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## *The African Information Crisis*
### (Co-Editors Al Kagan and Colin Darch)

# Introduction

This thematic issue of the *ACAS Bulletin* is an attempt to open debate on an under-studied and under-theorised aspect of the wider African socio-economic crisis. We have attempted to bring together librarians, information workers, publishers, and media experts, practitioners and theoreticians, to discuss from their varying viewpoints the massive problems that they face in their professional lives, often in Africa. Some of our authors are people who are often prevented by the daily pressures of the information crisis from stepping back to reflect on its technical and above all its *political* character, and as editors of this thematic issue of the *Bulletin* we want to thank them for recognising the importance of contributing to this discussion and for taking the time to do so. We return to this point below.

Why use the word crisis? Terminology is important because it informs and defines how we react politically to the things we name. The fact that almost all African countries (except, in some respects, South Africa) lag far, far behind the industrialised North in terms of Internet and Web availability, in terms of access to an independent press in an appropriate local language, in terms of a neighbourhood library structure that is "free" in the sense that the individual does not have to pay at transaction level — all these and the many other aspects of the African information crisis constitute just that: a crisis. As a medical term, a crisis is "the point in the progress of a disease when an important development or change takes place that is decisive of recovery or death" — the English word comes originally from the Greek verb meaning "to decide". By their very nature crises are acute moments, usually requiring some kind of significant intervention to resolve them one way or the other. The death of the patient remains a real possibility.

There are changes afoot in the way our globalised world handles information. Information is now defined and measured in bits and bytes, the crucial first step in its com-modification. As soon as information becomes a commodity, it ceases to be freely available to the citizen, and it ceases to be part of the public domain. The global intellectual property regime has been changing for over a decade in order to facilitate what amounts to the privatisation of the scientific record of humanity, in the widest sense. In this context, we have thus rejected neutralist expressions such as "the information gap" and "the digital divide", precisely because they represent the African continent's position in the global competition for control of information as if we were simply behind by a goal or two in some kind of "knowledge football". In reality, most African people are not even on the field, have perhaps not even been allowed through the gates of the stadium.

The information crisis is an integral part of the crisis of political economy in Africa as a whole, and like that larger crisis may, perhaps, be managed or alleviated by short-term panaceas, but will not be fixed by them. In the information competition, there is little short-term prospect of African countries playing catch-up, but if we do not somehow find solutions to the kinds of problems delineated by our contributors, then the outlook is indeed bleak.

There has been much discussion of the so-called "digital divide," another expression that disguises rather than clarifies what amount to systemic inequalities in access to digital information, whether infrastructural, lin-guistic, or culturally determined. The crisis of inequality in access to digital information is an old problem in a new bottle, but with one critical new characteristic. Inequality of access is intensifying at an accelerating rate. The most obvious list of barriers would include insufficient access to electricity, computer environments compromised by heat, humidity and dust, inadequate communication infra-structures, few maintenance personnel, large illiterate populations, a dearth of hard currency, the language barrier, underdeveloped national information policies, an

inability to upgrade equipment, and the absence of appropriate local content. In comparison, the mighty United States has more computers than the entire rest of the world combined. All African countries now have some kind of access to the Internet (Jensen 2001, 2002). But this is extremely unevenly distributed, with a massive concentration in a few countries, and within those countries, mostly in the largest cities. Not surprisingly, Internet access follows the distribution of electricity and telephones. To quote a sample statistic, 38 African countries each have fewer than 5,000 dial-up Internet subscribers.

There are three main areas in which the traditional public domain models of inform-ation delivery are currently under threat. They are first, sweeping changes in the balance of intellectual property rights in favour of rights owners; second, the manifest inability of most African societies to sustain the information infrastructure necessary for social innovation and democratic practice; and third, the overwhelming and omnipresent burden of debt in Africa.

A forceful global drive to extend intellectual property rights into new areas has been in progress since the early 1990s, in what has been described as a kind of intellectual enclosure movement. There is strong resistance to this ongoing contraction of the public domain, but the likely outcome of the battle is not yet clear. In the modern global economy, the enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPRs) is a cruel and risky game, and poor countries make little impact with their complaints about such intangibles as social justice and the free flow of information. Rights holders in intellectual property have gone onto the offensive, privatising information and knowledge for profit. Copyright law is a key weapon in this process. The World Bank argues, with a certain hesitancy, that

> "[t]here are reasons to believe that the enforcement of IPRs has a positive net impact on growth prospects. On the domestic level, growth is spurred by higher rates of innovation — al-though this tends to be fairly insignificant until

countries move into the middle-income bracket." (World Bank 2001: 129).

As the qualifying phrase in the above quotation implies, the poorest countries actually *suffer* from the exploitation inherent in the process of privatisation of indigenous knowledge.

At a broader level, even the director of Unesco's Information and Informatics Division felt compelled to write in January 2000, in the sober French monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*, that 'far from being a mere technical adjustment [...] changes to intellectual property law are a political matter.' The multi-national corporations, he continued, are 'patenting everything they can, [...] committing *daylight robbery on the common property of humanity*' [emphasis added]. If the balance shifts any further in favour of rights holders, harmful social consequences will likely follow. The commodification of information in the global economy is an ominous prospect for librarians and others, trained in the liberal tradition of the free flow of information, and for scientists who believe in full disclosure as the basis of scientific method.

As the struggle over IPRs continues, there is also a quiet and overdue acknowledgment within the information professions that the 'Alexandrian model' of never-ending library growth is in all probability unsustainable. In the South, libraries are usually recent foundations, modelled on Northern paradigms. Libraries and information systems in African countries find it hard to sustain themselves financially and organizationally at any level of growth at all, and have been in that situation for quite a while. This trend is not in itself essentially a characteristic of poverty, although poverty exacerbates it. Rather, it is implicit in the Alexandrian library model, in which the ideal library collects 'everything', just in case, and grows forever.

But the major obstacle to the development of adequate information infrastructures in Africa — as indeed, it is an obstacle to all other kinds of development — remains indebtedness. African debt continues to rise inexorably. Sub-Saharan Africa includes 33 of the 42 countries classified

as 'highly indebted' by the World Bank. Nearly forty years ago, in 1962, the debt burden of sub-Saharan Africa amounted to $3 billion; by 1980, the amount was $142 billion; and at the end of 2000 foreign indebtedness for the region stood at $231 billion, and posed, in the words of the Jubilee 2000 campaign, 'a fatal impediment to Africa's development'. Similarly, from the end of the Second World War until the 1970s, existing disparities in wealth between the richest and the poorest increased only slightly. But since then, neoliberalism, concretely expressed and enforced as the World Bank's notorious SAPs (Structural Adjustment Programmes), has helped massively to accelerate the growth of inequality. According to the United Nations, the richest countries were only three times richer than the poorest countries in 1820. But the ratio had widened to thirty-five times by 1950, forty-four times by 1973, and seventy-two times by 1992 (United Nations, 2000).

Access to information is both an important *prerequisite* for economic, social, cultural, and political advancement, and an important *outcome* of those processes. Any discussion of the information crisis in Africa and elsewhere needs to be rooted in an analysis of global power relations, including economic in-equalities, which are, as we have seen, widening increasingly rapidly. But in the same way that the ideologically loaded term "free trade" serves to mask real issues, our uncritical use of such expressions as the "digital divide" allows matters that are in a fundamental sense political to be disguised as merely technical. "Free" trade is not free, nor is it designed to facilitate the international flow of goods and services. It is, rather, a system to allow transnational corporations to maximize profit. The North requires poor countries to open their markets, but there is no reciprocation. Western export subsidies and trade barriers continue to cost Africa and the developing world billions of dollars every year. The tariff barriers protecting industrialised countries against manufactures from the Third World are four times higher than those *within* the industrialized North. For agriculture alone, tariffs against the South totalled $245 billion in 2000, five times more

than the total of Northern development aid in the same year. (Beatty 2002) It would be naïve to suppose that information, now seen as a form of capital, would be treated any differently. In an uncharacteristically candid moment one major industrialist gave the game away by admitting that he would

> "define globalization as the freedom for my group of companies to invest where it wants when it wants, to produce what it wants, to buy and sell where it wants, and support the fewest restrictions possible coming from labour laws and social conventions." (Percy Barnevik, President of ABB Industrial Group, quoted by Greenfield 2000)

As we write, the World Trade Organization is busy negotiating GATS (the General Agreement on Trade in Services), which will, among a wide range of other structures, regulate such fundamental information providers as public libraries — and which will almost certainly try to establish a framework of enforcable international rules for their eventual privatisation. Thankfully, the WTO, a powerful but unaccountable bureaucracy that nevertheless makes policies that govern our lives, has had anything but clear sailing. The growth of a worldwide anti-globalization alliance — including old and new leftists, anarchists, greens, feminists and multitudes of ordinary, irate citizens — is the source for a sense of optimism that these impersonal but real tendencies can be effectively opposed, and that the victory of globalization for transnational corporate benefit is not inevitable in every realm. When the *Economist* calls the movement "angry and effective" (23 September 2000) and the Swiss president resorts to quoting Marx in self-justification at the World Economic Forum, clearly something significant is going on (Cashdan, 2001).

When we first started work on this project to put together a special issue of the *ACAS Bulletin* on the African information crisis, it was our intention to try to identify a variety of African contributors who would address a broad range of concerns *both politically and technically*. As we

have argued above, we believed that the technical issues only make sense when understood in the framework of the broad political economy of information at a global level. We wanted to include librarians, publishers, academics, computer specialists and other information workers, both in order to appeal to a broad readership and to bring together differing perspectives on common issues. If we had intended to address a narrower readership, especially from our own field of librarianship, we might have had an easier time. The list of potential contributors that we put together included men and women from a diverse range of ethnic and geographical backgrounds both within Africa and overseas. However, as readers can see for themselves, our intention to recognise or create such a diversity of viewpoints was not as concretely realised as we might have wished in the end result.

This experience constituted a concrete and practical lesson in the workings of the information crisis on the ground, and in how privilege is able to reproduce itself. Information workers, librarians, publishers, and academics from rich countries and from the richer sectors of South African society have at their disposal the time, skills and resources necessary to enable them to theorise experiences politically, and in a discourse appropriate to the way in which we expect to consume academic or activist output. Conversely, even though ACAS articles are supposedly short and provocative reflections, many information workers — in Africa or elsewhere — are so closely engaged in daily struggles with little support, that they have no access to a theoretical space that would enable them to engage effectively with the academy or with activism in this kind of endeavour. So in just the same way as privilege reproduces itself, so does its contrary, disadvantage. Nonetheless, it is certain that more and more information workers on the continent will come forward to break the silence around the political economy of information work in the framework of indebtedness, poverty and the ongoing privatisation of content. Believing as we do in the necessity of synthesising theory and practice, we encourage them to come forward.

This project is related indirectly to the work of one of the co-editors in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). Kagan is convenor of the IFLA Social Responsibilities Discussion Group, whose mandate is to address what it terms the "growing gap between the information rich and the information poor, both between countries and within countries."

Joel Samoff's article opens the issue with an exploration of the nature of knowledge, who controls it, and how it is controlled. In examining the information work of the World Bank, he shows how the bank's manipulation of knowledge is an important aspect of its neo-liberal agenda. He demonstrates how World Bank aid is actually used as a lever, to favour and finance the reproduction of Western projects and their control of information, rather than local or indigenous knowledge production. Finally, Samoff notes that a process that is political, rather than overtly scientific, is employed to validate the knowledge thus produced.

South African activist Jenny Radloff describes ways in which information and communi-cation technologies (ICTs) can be used as a force for empowerment. Her special focus is on the deployment of electronic communication networks '— already in place — to empower African women across the continent. She explains that such networks are normally and subversively committed to "the production of indigenous knowledges that resist dominant ideologies about the superiority of masculine and Northern mean-ings." Radloff shows how communication technologies can be employed as tools to help rural women fulfill their needs, although she is aware of key contradictions that emerge in this process. The development of these technologies, for example, simultaneously constructs an increase in the marginalization of those women who are without them.

Tanzanian publisher Walter Bgoya illuminates the role of the African publishing industry in the strengthening of current neo-colonial education models. He shows how the mode of transmission, the foreign languages of instruction, act to

disempower students and promote a generalised cultural sense of inferiority, as well as promoting what amounts to colonial content. Bgoya laments the policies, imposed by international donors and funders in the framework of globalization, which have effectively silenced the anti-neo-colonial discourse of African leaders. Such a conjunction of forces, he argues, leads to a culture that is, in the end, hostile to books and reading and the acquisition and creation of knowledge.

Co-editor Colin Darch and library educator Peter Underwood, both from the University of Cape Town, explore how individuals in the Third World can be empowered through information literacy, arguing at the same time that the very concept, almost coterminous with the academic project broadly conceived, really only makes sense in a world in which a critical gap in information awareness between the inforich and the infopoor is a basic reality, and in which rapid technical change is a constant. In the traditional Western model of university education, privileged and well-prepared students were expected to become information literate by themselves, a demand that effectively sets up the historically disadvantaged for failure. Darch and Underwood also explore an example of the effective use of information literacy to support political activism.

South African analyst Keyan Tomaselli explores the effects of globalization on the media, the constraints imposed and the new freedoms offered. He shows how African governments no longer have ironclad control of the airwaves with which to broadcast their own self-referential propaganda. Ironically, the transnational media companies have opened up potential political space that are new, but at the same time have sidetracked and betrayed the opportunity by replacing information with sensation in order to sell advertising.

These authors demonstrate in various ways that the development and use of information and communication technologies in Africa both create and are created by powerful political currents. The contemporary African information crisis has developed as a direct corollary of the emergence of the information society in the capitalist North,

and is the result of a conjuncture of earlier information problems, accelerated by rapid technological change, an unsympathetic juridical regime, and the brutal policies of globalisation. The power relations between the rich and the poor are reinforced by the effective control over ICTs exercised by the former colonial powers, the United States, and such multilateral agencies as the World Bank. Aid and debt are cynically used as levers to maintain these relations. The African publishing industry works within this context, and transnational media companies promote consumption rather than debate. Nevertheless, progressive forces can hijack new technologies. African women have begun to do just that, and the worldwide antiglobalization networks show the power of electronic organizing. By starting to establish a broad framework of analysis for the information crisis in order to understand the deep processes at work, we may be able to continue the struggle, win small victories, and learn to use the same tools that reinforce existing power relations against them.

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## Knowledge Banks and Gateways:
### The Changing of Forms of Foreign Aid and Influence[1]

### Joel Samoff

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That *information is power* is so widely accepted that has become a cliche. In the contemporary world of aid ("development assistance"), with triumphant capitalism as the context, economics as the dominating social science, and business as the appropriate model for public institutions, that understanding of information has been transformed into the claim that *knowledge is development*. In a knowledge economy, where information, it is claimed, becomes a more important factor of production than land, labor, or capital, eliminating poverty requires "knowledge affluence."[2]

> Knowledge is critical for development, because everything we do depends on knowledge... For countries in the vanguard of the world economy, the balance between knowledge and resources has shifted so far toward the former that knowledge has become perhaps the most important factor determining the standard of living — more so than land, than tools, than labor. (p. 16)

International institutions, country donors, and the broader development community are rapidly coming to understand that knowledge is central to development — that knowledge *is* development. (p. 130)[3]

The enthusiasm for this perspective is complemented by the excitement about the rapidly developing technology for storing, manipulating, and transmitting information. The prospects are attractive: information, categorized, organized, and focused on development issues, readily accessible from anywhere in the world. Bits and bytes travel at nearly the speed of light, relatively unconstrained by the international exchange rules that control and limit the flows of capital, goods, and people. Political

controls, too, whether international or national, can readily be circumvented when improved and steadily less expensive technology is within the reach of the world's poorest citizens or their neighbors.

Perhaps a radical transition to the knowledge economy will reduce the disparities between the most and the least affluent and reduce or eliminate poverty. Perhaps. Yet, the era of the knowledge explosion, dramatic technological breakthroughs, and vastly expanded access to computing and electronic communications has seen an increase in inequality, both globally and nationally. Notwithstanding the seemingly inevitable and inexorable push of globalization, no transition is automatically democratizing or empowering.

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*Indeed, the very information technology that holds such promise for improving things can also be used to institutionalize authority, entrench inequality, and routinize oppression.*

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While an economic transition may open possibilities, it is people, organizations, and institutions who convert those possibilities into realities. Hence, in the absence of concrete manifestations of efforts of that sort, there is no reason to think that a transition to a knowledge economy will necessarily be any better for poor people or poor countries than whatever preceded it. Indeed, those who are currently powerful and influential will be best placed to manipulate the new setting and new rules to their advantage.

It is striking that the core notion, knowledge management, has such wide support. Are the echoes of *thought control* so faint they cannot be heard? Rather than uncritical acclaim — perhaps the mesmerizing effect of a very long period of

apparent sustained growth, at least in the affluent countries? — "knowledge management" ought to generate immediate concern. Which knowledge, which in practice means *whose* knowledge, is to be managed? What sort of management, that is, *control*, is envisioned? Who are to be the managers? To whom are the managers, and the knowledge management process more generally, to be accountable? Technology did not create subordination and exploitation. People did that. Nor can technology itself bring justice, or equity, or peace to our very troubled world. People must do that too. Indeed, the very information technology that holds such promise for improving things can also be used to institutionalize authority, entrench inequality, and routinize oppression.

With that sobering caution in mind, it is essential to explore the promises and problems of an emerging use of information technology to promote development in the world's poorer countries. I am concerned here specifically with knowledge management initiatives within the context of the aid relationship and with one major manifestation of those initiatives, the creation of publicly accessible education development knowledge databases by national and international funding and technical assistance agencies, especially the World Bank.[4] It is useful and timely to explore the understandings embedded in this effort. It is especially important to examine the notions of knowledge and knowledge creation, of the roles of knowledge in development, and of learning more generally that underlie these initiatives.

As of mid-2000, many of the important databases, including the World Bank's complete Live Data Base, Best Practice System, several projected education databases, and perhaps others remain restricted to internal use.[5] The most recent World Bank initiative, the Development Gateway, a very ambitious, broad-reaching, and well funded (the initial budget called for $69.5 m over the first three years) mega website to coexist with the World Bank's already extensive external website, was in its startup phase during 2000/2001.[6]

## Knowledge Management Systems and Aid to Education

Knowledge management and knowledge management systems are currently high on the agendas of the funding and technical assistance agencies that provide external aid to education, reflecting a convergence of two recent trends. The first as noted is the widely articulated sense that we live now in the Information Era.[7] Computers, or rather transistors, enabled this technological leap, expected to be far more dramatic in its consequences for human society than the invention of movable type, or steam or internal combustion engines. Quite simply, those who understand that transition can take advantage of it; those who do not, fall farther behind.

The second trend is the assertion by the funding and technical assistance agencies that although it is their funding that attracts attention, their principal role is increasingly to provide information and advice. Those agencies have of course always provided advice, often tied to financial support. As the World Bank explains, in the information era its development expertise and advisory services are even more important than its funds.

> [The World Bank's] ...main contribution must be advice, designed to help governments develop education policies suitable for the circumstances of their countries.[8]

Launched in October 1996, the World Bank's knowledge management system seeks to make the Bank a clearinghouse for knowledge about development—not just a corporate memory of best practices, but also a collector and disseminator of the best development knowledge from outside organizations.[9]

> Thus, if we are to become a Knowledge Bank, we must define our main product more in terms of advice (i.e., our greatest source of competitive advantage) and less in terms of lending . . .[10]

Other agencies characterize their focus and priorities in similar ways.[11] Here, then, is to be the new face of foreign aid.

The World Bank's 1998/1999 *World Development Report: Knowledge for Development* and its defining background paper, "What is Knowledge Management." emphasize that message.[12] Both incorporate the World Bank's description of the current situation and a sermon about what is to be done. The World Bank has moved energetically to develop its own knowledge management system, to which in 1999 it allocated approximately 4 percent of its annual administrative budget, a figure Denning apparently regards as low.[13]

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*As it asserts its role as a development advisory service and knowledge manager, the World Bank becomes even more powerful and dominating, in both affluent and poor countries.*

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Several electronic databases have been created within the World Bank's Education Knowledge Management System, at least some already externally accessible.[14] The World Bank has engaged the academic community in this database construction effort, including the principal U.S. professional association for comparative educators, the Comparative and International Education Society.[15] The World Bank is also funding an effort to "collect, document and disseminate indigenous knowledge," which is then to be incorporated into the World Bank's knowledge management system.[16]

### Development Knowledge Databases

While a rapidly expanding literature associates several meanings to the term, knowledge management within organizations seems to have two core concerns: (1) to improve the flow of information, including storage and retrieval, and especially to reduce bottlenecks and blockages in that flow; and thereby (2) to increase the likelihood that people who make decisions will

have access to information generally located at a distance. The promise is that development knowledge generated in one setting can be nearly directly and nearly instantly available in other settings.

Sharing information is certainly desirable and clearly has potential developmental benefits. But the funding and technical assistance agencies' approach to that objective, particularly the initiative to create and manage development knowledge databases, is fundamentally problematic. The manner and pace of its inception already suggest several troubling patterns, presented here in schematic form.[17]

1. The establishment of knowledge databases and gateways reflects a very important but unhighlighted equation of *information* and *knowledge*. Although Denning, the World Bank, and perhaps others regularly say that *knowledge* is not simply *information*[18] in practice the knowledge management literature regularly does just that, for example treating as synonymous "information management" and "knowledge management." Knowledge management documents commonly refer to "a piece of knowledge," indicating that knowledge exists as discrete units and that it comes in larger chunks that can be sub-divided into smaller pieces. Similarly, knowledge is regularly discussed as an object that can be acquired or borrowed or appropriated or sold. The morphing is dramatic, if not always clearly recognized. The risk is that as "knowledge" becomes "information," that quickly becomes "discrete chunks of information," which in turn become what the newsmagazines once called "cepts" (bite-size parts of concepts), what popular television calls "factoids," and what the popular culture celebrates as "trivia" (as in trivia quizzes). Where that occurs, that transition devalues and perhaps undermines the part of "knowledge" that has to do with thought, reflection, refinement, integration, and the individual and collective appropriation of information in favor of the part of "knowledge" that has to do with a generally accepted statement about a phenomenon or event or relationship.

A full discussion of the various meanings assigned to "knowledge" and their significance is beyond the scope of this brief paper. If it is useful to distinguish knowledge from information, then it is not helpful to define knowledge simply as accumulated or complex information, with an arbitrary dividing line between the two constructs. While a byte is an ordered set of bits, creating knowledge involves a good deal more than collecting and categorizing observations. For this discussion,

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*Using assumptions and tools appropriate to business leads analysts to conceive of education primarily as an investment in human capital, as production of students, and as a delivery system. Perhaps unwittingly but quite consistently, all of those perspectives systematically devalue learning and the face-to-face inter-actions that are the settings for learning.*

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I prefer to reserve "knowledge" for "understanding" or perhaps "understanding as manifested in practice." I take knowledge to be something more than information, however amassed or complex, and I take the transition from information to knowledge to require human action. As well, it seems important to link knowledge to the process by which it was created, indeed to consider knowledge itself a process. In this view, knowledge is an organic process of creation and re-creation, construction, deconstruction, and recon-struction, and integration, appropriation, and use. In that understanding, knowledge results from the cumulation and use of information in an active, generative, and iterative process. Over time and across experience, knowledge becomes information. That is, what was in one era an extended and contested compilation, categorization, and integration of observations and the generation of accepted deductions and inferences — understanding — becomes in another era a simple statement of what is widely

accepted as fact. As that occurs, the creation of knowledge is fiercely contested, both within and outside the scientific community, and the accepted procedures for validating knowledge have often been and continue to be far more political than scientific.[19]

2. What is deemed valid and legitimate knowledge, that is, information, is likely to become increasingly centralized in the North. While there will be efforts to collect information generated in the South, that information will be filtered, perhaps modified, and approved in the North before being incorporated into the corpus of official knowledge.

3. The information that is collected in the South will be shaped and framed by its interpreters. Indeed, the official knowledge collectors will have important but often invisible authority over what is to be regarded as knowledge and over the constructs used to organize it, for example, "indigenous," "traditional," and "authentic." In this process the constructions of "indigenous" and "traditional" become entrenched, with their accompanying and problematic intellectual baggage. What is old, or more often, what is deemed to be old, though in fact it may be quite recent,[20] becomes romanticized and at the same time fossilized. Gender-specific roles and customs, for example, that emerged in the migrant labor economy established under colonial role, may be elevated to the pedestal of "traditional" and thereby deemed worthy of preservation and special protection. Labeling particular eras and social behaviors "traditional" blurs the ways in which claims to authenticity are in practice contests about shaping the political economy.

4. That powerful role in determining what is and what is not knowledge will be obscured by the mystique of science and scientific method. Decisions about what to include in official knowledge databases will be defended on the basis of claims about reliability, validity, and reproducibility, with little critical attention to the ways in which basic assumptions and methodology effectively determine *which* information and *whose* understandings are to be

considered official knowledge. In this way, the recognition that generating knowledge is inherently a contested political process will be rejected in favor of the claim that knowledge generation and collection are primarily technical matters, governed by the rules of science, not politics.

5. With the rules of science as the ultimate measure and with those rules largely set and maintained by a small elite in the affluent countries, valid knowledge production will become an increasingly expensive endeavor, an effort beyond the reach of most people, including scholars, in poor countries. For example, large, controlled sample surveys will be considered more reliable sources of knowledge than individually conducted case studies, which in turn (since there are in fact rules and procedures to guide case studies and simulate reproducibility) will be considered more reliable sources of knowledge than local folkways and customs. Ironically, the collection of "indigenous knowledge" may marginalize indigenous researchers.

6. The centralization of the determination of what is knowledge entrenches the roles of the elite education and research institutions in the world, nearly all located in the most affluent countries. A few scholars and institutions in poor countries will be integrated into official development knowledge generation and management, primarily through studies and research at or associated with those elite institutions. But with few exceptions, they will remain junior partners in this effort, observers, commentators, and as requested, interpreters, but very rarely themselves creators or managers.

7. In this domain as in others, growth will be understood to be in tension with and a higher priority than equity. In practice, external aid agencies will work harder to increase their information ("knowledge") databases and their ability to manipulate and manage them than to assure equitable participation in their construction and equitable access to their content. As in today's electronic commerce, where the volume of activity and return on investment are often more important than profits from sales, there will be little incentive for those who create and manage knowledge databases to nurture a broad consumer base, especially since most consumers will have little to spend. Rather, the pressure will be to develop bigger and better knowledge bases and more effective operating systems, even if those trends will make access more difficult for many prospective users.

8. This approach to information also reinforces global power relations. In the contemporary era, the World Bank has assumed major responsibility for overseeing and managing the integration of the world economy and especially the incorporation of poor countries into it on terms they do not set. Control over relevant information, or even the claim that the World Bank is the major repository for and distributor of knowledge about development, entrenches and enhances the World Bank in that global role. As it asserts its role as a development advisory service and knowledge manager, the World Bank becomes even more powerful and dominating, in both affluent and poor countries.

9. It is far from clear that public policy will benefit from development knowledge databases or gateways in the manner envisioned. The common claim is that a decision maker in country A who uses a knowledge database to learn about experiences in Country B (or Countries B, C, and D) to inform and thereby improve the quality of the decision in Country A.

Phrased in that way, however, this argument is more obfuscating than clarifying. The confusions are multiple. Five are particularly troubling. First, information, and certainly knowledge, are not twigs lying on the forest floor, readily scooped up and carried off. Rather, the generation of knowledge involves selection, sorting, and filtering. People interpret and assign meaning. Meanings change. Knowledge is continually created and re-created. Unlike information, knowledge cannot be assembled and stored in shrink-wrapped packages. Second, it is important to emphasize yet again that the transformation of information into knowledge has both context and agency. While the knowledge

management systems literature claims to recognize the importance of process and agency, it generally focuses on information rather than on how the information is generated, passed on, and appropriated. Hu-

man agents, multistep communication flows, status-based transmission barriers, and more all disappear from view. Third, while it is appealing to assume that when decision makers have access higher quality information (leaving aside for the moment what exactly is higher quality information), they will make better decisions, that oversimplification distorts the role of information in the policy process.[21] Information reaches and is used by decision makers in complex ways. Very often, current research-supported information is used not to inform decisions but rather to justify and legitimize decisions reached on other grounds. Decision (and policy) makers do not rely significantly on small chunks of information gathered from databases created externally. Rather, they rely primarily on their own education and experience (including their assessment of the politics of the decision arena) and to the extent that they draw on other sources, on information provided, filtered, and interpreted by trusted colleagues and friends. Hence, development knowledge bases are likely to influence decision making — if at all — either by becoming part of the general education of decision makers or by being incorporated into the preferences and

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*Far from democratizing, the very character of electronic access to information itself will tend to reinforce existing power relations. The image of universal access is seductive.*

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recommendations of the funding agencies leveraged by their control over desired resources, that is, incorporated into conditions attached to aid. Fourth, while this approach focuses attention on those formally designated as policy makers, policy is often made in practice by people with no formal policy making authority. Education ministries may issue edicts about, say, language of instruction or repetition, but the actual policy,

that is the practical rules that guide what people do, may be made by headmasters and teachers, or indeed by students. Fifth, the assumed parallels between business (the arena where knowledge management is crafted and refined) and education and development more generally are fundamentally misleading. Business is largely concerned with products and outcomes. Education is primarily focused on process. Business is generally assessed in terms of volume and profit. Less readily quantified, useful assessment measures for education focus on the quality of interactions and on learning, whose observable consequences often have a very long time horizon. Business improvement strategies emphasize control and management. Efforts to improve education emphasize interaction and interdependence and often set sharp limits on control and management, whether centralized or decentralized. Using assumptions and tools appropriate to business leads analysts to conceive of education primarily as an investment in human capital, as production of students, and as a delivery system. Perhaps unwittingly but quite consistently, all of those perspectives systematically devalue learning and the face-to-face interactions that are the settings for learning.[22]

10. The knowledge management systems literature assumes that the knowledge that matters most is technical.[23] That knowledge is created and for the foreseeable future will continue to be created in the North:

developing countries will remain importers rather than principal producers of technical knowledge for some time. (p. 24)

For developing countries, acquiring knowledge from abroad is the best way to enlarge the knowledge base... Developing countries, whatever their institutional disadvantages, have access to one great asset: the technological knowledge accumulated in industrial countries. (p. 27)[24]

That is, notwithstanding the currently fashionable attention to what is termed "indigenous knowledge," in practice the South is expected to

be an importer — a borrower, or purchaser, or perhaps appropriate — of information consequential for economic and social progress. What are the consequences of this understanding of the role of knowledge, that is, information? Knowledge management systems explicitly value information that is not only technical but also clearly and rapidly productive, that is, profitable. In this specification of what is knowledge and of the knowledge that matters, the assertion that generating knowledge is inherently a contested political process will be rejected in favor of the claim that knowledge generation and collection can be organized as largely technical tasks, governed by the rules of science, not politics.

11. Far from democratizing, the very character of electronic access to information itself will tend to reinforce existing power relations. The image of universal access is seductive. The masses of the world, all with access to computers, telephones, and the internet, will hold autocrats, totalitarians, and exploiters to account. Their weapons will not be mass protests, strikes, or armed struggle but bits and bytes. For the present and foreseeable future, however, that promise of popular and democratic participation in knowledge generation and management will remain just that, a reality just beyond reach. In part, that is because most of the world does not have ready access to computers or international network connections and will not have them in the near future. Even more important, as the needed technology becomes more readily available in poorer countries, that technology (including both hardware and software) will continue to be developed and refined under the control of the more affluent countries. Each new communications or database scheme requires ever faster processors, more memory, larger hard disks, more and more rapid access to distant servers, and more complex operating systems and software. Until the poor countries are themselves the developers of new technology, they will always be trying to catch up and never succeeding. Put somewhat differently, the thresholds for access and contribution are constantly changing. Currently, what is needed is a relatively simple computer and an international communications connection, which are

prohibitively costly for most of the people of the world. As those costs decline, effective access will require more sophisticated (and expensive) hardware and software and, as well, more complex understandings and skills. For a poor community in the South, entrusting its knowledge to a remote computer in the North and its largely invisible managers is surely not a strategy for promoting either democratic participation and accountability or self-reliance.

Poor communities will face a further obstacle in securing access to the information deemed important, including information they have themselves provided. There will be a market for whatever is deemed advanced information. That will be so irrespective of the origins of the desired information. Those who provided the information in the first place ("indigenous knowledge") may need to pay dearly to have the distilled version returned in useful form (just as exporters of raw cotton pay to re-import their processed cotton in the form of dresses). Presumably, the selling price will reflect the value added by the intermediary agency. In practice, that price is likely to be in large part a function of the agencies' ability to control and manipulate the market for information. Indeed, those agencies' authority and influence, both at home and abroad, will to some extent be dependent on the market value of the information they generate, store, organize, and deliver. Some may seek to constrain the circulation of information to increase its price and enhance their competitive advantage. More likely is differential pricing as countries seek to use their aid programs, recast as development advisory services, to advance their foreign policy goals by favoring friends and discouraging or punishing enemies or rewarding those who adopt desired policies (for example, reduce exchange controls or trade restrictions). However this knowledge market evolves, the poor countries of the world are not likely to be the market makers.

12. The unbridled claims about the importance of information ("knowledge *is* development") combine with the mystique of research to reinforce power relations in another way. Information, or what can be presented as reliable

knowledge derived from research, has increasingly become the most important, and in some settings only, accepted rationale for pursuing a particular course of action. The claim that "research shows that . . . " must accompany every proposed activity for which funding, support, or authorization is sought. Entrenching one organization, or the external funding and technical assistance agencies more generally, as the accepted arbiters of relevant development information enables them to exercise vast control that is not only unchallenged but largely unchallengeable.

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*Poor countries must address the challenges of the political economy of information and seize its opportunities. Their goal must be information affluence even, indeed especially, where productivity is low and social services are scarce.*

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As I conclude this review of what seems problematic in the establishment of knowledge databases and gateways, it is useful to remind ourselves of the gap between rhetoric and practice. Three manifestations of that gap are especially important here. First, notwithstanding the public rhetoric that emphasizes the information-providing role of the World Bank and other funding and technical assistance agencies, the evidence to date suggests most agency staff continue to focus on projects and funds. As Gorjestani notes for the World Bank,

> Yet, the widely accepted definition of our main product emphasizes the project/loan, not the advice. More important, the current internal processes and incentive systems sometimes send mixed signals about the importance of quantity of lending and the resource transfer objectives vs. the knowledge transfer objective and the impact of advice. Under such circumstances, staff see knowledge management as an add-on or the 'flavor of the month.'[25]

Second, there is a similar disjunction between the rhetoric that emphasizes local contributions to knowledge databases and the ways in which databases have been developed to date. While "indigenous knowledge" may be an attractive notion, in practice we do not find compelling evidence that agency staff consider that knowledge central to their everyday responsibilities. Third, while the knowledge management literature asserts that "every knowledge sharing occasion is a learning opportunity,"[26] there is to date little evidence of efforts to organize the creation of development knowledge databases as itself an inclusive and collaborative learning process.

## On Constructing Knowledge Databases and Gateways

If databases of development knowledge are potentially useful and if their current elaboration is so fraught with problems, are other approaches more promising? Two potentially complementary alternatives are immediately apparent. First, databases might systematically include fuller research reports, instead of or along with the summaries. That would enable the end users to determine independently what are the important findings, to understand more fully the context in which they were derived, and to assess their contingencies and limitations. That approach would also enable end users to challenge, reformulate, and reject second and higher level inferences drawn from reviews of multiple studies. Second, if we accept that summaries are important, who should prepare them? It is neither necessary nor obvious that summaries must be drafted by organizations like the World Bank and the scholars they commission. Indeed, to the extent that standardized summarizing is desirable and possible, there is no intellectual or political reason why it cannot or should not be done in the South rather than the North.[27]

## Information, Knowledge, and Learning

To recapitulate, information is clearly important in the changing global economy. Organizations that are better able to generate, organize, store, and communicate information have tremendous

advantages over those that are less effective in doing so. While information in itself cannot eliminate poverty or close the gap between the least and most affluent countries, developing the ability to generate new information in many domains and improving information flow must feature prominently in effective development strategies.

Poor countries must address the challenges of the political economy of information and seize its opportunities. Their goal must be information affluence even, indeed especially, where productivity is low and social services are scarce. To achieve that goal will require going beyond acquiring, adapting, and absorbing externally generated information. Just as they must become the sites for technological innovation and for the production of new means of production, so must poor countries nurture the creation, inte-gration, accumulation, distillation, and application of new knowledge.

For that, development knowledge databases created and managed within the knowledge management systems of funding and technical assistance agencies are a problematic model. Distilled and digested bits of information disseminated through internet web sites risk perpetuating rather than reducing dependence. Amassed information, even very complex information collected in bottomless electronic buckets, becomes knowledge only when people use it. Banking knowledge, as in data banks, is an inappropriate metaphor. What is needed is learning, largely initiated, maintained, managed, and sustained by those seeking to change their situation. As Paulo Freire showed so clearly, a banking model of education — learners as recipients of expert-delivered wisdom who then accumulate and store that wisdom in order later to draw on it — stymies learning because it undermines and devalues the initiative and responsibility of the learners. So too in development. Using knowledge to solve problems and overcome obstacles is necessarily an active process in which the problem solvers must be directly involved in generating the knowledge they require. That knowledge is not a commodity or entity that can be cut into discrete chunks,

stockpiled in warehouses, and distributed by those who manage the warehouses. The point here is not that it is not possible to learn from others' experiences elsewhere. Of course it is. Rather, as conceived and implemented to date, the centrally initiated and managed education development knowledge databases seem more likely to frustrate than to support that learning. Achieving information affluence in poor countries cannot rest on transfer and absorption but rather requires a generative process with strong local roots.

## Notes

1. This paper draws heavily on work undertaken collaboratively with Nelly P. Stromquist and is a somewhat reorganized and abridged version of our article, Joel Samoff and Nelly P. Stromquist, "Managing Knowledge and Storing Wisdom? New Forms of Foreign Aid?" *Development and Change* 32,4(September 2001):617-642, forthcoming. We addressed these themes as well in Nelly P. Stromquist and Joel Samoff, "Knowledge Management Systems: On the Promise and Actual Forms of Information Technologies," *Compare* 30,3(2000):323-332.

2. I use here the terminology popularized by Noah Samara, an entrepreneur who seeks to transform Africa through direct satellite radio (and subsequently data) broadcasts to small receivers distributed widely across the continent.

3. World Bank, *World Development Report 1998/1999: Knowledge for Development* (Washington: Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 1999).

4. Since words matter, I use here the terminology that is becoming increasingly common in Africa and perhaps elsewhere in preference to "donor agencies" (some agencies lend rather than grant or donate funds) and "aid agencies" (in at least some settings it not clear whether aid provides more inflow than outgo).

5. While several funding and technical assistance agencies have announced their intention to emphasize the provision of development expertise and advice, the World Bank's effort is early and large and emphasizes electronic storage and dissemination of information. As it takes that lead, the World Bank invites both emulation and critique. Both because of that lead and because the World Bank's efforts in this arena seek to incorporate the expertise and recommendations of other agencies, it is appropriate

to focus on those efforts to understand better the paths being followed.

6. Impressive in its scope, aspirations, and panache, the World Bank's Development Gateway has already been sharply challenged, from both inside and outside the World Bank itself. For an overview of the critiques, see Alex Wilks, *A Tower of Babel on the internet? The World Bank's Development Gateway* (London: Bretton Woods Project, 2001). That paper and an on-going lively debate are available at <www.brettwonwoodsproject.org> [2001.08.06], which includes pages on knowledge banks and the World Bank Development Gateway. Claiming that the purported independent governance of the Development Gateway was a facade designed to obscure continued World Bank control, in July 2001 two Uruguayans filed with the World Bank Fraud and Corruption Investigations Hotline an "Appeal for investigation on Development Gateway for 'misuse of Bank funds or positions'" <www.item.org.uy/claim/Gdg-claim3.htm> [2001.08.06].

7. For a comprehensive and critical overview of this perspective, see Manuel Castells' series on *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell), *The Rise of the Network Society* (I, 1997), *The Power of Identity* (II, 1997), *End of Millennium* (III, 1998).

8. World Bank. *Priorities and Strategies for Education* (Washington: World Bank, 1995), 14.

9. World Bank, *World Development Report 1998/1999*, p. 140.

10. World Bank. *Knowledge Sharing and Innovation in the Africa Region: A Retrospective* (Washington: World Bank, Knowledge and Learning Center, Africa Region, 1998) [Prepared by Nicolas Gorjestani], pp. 8–9.

11. This combination of the provision of funding and development advice warrants critical attention in its own right, an analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper.

12. Stephen Denning, What is Knowledge Management? (paper prepared as background for World Bank, *World Development Report 1998/1999: Knowledge for Development*, available at www.apqc.org/free/whitepapers/index.htm [1999.08.05]).

13. Denning, What is Knowledge Management?, p. 13.

14. As of mid-2000 most of the World Bank knowledge databases under development were apparently not externally accessible. The World Bank Education and Training web site lists several themes: Access and Equity, Adult Outreach, Early Childhood Development, Economics of Education, Education Reform and Management, Education

Technology, Effective Schools and Teachers, School Health, and Tertiary Education. Most of those themes are annotated lists of World Bank papers and publications. A few, for example Early Childhood Development, combine resource lists with detailed guides and tutorials. Indigenous Knowledge has its own database, apparently in the form to be used for the projected education databases. The World Bank has also created a Knowledge Management Intern Program.

15. After initial discussions, at times heated, about purpose, forms, strategy, and payment, the World Bank and the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) agreed in 1999 to collaborate in the development of an annotated database of references to publications in education reform, termed the International Education Compendium (IEC). Working with student assistants, four senior CIES members assumed responsibility for the compilations, which World Bank staff processed and incorporated into a World Bank web site in March, 2000. As of March, 2001, the IEC was organized into a three themes (Teaching and Learning, Curriculum, Instructional Materials, and Assessment, and System Reform and Management) in question and answer format, with the answers presented as lists of annotated references in discrete Excel spreadsheets: http://www1.worldbank.org/education/globaleducatio nreform/ Edu%20compendium.htm. A CIES Task Force reviewed the history of this cooperation and reported to the CIES Board in March, 2001. For our comments here and in subsequent sections we draw on our own participation in formal and informal CIES discussions of this effort, on the report of the CIES Task Force (on which Samoff served), and on discussions with the CIES members who compiled the lists of annotated references.

16. Denning, What is Knowledge Management?, p. 10. As of early 2001, the World Bank's Indigenous Knowledge web site was available at http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/index.htm [2001.04.30].

17. Recall that I am concerned here with the early stages of a very ambitious effort. While it is of course too soon to be able to examine empirically the uses, misuses, and other consequences of these development knowledge databases, it is both timely and important to explore the direction of their evolution and to highlight what seems problematic in their process and form.

18. The World Bank's *World Development Report 1998/1999* begins by distinguishing knowledge about technology, also called technical knowledge and defined as know-how, from knowledge about attributes. The uneven distribution of know-how is

termed "knowledge gaps," while difficulties that result from inadequate knowledge about attributes are termed "information problems." It is unclear why these are regarded as the two most important types of knowledge and why other types of knowledge are not equally important for development. Nor is it clear why the lack of one kind of knowledge should be termed a knowledge gap, while the lack of the other kind of knowledge is an information problem. The slippage from "knowledge" to "information" is, however, already clear.

19. Thomas S. Kuhn's provocative analysis of how new ideas emerge and become accepted knowledge, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962 [second edition, responding to critics, 1970]), and the debates surrounding it, highlight the multiple influences on the creation of knowledge.

20. The common examples have to do with the uncritical and decontextualized use of terms like tribe and ethnicity. An issue of the World Bank's indigenous knowledge newsletter, *IK Notes,* provides a striking example of the social determination of what is old and therefore indigenous. No. 11, August 1999, focuses on Koranic education in West Africa, clearly—like Christian missionary education a bit later—a foreign and relatively recent import to that region.

21. A full discussion of the role of information in the policy process is beyond the scope of this discussion. Useful sources relevant to education and development include Fernando Reimers and Noel McGinn, *Informed Dialogue: Using Research to Shape Education Policy Around the World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), and Fernando Reimers, Noel McGinn, and Kate Wild, *Confronting Future Challenges: Educational Information, Research and Decision-Making* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1995).

22. These themes are developed more fully in Joel Samoff, "Which Priorities and Strategies for Education?" *International Journal of Educational Development* 16,3 (July 1996):249-271, and "Institutionalizing International Influence," in Robert F. Arnove and Carlos Alberto Torres, editors, *Comparative Education: The Dialectic of the Global and the Local* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp. 51-89.

23. Notice here, once again, the unstated and uncritical transition from "information" to "knowledge." Recall as well that the *World Development Report 1998/1999* defines the knowledge gap as the uneven distribution of technical knowledge.

24. World Bank, *World Development Report 1998/1999.*

25. World Bank. *Knowledge Sharing and Innovation in the Africa Region: A Retrospective,* p.9.

26. World Bank. *Knowledge Sharing and Innovation in the Africa Region: A Retrospective,* p.9.

27. Note that the references here to "external" or "outsider" are concerned with context and contest, not nationality. Rate of return analysis, for example, emerged as an analytic approach and technique in a specific setting and within a particular theoretical orientation. It reflects the interests of investors and allocators of resources, whether foreign or local, who seek to choose among alternate uses of their funds. While that approach may (or may not) prove useful to education researchers, decision makers, and managers in poor countries, it was not the creation of those responsible for education in those countries. Its proponents may be citizens of the U.S., England, Hungary, Japan, Chile, or Ghana. Characterizing it as "external," therefore, highlights not the nationality of its advocates but rather the particular setting, including assumptions, ideas, interests, theory, and ideology, in which it was developed and refined.

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# Creativity, Content and Connectivity:
## African Women Networking Towards Social Justice

### Jennifer Radloff

*"Today, without communication anyone is at a disadvantage in the face of any initiative, and as women in particular we cannot add another variable to be discriminated against."* (APC WNSP: n.d.)

Women's social, political, formal and informal networks have existed for centuries — to teach, to support, to produce and to create. The core reason for the existence of networks is usually to share information in its multiple forms. Every time we make information available and when it serves human advancement, we are participating in the democratisation of society. Every time we fail to do so, we not only stand in the way of that process, but also serve to break down the building blocks of democracy. Making information available about domestic violence, for example, breaks the barrier of silence. It lets the victim know that that kind of violence need not be shrouded in silence, and very importantly, that there are means of recourse. This empowers and brings domestic violence out of the closet and into the public sphere where it can be seen for what it is.

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*Creative and innovative women's networks are actively using the tools offered by the Internet for social justice and change. Recent initiatives in Africa are making a contribution to global networks.*

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What this means in real terms for 'information brokers' — which includes women's networks and anyone who is committed to sharing and spreading information — is that we have to disseminate information as widely as possible across all kinds of barriers, cultural, linguistic, political, and social. African women, and women globally, have rich experiences, supportive and

interactive communities and databases of information built and honed in the struggle against sexism. Women have realised that the increasingly globalised world, and the pace of information production and dissemination, means that understanding and taking control of the Internet can enhance and expand networks. These new technologies are being

adapted and employed to augment already vibrant networks. The potential for greater inclusion, global relationships and sharing is immense. There is, however, a great danger of exclusion, domination and the re-enacting of age-old differences, through the insensitive and uncoordinated application of new technologies for internetworking amongst women in Africa. Networks do not operate in isolation and are directly influenced by social reality. Women's networks are aware that the dangers of exclusion are as great as the possibilities of inclusion.

"I am a fan of the web and convinced of its vitality. Africa and the whole of the Third World must seize this tool in order not to loose time or power, and keep pace with the global rhythm of the millennium. We can have access to these new technologies, through our own wealth, and through international solidarity. It is a matter of political will." *(Fatma Mint Elkory of Mauritania, quoted in Morna and Khan 2000: 2)*

Women who are based in Africa and who use information and communication technologies (ICTs) for gendered internetworking and social change are confronting a range of challenges. Networking projects and initiatives are advancing the struggle against patriarchal and societal oppressions. Creative and innovative women's networks are actively using the tools offered by the Internet for social justice and change. Recent

initiatives in Africa are making a contribution to global networks. An over-riding concern of socially conscious women's networking initiatives that are using ICTs is to ensure that they do not repeat and reinforce existing patterns of domination, exclusion and marginalization.

## ICTs for Gender Justice

It is easy to be sidetracked by the debates around how ICTs are not as important as food, freedom from violence or housing. We could argue at length about African priorities, drawing up a shopping list of needs and hierarchies of importance for government policies and even donor attention, especially for women living and working in Africa, who are more vulnerable to poverty, racism, war and the particular scars of colonial legacies. The debate around the relevance and appropriateness of ICTs to African women's information access, networking and advocacy and lobbying is complex.

> "ICTs bring profound changes to our communities. They influence how we know and understand the world. They change work methods and the ways in which we communicate. They affect how we access and share information. They are also an important source of power. By acquiring the equipment and skills to use them, we gain access to that power."
> *(African Gender Institute and Women'sNet n.d.)*

A major aim of women's electronic information initiatives in Africa is to add to the "content" of the Internet, knowledges written by women involved in gender research and activism, speaking of local experiences. These networks acknowledge the value of information and experience derived from African contexts. They are committed to the production of indigenous knowledges that resist dominant ideologies about the superiority of masculine and Northern meanings. To see locally generated information delivered within Africa and channelled northwards to impact on bodies of knowledge that usually exclude or "invent" the experiences of African women is a key goal of networks

committed to social change. As Huyer (1997) says "The raw information heritage is too valuable to be trusted to others".

## Stories from the field

Recently the first Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Africa Hafkin Communications Prize, in recognition of outstanding and creative uses of ICTs, was awarded to the Bayanloco Community Learning Centre in Kaduna State, Nigeria (APC 2001a). This is an initiative of the Fantsuam Foundation led by Kazanka Comfort. Ms. Comfort worked on a women-led peace initiative in the villages, where women act as detectors of potential flash-points for communal violence, and as peace brokers. This made her realize that fast communication among rural women could mean the difference between life and death in an emergency situation. Her employer, the Fantsuam Foundation, saw the potential impact that having an e-mail address and access to computers in each village could make — and so did the villagers. So the Foundation decided to support community-based, community-sustained computer centres as part of their micro-credit and poverty alleviation scheme. The project founder and leader was herself no "techie", but a woman from Nigeria who realized the potential of the technology to help rural women, not only to meet their basic needs, but also to save lives in times of emergency and communal strife.

*African women are not voiceless — rather the majority in the world is deaf. In order to challenge this deafness women organise collectively.*

"The most amazing aspect about the Bayanloco Community Learning Centre," says Nancy Hafkin, "is that it managed to come into existence at all" (APC 2001a). Hafkin goes on to point out how the Bayanloco Centre had to overcome numerous obstacles in order to bring the project to fruition. What she lists are obstacles faced by most women's electronic networking initiatives. These include male

domination in the field of technology, and jealously guarded access, inherited technophobia among the women who would be the beneficiaries of the project, high levels of illiteracy, initial lack of Internet access, no telephones and no regular supply of electricity. We could add others — govern-ment monopolies of telecommunication infra-structure, few women in positions of structural authority, command of English as the medium of instruction and communication on the Internet, and information on the World Wide Web, which is of little value to African women's lives.

What Ms Comfort has grown, among much else, is the enthusiasm of local communities for ICT training, which is already producing profound spin-offs for the community and the women. Hafkin says of the project "Kazanka Comfort demonstrated that information technology is not an unnecessary luxury for rural women in poor countries, but rather a tool to help them meet their needs. The project was not technology driven; it was woman-driven!" She goes on: "There is a perception that Africa is the 'unconnected continent', bypassed by the so-called 'information age', and that African women are disempowered victims of social and economic equality. What is not adequately recognised is that Africans, and specifically African women, are being remarkably innovative, entrepreneurial and courageous in engaging information and communications technologies, in spite of limited access to resources and infrastructure."

Another powerful recognition of the way that women are applying ICTs for social change is the winner of the Betinho Prize awarded annually by the APC to recognise socially meaningful use of ICTs — Women's Voices. Women's Voices is a project of the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG). It is a video initiative that gives women, living in poverty, a voice in public policy-making in Nairobi, Kenya. It set out to talk to the women living in their neighbourhoods to ask them how they felt they could most effectively get involved in the public policy debate on poverty, an area where women's voices were seldom heard. They came up with an unexpected use of the technology. The women

raised funds to purchase their own digital video equipment, including old and borrowed Betamax cameras. They learned scripting, shooting and editing, and how to present their communities by showing rough-cuts. They recorded opinions and asked for contributions to the story and the narratives.

The neighbourhoods where Women's Voices works, Redeemed Village and Mathare 3B, are two huge slums outside Nairobi. Poorly constructed mud, carton and rusting iron sheet shelters crowd together along twisted narrow lanes, which serve as open drains. Water and electricity are scarce. Violent crime, illegal drugs and alcohol, HIV/AIDS and unemployment seriously impact on the residents (APC 2001b).

These two examples show African women ensuring the relevance of technologies to changing their lives and the conditions of their local communities. But women are also using electronic information networking in African contributions to global women's networking initiatives.

**Women's Networking Initiatives**

> "While it remains true that gender hampers many women writers' access to publishers, resources, and time, and true too that 'gender and/or women's issues' remain at best exoticized within most sites of knowledge production, 'voicelessness' is less of a problem than 'deafness'." *(Bennett 1999)*

African women are not voiceless — rather the majority in the world is deaf. In order to challenge this deafness women organise collectively. However, women's organising and activism acknowledge the challenges and differences which working in a gender-unfriendly world bring up. We need to understand that African women are not a homogenous group, and that women's networks are challenged and inspired by differences of race, language, class, geographic location, (dis)ability, access to resources, sexuality, and culture. A fundamental issue for women's electronic information

networks is — as Ramillo puts it — "... this momentous change in the world's information and communication regime has created two totally opposite realities for the women's movement. For those who have access and have learned how to use these new ICTs, their networks have multiplied in ways that would not have been possible before. For those who are being left out, these changes have resulted in increased marginalisation from mainstream information and communication spaces in a predominantly globalised world." (Radloff 1999)

**Global ICT Projects: Beijing and Beyond**

In 1993 the APC provided the on-site communications at regional preparatory conferences of United Nations world conferences. APC conducted training for women attending these conferences, both at the main event and at parallel non-governmental organisation (NGO) forums. Online or "virtual" thematic conferences were initiated in such critical areas of concern as health, environment, and peace. In collaboration with other networks, hands-on training was offered. At the Beijing Conference, a team from the APC Women's Networking Support Programme set up a communications tent. The team comprised women from 24 countries, speaking 15 languages, and provided a safe and user-friendly environment for women to break down barriers of fear around electronic communication. Women, who had never used computers, and some only for word processing functions, were now communicating, sharing and accessing information using ICTs. Information facilitation services included having women working remotely in England, Kenya, Zambia, Mexico and Australia. These regional contact points disseminated useful daily information to those NGOs unable to attend the conference.

As Burch (1997) explained, the programme opted to work particularly with groups whose work has a multiplying effect, and to show how women can channel information to and from groups that are not on-line, using a variety of communication tools. Given the previously organized information links, many countries had prepared in-depth information on the debates. This reached people via the Internet, and was re-disseminated via fax, radio, and meetings, contrasting sharply with mainstream media coverage. This experience encouraged women's organisations in the developing world, particularly in Asia, Latin America and Africa, to link into the Internet and develop their own electronic networks and web sites.

Since Beijing, great strides have been made in African women's access to and use of ICTs. This has provided an impetus, and inspired the Women's Networking Support Programme (WNSP) African team to plan and begin implementing training for African women's NGOs. This has focused on the strategic use of ICTs, in order for them to impact on the review process of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms of Action. The latter five-year assessment is known as "Beijing +5".

*We need to educate and train more women in order to challenge the often deeply entrenched techno-phobia nurtured from an early age by sexist societies.*

In March 1999 a global electronic networking meeting held at the 43rd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), discussed ways of shaping strategies for using electronic networking as part of the "Beijing +5" review process. Issues discussed included ways of sharing information around advocacy and accountability efforts and strategies by women activists worldwide. ICTs were again recognized as tools that, effectively employed, could enhance and facilitate the above activities. The meeting focused on mapping out how women are going to use new technologies to achieve their mandates both regionally and globally. Out of this initiative grew WomenAction. (WomenAction 2002)

WomenAction is a global information, communication and media network that enables NGOs to actively engage in the "Beijing +5" review process with the long-term goal of women's empowerment, and with a special focus on women and media. This network successfully

developed a communications network and information-sharing strategy that allows women in every world region to participate in and impact on "Beijing +5". One of the strengths of WomenAction is the focus on regional activities that feed into the global network.

In Africa, through a partnership between APC-Africa-Women and FEMNET, a Beijing Plus Five in Africa initiative saw the development of Flamme. The Project Goal was to assist African women's NGOs to impact on the assessment of the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms of Action through a programme of ICT awareness, training and information facilitation. The mission was to serve as an electronic forum for women to share and exchange ideas, strategies, information and issues of concern to impact on the implementation of the Beijing platform for action. "Flame" is a network of African sisters online committed to strengthening the capacity of women through the use of ICTs to lobby, advocate and participate in the Beijing +5 process regionally and globally.

### African and Global Women's ICT Networking Initiatives

*Women in Sync* is a collection of stories about the experiences of women and their organisations that have become a part of the APC WNSP network. All the articles in *Women in Sync* were written from the perspective of women who pioneered in e-mail communications in the days before the Internet boom. The articles also tell the stories of women who persevered in utilising computer networking that built connections among women across continents for women's empowerment (APC WNSP 2000).

**Women'sNet** is a joint project of SANGONeT and the Commission on Gender Equality and has been designed to enable South African women to harness the enormous potential for advancing women's struggles that is presented by new technologies. In collaboration with South African women's organisations and with links to partners in Zimbabwe, Uganda and Senegal, Women'sNet brought together an Information Strategy Team in December 1997. The team's task was to develop a framework for sourcing, organizing and making information available from a web site in an accessible and user-friendly way. Women'sNet has connected islands of activity on gender, collected and centralized previously dispersed gender information and created a "gateway" to South African gender-related information, including locally generated content and links to other relevant sites. The interactivity of the site allows for others to contribute easily via a bulletin board or by directly e-mailing Women'sNet. Women'sNet has begun the critical process of training women in the use of electronic communications and has identified training as an activity vital to its existence and to the promotion of gender equity in South Africa.

The **APC Women's Networking Support Programme** functions as a global network of women and their organisations who are actively involved in activities which support or facilitate women's access to and use of ICTs. The APC believes that IT is a powerful tool that can help build social networks and contribute towards progressive social change. However, they acknowledge that this access is not equal and that social, ethnic and gender inequities exist and are more pronounced for women in general, and particularly for women from the South — with the African women's situation being the least favourable.

WNSP aims to respond to these inequalities through their programme work areas that include training, participatory research, policy and advocacy in the area of gender and information technology, information facilita-tion, and regional programme support.

The programme has ongoing dialogue in virtual space with discussion lists for the global network and a separate list for the African chapter. Regular on-line conferences are held where plans are discussed and decisions taken on critical issues. Importantly, women with sound Internet skills mentor those women who are in the process of developing Internet abilities and a supportive and gender sensitive space has encouraged and advanced the potential and capacity of women. WNSP has been involved in many activities such

as the Beijing training since it's inception in 1993 and continues to provide a supportive activist environment as well as a sophisticated and responsive technical skills base.

**APC-Africa-Women** is a network of organisations and individuals that work to empower African women's organisations to access and use Information and Communication Technologies for equality and development.

Working with women in Africa and all over the world, APC-Africa-Women focuses on African women's empowerment by: developing and disseminating information; providing regional support; lobbying and advocating around gender and ICT policy; delivering ICT training; conducting research in the area of gender and ICTs.

## Conclusion

In order to support, broaden and include more women in these electronic webs, there is much work to be done. We need to educate and train more women in order to challenge the often deeply entrenched technophobia nurtured from an early age by sexist societies. ICT policy intervention is critical so as to include a gender perspective in all discussions related to ICT policy. By lobbying the various industries (which include government regulatory struc-tures, telecommunications industries, hardware and software manufacturers, etc.) and advocating policies which would allow for democratic policies which redress previous imbalances in provision, we will go some way to increasing access to a larger grouping of people, in particular women and girls. Women are creating local content, creating space for their own voices and promoting their knowledges — challenging the North-to-South information flow. Participatory methodo-logies and women to women training have shown to create a safe and nurturing en-vironment where women can engage with the technologies rather than the prejudices and exclusionary environments often created in mixed learning spaces.

I do believe we as women based in Africa need to be careful that ICTs don't "make us an object of information, never a subject of communication." (Foucault 1979: 200). Women are networking for various reasons from information sharing, solidarity and support to lobbying and advocacy, for research, for emotional and spiritual understanding and support and a curiosity about different cultures and experiences.

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# Textbook Publishing as the Enemy of Reading in Africa:
## An Over-Celebrated Industry

### Walter Bgoya

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Much has been written about African publishing in the last two decades, especially after the first of the Dag Hammarskjöld Arusha Seminar series on 'Developing Autonomous Publishing Capacity in Africa'[1] in 1984 and after every subsequent seminar; as well as after the establishment of the Bellagio Publishing Network in 1991.[2] During the same period the involvement of the World Bank and other UN agencies in African educational issues,[3] and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Policies and programmes have generated spirited debates and writing about African education and about the role of textbooks[4] and textbook publishing in Africa.[5]

This short paper recognises the crucial role that educational publishing can and ought to play in general education and cultural development in Africa. It does, however, raise a number of questions associated with the nature of education being given in African schools and, therefore, the efficacy of the tools - in this case books - that are developed for pursuit of that education.

The thrust of the paper is that generally speaking African governments have put in place education systems that are ill suited to the needs of the African people, whether the yardstick be development, democratisation, or the yet to be fully articulated African renaissance. Education systems in existence in African countries are modelled on those of their ex-colonial powers. They do not take into mind the needs of the vast majority of the people, pay only lip service to the cultural needs and imperatives of education (when they do not totally ignore and even vilify them) as, for example, denying African children their natural linguistic advantage in education at all levels and forcing them instead to use foreign languages as media of instruction.

Far from enabling African children to learn to think creatively and to live productively in

harmony with their physical and cultural environments, these systems disempower them, plant and reinforce inferiority complexes in their minds and insidiously promote the colonial legacies. Neo-colonialism, which was understood and condemned everywhere in Africa in the first two or so decades of independence, is no longer to be found in African leaders' political vocabulary! On the contrary, what was neo-colonial in African countries' relations with the Western world - and it has not changed only because labels have changed - is now systematically sought after and justified as the inevitable consequence of an invincible globalisation process that purportedly leaves no room for setting national economic priorities, practising independent national politics and international diplomacy or protecting indigenous social and cultural values.

At the dawn of African independences in the late fifties and sixties there were genuine efforts in all African states if not to challenge the basic philosophies of education behind the European models, at least to expand the opportunities so as to reach larger numbers of African children than had been the case in the colonial period. In some countries, notably Tanzania, Guinea (Sekou Toure's), Zambia, Mozambique, Angola, Congo (Brazzaville) but in others as well with varying degrees of radicalness, education policies were introduced that sought to do away with or to minimise the negative effects of the inherited models and assumptions about the ends to which African education was to be put. Theories of socialist education were studied and experiences of the socialist countries were in some ways emulated.

The issues raised, for example, in Mwalimu Nyerere's policy paper, "Education for Self-Reliance"[6] were a continuation of a long dated quest for educational relevance. From Greek

antiquity, in the concept of harmony which meant, to quote the great Soviet educationist, Anatoli Lunacharsky, "(...a correct inter-relation of forces, of any kind, including the cultural)" he postulated that "...to achieve this it is necessary that all citizens should from their first entrance upon life be undergoing preparation to become appropriate elements for the whole."[7] The debates in the early days of the Soviet Union about education remain instructive and as relevant today as ever. According to Lunarcharsky the task of the government with respect to education then was "... to carry through, with utmost rapidity and utmost breadth, the transmission to the people of knowledge, to destroy the privileged right to knowledge allowed before to only a small part of society". This is not at variance with what African governments ought to be doing today in the area of education. "Destroying the privileged right to knowledge allowed before to only a small part of society" is not perhaps as immediate or even as necessary as creating conditions for the participation of all the people in the acquisition of the knowledge.

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*Africa has been so short changed in education that those that are its products at the highest levels (the universities) are just as distantly related to books as their primary school leaving compatriots.*

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It is, nevertheless, of crucial importance to prevent the development of privilege for a few who can afford to attend well endowed schools. They can master the foreign languages of instruction because they have qualified language instructors and better books, while the majority remain in poor, ill provided and over crowded schools, with poorly instructed and poorly paid teachers. This is what is now taking place at great speed. This development, which promotes separate schools for religious communities (and in some cases racial communities) and also regional disparities in access to education, portends ill for democracy, and for peace and stability.

## Publishing what and for whom?

The bulk of publishing in Africa is textbook publishing. The publishing industry, which everywhere follows the curricula and syllabi, produces in Africa, books that reflect the neo-colonial nature of the African education systems. Everywhere in Africa, curriculum development is not the jealously guarded prerogative of the Ministries of Education it used to be in the early days of independence. Donor organisations and primarily the World Bank drive the education policy processes and since they pay - even if it is by way of loans - they call the tune. It is often argued that the most pressing problem is getting books on the children's desks - any books. But these 'practical' or 'pragmatic' leaders have argued like that throughout the 40 odd years of independence. One would expect, in a development conscious society a vigorous debate about the outcome of the forty years of education and what reforms (if reform rather than revolution) need to be put in place if we are to avoid the mistakes of the last forty years. On the contrary it is business as usual; the world is globally driven and we must go with the flow! The relevance of a donor designed and donor led education is no longer questioned. Major issues such as language of education, priority of education in development and, therefore, priority in allocation of resources follow the dictates of the World Bank and other donors.

In her well argued and highly critical book, *Whose education for all? The Recolonisation of the African Mind*, Birgit Brock-Utne makes the pertinent observation that "Countries.... in Africa are becoming more and more dependent on the West for aid in the education sector, for textbooks, and even for recurrent expenditures. With the aid follows Western curricula and languages, Western culture, and the idea of education as schooling". She "shows how Western donors together with parts of the African élites trained in the West are involved in this recolonisation to the benefit of themselves but to the detriment of the African masses."[8] Given that these are the realities of African education as dictated by the donors and accepted by the elite, can the textbooks published for the society

envisaged by these twin players serve a purpose different from that of the re-colonisation of the African mind?

It is no longer worth spending time debating whether there is such a thing as 'value free' education suitable for all children in all countries irrespective of their cultures and their natural and the built up environments; and that would be suited to meeting their social and economic needs. A more relevant debate would be about the nature and extent of damage an alienating education can cause those receiving it, and the nations which accept it or which only make cosmetic changes while leaving its core intact. If evidence were required of their relevance of the colonial education systems that were left behind and perpetuated by the élites, the current state of affairs in Africa speaks volumes. In the limited but important fields of literacy, developing and strengthening of reading cultures and creation of institutions for book production and dissemination, the pattern roughly corresponded with the political and economic fate of the African nations. Thus, in the 60s the situation was generally hopeful and energetic; in the 70s, political intolerance and bureaucratic expansion had negative repercussions on incomes, leading to the decline in the 80s to mid 90s; that period was dominated by economic decline, SAPs and the collapse of education. From the mid 90s to-date, globalisation is underway bringing with it further marginalisation of Africa on the world stage, despite what its proponents preach.

This large schema would be challenged by those in the business of nit-picking but the broad fact remains that the majority of 'educated' Africans are not yet sufficiently literate to find joy and profit in reading, and therefore to create the demand necessary to motivate and sustain publishing industries. Africa has been so short changed in education that those that are its products at the highest levels (the universities) are just as distantly related to books as their primary school leaving compatriots. Indeed one is likely to find more enthusiasm about reading at lower levels of the education ladder than at the higher ones. The speed with which graduating students seek to distance themselves from their

textbooks after university (by selling them) says a great deal about what those books mean to them. Books are forced savings that must be cashed in at the end of the 'painful' period of deprivation of idle joy or of making a quick buck with as little effort as possible.

## The textbook has become an enemy of reading, and education policies have become the roadblocks against access to knowledge.

The mystics who advocate the view that Africans don't like to read (oral culture syndrome) or that the weak purchasing power prevents them from buying books have it all wrong. It is no doubt true for the very poor, but how about the spending of the rest on all sorts of imported trinkets even disallowing for the daily beer 'at the club'? Is it not more instructive to look at the textbook and the attitude of the African student towards that object; how it imprints itself on the psyche of the students, and their hostility to books and reading?

The following scenario is not fiction. It is what happens in Tanzania. A pupil receives primary school education in Kiswahili. His teachers (through no fault of their own) will not have had good enough grades to qualify for selection to secondary schools (getting E or D in two out of five subjects, and not in arithmetic or English). On entering secondary school (with pass marks lowered to unacceptable levels because the education system must continue to justify having secondary education), the medium of education changes overnight to English. First, the student can not follow instruction even with the best of teachers. Secondly, the student is unable to read and understand his textbooks. So, in order to pass examinations, cramming and memorising texts (with little or no understanding of meaning and certainly no interpretative capacity) becomes the only way to learn. Professors, consequent to the education system to which they belong also lower pass marks to accommodate students and completely ignore language proficiency. Guessing what the student might have meant to write because the necessary (read the crammed)

key words are in an essay that anybody else would find incomprehensible, they award grades with no regard to scholarship and logical thinking. Most of those Professors justify carrying on in that way defending English as the appropriate medium of instruction, because they too were the victims of the system and see no reason for changing it.

As there is little reading in Kiswahili at primary school (books are generally not available or are of poor quality) and little or none at university (except for those specialising in Swahili language, literature and linguistics), it is logical to conclude that there are no written texts that students can read with ease and therefore enjoy. Is it any wonder therefore that the book has no attraction to the student and reading is only suffered as long as one has to be in a university and has to pass examinations! The textbook has become an enemy of reading, and education policies have become the roadblocks against access to knowledge. So, where is the African publishing industry to be located in this readerless landscape? Who are to be its patrons when the educated are uninterested in books?

Domination of the African publishing industry by textbook publishing is its Achilles Heel. Thus far this book trade is sustainable in nearly all African countries only on condition that government education budgets and donor support remain assured as parents are unable to pay the full price of all the textbooks required. When the education budgets are cut because donor support is not forthcoming for whatever reason (disagreements on policy matters such as human rights, democracy or press freedom) money for books is correspondingly reduced and the publishing industry suffers. A situation in which the textbook publishing trade were to be wholly based on private purchases, with little or no government support in the form of subsidies, would be a first step to an autonomous and integrated publishing industry. Better than that, governments that would ensure that there is money for education and for books without depending on the whims of donors would be the solid basis of a people's publishing industry. One cannot see this taking place in the next 15-20

years or as long as the per capita incomes of the African masses remain inadequate.

Tanzania has recently qualified for the IMF/World Bank Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) status and a good percentage of its debt has been cancelled. This cancellation carried with it conditionalities for increased budgets for the social sector notably education and health. But even before then, large sums of money were pumped into textbook purchases, by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) and a number of Tanzania publishers have established themselves as a result and are in a good position to grow fast. If this situation can be sustained for at least 25 years, a great deal could be achieved. A new initiative to provide school and community libraries with supplementary reading materials including children's books and fiction is also underway and the combined effect of these projects will undoubtedly have positive results on reading.

The increased budgets on the demand side naturally stimulate production. An illustration of half-hearted financing measures is the Children's Book Project set up in Tanzania with donor funding in 1989 as a buy back scheme with guaranteed purchase by the project of 3,000 copies initially and 5,000 later. So far, this project which we all hailed as a model success story has resulted in well over 160 titles. It is instructive, however, in as far as such programs are concerned, that its impact has been negligible on the book trade and consequently on reading at a national level. According to the CBP's records, the total number of books purchased and distributed - and it is generally agreed that with a few exceptions these were the only copies sold as publishers did not risk printing more than those legally required by the contract with the CBP. So, in over 10 years - only 480,000, plus perhaps 10% more copies, were given free to select schools in a few districts in Tanzania. This experience seems to be replicated in places where it is established - as I learned recently of a publisher support fund by Ford Foundation in Indonesia.

To conclude this short paper, some questions and answers may help sum up what I have tried to communicate. One, is African publishing as it exists in most African countries relevant to the needs and aspirations of the African people? My answer is No, not as long as it only publishes textbooks that are based on curricula that are outmoded and that even with the best of the teachers would provide an education that is of marginal utility. Secondly, are educational systems in Africa going to be internally driven and responsive to the needs of the vast majority of its people? Or will globalisation drive these systems and produce, according to market dictates, small privileged élites and vast masses of poor people? The answer is No, not unless there is real and relentless struggle by people's movements and political parties to wrest power from those élites and to really work for the people. Deriving from this conclusion, it is clear that a relevant and truly vibrant publishing industry is unlikely to emerge so long as the *status quo* remains.

Thirdly, while publishing is said to be best carried out by private enterprise, this is short-sighted and unnecessarily ideologically rigid in its attitude to the public sector publishing. It may be wholly necessary for a government that is determined to re-vamp its education system and the objectives of that education to find ways to stimulate the publishing sector – all parts and aspects of the book chain, including strengthening libraries. Whether such activity is conducted by the state alone, or in cooperation with the private sector publishers, is a matter of practical realisation of the objectives, not a matter of dogma. Participation of the private sector may depend on its own readiness to contribute to an entirely new approach to the great issues of social progress – including education of the masses. The attitude of multinational publishing companies, for instance, on such issues as indigenous language publishing may well appear to limit their participation.

Finally, we must continue to seek to elevate debate on these matters and not merely accept premises that in the final analysis only seek to promote and glorify the pre-eminence of the market, without looking - as we must - at who in the end wins.

## Notes

1. Two more seminars, Arusha II (The Future of Indigenous Publishing in Africa), and Arusha III (African Writers- Publishers Seminar) organised jointly with the African Books Collective (ABC). Arusha III resulted in the publication of  "The African Writers' Handbook" published by the ABC, Oxford, 1999. An Arusha IV Seminar "Strengthening African Scholarly Publishing" is being planned for later in 2002.

2. So called following a conference held in 1995 at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study Centre, Italy. Papers from the conference were edited by Philip Altbach and Salah M. Hassan and published as "The Muse of Modernity: Essays on Culture as Development in Africa", Africa World Press 1996, The Group established the Bellagio Studies in Publishing and produced several publications under the editorship of Philip Altbach of the Boston College Centre for International Higher Education and distributed by the African Books Collective, Oxford.

3. For example the "Education for All" Conference convened by World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF and UNESCO in Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990.

4. The World Bank asserts the position in its document, "Education Policies for Sub-Saharan Africa: Adjustment, Revitalisation and Expansion", World Bank (1988a), that more textbooks and instructional materials is one measure of restoring quality of education in Africa.

5. While the African Development Bank in its1986 Education Sector Policy Paper posited the view that "there is an urgent need not just for any teaching materials and textbooks, but for materials that are more closely in tune with the realities and needs of African societies" the World Bank could only state that, "Difficult choices will have to be confronted: what pedagogical material to develop locally and what to purchase abroad, the trade offs between higher cost of local printing and least cost printing elsewhere...usually outside Africa"(both quoted from World Bank 1988a:137).

6. Julius K Nyerere, Education for Self Reliance, Government Press, Dar es Salaam, 1967.

7. Lunacharsky, Anatoli, On Social Education, in On Education, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1981, p.32.

8. Brock-Utne, Birgit, Falmer Press, New York, London, 2000, p.xxiii.

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# Information Literacy in Africa:
## Empowerment or Impoverishment?

### Colin Darch and Peter G. Underwood

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The way in which information is conceptualised changed dramatically in 1948, when Claude Shannon published his seminal paper showing how information could be mathematically measured in bits. In the meantime, we have acquired the technological means, through information and communication technologies (ICTs), to implement and exploit Shannon's conception, thus transforming the sets of skills needed to pursue the academic project, and — arguably for the first time — becoming explicit and self-conscious about them. Information literacy is the expression of that self-consciousness. The criticism has been made that the concept of information literacy is virtually co-terminous with the academic project, and therefore redundant. The first part of this argument is true up to a point. The old "Oxbridge" model of university education — to pick up a British example — was based on the acceptance of a range of shared assumptions about class, race and gender in which the skills necessary for *academic* success could remain implicit — students all knew how to read, for instance, as well as how to "read" (in the sense of decoding cultural subtexts). Of critical significance in this model is an acceptance of the importance of discourse and dialectic in shaping thinking skills, the communication of ideas and the art of persuasion through rhetoric. The model has obvious links to the inheritance of a framework of knowledge from classical times in which each component had to be tested for accuracy and reliability before being adopted. Thus, the process of learning and exploration was imbued with the critical review of information. But now, as the academy, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America, incorporates assertive "others" into itself — women, people of colour, workers — whose assertiveness often consists precisely in their refusal simply to assimilate to existing modes of knowledge production, the skills needed to

produce knowledge need themselves to be interrogated. And so information literacy can gradually come to be recognised as to some degree the product of changes in the ideology of knowledge production.

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*[T]he debate about the development and application of information literacy techniques often begins and ends with a focus on the use of electronic sources of information accessed over a network. Such an emphasis immediately locates information literacy on the side of the info-rich, those with access to such an infrastructure.*

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Information literacy makes explicit by its very existence as a concept, the class, race and gender postulates underlying the production of knowledge, and proposes a counter-strategy. Thus, the sets of skills historically and unconsciously possessed by white males are externalised and made explicit in pursuit of new ways of producing knowledge, not only in the academy, but also in society at large. In recent years — certainly from the 1990s onwards — the concept of information literacy has been more and more acknowledged as a foundation component in the development of students in South Africa, as well as elsewhere on the continent and indeed in the world. The concept's potential at all levels, from primary and secondary through to higher education has been increasingly recognised. There are some dangers associated with this, as well as some benefits. One of the most obvious is the reductionist and often implicit confusion between "computeracy" (or computer literacy), and the much broader and deeper concept.

Part of this problem has arisen because of the prevailing emphasis, especially in Africa, on access to information through the ICTs, which implicitly assume a network infrastructure, the ready availability of computers, and their acceptance within the socio-economic framework of a society. It also argues that the strong focus in many societies and organizational groups on recorded text as the "acceptable" form for information has tended to reinforce a technological orientation to information literacy development. Empower-ment through information literacy develop-ment will only be successful as a strategy for social and economic development if all forms of information are given value and citizens are encouraged to make appropriate choices.

### The Historical Origins of the Concept

It is commonly suggested that information literacy describes some kind of sub-set of the fundamental competencies that *scholars and students* need to acquire during the formative years of their education. But in fact the original focus was on *workplace* skills and competence, and this usage of the term information literacy can be traced back to Paul Zurkowski's comment to the effect that

> "people trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources for moulding information-solutions to their problems." (Zurkowski, 1974)

Behrens (1994) demonstrates that this definition has been gradually broadened to take in uses of information in environments other than the workplace, and indeed the literature does reflect a gradual shift of focus away from the workplace and towards the educational arena. As the number of papers published has expanded, the locus of interest has increasingly moved to the various levels of education, including continuing, or community, education. At the same time, and we would suggest in parallel with the trend in

information literacy, the concept of intellectual capital or knowledge capital has received much greater attention in the world of business studies. Indeed, the emergence of the *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, launched by Emerald in early 2000, typically and undoubtedly marks the first step towards the acceptance of the concept as academically respectable. Meanwhile, alongside the proselytising literature of information literacy, there has also developed a set of data-rich studies that explore the present competencies and needs of typical groups of information users in the education sector. Sayed (1998), for example, presents a study in depth of the information literacy abilities of students at the five tertiary-level education institutions in the Western Cape of South Africa.

Professional bodies such as the American Library Association (ALA) have also been active in developing views on exactly what it is that an information-literate person should be able to accomplish. The ALA's schematic and linear model "Nine information literacy standards for student learning" identifies three levels of competence, with a total of nine particularised skills:

| **Information literacy** | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Access information efficiently and effectively. | |
| 2. | Evaluate information critically and competently. | |
| 3. | Use information accurately and creatively. | |
| **Independent Learning** | | |
| 4. | Pursue information related to personal interests. | |
| 5. | Appreciate literature and other creative expressions of information. | |
| 6. | Strive for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation. | |
| **Social Responsibility** | | |
| 7. | Recognize the importance of information to a democratic society. | |
| 8. | Practice ethical behaviour in regard to information and information technology. | |
| 9. | Participate effectively in groups to pursue and generate information. | |
| (adapted from American Library Association, 1999) | | |

### Timeless and Global or Class Specific?

There are two things about these standards that are especially noteworthy. First of all, they are entirely non-specific about technology, and most particularly about information technology. The second thing is that they in fact characterise the liberal concept of the scholar that we mentioned above with reference to the Oxbridge model, with their leisured enjoyment of artistic expression and their implicit focus on the pursuit of scholarship. The standards are clearly intended, in the first sense, to be timeless and global: they are designed to describe the activities of a scholar in any locality and at any period.

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*Even more questionable is the ALA's use of such post-modern terminology as "information power", suggesting that there are winners and losers in some "information game" — a game in which it is likely that the information literate person will always succeed.*

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However, as we have mentioned above, the debate about the development and application of information literacy techniques often begins and ends with a focus on the use of electronic sources of information accessed over a network. Such an emphasis immediately locates information literacy on the side of the info-rich, those with access to such an infrastructure. It is understandable why this should be: first of all, it is "of the moment", attractive to prospective funders, and seems to address the urgent needs of the workplace. But second, it obscures the essentially *inclusive* nature of information literacy and, more particularly, *underplays* the development of the *habit* of critical assessment of sources and information. Politically, we need to ask ourselves whether this is purely accidental.

The ALA standards are open to interrogation in other ways. They are extremely linear and individualistic — *acquiring* information literacy *leads to* independent learning, *which develops*

social responsibility, and so forth. Apart from any doubts one may harbour about such easy causalities, the emphasis on independent learning may be appropriate in a society with easy access to a wide range of information sources — where "facts" can be checked against several sources. But in much of Africa, in societies and communities lacking this opportunity — and this could apply to many fragments of the United States of America, as well as elsewhere — recourse may have to be to community sources of information, such as shared experience, in order to decide whether a statement can be accepted. The importance of this insight in Africa, with its strong social tradition of the oral transmission of information, should be self-evident. In other words, information literacy is bound up with a *quality* of thinking as well as with the *use* of information.

Even more questionable is the ALA's use of such post-modern terminology as "information power", suggesting that there are winners and losers in some "information game" — a game in which it is likely that the information literate person will always succeed. Here we begin to see the links between certain conceptions of information literacy and ideas about knowledge capital beginning to be made explicit. Quite apart from running counter to the sense of building up a community by facilitating group development, "information power" implies control and segregation, neither of which resonates with the notions of community or of democratic practice. At the same time, an identifiable thread of nineteenth-century utilitarianism runs through the standards, echoing debates in the 1800s about popular education. The "March of Mind", was intended to mould citizens who could take their place in the *productive* life of the nation, and this required a normative form of education. Standardisation did not stop with formal education, either: nineteenth-century improvements to the printing press made it possible to supply a large and seemingly insatiable popular market for publications of all sorts. The poet Ebenezer Elliott expressed the sentiments well:

Mind, mind alone,
Is light, and hope, and life, and power!
Earth's deepest night, from this bless'd
hour,
The night of minds, is gone!
"The Press!" all lands shall sing;
The Press, the Press we bring,
All lands to bless:
Oh, pallid want! Oh labour stark!
Behold, we bring the second ark!
The Press! The Press! The Press!
(Elliott, 1844)

Brougham, writing of the benefits of the
newspaper industry is even more pointed:

> Here is a channel through which, alongst
> with political intelligence and the
> occurrences of the day, the friends of
> human improvement, the judicious
> promoters of general education, may
> diffuse the best information, and may
> easily allure all classes, even the
> humblest, into the paths of general
> knowledge. (Brougham, 1835)

The hapless recipients are seen as empty vessels,
to be filled with knowledge for the good of
society. Many statements about the purpose of
information literacy work are normative and
dirigiste in just this fashion: there is a mental
model of the literate person, and the task of
information literacy education is simply to
encourage everyone to conform to that model.
The relationship between knowledge and
information, development, and political power is
simply too complex to be reduced in this way
(Schech 2002).

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*We should remember that for a
substantial time, the only reason for
recording something was because it
was considered not worth memo-
rising. Yet, our model of infor-
mation almost always assumes a
recorded medium and assumes that
degree of access to those records is a
vector of "information richness".*

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Explicit in the model of information use within
many communities is recognition that the
community uses sources of information quite
effectively. We know this because the community
is surviving. Such sources of information include
non-codified traditions, insight and wisdom,
tested over time, and appropriate when applied to
local circumstances. A fascinating case study has
been published in Australia, showing how such
non-codified community knowledge can be
articulated with modern information literacy
techniques in the building of alliances for local
political purposes. In this case, an Aboriginal
community and its allies were able to prevent a
bridge-building project that would have violated
community religious beliefs in serious ways
(Owen 1996). The author concludes by
identifying what he terms six myths about
information literacy — that it is about im-
proving study skills; that it is for young students;
that it is about individualism; that it is about
libraries; that it is about the workplace; and that
it can just be added on to existing library services
(Owen 1996: 132-133).

Owen shows that by encouraging such com-
munities, information workers can develop the
local information base by supporting the
community as it considers, debates and selects
what seems appropriate and identifies what is
still needed. Information on certain topics, such
as health and agriculture, is more likely to be of
immediate use and more easily adopted than
information that appears to challenge traditional
beliefs and structures. The information literate
person thus appreciates both the apparently
objective "facts", as well as the network of the
culture within which they are to be used.

Here is the crux of the matter: the "information
rich / information poor" debate has been
characterised largely in terms of *access to
documents*, be they in electronic, print-on-paper,
or other *recorded* forms. What has been ignored
is the information *culture* to be found in any
community, which comprises a mixture of oral
and recorded knowledge and perceptions. We
should remember that for a substantial time, the
only reason for recording something was because
it was considered *not worth memorising*. Yet,

our model of information almost always assumes a recorded medium and assumes that degree of access to those records is a vector of "information richness". In this sense, amongst the griots and the elders, it is the ICT-dependent information worker who is the information illiterate.

The role of a library is to serve the infor-mation needs of a community: the emphasis in professional education of librarians and information workers has moved over the last fifty years from an almost complete obsession with praxis to a more nuanced understanding of how needs and techniques influence each other. The rapid development of ICTs has the potential to shift attention, once again, back to *techne* at the expense of that broader understanding of social need. The technology of the information age has proved for the most part robust and attractive, with the potential to be a driver of social change rather than merely a consequence of developing social need. Such powerful forces have a destructive as well as a shaping consequence. The baleful effects can already be seen in communities where the value of indigenous knowledge is being ignored in favour of documentary knowledge from the outside.

The task of educating professional infor-mation workers in Africa is changing funda-mentally. Many present-day students may never work in a traditional library — but, paradoxically, this does not diminish the need for their services. Rather, it increases the need for people who understand how to get the best out of what resources are available, *including the knowledge embedded in the community itself.* It also suggests that, if information literacy is to assist in the empowerment of people in Africa, then its exponents must not only be technically

information literate themselves, they must also be able to pass on this skill to others in the full consciousness of the information riches and knowledge present in every one of our communities.

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## The Media in Southern Africa:
## The Politics of Power and the Power of Politics

### Keyan Tomaselli

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"Power at any price". This criticism of Boris Yeltsin was made by Mikhail Gorbachev in the early 1990s. It applies equally to some democratically elected African presidents who, in the wake of the downfalls of the Abacha regime in Nigeria and Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, want to protect their ill-gotten gains from recovery by future democratically elected governments. My article takes a brief look at some of the dynamics that have the potential to stifle any return to totalitarianism.

Transformation, as it has come to be discussed in post-apartheid South Africa, however, is more than changing the discourse and demographics of an organization: it is about changing the structures and the ethos in the way people go about their business in the workplace, with regard to employment practices, in civil society, and in the conduct of affairs of state, politics and civil society. The decade of the 1990s has seen significant shifts in the political economy of Southern African media. These followed the demise of state-sponsored apartheid after 1990, and the restructuring of its supporting media apparatus.

More broadly, however, media in other member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), to which South Africa was admitted after 1994, have also been affected by political events and by global technology and policy changes. The ownership, content, delivery systems, users and audiences for a range of media services have also come under review.

South Africa operates as a regional centre within SADC, hosting the continent's most developed physical, financial and media infrastructures. Political, economic and cultural changes, wars, natural disasters, the

AIDS/HIV epidemic, and multiplying instances that show an entrenchment of democracy among populations, have all had varying degrees of impact on regional media systems and practices. In South Africa especially, regulatory institutions, media companies and parastatals have been struggling anew with 'Visions', 'Missions' and other declarations of democratic intent since democratization began (however fitfully) in February 1990.

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*A vigorously independent media is intrinsic to the infrastructure that the post-national public sphere requires. What national governments need to get used to, is that such an infrastructure must, like the post-modern public sphere, disregard the borders of the traditional national state.*

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Traditionally, broadcasting in Africa has been part of the civil service. Therefore, states and governments have tended to seriously proscribe broadcasting autonomy. In many instances, radio and television have mainly been used as the propaganda arms of ruling elites. Since 1990, however, the democratizing and privatizing impulses stemming from South Africa's post-apartheid transition have spurred Southern African governments into re-regulating the airwaves. In many countries, private satellite transmission is now available, via both encryption and free-to-air broadcasting, in addition to terrestrial public service and commercial channels. However, the way that re-regulation and privatization occurs also has a bearing on developments. National states have all sorts of ways of ensuring compliance and control. These are ensured via a range of

mechanisms, from privatizing to themselves as Zimbabwe has done, through influencing personnel appointments, to outright censorship, torture and detention.

In the print media, state-owned newspapers now compete with commercial ventures, some of which are funded by global interests. In telecommunications, monopoly providers dominate the regional public switched telephone networks (PSTN). In South Africa, Telkom, the state owned PSTN monopoly, plays a major role in upgrading and standardizing other sub-continental infra-structures, while South African cell phone providers have won huge tenders in Uganda and Nigeria. However, as in many other regions, there are trends towards privatization, while private cellular providers offer what are increasingly becoming parallel telephony services, often in partnership with parastatal landline providers.

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*The media are replete with reports about self-enrichment schemes, stock market maneuverings, and sales/buy-outs, all done without any clear or sustained commitment to grassroots empowerment.*

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Countries previously without TV, for example Malawi and Botswana introduced fledgling services in 2000. In all SADC countries issues of freedom of the press have been hotly reignited by de-regulation and re-regulation policies, and liberalization of national economies. The 1991 Windhoek Declaration set the scene, but during the 2001 anniversary month marking a decade of its publication, there were to be ironic developments. Among these was the resignation of the head of the new Botswana TV over a government instruction not to screen a documentary on capital punishment, still constitutionally permitted in that country. In Zimbabwe, there were state-sponsored attacks on the independent press and its printing machines, the detention and torture of editors, and hit squad threats against journalists. On the eve of the 10th Windhoek declaration anniversary, the Namibian government imposed a ban on state advertising

in, and purchases of, that country's largest selling newspaper because of its critical coverage of government policies and actions. Swaziland banned a newspaper and a magazine. Malawi arrested vendors selling newspapers which published columnists critical of the president's desire for a third term. Zambian editors continued their cat and mouse relations with their government. The South African government and eleven black professionals accused the media of conducting a malicious campaign of hatred against that country's President when it called for transparency and accountability, especially with regard to AIDS and corruption. These restrictions and utterances all occurred within a few weeks of the Declaration's anniversary celebrations in May 2001.

The growing tendency on the part of some Southern African governments to visibly flout press freedom and other human rights is now coming into collision with a belated realization that, under globalization, power and policy-making are becoming less confined to the national domain. Party and economy are no longer synonymous. These governments no longer care about their international credibility, about sanctions and IMF and World Bank restrictions, about creating regional instability, or about democracy. One of the reasons why presidents who have overstayed their democratic welcome are demanding third terms is to protect themselves and their cronies from pauperization, from being made to return their illegitimate wealth to the very citizens from whom they stole it. They seek to retain power at any price, but in accomplishing this entire national economies may be destroyed, with serious social and economic consequences for neighbouring states.

A vigorously independent media is intrinsic to the infrastructure that the post-national public sphere requires. What national governments need to get used to, is that such an infrastructure must, like the post-modern public sphere, disregard the borders of the traditional national state. In general terms, the following processes emerged after the demise of apartheid and the Cold War from 1990:

The first is *globalization* of infrastructural ownership and control, what with foreign interests purchasing shares in domestic media; and domestic media, especially South African, purchasing international interests. Where governments fear an opening of the public sphere, such as in Zimbabwe, decrees with the aim of curtailing criticism of government now curtail foreign ownership in newspapers. This is occurring at the same time that South Africa is relaxing its foreign ownership restrictions on telecommunication as it tries to raise adequate investment capital and improve (urban) services. The irony is that global infrastructural ownership and investment sometimes, and occasionally even necessarily, keep open sectors of the public sphere that national governments want to close down.

Second is *black empowerment*, especially in South Africa, whereby union-dominated capital now owns shares in a variety of major media industries, both locally and internationally. While many of the South African empowerment groups are experiencing financial slowdowns due to the global downturn and the failure of a significant South African upturn, some of their directors, many of them former activists, are making fortunes. The media are replete with reports about self-enrichment schemes, stock market maneuverings, and sales/buyouts, all done without any clear or sustained commitment to grassroots empowerment.

Third, *State controlled media* are coming into conflict with privately run media, which are more critical of government, and which highlight *freedom of speech issues*. The fact that some of these media transgress social and sexual taboos gives some states excuses for censorship and repression.

Fourth, *privatization*, whereby governments sell off blocs of shares to commercial investors - local and international - has had equivocal results. On the one hand they import much needed investment capital to previously moribund parastatals; but on the other, they negatively impact employment, indigenous ownership, and the public service ethos. In South African TV,

for example, the national public service broadcaster replaces information with sensation to retain advertising revenue; entertainment overshadows debate, and ratings substitute public spheres with the voyeurism of the misnamed 'reality TV' genre and 'quiz' shows like *Greed*. These trade on the staples of traditional and post-modern political economy: individual greed, selfishness and exhibitionism. These shows are now broadcast to many African states via DStv, an arm of M-Net, South Africa's only pay TV station. *Big Brother*, for example, constructs mythical 'tribes' which substitute for the real public sphere. A spurious interactivity confers upon viewers of two 24 hour satellite channels and one terrestrial channel the power to vote individual contestants off the programme.

> *The emergence of new demo-cratically elected governments during the 1990s thus situates African media in transformed global, re-gional and local contexts. The power of the market is now globally determined by the West to be the power to be protected.*

Newspapers make these shows and their bizarre characters their lead stories, and competitions and phone-ins mobilise consumers in ways which baffle even the most interactive of democracies. The separation of the public and the private is collapsed as individual avarice and interpersonal vicious-ness become the only real values in line with the new version of political economy. Real news and real politics are backgrounded, and are even seen as boring and irrelevant.

Fifth, with human rights comes *accountability*. The media are coming under severe pressure to work within 'nation-building' and develop-mental media discourses, which reduce dialogue and public debate, and frequently mask partisan political imperatives. The melting away of national borders has reduced nation-building symbolically to the 'tribe' sequestered in the house in which M-Net's *Big Brother* has assembled all kinds of crackpots to see who will

crack first. Human rights disappear, while the unit of accountability is legitimised solely at the level of the individual, the endorsement of greed, and the use of any means possible to pursue personal enrichment. So much for the notion of *ubuntu* - "I am because we are" - takes on an ominous inversion of meaning.

Most of the processes discussed above have occurred within a policy vacuum with the single exception of South Africa. The result has been a lack of transparency and public accountability. Only South Africa has a civil society and union movement strong enough to sustain the social dialectic, while the nascent social movements of Zimbabwe come under greater threat with every move designed to keep the ruling party in power. Indeed, *Big Brother* has become a hook on which some critical journalists have been discussing issues of the polity. Do hypermediated post-revolution generations relate more to 'reality TV' than they do to their own conditions, or do they perhaps make sense of them via these kinds of genres?

While the attitudes of many new African governments towards the press are little different to their authoritarian predecessors, the political conditions which led to their ascent to power locate this authority within global relations of an order not previously experienced at the local level of individual countries. The rusting away of the Iron Curtain fundamentally altered local-global relations in Africa. Altered too, are the solutions that multilateral institutions expect African nations to follow. These bodies - the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, and the host of United Nations agencies - all declare that

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*Debate, dissent, argument, disagreement and criticism are the motors of constructive and democratic progress and development.*

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freedom of the press (as a watchdog for capitalism) is a vital component of the new conditions within which governments now have to conduct themselves. The emergence of new democratically elected governments during the 1990s thus situates African media in transformed global, regional and local con-texts. The power of the market is now globally determined by the West to be the power to be protected.

The new democratically elected political elites wanting to retain authoritarian media control are now faced with new technologies such as faxes, Internet and satellites, which provide influential mechanisms to monitor, mobilise and campaign internationally around local attacks on media and journalists. The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), based in Windhoek, Namibia, for example, transmits on e-mail news of infringements on press freedom almost as they happen. One item received on 10 June 1996, well before the current state-sponsored lawlessness, contained the following paragraph in its ACTION ALERT on Zimbabwe:

> Reuters bureau chief in Zimbabwe, Chris Chinaka, says he has been warned that he would be killed if he continued to "write reports critical of President Mugabe". Chinaka says he was attending a government reception on March 27 when he was called over by the Secretary-General of the Indigenous Business Development Centre (IBDC), Enoch Kamushinda. "'You should have been killed for writing reports critical of President Robert Mugabe,'" Chinaka reports Kamushinda as saying. "'I am warning you to stop writing reports against President Mugabe. Stop everything you are writing on Mugabe.'"

This is chilling commentary of the continuing character of media-state relations in many parts of Africa. MISA and other organisations in Zambia and Zimbabwe now also transmit such e-mailed Action Alerts on a daily, and even an hourly, basis. Repressive African governments thus have fewer places to hide - at least they cannot conceal their anti-democratic actions as easily as was the case prior to 1990. But the spurious legitimacy conferred upon these kinds of despots by US Universities handing out honorary doctorates to corrupt presidents remains an enigma to us in Africa.

The 1990s saw media in Africa flexing their muscles in ways not previously possible. Attempts to suppress the media can only be temporary last gasps on the part of governments unused to, or frightened of, independent news media holding them for accounting to their readers/listeners/citizens. This realization, of course, raises the thorny question of exactly whose interests the different sectors of the media serve. Each has its own constituency, and each tries to mask this by claiming universal validity and by representing its sectoral interests as the interests of the entire nation. Thus, 'development journalism' came to represent the interests of the state, while the new global version of classical political economy assumes that capitalism is in the interests of all classes, even the working class and the lumpen-proletariat. In between these poles are a variety of other groupings and perspectives all jostling for the access and the power to define meanings and solutions.

Ideology is always a form of *fixation of belief by authority* (Peirce 1992: 109-123), whether this authority be that of class position, rank and mobility within hierarchies. As belief, people conduct themselves in accordance with the expectations that accompany these. Newly-elected parliaments and administrations are now staffed by members drawn from the liberation movements or previously suppressed opposition parties. They now manage state institutions which frequently replicate those previously constituted around the technocratic and largely secretive business of maintaining structures of oppression and patronage. Today's *institutions* are essentially those that existed previously, but now their incumbents face a contradictory task. On the one hand, they are employed in positions defined by the authority of technocratic, secretive practices perfected over many generations of institutionalized oppression in isolated local conditions. It is remarkable how easily and quickly the new incumbents adopt, and fit into, the old top-down assumptions. On the other hand, the new apparatchiks have to re*constitute* these around the achievement of democratic conditions in a global environ-ment.

Debate, dissent, argument, disagreement and criticism are the motors of constructive and democratic progress and development. The Frankfurt School which tried to explain the success of Nazism taught that to kill the social dialectic (debate, critique and dialogue) in any society is to terminate democracy, reason, justice and development. Authoritarianism results. Democracy and justice, fought for over generations, even centuries, dies in a moment.

One South African columnist wrote of *Big Brother* that Big Brother's not watching us, we are watching Big Brother. So extraordinary was the viewership during its first week of transmission in September 2000 that the national Internet infrastructure all but collapsed because of its use by viewers wanting to access the show's web site. The power of the market has become the market of power. Governments perhaps become quite irrelevant in this new set of relations. Some are simply last gasps at retaining national boundaries in an age of porous borders. The real media event, which hardly receives the prominence it should in feature writing, is the growing globalization of the social movements who contested global political economy at Seattle, Davos, Washington, Genoa, and elsewhere. The developing world's citizens and media should be plugging in, as the Mexican *Zapatistas* did, to offer alternative ways to manage and regulate the global infrastructure needed for the global social realm. The media are an essential part of this struggle.

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## "On the Edge" Commentary Series

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*Note: The views expressed do not represent ACAS official positions; they are provided to stimulate progressive discussion and debate.*

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## Editorial Update to *A Dream Betrayed*

### Carol Thompson

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The international community condemned the March Presidential elections [in Zimbabwe] as not free nor fair, including the Commonwealth Observer Group, the SADC Parliamentary Forum, and the Japanese and Norwegian Observer Missions. Only one group, the South African Observer Mission, called the elections "substantially free and fair."

In the aftermath of the elections, all hoped that the violence would abate, but the killing continues, with most of the perpetrators identified as loyal to ZANU-PF (youth militia, trade unionists, state intelligence officers, etc). Those suffering the most are the farm workers who are assaulted and removed from the farms where they work, as the land is taken over by the government. Parliament passed the law to muzzle the press; Eddison Zvobgo, an ex-cabinet minister and still a MP, called the law "draconian" and so "vague" as to permit any government action. Journalists are regularly arrested for reporting "lies" about the government.

The Heads of the Commonwealth Observer Group, representatives of South Africa and Nigeria, called for "unity talks" in an effort to bring the ruling party together with the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In May 2002, the talks were repeatedly stalled and perhaps, permanently delayed, by ZANU-PF stating it could not talk with the MDC until it removed its legal case contesting the fairness of the elections. The USA and the EU passed "smart sanctions" restricting travel of top govern-ment officials and family members. However, President Mugabe, with a large contingent, traveled freely via Paris to New York for the United Nations conference on children.

The international press rarely reports the high degree of organizing among Zimbabwean citizens, urban and rural. Zimbabweans remain highly dedicated (e.g. walking with empty stomachs to meetings, week after week; protecting neighbors) to a fair distribution of land and to accountable governance. Press pictures of the long and patient queues to vote in Harare (some waited 11 hours and did not have a chance to vote) were a rare hint to the international community of the organized commitment of Zimbabweans to retain the rights they won in 1980.

# A Dream Betrayed

## Janice McLaughlin

I feel as if I'm watching history repeat itself. The actors are different but the script is the same. Twenty-five years ago, Ian Smith, then Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, declared that he would never allow the black majority to rule: "Not in a thousand years." "Not in my lifetime."

In 2002, President Robert Mugabe made virtually the same statement regarding the strongest opposition that he has faced since he first came to power in April 1980. "We will never allow the MDC to rule," he declared, claiming that the Movement for Democratic Change, a new political party launched in 2000 from a coalition of trade unionists, intellectuals, youth and business people, was a puppet of former colonial interests that would indirectly reinstate white minority rule.

Both used similar tactics against the opposition - violence, smear campaigns, arrest, detention and even death. The presidential elections held the 9th and 10th of March gave Mugabe 56% of the votes cast and another six years in office. Few observer missions certified these elections as free and fair. "From our experience on the ground, we cannot accept the legitimacy of the electoral process and therefore its outcome cannot be free and fair," declared the Churches in Manicaland, an ecumenical group encom-passing all Christian churches in Eastern Zimbabwe. "The electoral process ignored the basic minimum electoral norms and standards compiled and accepted by the SADC (Southern Africa Development Community) countries,", it said, citing the abduction of polling agents, beating, harassment and detention of polling agents and those supporting the opposition candidate, and the lack of security for ballots. The statement called for "rejecting the culture of lies and hypocrisy, intimidation and violence that has flourished in recent times and the promotion of honesty, truth and self-sacrifice within private and public institutions."

In spite of the almost universal condemnation of the presidential poll where thousands of urban voters were denied the vote by reducing the number of polling stations and by changing the electoral laws, Mr. Mugabe was sworn into office on 17 March, verbally attacking all those who voted against him and vowing to send away all those who are opposed to his rule. Like his predecessor, Ian Smith, he seems not to care what becomes of the country and its people. Already many nations have imposed sanctions and hunger is looming. Zimbabwe may soon be as isolated as was Rhodesia after Smith made his infamous unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) from Britain in 1965. In response, the United Nations imposed sanctions on the rebel nation and nationalist guerrillas launched a liberation war that took the lives of an estimated 80 thousand people until peace was negotiated at an all party conference convened by Britain in 1979.

One hundred and ten people have been murdered in political violence over the past two years. One of the victims was Takatukwa Mupawaenda, the cousin of Maryknoll Sister Claris Zvareva, who works in the Institute of Bio-ethics at the Catholic University of Bolivia in Cochabamba. She was visiting her family in the rural areas when her 70 year old cousin was dragged from his home early in the morning to a nearby field where he was beaten to death. "Every rib in his body was crushed," reported Claris's brother, Jacob. According to newspaper accounts: "He was accused of mobilizing chiefs, headmen and other traditional leaders against President Mugabe in next month's residential poll. Mupawaenda was attacked by more than 30 ZANU PF supporters in his home.. They used sticks and sharp instruments to kill him." The irony is that Mupawaenda was a respected religious leader in the area and had given Mugabe's guerrillas spiritual guidance during the liberation war.

Like many others, he had become disillusioned after twenty years of Mugabe's rule. "We had such high hopes after Independence," recalls Mrs. Agnes Mapfumo, a youth trainer at Silveira House, a leadership-training center on the outskirts of Harare where I work. Mrs. Mapfumo knows Robert Mugabe personally as well as two of his sisters who used to work at the Center. "Our lives improved at first," she says. "The first ten years after independence saw enormous gains being made in health and education. Rural development was also a priority of the new government. Irrigation schemes were built, loans were made to small-scale farmers and new markets were opened for their products. We were happy and felt that the sacrifices we had made during the war had not been in vain." Now she is one of those calling for change.

Chaz Maviyane-Davies is another outspoken advocate for change. Zimbabwe's leading graphic artist, Chaz has won numerous international artistic awards. But he is proudest of the work that he has done at home to overcome voter apathy. Both in the 2000 parliamentary elections and the 2002 presi-dential elections, Chaz produced one poster each day for a month that visually reminded viewers of the importance of their vote. Powerful graphic commentaries on the problems in the country, these "Portals of Truth", as he called his latest series, have appeared in the media both nationally and abroad. His courageous expres-sions have not earned him applause in the ruling circles and he was deliberately bypassed in recent government awards to Zimbabwe's leading artists. [All the Portals of Truth can be seen and downloaded from www.agitnet.org]

I met Chaz shortly after Independence when he was just starting his own studio. Although he needed new clients to survive, he always volunteered his work free of charge to non-governmental groups like those for whom I worked. Recently he designed the cover of "Tusimpi", a book of Tonga proverbs that grew out of an advocacy program that I am promoting among one of the most disadvantaged groups in the country. The Tonga people are calling for the preservation of their language and culture. Chaz used some of the proverbs from the book in his "Portals of Truth."

People ask me how I feel personally when the former liberators, whom I once supported, are now the oppressors. "Did we make a mistake?," a friend in the anti-apartheid movement recently asked me. "I would do it all over again," I replied. "I supported what they stood for in the 70s. I cannot support what they stand for now." As a result, I am involved in groups that help to expose what is happening in present-day Zimbabwe such as Amani Trust, an organization that provides medical, legal and counseling services to the victims of violence. Amani is a founder member of the Human Rights Forum that brings together nine of Zimbabwe's leading justice and peace groups to document violations of human rights. The Forum has produced some of the most thorough and well researched infor-mation about Zimbabwe's descent into lawless-ness and anarchy.

In 1977, as press secretary for the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia, I compiled similar reports about the atrocities committed by the Smith regime. I am proud to be supporting a new generation of prophets who are exposing present-day atrocities. I do not believe that isolation will change Zimbabwe, any more than it changed racist Rhodesia. Sanctions may make it more difficult for Mugabe's government to do business as usual but they will also cripple those working for change. Rather I would call on the international community to support the courageous civic groups, organizations and individuals, like Chaz Maviyane, Amani Trust and Silveira House, that are working peacefully to bring change.

*[Janice McLaughlin, MM, is the leadership development coordinator at Silveira House, a Jesuit training center that offers civic education and advocacy, conflict resolution and mediation, sustainable agriculture, community-based AIDS education and practical skills training. She is also on the board of Amani Trust and the African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching.]*

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## ACAS Action Alerts

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*Dear ACAS members,*
*From time to time we send you alerts on issues of topical interest. This brief notice is sent to you at the request of one of our members.*
*Meredeth Turshen and Michael West*

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## Tanzanian Environmental Activists Persecuted for Speaking Out Against World Bank Group Gold Mine!!!

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The Tanzanian government has charged two environmental activists and an opposition political leader with sedition for speaking out about allegations of widespread human rights abuses at a World Bank Group guaranteed gold mine. We are sending out this message because these activists need your help! Please take 15 minutes to send a short fax to World Bank Group President James Wolfensohn (as described below).

Rugemeleza Nshala and Tundu Lissu of the Lawyers' Environmental Action Team (LEAT) and Augustine Mrema, Chairman of the Tanzanian Labor Party have been raising concerns over allegations of killings, illegal evictions and destruction of livelihoods at the Bulyanhulu Gold Mine in August 1996. According to the evidence they have compiled, tens of thousands of artisanal miners and their families were evicted with little notice, and as many as 52 miners may have been buried in mining pits, when the Government of Tanzania and Sutton Resources, a Canadian mining company, took control of the mine site. The World Bank Group's insurance arm, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), is supporting the project with an enormous amount of political risk insurance. MIGA has rejected calls for an independent inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the 1996 evictions.

For their efforts to publicize these allegations, Mr. Nshala, Mr. Lissu, and Mr. Mrema have been accused of making statements which "bring into contempt or to excite disaffection against the lawful authority" of the Government of Tanzania. Mr. Nshala and Mr. Lissu are appealing for help from individuals and organizations around the world. Specifically, they have requested that people send a fax to World Bank Group President James Wolfensohn, and insist that he: 1. Call on the Tanzanian Government to drop the sedition charges; 2. Call for an independent inquiry into the allegations of human rights abuses at the Bulyanhulu mine; and 3. Respond to your fax and tell you what he plans to do about this.

Send the fax to: James Wolfensohn, President, World Bank Group, FAX NUMBER: (202) 522-7700

Please don't forget to ALSO send us a copy of the fax: Steve Herz FAX NUMBER (202) 783-0444

Or, if you cannot send a fax, please send an email letter to President Wolfensohn by clicking on:
http://www.actglobal.org/campaigns/Tanzanian_goldmine/

For more information on the controversy surrounding the Bulyanhulu Gold Mine see:
http://www.leat.or.tz/active/buly/

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or are willing to take additional action:

Tundu Lissu
Lawyer's Environmental Action Team (LEAT),
Tanzania
Email: lissu@wri.org

Steve Herz
Friends of the Earth USA
Email: sherz@foe.org

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## Support Self-Determination for Western Sahara

The Bush administration is pressuring members of the UN Security Council to impose the "Framework Agreement" on the people of Western Sahara. Last month the U.S. circulated a draft resolution to members of the UN Security Council that would have imposed the Framework Accord on the people of Western Sahara. The Framework Agreement, if adopted, would effectively give Morocco sovereignty over Western Sahara and deny the people of Western Sahara the right to self-determination. The Framework Agreement would supercede the current UN settlement plan that includes a referendum to determine the will of the people of Western Sahara. The Security Council did not vote on the U.S. draft resolution and on April 30th extended the mandate of United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) for three months until 31 July 2002. But the U.S. government is still working behind the scenes to get the Framework Agreement adopted before July. If adopted as currently proposed, it would be forced by the UN on POLISARIO and the people of Western Sahara.

Please contact your members of Congress and urge them to sign on the letter being circulated by Congressman Donald Payne (D-NJ) and Congressman James Pitts (R-PA) in support of a self-determination referendum in Western Sahara. Be sure to tell them that signatures are being coordinated by Charisse Glassman in Congressman Payne's office and Karin Finkler in Congressman Pitts's office. You can get the fax number of your Congressional representatives by going to www.google.com and searching for "Senator X" or "Representative X."

More information on the issue is available at www.richardknight.com.

# ASSOCIATION OF CONCERNED AFRICA SCHOLARS
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