

JAMAICA LIBRARY SERVICE

Brief Report on 60th Anniversary International Conference

Introduction

The Jamaica Library Service's International Conference, one of the commemorative events to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the organization was executed during February 16 – 21, 2009, under the theme "Public and School Libraries: Your Partner in National Development." The conference sought to engage the attention of not only library and information professionals but also teachers, principals, policy makers, developmental and literacy specialists, and community leaders.

The main objectives of the conference were:

- Initiating discussion with policy makers on the importance of libraries on national development
- Highlighting best practices
- Developing the human resource asset
- Forging partnerships
- Providing opportunities for networking and sharing of resources

Over the past 5 days these objectives were successfully met.

The conference provided an interesting mix of topics presented by a qualified slate of speakers. Highly informative and often sparking energetic discussions, these presentations were done as plenary sessions, panel discussions, workshops and poster sessions.

Dr Kwame Boafo, Director, UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean, set the tone at the Opening Ceremony held on Monday evening by indicating that the theme of the conference paralleled UNESCO's "Information For All" programme which focuses on harnessing the resources of libraries for national, socio-economic, political and cultural development.

He stated that in a globalized society where the lack of knowledge can make a tremendous difference, information was considered the missing element between prosperity and poverty, ignorance and enlightenment. He emphasized that information was valued as a strategic resource, a basic ingredient for economic and human development, and that libraries supported by ICTs have a key role to play. He reaffirmed UNESCO's commitment to support libraries.

The conference was then declared open. This was followed by the official opening and viewing of attractively arranged exhibits from booksellers, distributors, libraries, publishers and financial institutions.

Sessions

The first plenary session featured the Minister of Education, Hon. Andrew Holness. He spoke of the government's commitment in advancing the development of the human resource which was a national treasure. He declared that Government's policy would be based on the concept that a national policy for public and school libraries would be one that emphasized that the development of the human resource did not lie solely with the individual but with the nation as a whole. The Jamaica Library Service must assist the Ministry in the realization of that policy objective.

The Minister said further that schools needed to enlist the support of public libraries in enabling media literacy.

Critical to the Government's achieving the objective of a functional and productive populace would be the role of parenting. The Government had therefore created a National Parent Support Commission to create parenting skills programmes. He regarded the Jamaica Library Service as well placed to partner in this undertaking. He underscored the critical role which the libraries had to play in the development of all facets of literacy.

The Director General of the Jamaica Library Service Mrs. Patricia Roberts, in her presentation focussed on the critical role the public and school libraries play in enabling the achievement of developed country status as outlined in Vision 2030 Draft National Development Plan. She pointed to commonalities with the Jamaica Library Service's 5 Year Strategic Development Plan and the current programmes of the organization which could give critical support to the initiatives being proposed.

Other speakers presented on topics relevant to the theme and explored such aspects as the political, educational, social, informational, economic and technological. The need for greater collaboration between national and public libraries, between public and school libraries, and between School Librarians and School Administrators was advanced. Challenges were thrown out for the public library to become more innovative in its promotional activities and encouragement given to pursue more aggressive marketing strategies to attract the attention of non users in pursuit of Life Long Learning.

A convincing case was made for the public library's involvement in facilitating the business and productive sector and in promoting community peace and social wellbeing.

The Ministry of Education's strong position on quality, access and literacy was echoed in other presentations. Several of these centered on Information Literacy Programmes being undertaken in other countries, and the need for greater focus on not just the traditional 3Rs but facilitating functional literacy as an agent of change.

The UNESCO sponsored panel discussion entitled: "Information Literacy Programmes Impacting Educational Development: Case Studies from the Caribbean," outlined information literacy activities being undertaken by the University of the West Indies (UWI) – Jamaica), The Bahamas Public Library, The Belize National Library and The National Library and Information

System Authority (NALIS) – Trinidad and Tobago. The presentations highlighted the positive impact that these information literacy initiatives had and how the best practices shared could empower adults and students to become sophisticated users of information. One important observation made by one participant in this presentation was the need for empirical data on these initiatives as major political decisions could not be made without supporting data on the impact of these initiatives.

We were enlightened as to the Reading Habits of Jamaican Children and that the factors contributing to this were gender, maternal education and socio-economic status.

Mr Ancil Torres of the Torres Foundation for the Blind spoke on Assistive Technology and highlighted some of the products available for the visually impaired.

The case for promoting and supporting our indigenous literature in the pursuit of a national and personal identity was forcefully and passionately made.

Strategies for the library to promote health and wellness, strong families and resilient and vibrant communities were clearly articulated.

We were enlightened regarding the use of the Geographical Information System (GIS) in Jamaica and encouraged to partner in increasing awareness of its use and the proposed National Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI)

The use of the new technologies to facilitate collaboration between libraries, explore learning, promote and encourage reading and to contribute to research was addressed.

Participants were apprised of the innovations being introduced in educating librarians in the Caribbean in order to respond to the changing roles of Librarianship in the 21st Century and beyond.

The importance of having a National Information System was re-affirmed. The current position, initiatives being pursued, challenges and positive solutions were outlined.

Tours

Two tours were carried out. Visits were made to Prospect Plantation, Oracabessa High School Library and St Ann Parish Library. The visitors to the High School Library were well entertained by musical selections rendered by the students and the school band. A set of books was donated to the school by Mr. Gerald Brown on behalf of School Libraries in the Manitoba area of Canada.

Presentation

On Thursday, February 19, 2009 a most welcome donation of books valued at over One Million dollars was made to the Jamaica Library Service by Carlong Publishers.

Participation

A total of Two Hundred & Fifty Two (252) persons participated in the conference. Participants came mainly from Jamaica. Other participants were from United States of America, Canada, Belize, Bahamas and Trinidad & Tobago. Some prospective overseas participants and presenters who had initially indicated interest cancelled citing the effects of the global financial crisis on their budgets.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing it was agreed that this conference has provided a forum for the exploration of a variety of concepts, issues and solutions that will drive the thrust to ensure that School and Public Libraries will continue to play a vital role in National Development.

A list of recommendations is appended.

**JAMAICA LIBRARY SERVICE 60TH
ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 16 – 21, 2009**

APPENDIX I

Recommendations

Business Sector

1. Adjustment of public library opening hours to better facilitate business persons.
2. Marketing of the Public Library Resources to increase awareness of how these can be of benefit to the business and productive sectors.
3. Establishment of business support centres to facilitate business start up, dissemination of market information and regulatory requirements for business enterprise.
4. Hosting of labour exchange sites.

Social Wellbeing

5. The Shortwood Branch Library Model should be replicated in similar inner city communities to facilitate the defusing of the culture of conflict.

Promotion of Indigenous Literature

6. Government should provide incentives to writers, illustrators and publishers of local literature

Policy

7. Ensure synchronization of National Library Policy and the National Development Plan.
8. A policy for School Libraries was critical as the lack of this adversely affected the provision of libraries in schools, and the working conditions and conditions of service for school librarians.
9. Shift in organizational structure of school libraries to allow for the recognition of the teaching and curriculum support role. To achieve this Education Officers, who should be qualified in both teaching and librarianship, would monitor the teaching functions while the Jamaica Library Service would provide administrative support.
10. The library community should be proactive and draft the National Library Policy for presentation to the Minister of Education.

11. Research done on the impact of the school library on school performance should be replicated as this can be an effective tool in influencing policy decisions.

Standards

12. Updating standards to reflect current trends in school librarianship was considered urgent.

Literacy

13. Development of a National Literacy Strategy to provide a targeted approach for children with special needs.

Advocacy

14. More effective advocacy on the part of Librarians to address the inequities in the systems.

Networking and Sharing of Resources

15. Partnership between National Library of Jamaica and the Jamaica Library Service to be extended to include
 - Promotion of awareness of cultural heritage
 - Improving and extending services to end users
 - Library infrastructure development
16. A single portal should be created to enable the public to easily access the material available from the units within the National Information System.

National Information System

17. At the closing session there was a recommendation for more action to be taken to increase awareness regarding the National Information System.