

UTILISING THE UK SERIALS RESOURCE: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES - THE EXPERIENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPUS BOOK LINK PROJECT

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This paper outlines the problems faced by libraries in developing countries, and describes two schemes run by Book Aid International to enable duplicate and surplus journal material to be sent to those libraries which can use them.



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Throughout the conference we have heard how to manage, buy, and use journals. My objective is to tell you about an alternative option for when the time comes to review your collection and to empty your shelves or warehouse of the stocks of journals you no longer wish to hold. My question to you is: What do you do with your excess stocks?

In the UK we could happily say that we have an excess of information, that access to information, well most information, is easy. This is an enviable position compared to that of our colleagues in developing countries. They are faced with major information shortages and struggle to obtain even the most basic of information, information that we in the UK take for granted. Imagine how you would feel if you had been invited to write an article for a learned journal and you lived in a rural village in the north of Uganda. It is the summer vacation from university. You need to check the spelling of a word but you do not own a dictionary. No one in your village owns one. The nearest library is 50 miles away and you have no transport. What would you do?

Book Aid International is a non-governmental organisation that works in partnership with organisations in developing countries to support their work in literacy, education, training and publishing, by utilising the vast quantities of books, journals and other materials produced in the UK to strengthen libraries, schools, universities and other organisations.

The organisation was set up in 1954 by Lady Ranfurly. Since then we have evolved and grown into the UK's largest materials donating agency. Approximately 80% of our work is in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the remainder in Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean. We work closely with organisations to identify what they need. This helps greatly to avoid sending materials that are irrelevant and unwanted. We employ qualified librarians to sort and select the books to ensure that our stock is the best quality possible. By carefully recycling the books and journals that are

donated, we are able to match them effectively to the requests. We have a number of projects which support different aspects of development: health; literacy, and education. Today I am going to concentrate on one of our projects, International Campus Book Link, as this is our main means of distributing journals.

Support for higher education, in particular universities, has in general decreased over the last few years. Following the lead of the World Bank most agencies are now targeting their aid towards basic or primary education. The result has been that universities in Africa, previously used to a good standard of support, are now faced with major cuts in outside aid. This has unfortunately combined with failing economies and a reduced availability of foreign currency. Universities, such as Moi University in Kenya, have had to dramatically cut back the numbers of journals to which they subscribe. In 1990 they were able to subscribe to 450 journals. By 1994 this had been reduced to only 27 titles. If you compare this figure to the numbers of journals to which a university in the UK subscribes, approximately 7,000, you can see clearly how desperate the situation is.

Book Aid International along with a number of other educational bodies, World University Service, Association of Commonwealth Universities, and the British Council, set up the International Campus Book Link Project in 1992. Research in 1988 had established that there was an urgent need for a project to provide ongoing support to Africa's universities. It was felt that the project should concentrate on supplying journals. The cancellation of many subscriptions was seen as being extremely damaging to the future of higher education and research in Africa. Journals form an essential medium for the exchange of ideas and the stimulation of new study.

The journals, donated through the project, are invaluable contributions to the universities. We receive many comments from our partners, such as the International Relations Institute of Cameroon, from whence, in response to an offer of a free subscription to *Computers and Communications in Africa*, came the reply, "I am delighted to accept your generous offer and seize this opportunity to thank Book Aid International for the tremendous work done in African institutions of higher education".

Since 1992 we have been building up close relationships with the libraries involved, in order to gain a clear picture of what is needed. We are currently working with 32 university and research libraries in 14 countries. These range from long established universities, such as Makerere University in Uganda, to newer institutes, such as Zimbabwe's National University of Science and Technology. Research libraries, such as the National Research Institute for Health in Ethiopia, also receive support from us.

Education is seen by most people as being a key to economic and social development. This view is supported by the World Bank which states, "Without education, development will not occur. Only an educated people can command the skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and for a better quality of life". Without education people are not free to make choices about the society in which they live. Access to information and the ability to interpret that information are rights that should be available to all of the world's people.

For most people education is equated with the ability to read and write and to then be given the skills to understand information and gain knowledge. The 1994 UNDP Human Development Report states that in Sub-Saharan Africa 51% of the population is literate. This is a figure that Book Aid International wants to help maintain and increase.

We also want to help the other 49% to develop literacy skills, and enable them to have access to basic information for themselves. Not being able to read or write means that they are reliant on others to interpret the facts for them and are therefore vulnerable to misinterpretation. The impact that this has on social and economic development is great: health campaigns will not be as successful; propaganda is easily fuelled, and basic human rights can be eroded.

The role of books in all of this has been brought to the fore in the past by organisations such as the World Bank. Studies have shown that books are vitally important in increasing educational development and impacting upon literacy levels. Without books learning is restricted to the ability of the teacher. Free thinking is not developed because students are forced by the lack of books to learn by rote, as opposed to interpreting the

facts for themselves. Books cannot help but be thought of in a dispassionate educational sense. They lose their appeal of adventure and become not a treasure trove of ideas and thoughts, but a means to an end, to pass exams, to get to the next stage.

Despite the emphasis on the importance of books, many students on reaching university find that their libraries have shortages of up-to-date books and journals. The excitement of being awarded a place at university is soon replaced by disillusionment at the lack of resources available for study and research. The number of available textbooks is declining rapidly and is likely to continue to do so as currencies devalue and foreign exchange becomes harder to find. My recent visit to Malawi brought home to me the realities of this situation. In October 1994 there were eight Kwacha to £1. By December this had escalated to twenty five Kwacha to £1. The impact of this upon subscriptions to UK journals is disastrous for libraries which are already having to cope with reduced acquisition budgets.

As you are all aware, journals are vitally important for research and development. They are a primary means by which information is disseminated and a forum for discussion and debate of new ideas. They facilitate research and development and without access to them the teaching and research capabilities of Africa's universities is seriously undermined. However, they are expensive and are often one of the first items to be cut back.

The mechanics of the International Campus Book Link project are simple yet effective. We use a database to match the requests for journals to donations. This means that we only send materials that are wanted by the universities. The database means that it is an easy matter to keep track of what is coming in and what is going out. This system of control ensures that quality and relevance are put first to guarantee that we meet the needs of the universities with the greatest efficiency.

When a university accepts the invitation to join the project, we ask for a list of the journals that they would like to receive. The requests are entered onto the database to be matched to UK donations as they arise. We also ask the universities to specify the subject areas in which

they are interested. This enables us to offer them material not listed but which could be of interest to them. Many libraries lack access to the up-to-date bibliographic information vital for selection and acquisition. Therefore they are often unaware of what publications are available.

Donating material to us is straightforward. A short letter, or quick telephone call, informing us of what you have, is all that is necessary to get the ball rolling. Once we know what you have, we can let you know what the next stage will be. If we have requests waiting to be fulfilled, we will ask you to send the journals to us, clearly marked with our vibrant green labels. If there are no requests and we are interested in the journal, we will ask you to hold onto it while it is offered to universities which have shown an interest in the subject. This can usually take a couple of months.

We get donations from a variety of sources in the UK. These include libraries such as the Medical Research Council libraries, which have been donating to us since the beginning of 1993. Useful journals that they have donated have been the *New England Journal of Medicine*, requested by Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda, and the *British Journal of Cancer*, which was sent to the University of Ghana's Medical School. Individuals also donate material to us and make up approximately half the donations that we receive. Recently more support has come from publishers who donate both back-runs of material and current subscriptions.

Book Aid International sends tertiary books, in response to requests, to a variety of institutions in developing countries. Many of these are now sent to African universities through the International Campus Book Link project. Both journals and books, as well as being requested, have to meet other criteria. Physical condition is very important because we have to send material that will last a reasonable amount of time once it has reached its destination. We have limited resources and have to ensure that whatever we send will have as long and as useful a lifetime as possible. It would be a waste of time for everyone concerned for us to send a journal or book that only lasted a few months. For some subjects the content can be more flexible than others. We have to be especially careful when sending medical material and we do not accept material over five years old.

Other subjects, such as history, can be up to 15 years old, while African material can be much older.

Journals have to be in complete year runs. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, we do not have the resources to administer the sending of single issues, and secondly, I can imagine no frustration worse than finding that your library holds the journal which you require but the issue that you need is missing. Since the university library is often the only resource available in the country, your search would end very quickly.

Once we have accepted the materials that you have, we will ask you to send them to us in London. We do not have a transport service ourselves but rely on the help of volunteers and other outside help. Many collections can be made through local Rotary Clubs, which volunteer to collect donations for us. However, as we grow, and are offered larger quantities of material, this arrangement is coming under increasing pressure. So anything that you can do to help us and the Rotary is always greatly appreciated.

An effective journal donation scheme has a good relationship with those receiving the materials. This is vital in order to send material that is useful and wanted. Sending vast quantities of unwanted material is pointless and poses more problems than it solves. Recently I was in Uganda evaluating the project at Makerere University where I met Robert Kakembo, Medical Librarian at the Albert Cook Medical Library. He emphasised to me the importance of the good relationship between us and the university librarian in ensuring that only wanted books and journals are sent. He has a major problem in knowing what to do with unwanted donations. They take up too much space and are impossible to give to others. He is not in a position to throw them away and yet he needs to. Finding ways to dispose of stock is a familiar story to all librarians in the UK. However, we must realise that donating material is not just a matter of clearing our shelves. It is a matter of finding a home for them, where they will be both wanted and used. This is why Book Aid International is careful to match donations and requests.

It is important for us to liaise with others working in the same field, mainly to avoid wasting valuable resources through duplication

but also to exchange ideas and develop new projects. We work with other journal donation agencies, such as Australian Centre for Publications Acquired for Development, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and others, to exchange information and to keep the other programmes up-to-date with our activities.

There are many different journal projects throughout the world. Many are run by established organisations which have a great deal of experience and have learnt valuable lessons to pass on to other donating agencies. They recognise that a major problem with journal donation schemes is ensuring that the scheme is ongoing and continuous over a long period of time. Many schemes only last one, two or three years and after that time funding is stopped and with it the supply of journals. For example the University of Nairobi was able to renew 160 journal subscriptions in 1989 out of an original list of 650. In 1990 the 160 subscriptions were stopped as the funding was for one year only. This poses even greater problems when the journals, purchased under such short term schemes, are core journals. When they stop, the university's access to vital current information also ceases, with repercussions throughout the faculties.

In order to overcome the problem of sustaining the information flow we took the International Campus Book Link project one step further and developed the Subscription Support Scheme. It was set up in 1994 with funding from Citibank and facilitates ongoing donations from people in the UK which can then be sent to the same university each year. Many professionals in the UK subscribe to a journal or receive it as part of their society membership. They may only look at the journal once and then assign it to their shelves. Every so often they will look at the pile and wonder how to get rid of it, preferably to a good home. The Subscription Support Scheme offers the solution. We ask people to send their journal to us at the end of each year. It can then be forwarded to a university which has requested it. The person is assured that their journal is going to good home and the university is assured of receiving it each year. The advantages to the universities are considerable. They can now plan

resources and research that was previously denied to them due to the unpredictability of donations.

Since 1994 the number of people contributing to the Subscription Support Scheme has increased from 150 to 300. We hope to increase this figure to 500 by the end of 1995.

We are very pleased that a number of publishers have become involved in the scheme. These include: Sage Publications, which has agreed to donate 150 subscriptions for the next three years; the British Medical Journal Publishing Group, which has also agreed to donate 50 subscriptions for three years; Blackwell Science, Taylor and Francis, Scientific Press and Oxford University Press are also donating subscriptions. Other publishers, Carfax, Chapman & Hall, Cambridge University Press, and Bowker Saur, have also shown a great deal of interest.

Support from publishers is an important contribution to the work of Book Aid International. This has great importance for the International Campus Book Link project as it grows and the demand for current subscriptions outstrips the demand for back-runs. Areas such as social sciences and humanities, where people tend to hold onto their journals longer, are under-represented in the project. With the publishers' help we are addressing this imbalance. This is very important to universities such as Moi University in Kenya, where over 50% of the student population are studying these subjects.

I hope that this paper has illustrated the vital need for information in developing countries. The demand for books and journals is far greater than the supply. Book Aid International provides an effective means of recycling some of our excess information in the UK to the advantage of many people in developing countries. Through projects like International Campus Book Link, it is possible to target this information to specific areas in need of support. What we are doing is,

however, but a drop in the ocean and much more needs to be done to meet this desperate shortage.

It is difficult to imagine being unable to find the information that you need, or at least a close alternative. Try to envisage, however, a library that has odd issues of journals, most of which date back to the early eighties, and that library is your only source of information about the subject of your studies. This is the situation that I saw in the universities I visited in Uganda and Malawi. The Albert Cook Medical Library had hardly any current journals. The most recent ones I saw were odd issues of 1994 BMJs. While I was looking around, I saw numerous students, heads down studying, working hard to pass exams, but many of the textbooks that they were using dated from the 1970s.

Seeing this I am impressed by the many students, teachers and researchers in Africa, who, without the access to information that we take for granted, overcome these obstacles. We can only admire the determination and resilience that they possess to persevere and gain degrees, postgraduate qualifications and PhDs.

It is our hope that by working in partnership with libraries and others, Book Aid International can support education and development to provide more opportunities for people in developing countries to achieve their potential.

In conclusion, I return to the thought with which we began: What do you do with your excess stocks?

* If you would like to know more about the work of Book Aid International and the International Campus Book Link project, please contact us at: 39-41 Coldharbour Lane, London, SE5 9NR, Tel: 0171 733 3577, Fax: 0171 978 8006, e-mail: rls@gn.apc.org

Please do not send materials without contacting us first.