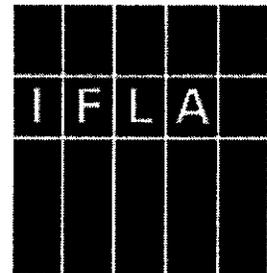**UNITED NATIONS
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Governance and Information Literacy: Pillars of Sustainable Development in Southern Africa

I F L A

GOVERNANCE AND INFORMATION LITERACY: PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

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1. Overview

Good governance is a basis for sustainable information literacy. Both good governance and information literacy are pillars of sustainable development. Progressive nations with modern economies recognise and advocate that information is a vital national resource. In fact, such economies are very much reliant on a reliable flow of quality information. To sustain development in Southern Africa, governments must be willing to enact legislation that forms the basis for policy frameworks for effective delivery of library and information services. In other words, these governments must and willingly, define expectations and verify performance levels of library and information services for the sustainable development of their individual and collective citizens. An information literate citizenry possesses the ability to know when there is a need for information, how to identify, locate, evaluate and use such information effectively in dealing with a problem or problems at hand (National Forum on Information Literacy, 2006). This paper discusses governance and information literacy as possible pillars of sustainable development in Southern Africa. It also recommends a template for the development of a library and information services policy framework that could be adopted by countries in Southern Africa.

2. Governance and Information Literacy

All countries in Southern Africa have laws that determine the provision of library and information services. In some of these countries, the laws are specific to a particular kind of information service, for example, a national library service, national archives, etc. In others, the laws are fragmented, mentioning the importance of and establishment of library and information services within the context of other matters. For example, acts of law that establish universities and determine local authority jurisdictions. Whatever, legislative bases are in place, it is apparent that governments in Southern Africa regard library and information services as essential to individual and collective development of their citizenry. These legislative instruments form the governance basis for justifying the provision of effective library and information services.

2.1 Good Governance

In the context of this discussion, the term governance is taken to denote a process carried out for a specific nation and for the provision of library and information services of varied kind for individual and collective benefit of society in that nation. In fact, the

'good governance' movement is borrowed from the corporate world where in 2002 the global consulting firm McKinsey & Company surveyed institutional investors around the world to determine just how important the governance process is to a progressive economy. Key among the findings was that investors were most willing to pay a premium for a country with good governance practices. In some countries, investors were willing to pay a premium as high as 40%. In the context of corporate finance, the premium would be higher in countries where corporate governance practices are unsound and the relative value of a well-governed corporation is therefore greater for its shareholders.

The purpose of good governance of national library and information services is to assure that all information agencies in any nation provide good services that are well-deserved by individual and collective clientele. While the term governance may imply generally, that governments tend to use coercive power, their intentions are usually to yield good results. Hence the distinction between the term *government* and the term *governance.*
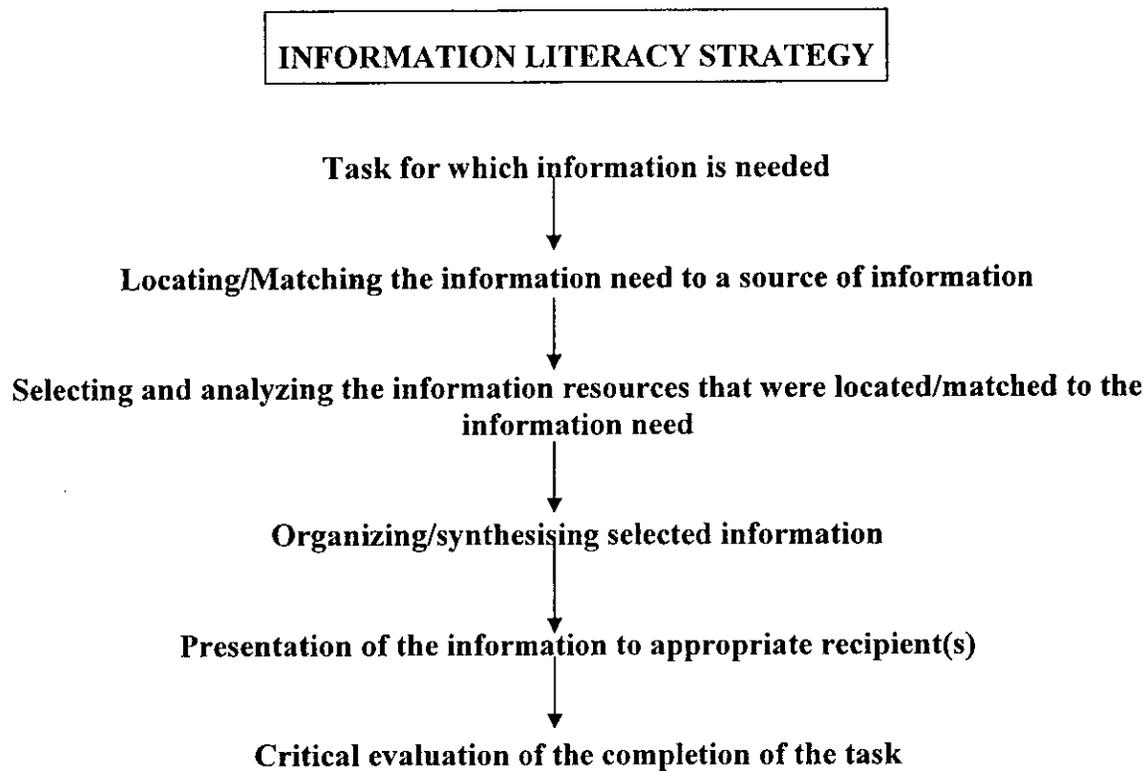
There has never been any universally agreed upon definition of governance. However, most literature tends to define it as an exercise of authority through institutions and their resources to manage society's issues and concerns. In the context of library and information services, governance can be viewed as the use of say a national library and information service, its structures of authority and collaboration to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy. Governance of this nature has been used to invoke the efficacy of government and the achievement of consensus by democratic means. Library and information services are generally a 'good thing' and ordinarily contribute immensely to democratic processes. An informed society is akin to democratic processes. It is information literate.

2.2. Information Literacy

It was alluded to, earlier that a modern economy couldn't exist outside the ambit of information. This is because such a society or economy has commoditised information and made it essential to planning for national development. In fact, information is a crosscutting commodity that adds meaning to all segments deemed necessary for development, for example, individual and collective participation in democratic processes. Without information, national development plans (and international ones for that matter) remain idealistic and very much inclined towards failure. To justify the crucial nature and applicability of information to national development, one needs to appreciate and understand the importance of information literacy.

An information society (IS) demands that people must develop new attitudes towards the exploitation and use of information (Raseroka, 2006: 4). Thus information literacy embraces recognition and definition of a need for information; locating and selecting appropriate sources of needed information whether from people, script or electronic formats; evaluation of information at hand; identification of relevant information for solving an issue or problem; and, organisation for sharing the information with others (Raseroka, 2006: 4).

The conceptions of information literacy evolved from the related term *information skills*, which referred to people who are able to solve their information problems by using relevant information sources and applying relevant technology (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_literacy). Today these conceptions have become more complex following the application of new technologies to library and information services. The following model should help clarify core elements of an information literacy strategy:

INFORMATION LITERACY STRATEGY

Task for which information is needed

↓

Locating/Matching the information need to a source of information

↓

Selecting and analyzing the information resources that were located/matched to the information need

↓

Organizing/synthesising selected information

↓

Presentation of the information to appropriate recipient(s)

↓

Critical evaluation of the completion of the task

Another conception of information literacy, specifically from the field of library and information science sub-assumes that information literacy is the basis for life-long learning. Below are some assumed competencies of an individual who is information literate:

AN INFORMATION LITERATE PERSON

- Acknowledges that accurate and complete information is the basis for good decision making

- Acknowledges the need for information for all human activity

- Can locate needed information (hierarchical levels information needs)

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- Can negotiate information needs (formulation of questions)

- Can match potential sources to the information need

- Can develop a search strategy

- Can access sources of information (oral, script and electronic)

- Can evaluate information

- Can organise and apply information

- Can use information in problem solving

- Can use information ethically

Information tends to be presented in other various formats in addition to the printed word. This means that a person who is information literate should embrace other competencies that are implicit to information literacy such as visual, media, computer and network (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_literacy).

From the perspectives given above, it is clear that information literacy is very much linked to governance and suggests those competencies that empower the citizenry of any nation. An empowered citizenry in turn, can appreciate national plans and implement them accordingly for individual and collective benefit. That is how information literacy and governance become pillars of sustainable development.

3. Pillars of Sustainable Development

In most states in Southern Africa the value of information (and information literacy) is not yet fully appreciated and adequately understood to be exploited for sustainable development. Without being specific to any country, one comes across variedly developed library and information services infrastructure. Some libraries are moderately developed and equipped, other are poorly equipped. Other factors that de-link library and information services from development issues could perhaps include:

- Fragmented legislation that does not adequately draw the framework for the provision of library and information services

- Down play of information services by national development plans

- Non appreciation of information as a commodity and therefore a cross-cutting and vital element in the development process

- Fragmented policies or lack of such policies to consolidate the establishment of a solid library and information service

- Lack of political goodwill to allow fuller exploitation of information as a resource necessary for sustainable development

- Inadequate lobbying and advocacy by information practitioners so that their role in society is better appreciated and understood

It should have been noted in the preceding section that information literacy has a large bearing in equipping the citizenry with the necessary capacities to participate in the processes of how they are governed, how decisions are made, etc. In fact, information literacy as a skill, allows individuals and communities to build capacity to effectively use information in everyday life. Information itself being a crosscutting commodity must always be viewed as the centre and fulcrum of sustainable development.

Sustainable development implies that kind of development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development). The following model shows how information supports the commonly acknowledged fields of sustainable development:
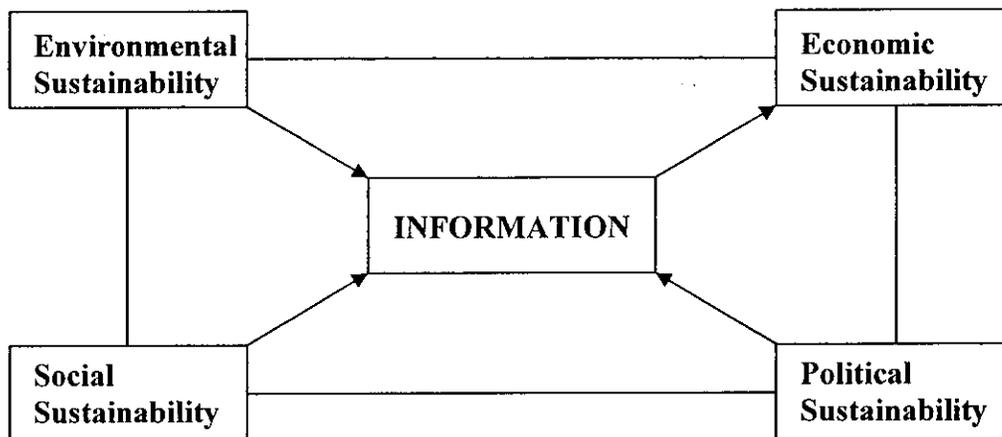
In view of the above, it is therefore perfectly rational and justified that each nation in Southern Africa formulates a library and information services policy framework that clearly segments all actors in the information sector and provides them with terms of reference to guide their operation and practice. Some countries in southern Africa have already put some policies in place, while others are yet to do so. Namibia for an example has a policy framework that was approved by cabinet way back in 1997 (Namibia. Legislation Committee, 1997). The template that is suggested below is largely drawn from the Namibian experience.

4. Library and Information Services Policy Framework

Southern Africa is a large and diverse part of the African continent. While all the countries in southern Africa share common history and culture, they also have

fundamental country-specific uniqueness that needs to taken into account when drawing up a policy framework for effective library and information services. The framework suggested below is therefore a general guideline, which where necessary, must be modified accordingly to answer to local needs.

The rational for any policy framework is to harmonise conceptions about certain institutions and to affirm national values regarding those institutions and the way they should be run and provide a service. For example, the policy framework for libraries and allied information agencies for Namibia was premised on the understanding that Namibia needed a policy on library and information services (Namibia. Legislation Committee, 1997). Already different professionals within the information sector – librarians, archivists, journalists, and publishers – could begin by selling the need for information services so that it is collectively owned. This should ideally involve lobbying of the government at both central and local levels, traditional and political leadership and members of the community so they buy into the idea. Once this is accomplished the steps that follow are more mechanical and therefore straightforward:

4.1. Make a case about the role of information in sustainable development. This assists the stakeholders in appreciating and understanding why the country needs a policy on library and information services.

4.2. Relate information to national development goals and objectives. Already this makes the stakeholders appraise the role played by information in development issues and concerns.

4.3. Establish and state principles for the development of library and information services in the country. Who is largely responsible for information services and on what vision is each of the services based? In Namibia the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture is the major provider of library and information services and its vision is built on four elements that underpin the provision of information for all – access, equity, quality and democracy (Namibia. Legislation Committee, 1997: 3 – 4).

4.4. Craft a vision, mission, and core values of the intended policy. Follow this with suggestions of strategic directions and initiatives. Suggestions of strategic directions should outline resources that are needed and how they can be mobilised, e.g., human resources, client development, information material, accommodation and facilities, information and communication technology, funding, organisation structure, coordination and research (Namibia. Legislation Committee, 1997: 6 – 7).

4.5. Conduct a baseline study of sectoral players and suggest how detailed policy proposals can be directed towards each player, that is, community libraries, school libraries, college libraries, university libraries, special libraries, national library, national archives, etc. For each of these players, state the vision and statement of principle, for example what is each player expected to do and as a principle, how is each player is expected to accomplish it?

5. Conclusion

This paper discussed good governance as a basis for sustainable information literacy. Both good governance and information literacy were viewed as pillars of sustainable development in southern Africa. Included in the discussion were issues surrounding governance and information literacy and how they open up opportunities for individuals and communities to build capacity and competencies to positively employ information. The discussion also posited how information is a pillar of sustainable development in southern Africa albeit the fact that it is not fully appreciated and exploited for sustainable development. The paper concludes with a suggestion for a policy framework for library and information services that can be adapted by countries in southern Africa. The Namibian experience is largely referred to as a blue print.

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