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*Globalisation: Empowering Women through Information. Impact of Information
Availability and Use in Society on Women*

Public Library Services, Economic Information and Women: Recent Advancements

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Abstract: During the International Conference on Women, in Mexico in 1975, an African delegate Ester Afua from Ghana, made decision to establish the World Bank for Women. This bank started growing and had branches in several African countries and in Latin America. There has been many other initiatives to deal with problems women are faced with in rural as well as urban economies. Many economic models have been created both to support globalization and to fight against it that have had in common the same omission: the omission of women as an important economic factor in development and the needs of women to have access to economic information.

This paper will focus on several economic aspects in Europe and other regions of the world to investigate, whether public libraries have established services for women in regard to economy and whether these services have reached women. Have public libraries collected resources on economic needs and developments? How are they organized? Are there personnel specialized in economic issues who focus on serving women or women's organizations? Are these services cooperating with one another and do established networks exist at local and global levels?

Answering some of these questions would require long-term studies and, therefore, this presentation intends to find some of the recent advancements in public libraries' work on providing economic information for women in two regions of the western world.

Globalisation/Globalization: Pros and Cons

Globalisation can be defined as follows:

Globalisation

- is the growing integration of economies and societies around the world
 - is a complex process that affects many aspects of peoples' lives
 - includes rapid growth
 - aids in poverty reduction
 - develops advanced technologies such as Internet.
 - provides for easier communication and transportation

 - is both cause and target for terrorism
 - is a reason for the spread of diseases and viruses (AIDS, SARS), and
 - enhances the development of life-extending technologies.
- (Globalization, Growth..., 2001: ix)

Has globalisation been successful? Has it ever been beneficial? Has globalisation caused harm or damage? Indeed, globalisation has done all this and even more. According to a World Bank report, "within countries that have succeeded in breaking into global manufacturing markets, integration has not, typically, led into greater income inequality. Nevertheless, there are both winners and losers from globalization." (Globalization, Growth..., 2001: x.) Thus, the answers are multifaceted and negative as well as positive. Due to the fact that in most developing countries the state is smaller in relation to national income than in the United States or the five economically richest countries, successful globalisation enlarges the state, both absolutely and relatively. At the same time, globalisation weakens some aspects of government and reduces the usefulness of some policy instruments. (Globalization, Growth..., 2001: 16) Although globalisation usually weakens monopolies, occasionally one firm may get a temporary global monopoly as, e.g., in telecommunications.

While there has been, since 1980, a great wave of global integration, considered to be the third wave, the greatest and still continuing at present, this wave is unique in that it presents cultural challenges, threatens the environment and weakens regulation. Critics claim that the political and business elite's have chosen two institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) "to run about 90 Southern countries' economies." Consequently these countries are forced to adopt policies even more committed to deregulation and withdrawal of government from insuring public welfare than those in the U.S. (World Bank/ IMF Fact Sheet, 2001) Simultaneously, a global civil society has emerged -- "globalization from below." (Globalization, Growth..., 2001:3) This society is different from any previous society in that it has become a powerful force in global collective action both for improving the environment and for reducing poverty.

We are always reminded of the importance of information, also when it deals with agriculture and food security. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reminds us of "the irreplaceable role of the agriculture sector in the economic and social development. --- Although recent decades have increasingly become known as the 'information age', hunger and food security have tended to attract media coverage and priority only when exceptional events bring to light their most dramatic manifestations. The same holds true to positive

developments ---.” The biggest positive news is ”the most significant achievement of humankind over past 50 years: the major retreat of world hunger, particularly in densely populated Asian countries -- demonstrating that even massive and extreme food insecurity situations can be overcome.” (The State of Food..., 2000: 16)

Libraries, Woman Librarians and Globalisation

Why should we discuss globalisation here, at a gathering of librarians and information specialists with a strong interest in women’s issues? There exists an abundance of good reasons for information professionals to be concerned about globalisation, but the most important reason is that *we’re all involved in it*. We have been involved in it as long as modern professional librarianship has existed. The world of knowledge is global and we as knowledge workers are integrating knowledge into the lives of all peoples.

Another although alarming reason is that globalisation has brought about phenomena that lessen knowledge and other essential things by cutting social spending and reducing expenditures on health, education, etc. There are many countries where expenditures on education are minimal, where many children, especially girls, never go to school, where increased school fees force parents to pull children, usually girls first, from school, and where literacy rates don not ascend but go down. In these countries, women who are overburdened with domestic tasks must provide care for all family members. We are facing some of the grimmest facets of women’s lives: no or insufficient education, no or extremely low pay, no or inadequate jobs, no or deficient social protection.

A particular reason for us to discuss globalisation and economic information for women is that knowledge is power, thus also economic knowledge is power, and we must ask: Do women have **economic power**? Do women have economic knowledge?

We arrive at crucial questions: Do women have **access to economic information**? Do services that provide economic information specifically for women exist? We must turn to look at ourselves: What provisions are libraries making for women to gain access to information that enhances their ability to become literate, to get education, to get paid for their work, to care for their families and participate in the society.?

As if it wasn’t sufficient to realize that many women are lacking education and skills to gather and use information, we must ask: Is it the lack of education in economic and financial matters that keeps women’s gains at much lower level than those of men? Does any correspondence exist between women’s low income and low preparedness to deal with financial matters? We library and information professionals must, then, ask ourselves: Are we providing women with the information they need?

Enough of questions! We must start looking for answers. We must observe, survey and investigate both the past and current phenomena regarding women’s education, economic issues and library and information services in order to arrive at least some understanding of the issue and the burning questions; then, perhaps, we will be better equipped to redefine our role and provide means for women to access information..

Globalisation and Public Libraries

UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (1994) states:

”Freedom, **prosperity** and development of society and individuals are fundamental human values. They will only be attained through the ability of well informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory **education** as well as on **free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information.**” Several aspects have been considered and put into action in order to promote information services in public libraries. Public libraries have provided services to many specific groups, among them women as homemakers, wives, parents, educators, partners, etc. and as entrepreneurs and social and political activists. Community information services have been organized in many countries by local government, whether located in town halls or public libraries to promote access to government-produced information and alongside with it varied general local information. Community information was said to be ” --- just about that, helping those who are in anyway disadvantaged find the means to solve their daily problems and to find a better life.--- community information services are going to be needed more than ever to ensure that everyone has access to information, otherwise the inequalities of past ages will simply be perpetuated.” (Bunch, 1982: vii)

Almost two decades --and a great variety of community information services -- later, in a meeting organized by IFLA and others in Medellín, Colombia, the theme was citizen’s and community information as seen from four axes:

- the **process and identity of globalisation**
- conveying information and encouraging reading
- the **right to information, community participation** and
- public policy; and information transfer **technology at the service of local communities.**

(First Latin American..., 2001)

The meeting concluded that one of the most important aspects in the realisation of public libraries’ mission is ”the **integration of information services** with the community as an essential tool” As in other regions of the world so also here ”the commitment of Latin American librarians is required for its administration and development.”

The work ”to quench the people’s thirst from the lake of knowledge” by creating community libraries, such as that of Bodibeng in Soshanguve, South Africa , (Mayer, 2000) involves responding to an increasing crisis resulting of conflicts between very different cultures and needs, financial difficulties, educational disparities or total lack of education, demands for entertainment and relaxation, and newly emerging needs for professional training, financial skills and economic information. Conflicts are being experienced also within the library profession: imported or academic models and knowledge are substituted with **local models**, those based on community needs as expressed by the surrounding community. In Bodibeng, ”Due to political history, but also the high rate of poverty, the residents in so-called townships are used to a culture of not paying municipal rates and taxes. This leads to an ever-increasing lack of finances in Municipal Government --- up to the point of bankruptcy.” An **awareness campaign** in which the community themselves became a driving force and pressure group formed the basis for the success in development of the community library for more than 450.000 residents. Emphasis was put on the impact sof library services on the level of education, **economic empowerment** and quality of living, all of which are essentials of normal citizenship.

In India, as reported by the Working Group of the Planning Commission on Libraries and Informatics, there exists need for change in all types of libraries in regard to library environment, fragmented and isolated services, organisational structure, library collections, information based infrastructure, and information and knowledge management. Yet, first and foremost, there exist a need for bringing about **attitudinal change** both among library staff and its current and prospective users. (Dasgupta, 2000) The required changes will come about through **new library legislation**.

Information Services for Survival

In his thoroughly realistic statements, Ngozi Nwalo from Nigeria describes some of the prospects for African libraries in terms of **managing information** for development. "Anybody that has closely monitored foreign and Africa based mass media reports -- documentary and news -- on poverty, hunger and disease in parts of Africa would begin to wonder why some people are surviving at all in the region. Many new democracies are pulled down in Africa because people are no more patient with the political class and their promises of a better tomorrow. --- It is in the foregoing socio-economic climate that libraries in Africa have to thrive. It is in a milieu that they are expected to be efficiently and effectively managed."

What kind of support do governments propose for libraries to better their information services, is a question that often remains unanswered. Even governments themselves forego seeking for the best available information. As Ngozi Nwalo asserts: "As the governments and their agencies hardly rely on hard information for their development activities, the available information mostly lie and gather dust on the shelves of the originators. As would be expected, the governments in African countries accord very low priority to serious information and so hardly see the need to strongly support and fund libraries." (Nwalo, 2000) It seems necessary, then, to take the long road in order to influence local and government officials through political pressure both to provide and to use the correct information also in and for libraries.

Many efforts have been made to create a **dialogue between librarians and government decision-makers**, for example NATIS workshops in ten African countries, and to raise the consciousness and awareness of officials of the value of information in the planning and decision-making process. The results of these efforts, lamentably, have failed to improve the situation. This neglect, combined with such elementary problems as poor information infrastructure combined with unreliable electric power supply and poor telephone facilities, and inadequate funding for libraries, makes any effort to provide information services futile, not to even mention services to such groups as women.

Women's Economic Power

In today's world a person's value is measured in monetary terms such as expenditure, income, wage, salary and pension. In all these aspects great differences exist. Women's incorporation in the active work life is influenced by their vital cycle. While men enter the labor market starting from a certain age and stay there for all their working lives, for women it's all quite different. Motherhood and the presence of children shorten in many countries women's paid labor activity and even eliminate it completely. This phenomenon is due to, among other things, the lack of child care and to the social pressure for mothers, not for the parents

together, to be responsible for their children. (de Villota, 2000: 27) In addition, women must provide and care for other family members and for the elderly and the sick.

There exist a vast literature dealing with labor market in general and women's employment, and their economic power, in particular. In the following are presented two examples, one on Spain and another on Europe.

In Spain, Paloma de Villota used in her study a methodology employed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and applied an index that intends to measure the level of women's access to the spheres of economic and political power. This elaborate indicator based on the proportion of professional and technical women as directors and managers is about their level of access into decision-making.

From this perspective, says de Villota, it can be confirmed that, in the Community of Madrid (population ca 5.3 million), women have reached the economic decision-making power level in the category of professionals and technicians as high as men and even higher at the baccalaureate degree of university studies. Similar is the case for women who have first and second degree studies. However, this situation is cut for those women who have pursued a higher level of studies (graduate or doctoral degree) and represent 38.6 % of feminisation and an index of female representation less than 0,89 of unit. The type of qualification in which women are superior to men corresponds with a graduate degree and an age of 25 to 29 years. Yet, at higher levels of study and age a masculine concentration prevails. The gender difference in regard to occupation of professional and technical jobs is one of the reasons that perpetuates salarial asymmetry in labor market. Women's better academic preparation is continually more difficult to maintain without discriminating factors in labor market. (de Villota, 2000: 143-147) With further analyses it becomes more and more evident that women's higher preparedness for jobs does not necessarily bring them either higher salary or better status.

In Europe, although there has existed employment crisis for more than twenty years, the female activity in labor market has not stopped from increasing. In Margaret Maruani's words it "progresses like a sea from a bottomless bottom. From the beginning of the 1960s, women have renewed and increased the active population. This evolution, evident in all employment statistics, is not unique nor essentially quantitative but derives from massive, lasting structural changes: feminisation of the salaried class and the development of the third sector, transformation of the relationships with employment and of the feminine behaviors of activity, success of women in educational system and universities . All these are main ingredients in this evolution." (Maruani, 2000: 15) There exist great differences so that the percentage of women varies between a third to a half of those in active labor force.

Also in the European labor market employment has increased. In the European Union, from the mid-1970s onward the growth of employment was caused by the presence of women. In recent times the scarcity of employment has not affected the movement in which the number of women entering the labor market keeps increasing. (Maruani, 2000:17) As director of the National Center of Scientific Investigation, Maruani is well informed and deeply aware of different forms of inequality, regarding women's status, working condition, salary -- notwithstanding unemployment in its most cruel aspects, subemployment and part-time employment. She concludes: "--- it's clear that those changes that affect women's work and employment don't have impact only on their professional place. The feminisation of the

world of work puts at play *the status of the second sex* --- in France this means a very important social change.” Although ”in regard to access to employment and education progress is considerable, while in the field of salaral equality and professional careers, in the area of unemployment, deprivation and subemployment, inequality is obvious, recurrent and impertinent.--- In the world of work, the equality of sexes does not make progress. Women continue to be caught in a boggy territory of stagnant and irrepressible inequality.”

Meeting Women's Need for Economic Information

Public library services and community information services are the major providers of economic information to the general public and, inferring from use statistics, to women. Indeed, general and conclusive statistics on women’s library use exist only sporadically. Women’s need for economic information has seldom been regarded as a particular issue and has been treated as part of general quest for practical information.

Recently a new trend has emerged along with the development of information and communication networks. As one example are the initiatives for women in South Australia delivered across governments departments and headed by the Minister for the Status of Women. It works in partnership with the Division of Multicultural Affairs and the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission (SAMEAC) to progress the interests of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Its program ”works to ensure women achieve full and equal participation in all sectors of society by: - providing effective and balanced policy advise on the interests and concerns of women across the state” and ”- increasing the participation of women in decision making at all levels” as well as ”- providing high-quality information and referral services to women.” (Women’s Statement 2001/2002)

The Women’s Information Service was established in 1978 and, as a feminist organisation, provides dynamic and interactive information services that assist women to overcome individual and social issues arising from their unequal status. One of its features is a supportive environment that allows women to explore and discuss their situations, to communicate by visit, phone, e-mail or fax. An Internet access program assists women in how to use the Internet. There is free Internet access for women who are comfortable in using it on their own. All services provided by the Women’s Information Service (WIS) are free and confidential. This service is based on the belief that *information enables women to make informed choices and therefore plays a key role in the enhancement of the status of women.* WIS services include also Share Accommodation Register, Tradeswomen’s register, Legal advice with referral service to local legal practitioners, and service to Rural, regional and remote women to find relevant online services and organisations. Also a Young Business Women’s Network, Financial Independence Project and Young Observer Program serve and encourage young women’s interest in government, policy and decision-making processes.

The information in finance found on WIS pages is practical and current. The most attractive feature of the governmental program is that it is ”investing in women,” promotes women by working together with other departments and agencies and maintains a personal touch by inclusion of women’s profiles in the Statement. In 2001 there was a considerable increase in phone contacts, in particular from women in rural and regional areas. Indeed, WIS is playing a key role in the enhancement of the status of women by actively promoting information services and use.

Public Libraries, Governments and NGOs

There is an avalanche of governmental information about the status of women, especially by international governmental organisations, most prominently by the United Nations Division on the Advancement of Women (DAW) and its Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Public libraries are doing a formidable task in providing access to these documents either in print or via Internet. (United Nations Division...) Especially the country reports contain usable information about women's status, actions by governments, obstacles and recent developments.

An abundance of literature and media items are flowing about actions by non-governmental organisations and groups of activists. This flow is not easily cached by librarians. In the Internet web pages appear, change character and disappear like mushrooms. Library and information services of feminist organisations and Women's Studies programs are cataloguing and indexing these pages while keeping their indexes and catalogues as current and comprehensive as possible. There exist very little sign of this work in public libraries although it must be going on in many of them.

What have recently come about are networks of anti-globalisation groups, non-governmental organisations, and their information on web pages. Although these groups seem to ignore public library services, they certainly know how to collect information, obviously also from libraries, organise and deliver it for their particular purposes. Journalist Pepa Roma has included in her book on anti-globalisation a "Directorio de la otra globalización" (Directory of the other globalisation) (Roma, 2002:345-361) that lists sources on globalisation of diverse non-governmental, governmental, international and local organisations, institutions and groups as well as individuals, both pro- and anti-globalisation.. Many of these sources provide analyses on the gathered information.

It would seem beneficial to both libraries and non-governmental organizations and groups to work closely together in order to provide accurate data in a suitable format to anyone in just about any location.

Conclusion

Prosperity, education and free and unlimited access to information are never distant to one another nor must they be. A good variety of public library and community information services, information networks and advisory services does not only advance knowledge and use of information; they also aid, accelerate and increment prosperity. Directing their services to women and including in their provisions any suitable economic information for women serves as direct investment for better economy and life.

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