

Letters to the Editor

Editor:

I agree with Mark Perkins that there has not been much debate about the MLAs 'Guidance on the Management of Controversial Materials in Public Libraries' (*Focus* 40(1)).

Indeed, I would ask 'what debate?' because librarians have shown a remarkable lack of interest in this subject. When the draft guidance was first issued there was very little response from individuals or local authorities.

The revised Guidance is much improved, but will still tend to make librarians risk-averse in their stock selection. This is what happened when Clause 28 made it illegal for public libraries to 'promote homosexuality'. Even after Clause 28 was repealed, many libraries still refused to stock the PinkPaper.

The Guidance will also have a divisive and damaging effect on community relations, particularly in areas with large Muslim

populations. The parallel I would draw here is with the Poll Tax legislation, which enabled local authorities to use public library membership records to track down people who refused to pay the tax. This breached the trust which many working-class communities had with their local libraries.

We do not need the Guidance because we already have robust stock-management policies in place which are able to deal with 'controversial materials'.

The Guidance effectively makes librarians agents of the state, working on behalf of the security and intelligence forces to gather information on library users. Big Brother would be proud of such a development which has been created by MLA and endorsed by CILIP.

If librarians do not defend freedom of information and freedom of expression, then who will?

John Pateman

Editor:

Without doubt, the Lubuto Library Project is providing an excellent and much needed library service to orphans and vulnerable children in Lusaka (*Focus* 40(1), 4-8). However, the information provided in the article left me less convinced that it embodies 'the key principles and practices of sustainable development' (pp. 7/8).

Respecting national institutions and the local environment and drawing on the local professional infrastructure are stated as important. Yet there is no mention of how the project complements the network of public libraries that have been operated for over 40 years by the Zambia Library Service (under Ministry of Education).

Nor does it appear to have made use of the experience and expertise of the librarians running this service under difficult economic conditions. In the same way, whilst reference is made to the use of local librarians to undertake training specifically for the project, there is no indication that this is part of or enhancing the library education and training courses already existing in Zambia (at degree, diploma and certificate level).

At the moment it would appear that all the funding and most of the expertise for the project comes from the USA. Even the book collections are built in the USA and shipped to Zambia.

Are any of the costs being met locally, either from the public or private sector? Has

a credible cost-sharing plan been built into the project from the start? Can the level of expenditure required to meet the costs of running the libraries be raised locally? It is always easier – and therefore very tempting – to start a new library or library service. But the costs of maintaining it recur year after year.

The Lubuto Library Project is not starting

Jane Meyers replies:

Diana Rosenberg raises a number of important questions about the Lubuto Library Project's (LLP) focus on sustainable development. After decades of disappointing initiatives that have assumed a 'library desert', Diana's scepticism is understandable.

That said, the LLP grew up from the grass roots and our co-operation with Zambia's library institutions and resources has been close and continuous. In fact, Lubuto's approach has been cited as a model in partnership and networking to promote reading in Africa.¹ Unfortunately there is only enough space here to address a few aspects of this complex subject. Readers wishing to find further information are encouraged to visit <<http://www.lubuto.org>>.

The Zambian educational establishment's complete ownership of Lubuto Libraries offers perhaps the best attempt at sustainability that any library development effort in an economically stressed world can achieve.

The libraries are built on land provided

in a 'library desert'. It could be that it has already considered what is being offered by the existing libraries and librarians. But so that we, the readers, can put the project into context, perhaps the Editor can commission something on the current state of public, including children's, libraries and library education and training in Zambia?

Diana Rosenberg

by the host organisation and government and are owned by them from inception – and the libraries are designed to require limited resources to maintain and run. All of the recurring operational costs are the responsibility of the host, with support from the Zambian government and the local community.

Lubuto buildings, designed by an accomplished Zambian architect, incorporate traditional techniques and living patterns, which help keep continuing costs to a minimum. A careful sustainability plan was recently developed with Zambian Open Community Schools (ZOCS) for building three Lubuto Libraries, hosted by community schools, to serve street, vulnerable and out-of-school children.

LLP's approach creates a framework in which local organisations and Zambia's government and library community work together, supported by external resources such as the long-term in-service training of Lubuto librarians by VSO volunteers, where appropriate.

The MoU with the Ministry of Education that was referenced in the article provides for co-ordination with the Zambia Library Service and for the involvement of Zambian librarians in planning and training.

LLP recognises the importance of sup-

¹ Erató-Nadia Bizos and Francis Sampa, *Promoting Reading! Factors contributing to the success of reading development projects in Africa*. (Paris: Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Working Group on Books and Learning Materials, 2008).

porting the library community. Lubuto co-founded ZBBY to address not only the almost complete lack of relevant children's books in Zambia in any language but, specifically, the desperate need for interesting, beautifully illustrated trade books in Zambian languages. Elizabeth Msadabwe, former head of the Zambia Library Service, is ZBBY's Chairperson. Workshops planned as ZBBY's initial activities will increase capacity for teaching, librarianship, writing, illustration and publishing for children in the country.

LLP's headquarters is located in the USA because the organization was developed on a shoe-string, not because of any dependence on US funding and expertise. Many of Lubuto Libraries' start-up costs are met in Zambia, by both public and private sources, and all of the ongoing operational costs are supported in Zambia. That said, we have not lost sight of the experience with free and openly accessible libraries providing equitable access to educational and information services in the United States, which have provided opportunities for self-betterment for over a century.

These days it seems that librarians worldwide bemoan the lack of appreciation of the importance of their efforts. LLP is working hard in Zambia to establish libraries'

critical role in providing equitable access to educational resources.

The problem we face is that library services to children, and especially to out-of-school children, have been almost completely left out owing to a lack of understanding of the specialized nature of children's librarianship and the developmental need for regular exposure to good children's literature – either through books or (traditionally in Africa) storytelling. The Fulbright professor at UNZA, mentioned in my article, is the initial 'enhancement' of library (and teacher) education, along with ZBBY's efforts.

The welcome extended by Zambians to Lubuto's programme is a reflection of their deep-seated desire to provide educational possibilities for their children that go beyond the too often grim current reality. They want to see their young people grow and develop with a strong sense of identity and self-esteem, with ideas that will fuel their imaginations, and the skills that will allow them to create and communicate.

The LLP works because it builds on this common understanding, in order to meet the needs of the communities that it serves. And *that* is, simply, the best practice of librarianship in *any* context.

Jane Meyers

Editor:

This trio of letters – ICT – appears all over the place. But what does it mean? As far as I can make out, the I stands for information, the C stands for communications, the T stands for technology, and the whole thing stands for Information and Communications Technology. And this phrase seems to refer to the mechanics of the transmission of information. So far, so good.

What does not make any sense, to me at least, is all the ballyhoo about today's ICT. It does not make sense because people have been using 'communications technology' for millennia. Think of the technology involved in setting up a chain of beacons, or semaphore stations, or heliograph stations. Long-distance *wireless* communications technologies, that could transmit information much faster than a man could run or a dispatch rider's horse