LIASA Virtual Conference

Topic: The Role of Libraries in Promoting Local Content

Background

- The legacy of apartheid is visible in the library and information sector
- Libraries remain sparsely located and concentrated in the cities, thus continuing to serve the privileged minorities to the detriment of township and rural communities.
- Since the dawn of democracy, a number of interventions have been made to redress the inequalities in the sector
- One of the key interventions is the Library Conditional Grant which has been in place since 2007

Paradigm Shift

- This presentation notes the paradigm shift in the Library and Information services sector that libraries do not just provide reading material
- In most underprivileged communities, community libraries play the role of school libraries
- The frequent users of community libraries include job seekers, entrepreneurs, learners and students who make use of internet and photocopying facilities
- In addition to serving the reading needs of the communities, libraries are a valuable resource that fosters social and economic development

Problem Statement

- “What is South African about South African Libraries?” In other words, what defines the character of our libraries as uniquely South African?
- How best are the reading needs of communities served?

Recent Setbacks

- The low levels of literacy and the lack of a culture of reading in South Africa is a very well documented phenomenon
- The outbreak of Covid-19 meant that many reading promotion events either had to be cancelled or held in a different and less effective format
- There was no National Book Week or SA Book Fair which over the years have played a fundamental role in reading promotion
- In this year's Budget Vote by the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, there was not a single mention of reading or reading promotion
The State of the Sector

- Libraries play a pivotal role in giving communities access to reading material and are central in building a community of readers.
- With the collapse of the SA Book Development Council, what role do libraries play in promoting a culture of reading?
- One of the fundamental areas of underdevelopment is the availability of local content in community libraries
- Heritage/Archival institutions like Lovedale Press need to be salvaged
- Indigenous languages books are more disadvantaged

Strategic issues

- There needs to be a strategic realignment between the National, Provincial and Local mandates – implement the District Development Model (DDM)
- Strong synergies need to be drawn between the Department Sport, Arts and Culture and the Department of Basic Education
- Establish a close relationship between community based organisations and libraries

Areas of Intervention

- The availability of local content, particularly works by African authors, is essential in the transformation of the library sector as well as in engendering a community of new readers.
- We need to make a concerted effort to promote reading as a fundamental tool for self-empowerment and libraries as primary sources of information.
- Provinces to introduce quarters for stocking local content
- Community libraries to have a percentage of books in local languages
- Establish a relationship with local book clubs and poetry societies
- Libraries to adopt writers based in their communities

Conclusion

- Campaigns come and go, but libraries are entrenched in the communities and ought to serve as reliable vehicles in the creation of a reading nation. Libraries are paramount in the inculcation of reading as an integral part of human development. The availability of local content in libraries is what would make libraries truly South African.