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Agenda item 5:

Chair's Report to CDNL on activities 2007-2010

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Aim

In this report I will try to review and assess the activities of CDNL since I was first elected Chair at the Annual Meeting in Seoul in August 2006.

Survey of CDNL members

At the Seoul meeting it was suggested that a survey of members would enable us to learn what sort of organisation members wanted CDNL to be, and what sort of activities they wanted it to undertake. I directed the Secretariat to carry out the survey, analyse the results and provide a detailed report to members for the 2007 meeting in Durban.

That report confirmed that members value CDNL as an organisation which offers them the chance to discuss and develop strategic alliances with other organisations, communication among national libraries, and collaboration particularly on digital initiatives.

Let me just recapitulate some of the main findings of the 2007 survey. With due caution (as the response rate was very low), we noted that some consistent themes emerged:

- closer **collaboration** among national libraries, and with IFLA and other library bodies, is important;
- **strategic relationships** with other professional, governmental and private sector organisations are important;
- the web environment is the dominant factor in all national libraries' activities and services;
- the core **digital issues** of concern to national libraries include: standards for metadata, standards for interoperability, web harvesting, digital preservation, frameworks for agreements on building collaborative digital libraries;
- National libraries have an interest in working to align **intellectual and cultural property** principles and practices with the digital age, and to support cultural

- diversity (through policies for equitable access to information and preservation of heritage);
- there is a 'digital divide' between developed and **less developed countries** in terms of resources available to national libraries for skills, applications and connectivity;
- national libraries should respond to trends in society and the needs of their **user communities**, through consultation and the development of participative working.

When we discussed the survey report and findings at our meeting in Durban, we recognised that the responses had produced a rich fund of ideas for CDNL to consider and perhaps to implement, resources permitting. Examples of such action areas were:

- web harvesting and digital preservation;
- developing collaborative 'digital libraries' of various types;
- raising awareness of the role of national libraries and sourcing financial support for digital developments;
- developing shared tools (directories, databases), services and protocols;
- practical arrangements for sharing resources and 'best practice' advice on implementing innovative ICT applications;
- legal and legislative developments: intellectual property issues and particularly copyright, e-legal deposit;
- connecting the digital collections of national libraries providing a searchable window to the cultures of the world; developing multilingual access to information;
- engagement with communities to develop user-centred services and encourage the creation of new content;
- improving communication among national libraries and strengthening the work of CDNL as an organisation.

However the question of resources is the key. CDNL as such has no budget: that is clear from the Statutes, and at no time have members expressed any desire to change that. With that fact in mind, in 2007 we briefly considered some recommendations for action, but realised that they were too ambitious and that a more modest and gradual approach was required: it was clear from responses that members recognised that, as the organisation did not have a budget, action to meet objectives necessarily depended on the willingness of individual national libraries (or regional groupings of national libraries) to provide resources.

The issue of resources has not changed: if anything, it has got much worse due to the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and its continuing effects on national economies.

Nevertheless, I believe it is fair to say that we have collectively made progress in the areas mentioned above, and in particular:

- we have gained experience from the development and implementation of various digital library models;

- we have collaborated strategically with IFLA, partly through the support of individual national libraries for the Core Activities, and partly through CDNL's support for IFLA's advocacy to multilateral organisations;
- we have encouraged the project work of the IFLA Section of National Libraries;
- we have improved our communications, by delivering presentations and papers, and by modestly exploiting the communication potential of our discussion list and website;
- we have made significant efforts to develop communication between the CDNL Executive and Secretariat on the one hand and the various regional organisations of national library leaders on the other hand.

Overview of activities

Professional activities:

CDNL continued to collaborate with IFLA through ICADS (the former ICABS which changed its name in 2008 to reflect a stronger focus on digital initiatives). The feasibility of the digital library interface project called 'National Libraries Global' has been tested. Various enquiries have been received about adopting NLG, and in particular, Spanish- and Portuguese-language interfaces have been developed for use in Latin America.

CDNL collaborated with the IFLA Section of National Libraries which has carried out a survey of international relations activities of national libraries.

A CDNL representative participated as an observer at meetings held by IFLA to discuss 'convergence' issues with NGOs representing archives and museums. Many of these activities were reported on at the one-day 'Digital Futures' conference held in Milan in August 2009 under the aegis of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage. (The Secretariat of CDNL worked with IFLA to ensure that the meeting had a balanced representation of CDNL members from all regions.)

CDNL produced a professional policy statement on its 'Vision for the Digital Library' – this statement is on the home page of CDNL's website.

Various key figures in CDNL have given papers and presentations in their regions. For my part I have given presentations, in my capacity of Chair of CDNL, at international meetings in Singapore, in Tokyo (for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the National Diet Library), and recently in Seoul to celebrate the Korean National Digital Library.

Communication:

The website was given a slightly new look, and the discussion list (CDNL-L) has been kept fully up to date and used regularly for business information from the Secretariat, and occasionally for posting information from members. The Secretary moderates the list, and deals with requests from non-members to post items to the list. However all members

of CDNL are subscribers to the list and are able to post information to it directly – we would like more members to take advantage of this facility.

The Secretariat has made efforts to obtain annual ‘country reports’ from members, according to a standard reporting template. These have been posted on the website and constitute an incomplete but useful information resource.

The Secretariat has communicated with regional groupings of national libraries. Communication has been strong with CDNL-AO (Asia and Oceania) which has formal annual meetings, a website and a newsletter (published by the National Diet Library of Japan), although it does not have a permanent secretariat. There has been good communication between the CDNL Secretariat and ABINIA. The South African Vice-chair of CDNL has worked to promote regular communication among members of SCANUL (African national and university libraries), and the CDNL Secretariat has developed good contacts with national libraries in some African countries.

Administration:

After I was elected Chair in 2006, the National Library of Australia kindly provided secretariat support to CDNL for several months - for which I am very grateful to them. In 2007 this function transferred to the National Library of New Zealand, and since then half the time of one professional staff member (averaged over the year) has been employed on the administration of CDNL.

Following extensive consultations, the Secretariat drafted a revision of the Statutes of CDNL in 2007-08. The revised Statutes were approved at the Annual Meeting in Quebec in 2008.

The Secretariat maintains the list of subscribers to the listserv CDNL-L (which is hosted by IFLA) and a full address file of contacts at national libraries. We have kept both our in-house address list and the list of subscribers to CDNL-L constantly up to date - a time-consuming process, and never completely accurate as we have not had the resources to research the question systematically but have depended largely on information received.

The Secretariat has dealt with numerous items of general correspondence from national libraries and outside organisations.

The Secretary has worked closely each year with the local organiser appointed by the national library hosting the Annual Meeting. The preparation of the annual meeting involves a great deal of effort to identify suitable meeting facilities, call for registrations, process papers, invite speakers, deal with protocol questions, organise the agenda including any special items such as discussion groups, liaise with technicians, and liaise with IFLA HQ for extra meeting rooms and publicity for CDNL within the WLIC programme.

The Secretariat has also updated and reissued the policy document 'Requirements for hosting the annual meeting', which sets out the respective responsibilities of the Secretariat and of the national library which hosts the annual meeting. This is an important document because the annual meeting is expensive to run.

Challenges and outcomes

What have been the challenges over the period under review, and the achievements?

The report on results of the 2007 survey noted some issues of concern:

- there was a very small number of replies, mostly from national libraries of developed countries; with the result that:
- there were many regions whose views could not be reflected at all in the survey report: North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, all the small island states of the Indian Ocean, Caribbean and the Pacific, North America (with the exception of Canada) and South America (with the exception of Brazil);
- there was clearly a 'digital divide' between the national libraries with more resources, and those with fewer resources, mainly those in the developing countries. In the latter case, lack of resources means lack of connectivity, and working largely with traditional processes and print materials.
- Certain issues were mentioned only in passing or by implication - e.g. collaboration with film, sound and television archives; the impact of convergence of digital and broadcast media; collaboration with the tertiary education and RS&T sectors; institutional mergers (national libraries and archives); the role of national libraries in national government policy development, etc.; while some other issues - e.g. wider telecommunications issues, availability of high-speed broadband Internet, and regulation - were not touched on in the survey, and not raised in responses.

Increasing financial pressures have been the biggest challenge to CDNL internationally – not only do they limit what individual national libraries can achieve, but they also prevent some members (from many developing countries but also from some developed countries) from attending our Annual Meeting, when face to face discussions on difficult issues are so important.

Main achievements over the period of this report have been:

- CDNL has promoted 'digital library' initiatives;
- The Executive has continued to provide an effective independent venue, at the WLIC but 'off campus', for CDNL members to focus on strategic discussions;
- We have clarified the Statutes and eligibility for membership of the organisation (although there is still more that could be done to streamline the operation);
- The Secretariat has worked hard to communicate with members in all regions, to explain to them the work of CDNL, and to encourage them to attend the annual meeting;

- We have provided an information resource to our members and about our members, through the website and discussion list: the CDNL 'country reports' are a mine of information;
- We have provided advice on specific regional issues to colleagues.

Prospects for the development of CDNL

There are, in my opinion, some other areas in which CDNL could operate strategically:

- providing high-level support for a renewed approach to the development and application of technical (bibliographic and preservation) standards;
- advocating to national governments and to regional and international organisations, particularly on information matters of legal and economic importance;
- promoting recognition of the concept of information literacy;
- promoting national library services to indigenous communities;
- promoting open access.

Conclusion

Essentially, I conclude that the main purpose and the achievement of CDNL remains what it always has been: to provide a forum for creative strategic discussion among peers.

Finally, my very warm thanks to three persons in particular: Erland Kolding Nielsen, John Tsebe and Lynne Brindley have been Vice-chairs successively, and I have greatly appreciated their unfailing and collegial support and advice during my four years as Chair of CDNL.