reducing the duplication of non-core materials through joint purchasing of electronic resources..." Challenges facing consortia are strategic development which requires collective strategic leadership in the sector, working towards "new levels of service delivery" and finding research-centred solutions to common problems through innovation and improved support for researchers (Thomas and Fourie, 2006).

CALICO has sought to exert pressure on Telkom to permit differential tariffs for network connectivity (Darch, Rapp and Underwood, 1999:27). Late in 2006 a new fixed line service provider for South Africa emerged and this development should impact favourably on access and cost of access. Another development that should make an enormous difference from 2010 to the cost of connectivity for the entire East African region from Mtunzini in South Africa to Port Sudan is the East African Submarine Cable System, a fibre optic cable project that will link 21 African countries (EASSY fibre optic cable construction has started, 2008).

Darch, Rapp and Underwood (1999:28) were far-sighted in their predictions of the burning issues for this sector, that is, the provision of high-bandwidth connectivity at a low tariff, and large-scale information literacy education and training through consortia. South Africa is well placed on the continent to lead such initiatives (Lwehabura 2007), with the University of Pretoria securing undergraduate enrolments in information literacy of some 6,500 in 2006 (Bothma, 2006).

## Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of information policy and information sources, systems and some services in South Africa. The rest of the sector's services, the education and training sector and developments in the organised profession are reviewed in Part 11. Some of the future challenges for the sector have been addressed more fully in Stilwell (2007b). In terms of the fit between the national transformation agenda as it relates to this sector, it is clear that a great deal has been achieved although the many developments that are still in progress will need to be carefully evaluated. Much however, remains to be done with regard to the school library sector as Part 11 will show.

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