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***Information Needs Are Legitimate* Interview with Kay Raseroka, President**

by Eva Pressl

Institute for New Culture Technologies

World-Information.Org -- <http://world-information.org>

What was IFLA's motivation to come to WSIS 2003 in Geneva?

IFLA is concerned with the information society, particularly because it is the pre-stage to a knowledge society. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are only tools and without people that know how to use and exploit them an information society for all will remain nothing but a distant dream. A lot of people still lack access to ICT. So we are concerned with the actual use of ICTs as a facilitator to access to information for the empowerment of people. The latter is something that we librarians have always dealt with.

What relevance does ICT have for libraries and librarians?

We are probably some of the earliest adopters of technology. Libraries have needed to cooperate and so we networked our libraries in order to be able to transmit data and share information to meet the needs of library users. This we have done for at least three decades. Yet now that ICTs are so readily available it is rather a matter of training people how to use those tools to access information.

Besides the use of ICT in an organizational way does the increased use of digital material change your work?

It changes the speed with which we have access to information, but has also made much more different formats e.g. audio and video available to library users. Moreover the possibilities to exchange and transfer information have multiplied since we do not rely exclusively on printed material any more. But the need for people to absorb information or discover their own need for information to improve their lives remains a basic and unchanged condition. Besides, the use of ICT also means that librarians can reinforce preservation activities by digitizing very rare materials that we can thus make available to a broader audience whereas before one had to visit a special library in order to access information. We used and are still using those new tools for our ends and that is where WSIS is significant. ICTs are available, but must be seen in the context of the diverse communities.

You said that you digitize a lot of material, have you ever had copyright problems?

What we digitize is already in the public domain meaning that the copyright has already expired. In that sense we rather make information available that was not accessible before. Yet we do have problems with material that is contained in electronic journals which aggregate articles (eg. contained in back issues) and can only be made electronically accessible by paying license fees. The high cost of license fees limits access. Libraries are a public good. They educate and empower people to access and use information. Thus they enable an informed decision making and let people - through the contribution of their own ideas - become better citizens. If libraries can not afford to provide access to information that is needed and helps people to be alert, aware and develop themselves, then the information society's future is endangered.

We will have people who will have to rely on material that is cheap, of dubious quality, based on opinions rather than verifiable facts. This in turn will lead to misinformation. Libraries are at the heart of providing information that is well researched and accurate. Thus concerning the use of the Internet we see our role in providing portals where people can get accurate information. People shall not need to rely on questionably material that they find in the open digital space.

Do you think that copyright is narrowing the free flow of information and the access to information?

Copyright was meant to assist authors, the people that created the material, so that they could be acknowledged appropriately. Yet what is happening now is that it is no longer the authors that benefit, but the publishers. That in itself raises the costs because you are no longer dealing with the person who produced the material, but with an intermediary. Secondly there is a tendency that copyright is extended and surrendered to the forces of the free market.

We think that this is wrong and unfair, because no information is created ab initio. People do not produce material from nothing, they use public good that is provided for example in libraries. And surely the moment copyright expires is the time to feed the products and research results back into the public domain. We are willing to wait for a certain period of copyright, a time span that enables authors to recoup their costs and generate profit. But the extension of copyright (for example that of Mickey Mouse) is destroying the public good and distorting the original intention of copyright. Maybe it is time to reintegrate the moral rights into copyright or (for all concerned) to ask the question of what is morally right in the area of access to information?

Does IFLA take measures against this copyright regime?

We raise awareness concerning the need for a fair copyright system that takes into consideration both the rights of the authors and those of the public. Moreover we appeal to the moral responsibility of sharing information in order to be able to create more knowledge. However, since the rampant exploitation of indigenous knowledge systems for profit has become widespread we are even more worried. The notion that traditional collections of information (held in the memories of communities and shared orally) are said to be in the public domain, by virtue of being community owned warrants rapacious exploitation, addition of the value but without compensation or sharing of credit to the original creators is totally unacceptable. We can not justify such double standards. We must be morally correct and acknowledge that

communities, whether from developed or third world communities, need each others information sources for the creation of new knowledge. There are so many cultures that we can only contribute to a better understanding when we share our different perspectives, information and knowledge.

Do you think that copyright issue are adequately represented at WSIS?

If copyright is not an issue then it should be. Some of the NGOs and civil society organizations are very concerned about it. Generally many say that we should partner with the private sector. But we do not have similar values. The industry is concerned with making money by hook or by crook; sorry to say so. And although it sometimes makes the impression that there are business people with social responsibility, observations indicate that they pick and choose those responsibilities as profit dictates.

But if the private sector is not going to provide a solution to this problem who will?

We are not saying they should provide a solution. We are asking if they can listen to the broader issues of morality, ethics and the need of the billions of people who do not have the financial means to participate in their money based system. The product we are looking for is one that enables a sustainability of the quality of life for humanity through the ethical use of information resources by all.

Do think that WSIS will be a success and help you advance your cause?

What WSIS has done is raise awareness concerning the need of people to use and exploit information. And that is fantastic, because it has never happened before that a conference focused on information as basis for creating knowledge and a better society. IFLA will use the input and experiences from WSIS and continue to help people in being alert to the importance of knowing that information needs are legitimate; learn how and where to find information and how to critically analyse information in order to develop themselves and contribute to a democratic society.

Kay Raseroka is Director of Library Services at the University of Botswana --
www.ub.bw/library/public_html

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