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***My experience with the nascent National Library of Mauritius***  
*by Yves Chan Kam Lon, Director, National Library*

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I am indeed very grateful to the *Western Australian Local Government Librarians Association* for having invited me to be a speaker at the *WALGLA eighth biennial conference*, held on March 04<sup>th</sup> 2005. I would like to thank very much the organisers of such a conference for this kind invitation.

I shall speak on my national library experience as I have been privileged to be closely connected with the birth of this national library and I would wish to share some of these experiences with you.

I shall first introduce Mauritius and speak briefly about library service in the country and obstacles to its development. Then, I shall concentrate my exposé on the birth of the National Library and on its initial development until the present time.

**Mauritius: Background**

Mauritius is an island of about 1,865 square kilometres located in the South West of the Indian Ocean. Mauritius has successively been under the Dutch, French (1721-1810) and British colonisations (1810-1968). Before 1840, Mauritius had a population made up mostly of descendants of French and African origins. However, there had been by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an influx of some 300,000 Hindus and Muslims from India and some 3,500 Chinese. It became independent on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1968 and acceded to the status of Republic within the Commonwealth on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1992. The country has a Westminster type of parliamentary government. The population estimated at 1.2 million comprises Indo-Mauritians, general population (people of mixed Europeans and of African origin) and Sino-Mauritians. Mauritius has become the country with the fifth highest density of population per square kilometre in the world. Its population practises freely different religions, namely Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism etc.

Mauritius can boast itself of being a literate society. Its literacy rate averages 80% and education is free and compulsory up to the age of 16 at secondary level and university education is also free to non-working students. Recently the Education Act made it mandatory for students to attend college until the age of 16. There are some 285 primary schools, 135 secondary schools (state and private) and 45 pre-vocational and vocational institutions. Five institutions offer tertiary education, namely the *University of Mauritius*, the *Mahatma Gandhi Institute*, the *Mauritius College of the Air*, the *Mauritius Institute of Education* and the *University of Technology*. Mauritius has also introduced distant learning mode, which is fast gaining ground among Mauritians. Many private organisations offer distant learning in collaboration with foreign universities.

English is the official language of Mauritius. It is the language of administration and of courts and the medium of instruction in schools from primary to tertiary levels. However, French is quite widespread in the country as it is used heavily by the mass media. Creole is the *lingua franca* of the island; it is the language that unites all Mauritians who are also very conversant in their ancestral languages. Mauritians of Asiatic descent can easily speak in their respective ancestral language, such as Hindi,

Telegu, Tamil, Bengali, Urdu, Gujrati and Chinese. Hindus are also very comfortable in Bhojpuri, which is a dialect of Hindi. It is the policy of the Government to allow the blossoming of all these languages in complete harmony with each other. Every student has the opportunity to master his respective ancestral language at the level of his primary schooling and he can still deepen his knowledge in that language up to the secondary level. The University of Mauritius is currently running a joint B.A. – Hindi/English, which is run by the University of Mauritius and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

It is thanks to an educated population that Mauritius is forging ahead in the economic sector. Mauritius is changing gears and is now accelerating by putting in place a financial service sector and by establishing Mauritius as a cyber-island.

During the past twenty years, the Mauritian economy has diversified from a *sugar cane mono-crop based* economy in the 1970's when PIB net capita of \$300 in 1970 to a diversified economy with a PIB net capita of \$3,030 in 1993 and PIB net capita of \$4,760 in 2002.

The national long-term perspective aims to make Mauritius a happy, multi-cultural family, enjoying an excellent standard of economic and cultural infrastructure, while empowering its citizens to effect change among a wide range of services.

### **Library Services in Mauritius**

From the historical point view, library development can be said to have known four major stages. During the French colonisation, the country did not possess any public library though there was one bookshop cum library – “La Librairie Bourbon”. It is assumed that many of the French bourgeois had their own private libraries whereby they could indulge in their intellectual pursuits. During the French period, there was a blossoming of literary associations, which had each of them a library. The “Société d’Emulation Intellectuelle” was the most prominent association at that time.

During the English period (1810-1968), library development was very slow. Library development was left in the hands of private institutions. Thus the Mauritius Literary Association (1825-1863) started a subscription library and the “Librairie de Maurice” founded in 1828 had a collection of books for sale as well as for loan. Some additional literary associations sprang up: the “Cabinet Littéraire (1837)”, the “Société Pour l’Encouragement des Arts et des Sciences (1820)” and the “Société d’Histoires Naturelles (1829)”.

The third stage of library development in the country is characterised by the growth of public libraries in towns: The Mauritius Institute Library (1901), Carnegie Library (1920), the Municipality of Quatre-Bornes Library (1948) and the Municipality of Vacoas-Phoenix Library (1966), the Municipality of Beau-Bassin/Rose-Hill Library (1946). Although the City Library of the Municipality of Port-Louis was founded in 1851, it was opened to the public in 1933.

The fourth and final stage was mainly the growth of tertiary institution libraries in the 1970's, when the country achieved its political independence in 1968. These libraries, as should be expected, have been established to serve the aims and objectives of their respective parental institutions. The University of Mauritius library (1971) collects in subjects such as technology, agriculture, management and law, social sciences and humanities. The Mauritius Institute of Education library (1973) is

strong in curriculum and educational pedagogy, while the Mahatma Gandhi Institute library (1976) holds materials pertaining to social sciences, humanities and history, Belles Lettres, Eastern and Western. The Mauritius College of the Air Library has a strong collection of audio-visual materials.

It should be stated that Mauritius has also some special libraries, which serve their respective clientele: The Mauritius Sugar Industry Research Institute library, the Supreme Court library, the National Assembly library and libraries of various ministries and parastatal organisations in different sectors. These special libraries are characterised by their desire to serve principally in-house staff. Apart from these special libraries, there are some secondary school libraries. These libraries are mainly found in state and private colleges and they have been established to support teaching and to provide some reading to students. Primary schools are served by a rotative library service provided by the junior library.

Library service in the rural areas is practically non-existent. There is in fact one good public library which is adequately equipped and which provides a library service to rural users. This library was established in 1976 at Mapou. There are also public libraries at Goodlands, Grand Bay, Mahebourg, Rose-Belle, Rose-Hill and Rivière des Anguilles.

In general, library service in Mauritius is inadequate and the various reports, which had so far been produced, testify of this state of art. The *Ward Report* (1942) recommended that the island be provided with a proper library structure and organisation. Ward Report also suggested that the rural regions be served as well as urban areas by a good library service. *Toussaint Report* (1959) supported the Ward Report. The Report stressed the inadequacy of library service and it commented on the lack of coordination and cooperation and on the shortage of qualified librarians in the country. The Report came up with the following recommendations:

- (a) To create a Central Library Board
- (b) To compile a National Union Catalogue
- (c) To establish a book selection and policy for libraries in the country
- (d) To introduce training course for librarians

The next report was issued by Sydney Hockey (1966). He was invited by the Minister of Education, Arts and Culture to come to Mauritius to survey local library organisation and to recommend future development. The Hockey Report endorsed the recommendations of Toussaint Report concerning the establishment of a Central Library Service and three regional libraries. He stressed on the importance of staff training and on the need for library legislation. The next report to be produced is the one, which K. C. Harrison (1974) wrote in accordance with the instruction of UNESCO in order to advise on the setting up of a national information system in Mauritius. Harrison Report made the following recommendations:

- (a) To establish a Mauritius National Library Service under the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture
- (b) To set up a National Council on Libraries, Documentation and Archives Services
- (c) To enact a library law
- (d) To designate the Mauritius Institute as the National Library, which will act as the national and international centre for library cooperation and inter-lending.

The Pope Report (1988) was the latest one to be produced for the country. Dr E. Pope stressed on the importance of compiling a National Union Catalogue, which could start immediately. Dr Pope pressed urgently that the machinery be set in motion towards the compiling of a National Union Catalogue. She viewed this union catalogue as a *sine qua non* condition for the establishment of a national library in Mauritius. She also recommended that in-service staff mainly para-professionals be trained properly in library studies.

### **Obstacles to the Development of Library Service**

There is a noticeable low use of information in the country. People have not been trained in the proper use of information. The learning process in the country tends to inculcate in students, an implicit understanding that the knowledge needed for problem solving is stored in human memory. Learning by rote is still prevalent. It is often the only way to cope with large classes; a limited supply of textbooks and a lack of trained teachers and it substitutes from individualised instruction and independent learning through reading, experiment and discovery.

A student may go to a public library to study his textbooks because the place is comfortable, but he will seldom browse among the shelves looking for books, which will increase his knowledge. Once he has completed his *Cambridge School Certificate* or *Higher School Certificate*, he won't venture any more into the library. The average man does not know how to access or deal with information housed in libraries. So too is the illiterate man. He relies mostly in oral information, especially if he lives in a rural area.

In general, Mauritius does not possess a reading public, thirsty for knowledge. Reading is still a luxury to people who can afford to buy books. Children are not encouraged to read, since their childhood, as parents can't afford to buy them the reading materials. Public libraries do not provide a children's section, except the Municipality of Port-Louis library. Only a few bookshops offer on sale children's books, which are expensive to acquire.

The hard fact is that information system and services have not yet been totally integrated in the national development process of the country. Information has not yet been perceived as an active agent in economic progress. This is reflected in the fact that information systems had to receive the lowest priority, being even considered as an expensive luxury to establish. As a result, money is scarce in this vital area of information. Two complementary factors have contributed to the failure of establishing a national library service in the country. On the one hand, people are unaware of the enormous potential of information and on the other, Government is not yet convinced of the importance of organised information and of library systems. K. J. Mchumbu<sup>1</sup> may have hit on the right nail when he states that: "*the social pressure to expand the library services is minimal*". To the majority, librarians have very little social relevance. Not expectedly, the role of library services is still a limited one. But the hope is that policy makers, planners and administrators are slowly coming to realise the importance of information for economic and social development. Until such time when the Government will realise the full potential of information, funds be scarce, hardly sufficient to develop any information services in the country.

Another obstacle to information development is the obvious lack of skilled manpower. Despite the high level of education in the country, existing services are

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<sup>1</sup> Mchumbu, K. J. "On the librarianship of poverty" *Libri*, 1982, vol. 32, pp. 244-250, p. 248

still inadequately staffed with trained people. The library profession is poorly considered in the country and few people would venture to embrace such a profession. As a result, the lack of information specialists makes it very hard to recruit other categories of staff such as systems engineers, economic analysts, etc. *“Unqualified staff provide a poor service, which is then a source of difficulties when it comes to persuading senior administrators of the importance of information where development is concerned”*.<sup>2</sup> Access to locally produced information is not as it should be. The result is that much information remains untapped and unused. Official publications such as statistics, reports, surveys, documentaries etc, are hard to track down. Many a time, such reports are not published and they may be reprinted for a restricted circulation among officers of a given ministry. Potential users are unaware of their existence. A valuable information source is thus wasted. In addition, access to international information is checked by its excessive cost. If ever some foreign publications can be found in the libraries in the country, they may be duplicates of the same copy, since there is no cooperation among libraries and thus, access is denied to this important information. Linking local libraries to foreign networks is still a far-fetched dream because of its heavy cost and because of the low level of use of information by local people. But such a link may be achieved if Mauritius discusses the problem with a friendly developed country when it concerns technology transfer.

The inability to have access to information is also caused by a lack of adequate bibliographic tool, which can help in localising and identifying information needed for research, for example. In Mauritius, the only national bibliography has been compiled by A. Toussaint in 1955 and it is irregularly supplemented by a memorandum of books published by the Mauritius Archives. Such a list is not complete as many publications escape the bibliographical net. There is yet no National Union Catalogue, no union list of periodicals, no list of theses and dissertations undertaken by Mauritians in local and foreign universities, no index to Mauritian articles, no such current national bibliography of books published in the country. Hence, much literature still remains unknown without a proper national bibliographic control system.

### **Some ways to offset the obstacles**

Social pressure can goad the political will to organise information in a scientific and efficient way. People have to raise their voices, clamouring for more and more information. Government will have to react to popular demand.

First and foremost, the Mauritian Government should set up a national library service in the country, following the establishment of a global national information policy. It has to commit itself to the development of an information industry, which can only be of benefit to everyone.

A national library service would initiate the creation of bibliographical tools indispensable for information access. It could act as a national bibliographic centre. Through its control of or liaison with the National Archives, the national library can improve access to information in a number of ways. *“It can coordinate the listing of unpublished reports and statistics relevant to development. It can also ensure that public libraries provide government information when this is available in published*

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<sup>2</sup> Salman, L. “The information needs of the developing countries : analytical case-studies”. UJISLAA, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 241-246, p. 243

form”.<sup>3</sup> Besides, the national library could compile union catalogues, indexes to newspapers, indexes to periodicals, subject bibliographies, lists of publications and lists of theses and dissertations undertaken in local and foreign universities.

A national library has “to provide leadership in the establishment of a nationwide system of library and information services and to supply the techniques, technologies and manpower required for their development”.<sup>4</sup> The national library could also take a decisive role in the establishment of a good library school in Mauritius. It is also the role of a national library to support the formal education system and to promote the reading habit in children. This should be considered a priority since today’s children will be the readers of tomorrow.

A national library could organise library services throughout the island to provide adequate access to information to the entire population. A need assessment might first be conducted to determine what the rural population might want. It is a fact that rural people may be illiterate and are thus unable to read and write. Books may not be the only medium of disseminating information to them. Information may be supplied through audiotapes, documentary films, videotapes and close-circuit television. Elders may be supplied with new-information in the library by talking newspapers, i.e. news can be read by a fluent person in the language in which they are comfortable.

There was the urgent need to give more status to the library profession. Government should recognise librarianship as a professional job, deserving an adequate salary, comparable to that of its peers in developed countries. The Authority viewed librarians as the keepers of records, having nothing to contribute to the social and economic development of the country. But information is an important resource, which can lift up a country from the abyss of underdevelopment.

Mauritius had to train more and more people in the field of librarianship so that it could stop recruiting untrained persons to manage school libraries and even public libraries, for example. These untrained staff are really doing a disservice to the library profession and to the country as a whole. Ten years ago, there were barely ten professional librarians for a population of one million inhabitants. Hardly any Mauritians were willing to join the profession because it was a low-paid job, and to be trained as a professional librarian in the United Kingdom cost a fortune. Besides, one had to be a current registered member of the British Library Association to be able to work as librarian in a “good” library. But it might then take some additional seven years after an academic study to become a full-fledged member of the British Library Association. So, this was really a great constraint on Mauritians joining the library profession.

### **National Library: Historical Background**

The establishment of a national resource centre in Mauritius was first proposed in 1959 by the Mauritian historian, Dr A. Toussaint. In 1966, the Sydney Hockey Report recommended the setting up of a central library system. This was supported by two subsequent reports: the K. C. Harrison Report (1974) and the Pope Report (1988).

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<sup>3</sup> Annuar, H. “The role of the national library in information for development”, edited by M. B. Line & J. Line, Aslib, 1987, p.55.

<sup>4</sup> Al. Nahari, A. “Guidelines for establishing a national library.” National Libraries, edited by M. B. Line & J. Line, Aslib, 1987, p. 37.

The *Fulbright Alumni Association* was the catalyst in the establishment of the National Library. It organised, in 1992, a seminar on the need for Mauritius to have a National Library and its recommendation on the urgent necessity of setting up a National Library was sent to Government for necessary action.

The seminar on '*The national information policy: a toll for economic development*', which took place in 1993, also made a strong recommendation on the need for Mauritius to establish its national library.

Following these recommendations, the Ministry of Arts & Culture set up a national committee for the drafting of the *National Library Bill* in 1993. The committee, comprising librarians of various libraries of the country submitted (to the Ministry of Arts & Culture in 1994) the draft bill, which was vetted by the State Law Office and sent to the National Assembly to be debated. It was in December 1996 that the *National Library Bill* was debated, where many members of the National Assembly intervened on the subject. There was a unanimous consensus on the need for Mauritius to establish its National Library.

The proclamation of the National Library Act and Regulations on legal deposit were gazetted in October 1997. The National Library Board was constituted in December 1997 and the first Director of the National Library was recruited in April 1999.

As from April 1999, as Director of this newly created institution, I had to initiate a series of activities, which would launch the National Library in existence. A chronology of the major activities is presented for ease of reference:

**April 1999** Affiliation of the National Library to IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions).

Launching of Logo Competition.

**May 1999** The logo of the National Library selected.

Signing of lease agreement for a rented accommodation for the National Library.

National Library defined as an approved service body for the purpose of the Pensions Act.

The National Library houses the *Centre Serveur* of the *Banque Internationale d'Information sur les Etats Francophones*. (BIEF)

**June 1999** A portion of land identified for the construction of the National Library at Moka.

Brief for space requirement for the purpose-built National Library submitted to the Ministry of Arts and Culture.

**July 1999** The Legal Deposit initiated. Newspaper printers regularly sent copies to the National Library. Printers and producers were being asked to comply with the legal deposit regulations.

**August 1999** Recruitment of core staff.

**September 1999** Transfer of library materials of the Mauritiana Sections of the Mauritius Institute and of the Archives Department.

Launching of an Essay Competition entitled: *‘Role of the National Library in the development of Mauritius’*.

The Prime Minister, in the presence of the Minister of Arts and Culture, officially inaugurated the National Library on the 08<sup>th</sup> December 1999. The National Library was officially opened to the public in January 2000.

### **Statutory Responsibilities of the National Library**

The National Library of Mauritius was established by the Government, under the National Library Act of 1996, as a body corporate falling under the portfolio of the Ministry of Arts and Culture. The National Library operates within the following statutory frame visual:

- National Library Act
- Statutory Bodies (Accounts & Audit) Act 2000
- Statutory Bodies Pension Fund Act 2002

Consistent with its Act, the statutory responsibilities of the National Library are:

- To promote and encourage the use of library materials;
- To acquire library materials generally and in particular, a comprehensive collection of library materials relating to Mauritius;
- To collect, receive and preserve all library materials required to be deposited in the library;
- To lend library materials to the public through other libraries;
- To make library materials available to the public for reference;
- To participate in planning library services in Mauritius, promote research in library fields and provide assistance in information handling techniques;
- To act as the national bibliographic centre and maintain the national bibliography and other bibliographies;
- To act as an organising agency for national and international lending and exchange of library materials; and
- To initiate and promote cooperation between the library and other libraries, both local and overseas.

It is our vision to develop the National Library as the nation’s leading documentary resource pertaining to the Republic of Mauritius and as an apex library, serving the needs of the mauritian people in research, scholarship and creativity.

It aims to be a top class library in the provision of information services to the nation. Discretionary powers have been bestowed upon this institution to act as a central institution of coordination, planning and development of the entire library system of Mauritius. This includes the additional responsibility of acting as an ambassador of Mauritian Librarianship competence on the international scene.

### **Governance**

The National Library is governed by the National Library Board, presided by a Chairman “who shall be a person of academic distinction”, appointed by the Minister.

The National Library Board consists mainly of professional librarians from the different types of libraries of the country and of representatives of various ministries.

All the members are highly qualified and experienced in their field of responsibility. It is through the monthly meeting that decision regarding procedures, standards, norms and guidelines pertaining to the practice of good librarianship is achieved.

The National Library Board approved an organisational chart (1998-2003), which chalked out its initial development and another one for the year 2004-2005 to sustain the development of the National Library. At the present, the National Library has a staff of 30 members and it is its policy to recruit additional staff each year.

The first Strategic Plan has been developed in line with the objectives and mission of the National Library. The National Library is now guided by its 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Plan (2003-2005). As a leading body in librarianship in the country, several steps have already been taken for the development of the National Library itself so as to be able to play its role in the local and international fronts.

## **Resources**

The National Library acquired the printed Mauritiana section of the Mauritius Institute Library and that of the Archives Department in conformity with section 3 of the National Library Act 1996 and is the legal deposit institution for any library materials, printed and produced in the country.

At present, it has a collection of some 210,000 items, consisting of books, periodicals, newspapers, videotapes, audio-tapes, records, maps, manuscripts, CD etc and it is still acquiring materials through the generous donation of Mauritians and through legal deposit.

The National Library is the depository of United Nations, UNESCO, World Bank, International Monetary Fund documents.

The National Library's role is crucial in the building up of a most comprehensive collection of the nation's cultural heritage by collecting, receiving and preserving all publications and productions, printed and produced in Mauritius for present and future generation. Such a huge stock of information related to Mauritius is often referred to as "Mauritiana" in the technical jargon. Mauritiana materials are collected by means of the legal deposit system as per the Library Act 1996, which stipulates that every printer in Mauritius is required to deposit, free of charge, with the Director of the National Library, **six copies** of each publication, be it book, periodical, report, newspapers or any other printed document within twenty four hours after its publication. The same rule applies to all the producers of non-print materials produced where the latter are to deposit within thirty days of the day on which such material was publicly performed or offered for sale. On the other hand, in order to ensure that access to the most comprehensive collection of Mauritiana materials, the National Library has to bear the cost of all print and non-print materials published and printed abroad, related to Mauritius. The Library's Mauritiana collection encompasses a panoply of subjects such as agriculture, architecture, bibliography, computer science, economics, geography, handicraft, history, languages, literature, politics, pure and applied science, religion and so forth. It is interesting to note that the collection included bluebooks, almanacs, administrative reports and National Assembly debates as well as newspaper records as early as the year 1777.

## Services

We are indeed living in a most interesting time, where the management of information is becoming more professional and accessible. The fallouts of such an enterprise are tremendous and are likely going to be even more astounding in the future. The mind-boggling amounts of resources that are transferred and exchanged under this new context allow researchers and scholars worldwide to harvest the fruits of a carefully chalked out strategy and promote democratisation of knowledge.

Most importantly, it publishes the National Bibliography of Mauritius on a regular basis. It is noteworthy to state that the first Bibliography was compiled by A. Toussaint and H. Adolphe in 1986 and covered publication from 1502 to 1954. Therefore, there was no subsequent adapted editions of the National Bibliography. Since its establishment in December 1999, the National Library took over this challenging task and published its first consolidated National Bibliography for the period 1996-2000 in 2001. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition for 2001-2003 is in the press. It is hoped that the National Bibliography of Mauritius be compiled and printed on an annual basis.

With a view of informing the general public about the National Library's activities and achievements so far, no effort is spared to put this institution on the forefront of both national and international stages. Regular activities such as essay competition, exhibition, radio programmes, educational guided tours for students and teachers, press releases, updating of its website etc, are organised in order to attract public's attention to the availability of its facilities and services. The National Library provides a broad range of services to individuals, libraries and printers as well. Facilities such as scanning, electronic search on the Internet, audiovisual materials, and reprography of books, periodicals and other documents as well as free consultation are available for the general public. It is to this effect that the National Library acts as the national agency for the allocation of the ISSN to any serial publication such as newspapers, magazines, and newsletters, printed and published in Mauritius. The National Library has also introduced Cataloguing-In-Publication (CIP) among printers of the country. Printers thus benefit from the CIP (cataloguing-in-publication), which involves the cataloguing entry for a book before it is published. The CIP records for books are useful for the compilation of the National Bibliography of Mauritius – a comprehensive list of all Mauritian publications printed and published in Mauritius and elsewhere. The CIP data will appear in the printed book at the back of the title page, data containing main bibliographic details such as author, title, publisher, date of publication and ISBN created in a standard format, which add a professional touch to a publication.

On a more specialised domain, the National Library provides training in Librarianship to interested public officers and welcomes on placement or on attachments, students enrolled on BLib science degree courses as well as unemployed degree holders under "skills development programme" at the behest of the Ministry of Labour and Training and Skills Development. Consultancy services in library and information services are also provided to various Ministries on request. Bodies like the Mauritius Audit Bureau, the Mauritius Sports Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Commerce and Co-operative, and the Ministry of Labour and Industrial Relations have benefited from the National Library's counselling cell.

## **International Relations**

In this increasingly globalised world, the collaboration and cooperation between the National Library and other libraries of the world are vital for the updating of information. In this context, the National Library is affiliated to several international organisations, like IFLA and BIEF and has signed agreements with overseas libraries for exchange of information and library materials. On the international level, seminars and conferences are regularly attended to further the cooperation and collaboration with overseas libraries.

## **Customer Centric and Quality Service Delivery**

At the National Library, we firmly believe that quality is determined by the customer. It is within this concept that the National Library has embarked on a *Quality Management System* based on *MS ISO 9001 : 2000 Standard* and is on its way for certification by early 2005. A quality output is one that can satisfy the target group, namely the customer. Thus the National Library, within its quality management system, is required to focus on its customers in all work aspects.

Our customers are the Minister, Government and Non-Government Organisations, Publishers / Printers, Members of the public, Libraries at National and International levels, Staff of the National Library.

Top Management needs to identify customer requirements, convert them into quality output and ensure that they are fulfilled. Customer satisfaction is monitored through customer surveys and analysis of customer complaints.

Some characteristics of our quality outputs are:

Reliability, Accuracy of facts, Courtesy, Safety, Integrity, Cleanliness, Readiness to assist Reasonable cost, Timeliness, Efficiency.

The National Library has published its *Customer Charter*, which reflects our fundamental commitment to customer service in achieving its vision within the quality management system. The Customer Charter covers services provided by the National Library. Under this charter, we:

- set the standards and targets for our services
- list information on our various services to you, as a customer
- inform you where, and how to get information on our services
- provide information on addresses / telephone numbers of sections to be contacted if you have any complaint / query to address.

Besides the customer charter, our Library maintains a customer focused service by offering the following activities:

- information enquiries are answered on the same day and in case of delay, users are informed according;
- provision of spacious and air-conditioned Search Room for study purposes;

- provision of guidance for search and guidance by our skilled staff;
- availability of library materials in a variety of formats, and in reasonable physical condition;
- hours of operation meet the needs of customers;
- availability of free Internet access for genuine academic search;
- access to the catalogue;
- confidentiality of personal information upheld.

Management ensures that the **Quality Policy:**

- is appropriate to the purpose of the organisation, in view of our mission statement and the service offered;
- includes a commitment to comply with the requirements and continually improve the effectiveness of the quality management system in view of the dynamic environment;
- provides a framework for establishing and reviewing quality objectives through the management reviews;
- is communicated and understood at appropriate levels within the organisation the organisation through their display on notice boards and awareness sessions to staff;
- is reviewed for continuing suitability, in view of changes in external environment (markets, technologies, needs).

Our **statement of quality policy** is as follows:

We, the Top Management and employees of the National Library, believe that the Quality happens through people.

We practise Continual Improvement to achieve Customer Satisfaction by providing Customer centric, Cost-effective, Timely and Quality Service.

We are personally committed to first understand our customer expectations, to meet these expectations by performing the correct tasks defect free, on time and every time.

Management also ensures that quality objectives are established at relevant functions and levels within the organisation. Such quality objectives are measurable and are in line with the organisation's quality policy. Our Quality Objectives also show our commitment to continual improvement.

In line with our quality policy, specific functional quality objectives have been set with a view to measure performance against the agreed targets. These objectives are subject to review to anticipate changes within which we operate.

## **Excellent Customer Service Award in the Public Service - 2004**

In the context of Government Policy for Administrative Reforms, several initiatives are being adopted in order to improve customer satisfaction through the provision of timely and effective services. The Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms, in collaboration with the Mauritian Quality Institute, launched the *Excellent Customer Service Award* for year 2004, to promote and sustain the momentum of providing good customer service in the Public Service.

*The objectives of the Awards are:*

- to promote a quality service and customer-focused culture in the Public Service;
- to publicise and recognise the achievements of Ministries / Departments in the pursuit of excellent customer service;
- to provide a high level of public recognition and support for public sector institutions to improve performance;
- to further motivate Ministries / Departments and their staff to strive for continuous improvements in serving the community;
- to foster healthy competition leading to the improvement of the quality of service rendered by public sector organisations.

The assessment criteria for the awards were based on the three main areas of Quality, Efficiency and Cost Effectiveness.

The National Library participated in this award and was awarded a prize on the criterion **Quality** after the conduct of assessment and interview visits. The *Awards Ceremony* was held in November and was chaired by the Hon. Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, in the presence of the Hon. Minister of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms.

The National Library was also recipient of the *National Quality Award, level 1 : Quality Commitment*, initiated by the Mauritian Quality Institute.

## **Conclusion**

The task that lies ahead for the all-out professionalisation of the library sector in Mauritius is colossal and the National Library has already come up with an action plan, for the short, medium and long term range to better serve the public at large. Investment in training, state of the art equipment and construction of several purpose-built complexes in Mauritius and Rodrigues are on the agenda. The National Library is well aware that it is only through the unflinching and constant improvement on all of the above fronts pertaining to the collection and conservation techniques that such an ambitious project is going to be translated into reality and its mission a sweeping success! For the move would be to become a regional reference for Librarianship excellence in the Indian Ocean and endeavour to play a more active part on the international scene.

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