ENHANCING ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC PUBLICATIONS IN TANZANIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT: Lack of access to current materials in libraries of universities and research institutions in developing countries is a major problem that hinders research and teaching. Interlibrary loans and document delivery projects have not solved this problem by themselves. The Internet makes it possible for users to have access to electronic publications irrespective of their geographical location. The two government universities in Tanzania are all linked to the Internet and have access to electronic publications. The assumption then is that their faculty now have access to current information through the Internet. Research results show that in spite of the benefits of the Internet and access to electronic publications, its use among faculty is still very low. The main reasons for such a situation are discussed.

Introduction:

The history of university development in Tanzania should be viewed in the context of socioeconomic and political changes that have taken place at the national, regional and international levels. The first university, the University College of Dar es Salaam was established in 1961 as part of the University of London that had three campus colleges in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. In 1970 the University of Dar es Salaam was established out of a decision to split the three colleges into separate Universities for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The University had three campuses: the main campus, the Muhimbili Medical campus and the Faculty of Agriculture in Morogoro. In 1984, the second university was established out of the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Science. These Universities were fully financed by public funds as part of the Tanzanian policy that major socioeconomic and political activities were strictly under government control. In the late 1980s and 1990s the burden of strict control of educational and other sectors was too heavy for the government to bear. Under strict austerity measures the capacity of the Universities to fulfill the key mission and run their activities was severely affected. As a way forward, the University of Dar es Salaam and Sokoine National University of Agriculture for instance had to institute major changes aimed at building modern universities that can compete effectively at the regional and global level.

The major shift in policy has led to major reforms in almost every sector including the education sector. There has been a need to expand access to higher education in state-

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owned universities by increasing student enrolment and to transform them to modern universities. Building a modern university entails modern administrative and services infrastructure, well-trained personnel, competitive academic and research programmes. University libraries, as hearts of modern universities, have a significant role to play in the endeavour to build modern universities. In the process of transforming Tanzanian universities into modern universities, libraries have been part and parcel of the process by undertaking several innovative activities. These include applying information technology in organization and management of information services, imparting new skills to staff, building electronic databases and providing electronic information services. At this juncture it is imperative that University Libraries have to reflect their roles in building modern Tanzanian Universities. What is important is to examine ways of enhancing access to electronic publications in these universities.

This paper examines ways of enhancing access to electronic publications in Tanzanian government universities, namely Sokoine National University of Agriculture and the University of Dar es Salaam. It discusses the potential for Tanzanian academic libraries to benefit from the current developments by looking at experiences of having access to electronic publications from other countries worldwide. The paper is divided into three sections. The first part is introduction, followed by discussion on major issues related to access to electronic publications. The third part discusses usage of electronic information in the two universities, challenges and prospects and the last section presents a conclusion and some recommendations. The paper is basically based on a literature survey, interviews with users and some discussions with some senior members of staff in two universities.

Access to electronic publications:
Electronic publishing provides a whole range of opportunities to improve the scientific information chain, of which wide and apparently free dissemination via the internet is one of the most obvious. There has been massive change in the way that researchers in Tanzanian Universities communicate with one another and in how they produce and gain access to information. They are connected to various information and communication technologies and have access to essential skills, some have an opportunity to keep in touch with their peers at the click of a few buttons, rapidly publish and disseminate their own work and browse through whole libraries of reports and data, downloading the latest ideas needed for their work. However, with the same universities some scientists are still lagging behind without any IT knowledge and are scared of using the new technologies.

Who made it possible:
Access to electronic information to scientists and university communities has been made possible by the government of Tanzania and different donor organizations. The Ocean Data and Information Network for Africa (ODINAFRICA) has facilitated accessibility to aquatic electronic information. It has also provided equipment and skills to the Institute of Marine Sciences which is under the University of Dar es Salaam and hosts the National Oceanographic Data Centre.

Sida-SAREC has also facilitated access to electronic information by providing computers and funds for Internet installation to all departmental libraries of the University of Dar es Salaam.

Through INASP PERI programme the libraries have access to electronic journal articles. INASP has subscribed to full text journal articles from different electronic publishers which are EBSCO, Blackwell publishers, Academic Press, etc. The program also provides document delivery services through the British Library in UK. Also the libraries have access to ASFA online provided by FAO and INASP.

Accessibility and usage Study:

A study was done to assess usage of electronic resources by university academic staff and students in the two universities. The study shows that there is low usage of the facility in the two universities. The service is mostly used by university students both graduates and undergraduates, for example at Sokoine National Agriculture University electronic sources of information in general are highly used by students. Library users (mostly last year students and postgraduates) have quickly changed the approach and have a very positive attitude toward electronic resources, a good number of them come to the library asking also for electronic information both offline and online. At the Faculty of Law of the University of Dar es Salaam, on the other hand things are different, the lecturers prefer to use printed publications than electronic. The study found that Law Reports and legislation are the most consulted type of materials and that the staff have other formal and informal sources of information apart from the University library.

Why low usage and solution to the problems:

When asked why such a situation, some of the users indicated lack of Internet user knowledge, some are scared by the web, they don't want to get lost in the web. After realizing that e-information is not highly used by the faculty in all universities, the librarians have decided to introduce training workshops to both users and library technicians to introduce them to new technologies and how to search information on online databases. This has proved some improvement in some of the users.

Electronic information access problems and prospects

Library staff are not enough and also the facilities are limited. The university libraries have been striving to get more computers and Library staff get frequent in-house training with these new technologies and so a good number of them can assist users who are not familiar with the e-sources. For electronic journals specifically, librarians' publicize whatever sources become available for the university to access at no extra cost. In general in the absence of subscription to any print journal, we are happy that at least we have the journals under INASP programme. One of the disappointments is when the Internet is too slow to allow meaningful downloading. One more observation, you see the generation has changed, we are getting computer literate-students who actually like to use computers, so things are changing fast in Africa too.

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Recommendations:
The study recommends increased sensitization of library users on the range of new services offered by the library and intensification of user training, including outreach programs. It is also recommended that a national network of university and research institution libraries be established in order to enhance electronic resource sharing within the country. A consortium of this kind would reduce electronic resources subscription expenses to the libraries especially for sustainability when donors have withdrawn from funding the libraries, as most of the libraries depend on donor-funded subscriptions.

Conclusion
The time for Africa to succeed is now, by utilizing the liberation provided by information and communication technologies. The University of Dar es Salaam and Sokoine National University of Agriculture have enjoyed donor support to enable develop ICT skills, access and use. It is important that Tanzanian researchers and scientist take advantage of the facilities for the development of the country and the continent as a whole

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