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# Preserving, developing and promoting indigenous languages: things South African librarians can do<sup>i</sup>

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## Abstract

*Many of the world's approximately 7000 languages face extinction. While librarians are concerned with how they can serve users speaking indigenous languages and seek materials in indigenous languages as means or tools for reaching out and ensuring the relevance of their services to communities, linguists and language policy experts are concerned with issues of language preservation and development. Their emphasis is on the languages, which are also of interest to scholars and professionals in a variety of other fields. This article asks how libraries can contribute to the preservation, development and promotion of indigenous languages. On the basis of literature from various fields an attempt is made to construct a holistic conceptual framework for reflection by LIS professionals. Some examples from South African projects are given to illustrate the possible roles of LIS in the preservation, development and promotion of indigenous languages.*

## Introduction

Worldwide there is concern about the future of the indigenous languages that are spoken by smaller language communities. In 2010 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), published the third edition of its *Atlas of the world's languages in danger* (Moseley 2010). The *Atlas* lists 2, 500 languages in various categories, ranging from “vulnerable” to [recently] “extinct” (Moseley 2012). Ten of these are or were

spoken in South Africa, by Khoekhoe or San communities. Seven are extinct, and the remainder (Korana, N|uu and Xiri) are “critically endangered”, which means that they are on the brink of extinction. It is reassuring to see that none of South Africa’s official languages are listed in the *Atlas*. Nevertheless, concern is frequently expressed about South Africa’s indigenous official languages, at times in scholarly language (as in Webb 2012) and sometimes in more vivid journalistic prose, as in an article in *The Economist* (2011) subtitled “Tongues under threat; English is dangerously dominant”. That this is a matter of national importance is reflected in Section 6(2) of the South African Constitution (South Africa 1996), which explicitly recognises “the historically diminished use and status” of the country’s indigenous languages and requires the state to “take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages”.

Indigenous languages are also a matter of growing interest in the literature of South African librarianship. While Frylinck (1981: 101) made only a passing reference to the need for “translations into the vernacular of ... children’s picture books”, the need for library materials in African languages (and for staff able to serve library users in these languages) was referred to somewhat more frequently in the “Zaaiman report” (Zaaiman, Roux and Rykheer 1988). Awareness has grown. More recently, the 6<sup>th</sup> draft of the *Library and information services charter* (Nkondo *et al.* 2009: xx) identified: “insufficient information resources in indigenous languages” as one of the challenges facing the LIS sector. The *Charter* devoted a section on ‘multilingualism’ in which LIS are urged to provide “books in mother tongue ... in order to promote the Language Policy and foster reading and in so doing both promote linguistic and cultural diversity and affirm language rights in a multilingual society” (Nkondo, Teffo, Nassimbebi, Dick, Hart and Brown 2009:74).

The relationship between libraries and indigenous languages can be approached from two angles. Librarians are concerned with how they can serve users speaking indigenous languages, and look at materials in indigenous languages as means or tools for reaching out and ensuring the relevance of their services to communities. On the other hand, linguists and language policy experts are concerned with issues of language death, survival, revitalisation, development and promotion. Their emphasis is on the languages *per se*. As will be shown below, indigenous languages are also of interest to professionals in the field of basic education, literacy, reading, publishing and book development, the Internet, and general socio-economic development. This article focuses on indigenous languages and asks how libraries can contribute to their preservation, development and promotion. The question is approached

holistically. On the basis of literature from the above-mentioned fields an attempt is made to construct a conceptual framework for reflection by LIS professionals. Some examples from South African projects are given to illustrate the suggested roles of LIS in the preservation, development and promotion of indigenous languages. In this article the term ‘indigenous language’ is used to refer to a language spoken by a community that has lived in a given area for a long time, especially a community that lived there before the arrival of other groups, such as colonisers. In the developing world the term ‘indigenous language’ is often used to refer to any language spoken before the onset of colonisation. This article refers particularly to the nine ‘Black’ African languages recognised as official languages in the South African Constitution.

## Insights from the literature

This section draws on literature from a number of fields which deal with or touch on issues of preservation, development or promotion of indigenous languages. The literature in most of these fields is very extensive. Hence no attempt is made to present a comprehensive literature review. Although reference is made to literature from other parts of the world, the emphasis is on sub-Saharan Africa and more specifically South Africa.

Publishing in the Third World, and more specifically in Africa, has received a great deal of attention, with noteworthy contributions *inter alia* from Zell (1990), Altbach (Altbach 1992, 1996, 1999; Altbach and Teferra 1999), Krynauw (1994), Wafawarowa (2001) and Stringer (2002). There have been numerous articles and chapters about publishing in individual African countries such as Kenya (Chakava 1996; Shibanda 1998; Ogechi 2001; Chakava 2008), Tanzania (Bgoya 2002) and Botswana (Bahta and Mutula 2002) to mention just a few. Woodhall (1997) brought together case studies of five African countries (Senegal, The Gambia, Namibia, Zambia and Madagascar), focussing on the cost-effectiveness of African languages. In the literature on publishing in Africa a set of problems besetting African publishers recurs:

- Economic problems (balance of payments; lack of foreign currency; excessive tariffs affecting affordability of paper and equipment);
- Poverty (most people are too poor to buy books);
- Illiteracy and absence of a ‘reading culture’;
- The multiplicity of languages spoken by relatively small language communities;
- Competition from foreign-based multinational companies;
- Effect of donations and ‘dumping’ of unwanted and out-of-date books;

- Lack of book promotion policies and effective action by governments;
- Censorship;
- Dependence on the school textbook market;
- State interventions in textbook publishing;
- Adoption of counterproductive national educational policies;
- Procurement policies of government education departments;
- Ineffective book trade associations and national book councils;
- Poor distribution due to deficient transport and communications infrastructure, lack of bookshops especially in rural areas, and thinly distributed, underfunded libraries; and
- Lack of inter-African book trade.

It should be noted that the term ‘indigenous publishers’, which occurs quite frequently, refers to publishers located in the countries concerned, and not necessarily to those publishing in indigenous languages. Indigenous languages feature in this literature mainly as a problem for publishers. While it is recognised that authentic African writing should be in African languages, as advocated by Ng’ugi wa Thiongo (Chakava 1996), and that mother-tongue publishing has advantages in promoting literacy, the large number of languages spoken by small, economically stressed populations with low literacy rates make for very small markets, raising unit costs and making books unaffordable for the intended readers (Altbach and Teferra 1999). The dominance of colonial languages (English, French and Portuguese) also inhibits publishing in indigenous languages (Bahta and Mutula 2002). Zell (1990) pointed out that experiments in publishing in African languages have often been unsuccessful in commercial terms. Zeleza (2002) cited disappointingly small publishing outputs in indigenous languages in Nigeria, Tanzania and Kenya. Not surprisingly several authors from the publishing sector have criticised the use of multiple indigenous languages in the initial years of schooling (Chakava 2008) and there have been suggestions that governments should steel themselves to take an unpopular decision and choose one of their country’s indigenous languages as the official national language (Altbach 1992; Chakava 1996; Woodhall 1997). This would ensure a critical mass of readers, allowing some economies of scale. In a later article, however, Altbach (1999) provided a more nuanced and sympathetic analysis of the language issue and made some practical recommendations for dealing with the problems.

The problems identified in the literature on publishing in Africa are generally echoed in publications dealing with publishing in South Africa (Machet 1993; Mpe 1999; Galloway 2002; Machet 2002a, 2002b, Fredericks and Mvunelo

2003; Galloway 2009; Edwards and Ngwaru 2010). Here it seems that the official recognition of eleven official languages has been widely accepted and although Machet (2002b), Galloway (2009) and Edwards and Ngwaru (2010) outline the problems arising from the multiple languages much as do the authors cited earlier, there appears to be a general acceptance of the need to publish in all of them. Such criticism as there is, is aimed more at the failure of 'risk-averse' publishers to publish in indigenous languages (Fredericks and Mvunelo 2003, Edwards and Ngwaru 2010).

Generally libraries do not feature prominently in the literature of African publishing, usually being mentioned alongside bookshops as agencies for the distribution of books, although Shibanda (1998) presents a useful discussion on the symbiotic and interdependent relationship of publishing, bookselling and libraries in Kenya. Where they are mentioned, libraries tend to be characterised as poorly distributed, underfunded and inadequate, e.g. in the country reports in Altbach (1996) and in Chakava (1996, 2008). With some exceptions, e.g. Machet (1993) and McNaught and Bowen (1994), there is not much literature on bookselling as such, bookshops being dealt with mainly in the literature on publishing, this being done in the context of the 'book chain'.

The book chain, encompassing writing, publishing, printing, distribution and reading, provides a useful conceptual framework for the discussion of the book industries, as in Stringer (2002) who edited a volume comprising eighteen country surveys, including one for South Africa (Hendrikz 2002). As shown in the above list of problems, the publishing community tend to display a keen awareness of the socio-economic and political context affecting the book chain.

Indigenous languages are dealt with in various ways in the literature of LIS, depending on the context. One context is that of services to indigenous peoples (Stevens 2008), particularly services to the 'First Peoples' of North America (e.g. Earle 2009; Crawford 2011), Northern Europe (Greneresen 2012) and Australia (Senior 2007) but also to the people of Africa (Chisenga 2002; Lor 2003; Okorafor 2010; among many others). Here the emphasis is on the preservation of indigenous knowledge and its utilisation in the interests of the relevant communities, for example in relation to land rights (Greneresen 2012), and not so much on the languages as such. Although the management of indigenous and traditional knowledge implies indigenous languages, the language dimension is not often mentioned explicitly. Another context is that of service to readers and the building of appropriate library collections (Zaaiman, Roux and Rykheer 1988; Fredericks and Mvunelo 2003), with the emphasis on

the availability of material in indigenous languages to support educational programmes (Machet 2002a; Bokre and Olden 2006; Wessels and Knoetze 2008) and to promote and maintain literacy (Ogechi 2001; Machet and Tiemensma 2009). Unlike publishers, librarians writing about indigenous languages (Machet 2002a; Wessels and Knoetze 2008) have largely accepted the argument made by educationalists (e.g. Bunyi 1999) for the use of indigenous languages in education, particularly in the first years of primary education (Macdonald 2002; Smyth 2002; Willenberg 2005) and for the development and maintenance of literacy (Pretorius 2002).

Indigenous languages are touched on in a range of other fields, including reading, African literature (Egri Ku-Mesu 1998, Mpe 1999), book development (Ng'ang'a 1982; Galloway 2009), nation building (Hameso 1997), democracy (Webb 2002; Alexander 2006), and national development more generally (Abbott 2002; Bearth and Fan 2003, Webb 2012). In developing a conceptual framework, two further areas need to be considered more closely: language planning and development, and the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on indigenous languages. They are dealt with in the next section.

### Building blocks for a conceptual framework

From the literature three sets of concepts emerge as being potentially useful as building blocks for the construction of a conceptual framework for the role of libraries in language preservation and development. A first set is provided by the 'book chain' concept described above. The book chain (writing, publishing, printing distribution and reading) can be visualised as a cycle in that some readers themselves will contribute as writers, thus linking the end and the beginning of the book chain.

A second set is provided by language planning. Threats to the continued vitality and survival of indigenous languages have given rise in various parts of the world to explicit language planning processes as a means of systematically seeking solutions to language problems. Such problems can be of different kinds and levels, but they include those that arise in "multilingual political unit[s] in which some languages are stronger and others are weaker" (Gadellii 1999: 5). Language planning is seen as encompassing 'status planning', which has to do with policy and politics and deals with matters such as the status of languages in various domains, and 'corpus planning', which has to do with such matters as the production of grammars and dictionaries and decisions on

orthographies and scripts (Gadelii 1999). There is some scepticism concerning the practical effect of language policies. In South Africa there is no lack of policy, but concern remains about the future of all the official languages other than English (Romaine 2002).

Languages that do not develop are at risk. A UNESCO expert group on endangered languages (UNESCO 2003) identified eight major factors affecting language vitality. One of these is the capacity of the language to expand into new domains (such as work environments and schooling), and media, including broadcast media and the Internet. Based on Bunji (1999), Grimes (2001), Osborne (2010), Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) (2011) and SIL International (2011), the following practical measures were identified for the development of indigenous languages spoken by relatively small numbers of people:

- **Selection:** a standard version of the language is needed that can be taught in schools and used in writing and editing text for publication. **Standardisation:** This relates to the selection of an appropriate script, determination of the orthography of the language, and compilation of dictionaries and grammars.
- **Terminology:** Terminology has to be developed, e.g. for teaching mathematics and science. In addition, terms are needed for the many technological or other innovations that appear.
- **Teaching:** Mother tongue instruction is desirable and the aim should be gradually to extend the period of mother tongue instruction.
- **Teacher training:** Teachers need training in the didactics of teaching the indigenous language and in using it as a medium of instruction in other subjects. Dual-medium education also poses pedagogical challenges.
- **Reading matter/content:** A body of reading matter has to be produced for the speakers of the language. This is of particular relevance to the present study. Factors affecting the availability of materials in indigenous languages were discussed above. Although frequent reference was made to books, it is important to note that “books” does not necessarily mean the printed and bound book, but should be interpreted to include less formal printed matter, audio and visual media, and Internet-based content which is not limited to text. All media should be harnessed in recognition of the orality of indigenous communities and the integration of music and dance with words.
- **Language revival:** In some cases special programs are instituted when a language community attempts to revive a “dying” language.
- **Academic research and teaching:** A university department or research institute should conduct research in the language and its oral traditions.

These activities should be conducted in collaboration with the community speaking the language (Bunyi 1999). They should not be passive recipients of a language developed for them. The critical factor in the survival of a language is that parents continue to teach it to their children (Grimes 2001). The third set is provided by a model which originates in the field of ICTs for sustainable development. Such development implies the inclusion of local content and languages (Mohamed, Mohamed and O'Sullivan 2010). There is a danger that the dominance of English and a small number of major world languages that is already evident in the analogue media can be greatly magnified by digital media and the Internet. Multilingualism in cyberspace is an issue of current interest to UNESCO, and particular attention has been paid to it by the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO, in relation to work on the preservation and revitalisation of that country's many small indigenous languages (Kuzmin and Plys 2011). A range of factors has to be taken into account when considering multilingualism in the Internet. A useful approach to disentangling these factors is to use a model, such as the PLETES model developed by Osborn (2010). This model was developed for work on 'localisation' in the IT sector, and is concerned with "the translation and cultural adaptation of user interfaces and software applications, as well as the creation of internet content in diverse languages and the translation of content from other languages" (Osborn 2010: 10). The model comprises six key categories of contextual factors: political, linguistic, economic, technological, educational and socio-cultural, hence the name PLETES (Osborn 2010):

- Political: policies, decision-making processes and the interplay of interests leading to those; the legal and licensing environment;
- Linguistic: the linguistic situation in the country or region and aspects of each language, the number of languages spoken, their distribution and body of speakers, whether there is a standardised orthography for each language, whether the languages are characterised by diverse dialects;
- Economic: standards of living, resources available for various kinds of business, public, social and philanthropic investment, individual and family income levels;
- Technological: electricity and ICT infrastructures;
- Educational: systems of education (whether formal or informal), school infrastructure;
- Socio-cultural: demographics, social structure, ethnic groups, culture(s), popular and individual attitudes.

Interactions occur among all the factors identified in Osborn's PLETES model.



Combinations of factors (or their interfaces) can be studied to unravel the complexities of language decline, survival and growth, and the potential effects of policies and practices related to their maintenance, development and promotion. For example, when we consider the interface of Language and Education, issues that demand attention include mother tongue instruction, language of instruction at higher levels of schooling, bilingualism and multilingualism in educational institutions, the training of teachers to teach in mother tongues and second languages, etc.

### A conceptual framework for the role of libraries

As social and cultural institutions libraries play a role in the national system of education and literacy. They nurture, and are nurtured by, a culture of reading. Economically they are seen as forming part of the book chain, or more broadly, what are somewhat jarringly called the ‘cultural industries’. This means that library initiatives need to be integrated into the policies of the various sectors in which libraries are embedded. If this is neglected, library initiatives are likely to fail. Figure 1 provides a conceptual framework or ‘road map’ for an examination of the role of libraries.



Figure 1: Libraries, indigenous languages and the book chain

The hexagon forming the outer perimeter of the diagram (dashed lines) represents the external context, which is derived from Osborn’s (2010) PLETES

model. Osborne's Technological factors have been replaced here by Transmission, referring to the functions of transmitting and mediating content, including reproduction (printing, content publishing on the Internet), publishing, and distribution (bookshops, libraries, websites, blogs, etc.); and the physical and information technology infrastructure for these functions. The other five factors are as listed above. The order of the six factors (Language, Sociocultural, Economics, Transmission, Education, and Politics) in the figure deviates from that of Osborne, to align more closely with the book chain. The dashed lines of the outer perimeter are not to be read as indicating a particular direction (clockwise or anti-clockwise), since as in the PLETES model, each of the factors can interact with all of the others, but dashed lines criss-crossing the diagram have been omitted for the sake of legibility. Within the outer perimeter is a pentagon representing five major processes, linked by solid lines: Authorship Development, Publishing, Distribution, and Readership Development are derived from the book chain. The fifth, Language Development, has been added for the purpose of this framework. Printing or physical reproduction has been subsumed under Publishing. The book chain suggests a specific order: writing – publishing – distribution – reading, but this does not apply to Language Development, which relates to each of the other four. A number of issues have been listed in cursive font in proximity to the most relevant processes and factors. Libraries have been placed in the centre of the diagram as it is the purpose of the diagram to prompt reflection on the role of libraries in relation to each of the five major processes.

## Roles for libraries

In this section suggestions are made regarding possible roles that libraries can play in respect of the five processes depicted in Figure 1. Scholarly LIS literature, cited earlier, exists that deals with the need for libraries to acquire materials in indigenous languages to serve their users. However, little or no specific literature could be found on the roles of libraries in respect of the languages *per se* other than brief news items in newsletters and the press. It was necessary to rely on personal communications and personal observations. Hence this section provides illustrative examples only.

## Libraries and language development

Libraries can contribute to language development by serving as resource centres for the collection and documentation of indigenous language materials. This implies collecting and organising published and unpublished accounts of missionaries, early travellers, ethnologists and administrators who wrote comments on the languages they heard, produced early word lists, dictionaries, grammars and Bible translations, and collected stories and poems. Initially all this material was written down. In more recent times the documentation includes audio and video recordings. Collecting and organising this material is not strange to librarians. It is part and parcel of our traditional functions.

The Grey Collection, in the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), Cape Town, is an example of a significant collection of indigenous language materials. It was initiated by Sir George Grey, who served as the British governor of both the Cape Colony (South Africa) and New Zealand during the years 1854 to 1868. Grey was keenly interested in languages and learned to speak many of them himself. As governor, he was able to collect indigenous language materials from missionaries and colonial administrators (Kerr 2006). In this way the products of the early South African mission presses, including many rare pamphlets and tracts published at mission stations, were preserved and today form part of the NLSA's Grey Collection. Of particular interest is the work done by the German philologist, Dr Wilhelm Bleek, appointed by Grey to document and study this material. Among the most interesting material he collected is a set of drawings and paintings made by the San to illustrate what they told him. This collection, which is now listed in the UNESCO Memory of the World register (UNESCO 2011), comprises valuable linguistic material from groups that are highly endangered if not extinct.

This work constitutes an important task for national libraries and university libraries in developing countries. But small, local community libraries and resource centres can also contribute. These libraries should not limit themselves to collecting what has already been recorded, important as in this is, but should provide resources and assistance in projects aimed at extending this corpus of material. This may include recording oral history, indigenous knowledge and traditional stories, poems and songs in audio and video format, in partnership with community representatives and scholars.

## Libraries and authorship development

For a language to survive and develop it needs a rich and growing corpus of content in written form as well as in audio and video formats, both analogue and digital. It is important to increase the amount and variety of content, to help create a critical mass that will satisfy the needs of literate speakers and stimulate a demand for more. It is particularly important to encourage writers and other content creators. Community libraries can play a valuable role by organising and hosting writers' workshops, courses, conferences and other events intended to impart skills and motivate potential writers. Often this is done with writers' groups, literary non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community groups. In South Africa there are many writers' groups working in indigenous languages. Many are local in scope and form around a leading writer who serves as a role model and mentor (Higgs 2005b). Libraries can assist these groups by organising and hosting events.

In South Africa, the Centre for the Book, a unit of the NLSA, has a quite extensive programme aimed at developing South African writers and generally promoting the country's literary culture. The Centre has created a Writers' Network to serve this community (Higgs 2005b). Facilities include an International Reading Room hosted by the Goethe Institute, the Network Lounge, a quiet space where writers can work and read; and the Network Lab, which has computer workstations that are available to writers by appointment for doing word-processing. There is also a collection of publications of interest to writers, including South African literary magazines and handbooks on writing and publishing. A set of pamphlets dealing with various issues of concern to writers is available at nominal cost (National Library of South Africa 2011; Lunika, pers. comm. 2011).

## Libraries and publishing

As shown earlier, in developing countries commercial publishers are often hesitant to publish books that will probably only appeal to a limited market. Libraries may become centres for community-based publishing, to step in when commercial publishing projects are not viable. A South African example of such a project is the Community Publishing Project of the Centre for the Book. The aim of the project is to enable writers and community-based groups to publish books that are relevant to their communities, but would not be of interest to a commercial publisher. It provides advice, funding and technical support to new small publishers and writers' groups to equip them with the skills needed for

publishing their work on a small scale (South African Book Development Council (SABDC) 2011). A publication, *A rough guide to small-scale and self-publishing* (Higgs 2005a), has been produced which contains advice on all the steps in the publishing process, from finalising the manuscript to marketing and distribution. During 2008 to 2010 thirty-seven titles were published with the assistance of the grant. These included novels, poetry, short stories, drama and children's books in four of South Africa's indigenous languages (Lunika, pers. comm. 2011). Another project of the National Library is the project to reprint "African classics", undertaken in collaboration with the national Department of Arts and Culture.

Librarians are the 'book experts' in small communities, generally possessing useful skills in information technology and bibliographic technique. Thus they can be very helpful resource persons in community publishing projects.

### Libraries and distribution

Libraries are traditionally part of the book chain. They are specifically involved in the distribution process, as they purchase and process books and other materials for use by their client communities. In our context we must emphasise that libraries should make a point of purchasing materials in indigenous languages. This helps to build a market for materials in those languages. If a country's libraries are able to buy quite comprehensively copies of all materials that appear in indigenous languages, this reduces the risk that publishers take when they issue them.

When librarians select books in indigenous languages they need to rethink the selection criteria that would typically be applied to the products of established publishing houses. At this stage in the publishing of indigenous language materials criteria such as quality of paper, printing and binding should be disregarded or at least applied in a flexible manner, bearing in mind Ranganathan's (1931) fifth law: "Books are for use". The implication is that it is better to buy books in the languages the people can read and if they fall apart, to buy new ones.

In addition to providing access to indigenous language materials by purchasing them and making them available to library clients, there are other things librarians can do to promote the distribution of books in indigenous languages. One of these is helping to promote book buying. In partnership with other organizations a number of South African libraries have hosted indigenous book

fairs at which indigenous writers and their books are introduced to the broad public. An example is the City of Johannesburg Library and Information Service, which in 2010 started an annual Indigenous Literature Book Fair as part of Africa Week. The Book Fair features various activities relating to indigenous languages and culture and exhibitions of indigenous literature by publishers and booksellers (Stanford 2010). Another example is the biennial book fair, the Limpopo Indigenous Languages and Local Authors (LILLA) Book Fair of Limpopo Province (Lotz 2009).

Librarians hold as an article of faith that public library service should be free of charge. Hence it is understandable that librarians are hesitant to sell books in libraries. But since the formal distribution system for books (that is, bookshops) is largely non-existent in rural areas or in the sprawling, impoverished informal settlements surrounding major cities, we need to reconsider this position. Libraries can make a difference by offering their clients the opportunity to buy books in their own languages, particularly if these books are the works of local authors and have been published by writers' collectives or community publishing projects.

### Libraries and readership development

Without readers, no books will be written or published. Libraries can help by encouraging their communities to read in their own languages. What, apart from buying such books and putting them on their shelves, can librarians do? Book fairs can contribute to developing a culture of reading, particularly if the book displays are accompanied by a stimulating programme of events.

Some South African programs put the emphasis on reaching children at an early age. The City of Johannesburg Library and Information Service has an Indigenous Reading Programme aimed at "planting the seeds of mother-tongue languages" (Stanford 2010) in young children. The programme is undertaken in partnership with local bookshops and schools. It is aimed specifically at stimulating reading in indigenous languages for children aged five to nine and forms part of the city's African Literary Development Programme, which "aims to popularise African literature and encourage authors to write in all official languages" (Naidoo 2009).

There are other ways in which libraries can encourage reading in indigenous languages, for example by means of children's programmes, reading competitions, reading circles and clubs, book promotions and discussions. One

underutilised means of dissemination is community radio. In communities with a largely oral tradition, community radio, if it broadcasts in local languages, is a very powerful medium. Librarians can use it to promote books and readings, for example by broadcasting book talks and talk shows focusing on books and reading.

## Conclusion

An attempt has been made to situate the roles of libraries in the preservation, development and promotion of indigenous languages in a larger context, which is not exclusively focused on the needs of libraries, but considers needs related to the languages *per se*. It is suggested that the work of libraries in relation to indigenous languages needs to be seen holistically within the threefold contexts of the book chain, language planning, and key contextual factors (political, linguistic, economic, technological, educational and socio-cultural) in the wider environment. From this it is clear that the potential roles of libraries go well beyond the purchasing of books in the relevant language. Librarians have to help create a reading public and a “market” for books in the languages of the people they serve. Thus traditional selection criteria used in book selection in wealthy countries may have to be disregarded. Furthermore, simply buying, even generously, will not be enough. Libraries need to become involved in the writing, publishing and selling of books. In a sense, we may need to go back to earlier library models, for example to the time of the medieval scriptoria, when libraries were not merely places where books were collected and made available, but places where books were created and disseminated, often painfully slowly, but with immense patience and dedication.

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## Endnote

<sup>i</sup> This is a revised version of a keynote paper presented at the Satellite Conference of the IFLA Section of University and Research Libraries and the IFLA Section for Latin America and the Caribbean on the theme “*Cooperation among multiple types of libraries and affiliated information services of archives and museums toward meeting common goals of sharing*”, Guatemala City, Guatemala, 10-11 August 2011.