

MANAGEMENT OF THE WSF INFORMATION

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Esther Obachi giving her presentation on the management of the WSF information at the Training the trainers workshop, Nairobi, July 2006.
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1.1 Introduction

The World Social Forum (WSF) is a new global movement that believes that another world is possible. It started in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001 to counter the World Economic Forum. It provides an open space for free exchanges of ideas and debates, discussions and deliberations on issues

that affect humanity. The WSF has no common resolutions and no hierarchy but has regional secretariats that are autonomous. Issues for deliberation are agreed upon through consensus.

Therefore, the WSF brings together individuals, groups and organizations that fight against global injustice. It aims at linking the global activities with the grass-root population that subscribes to the basic principles of the WSF thus connecting the local population with global trends and events. It is opposed to the victimization of people through the neo-liberal system that entrenches violence, suffering, poverty and exclusion of a substantial number of the global population. It meets once a year on open space for debates and discussions but no common resolutions are passed . Participants have been meeting for the last 6 years at various venues as indicated here below.

2001- Porto Alegre, Brazil	10,000 participants
2002- Porto Alegre, Brazil	20,000 "
2003- Porto Alegre, Brazil	50,000 "
2004- Mumbai, India	100,000 "
2005- Porto Alegre, Brazil	150,000 "
2006- Polycentric meetings at Bamako, Mali; Caracas; Karachi, Pakistan	Various participants

1.2 The WSF Information.

Ever since inception in 2001, the WSF information has never been documented for posterity but for journalistic purposes. The WSF information can be located at various Websites and Blogs. Unlike World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other global organizations which have a tradition of publishing all their activities and produce annual reports, WSF does not have such a formality in its operations. Most of the knowledge and information gathered from the yearly Conferences and regional gatherings are posted to various websites and Blogs for whoever may access it. This is mostly done through individual efforts and for journalistic purpose.. There is no systematic documenting of the information gathered.

The information is mainly in digital form. There are also print materials from individual authors in the form of books, pamphlets, brochures etc. these, however, do not account for much of the numerous activities of the forum. Thus, information on activities of the WSF is gathered in diverse documents and stored halfhazardly. Therefore there is need for documenting, preserving and disseminating this pertinent information for the relevant users. Further, so much new knowledge is generated during the WSF conferences and related activities whose usefulness is impaired if it is not documented and disseminated. A gathering where new knowledge and information is created but not preserved for others loses value. Information and knowledge gathered from these activities ought to be acquired and disseminated by librarians and information workers.

This challenges the librarians and information workers to embrace new methods of preserving and availing information that includes digital preservation while contending with the prime causes of problems in digital

preservation. For example digital technological platforms are wonderful at making information more accessible but not so good at preserving that information for posterity. Whereas archive quality print paper can last unaltered for 500 years, a pdf- based institutional repository or a web-based set of html pages needs updating on a regular basis, for example, every time there is a new html standard and new browser software with limited backward compatibility (Joint, 2006).

1.3 The benefits of WSF information

The WSF information contributes to the observance and understanding of basic human rights that ought to be enjoyed by all. It is educative and helps in networking with other groups in the world with similar problems and concerns. This will help in alerting the population that they are not alone in their struggle for justice. It also creates solidarity within groups and gives an alternate platform for articulation of issues of concern among people that do not have a voice in international and national fora.

1.4 The role of the Librarian in the World Social Forum

Traditionally, it has been the role of librarians, curators and archivists to ensure long-term viability of and access to cultural heritage materials (Cantara, 2006)

The Librarian's role has always been that of a gatherer, organizer, keeper and disseminator of information and knowledge. In most cases the librarian has always skipped the first step of his/her role and wholly leaned on the other three steps; thereby leaving the first for other professionals. The World Social Forum is a platform that generates valuable information, which, if properly collected and utilized can change the world to be a better place to live in thus the catch phrase "another world is possible".

Most injustices are committed against the weak, the poor and the marginalized populations of the world. Since the World Social Forum is a platform for the deliberations of these atrocities, information generated from this platform needs to go back to the people at the grass-root. Hence, the vital role of the librarian. The World Social Forum information can be captured in all formats and disseminated to the population at the grass-root. In addition, the WSF provides an alternate platform for diversified views and ideas that can help reshape and solve the myriad social problems that afflict the disadvantaged in societies. This is in line with the true spirit that should be engendered in all librarians of providing relevant knowledge and information that solve current problems and enable the world to be better.

Access to information and knowledge is basis for sustainable human development and safeguard for human rights. Information and knowledge are crucial in the fight against poverty, which affect much of the developing world with Africa taking the lead. Yet, without careful planning, new technologies threaten to exacerbate the knowledge gap. This dilemma must be addressed systematically and cohesively. Hence, the need for effective management of the WSF information. Librarians

have an important role in applying their information management skills in this area to enable people to access alternate workable ideas for human and economic development.

It is envisaged that the 2007 WSF Conference in Nairobi will indeed serve as a unique forum for promoting regional cooperation in information management. It will foster partnerships in bridging the digital divide. An information gap or "digital divide" separates those most in need – particularly the poor and hungry that live in rural areas and the institutions who serve them – from the world's information resources. The introduction and use of new ICTs have exacerbated the already extreme differences between rich and poor countries, and created enclaves of information overloads within the poor countries. The digital divide is more alarming in the context of rural communities, which face further marginalization and widening information gaps when compared to communities in urban or peri-urban areas. Moreover, unless due attention is given to gender, these new technologies could very well further institutionalize existing inequalities. The above points underline the necessity for a specific approach designed to address and redress the rural digital divide. As already pointed out, much of the information generated at the WSF is enriched information owing to its varied formats . The challenge is to librarians and information scientists to gather, preserve and disseminate it in a manner most suitable for those likely to benefit from it.

1.4 How the information can be captured

The first step should be to attend the World Social Forum. Just as translators are referred to as the "Babels", the Librarians could be called the "Bibles". For information to be gathered one ought to follow the proceedings. Therefore, librarians ought to follow the events of the World Social Forum and participate in its activities. Each activity that takes place in the WSF can be captured, stored, organized and disseminated to all those who need it. Unlike journalists who collect information selectively and even discard it when it outlives its currency, librarians keep such information for posterity and reference. WSF information could be of valuable use to all the disadvantaged groups of the world if properly captured by professional librarians.. Information should be captured in all formats with the end users at the back of the librarians' mind.

2.0 Selection, Classification, Indexing, Preservation and Dissemination WSF Information

2.1 Selection

Librarians are aware that competing selection philosophies ("quality vs. demand") have been debated for a long time in the profession and complicate selection of information materials in libraries. This debate pits selection based on customer preferences ("demand") against selection based on quality materials ("quality"). The "demand" argument says that

since taxpayers fund public libraries, libraries should provide taxpayers with the types of materials they want. A collection based on "demand" may result in more "best seller" reading materials and other materials that are heavily influenced by popular culture rather than the "classics." Some argue that this type of collection will draw people into the library since the library contains the type of materials that satisfy the community's interests. Then, once you have the library users in the library, you can help "raise" their literary level by providing annotated bibliographies in different subject areas that may expand their horizons. The "quality" argument says that a public library should be a "people's university," providing people with materials to help them better themselves. All resources should be geared toward improving the cognitive level of its user community. However, this perspective suggests that there is a set of "best" resources. It is hard to agree on what the "best" resources are, since any two people are likely to disagree on what is "best." Some argue that a library basing selection solely on "quality" may end up with fewer users because people can't find what they want. In some senses, this is an artificial debate since most public libraries are going to strive for a mix of the two selection philosophies. Your ultimate goal is to provide a balanced collection that meets the needs of your community. However, to select well, one should know the following:

- The different literacy levels represented in your community
- The main occupational groups, hobbies, recreational activities, gender and businesses in your community,
- The socioeconomic status of the people in your community,
- The mean age of people in your community,
- The education level of your community,
- The ethnic groups (for language considerations) represented in your community (Evans, 1995; Rutledge & Swindler, 1987)

The above details will help the librarian to select the information that will be relevant to the user. During the Nairobi 2007 WSF, the East African Librarians will draw a priority list of the information they will want to document. Activities that will have relevant information for the people of the region will be given priority. Global and regional issues that affect the region will also be documented.

The existing information is mainly found at the Internet. This can be gathered and be systematically collated before it is repackaged in various formats for dissemination to the various users without forgetting the priority list.

2.2 Classification and cataloguing

Subject access to information has traditionally been provided by classification schemes that involve a system of controlled vocabulary

(Bates, 1998). The schemes that organize the subject access have evolved from hierarchical classification systems with notation to alphabetical indexing systems with sophisticated features for the representation of term relationships. Hierarchical classification involves a more philosophical approach based on a system of general to specific subject classification, establishing logical rules for dividing topics into classes, divisions, and subdivisions (Franklin, 2003). Some schemes are more adaptable to subject areas than others. Librarians are aware of the need to choose schemes that allow for flexibility and extensibility.

The cataloguing process goes hand in hand with classification. This process is concerned with creating entries for a catalogue. It usually includes bibliographic description, subject analysis, assignment of classification notation, and activities involved in physically preparing the item for the shelf, tasks usually performed under the supervision of a librarian trained as a cataloguer. A proper combination of these processes by librarians should ensure adequate access to WSF materials in order to make them reach as wide a readership as is possible.

It would also be advisable to develop an in house classification scheme with subject headings or key words that can easily be used by the community. In most Libraries, WHO, WTO, IMF, ILO, UN etc are used as subject headings. The WSF could also be given as a subject heading so as to easily assist the users to access the information on the same.

Information materials that are in pamphlet form can be placed in boxes that are labeled WSF as the main subject . Among the rural semi-literate population, colour codes could be used for easy identification of the information materials.

2.3 Preservation

Factors affecting the condition of library materials in print form are known to be light, temperature, relative humidity, pollution, inherent vice, biological attack, human error (including improper storage and handling), deliberate mutilation, and disasters (Greenfield, 1988). Prolonging the existence of library and archival materials by maintaining them in a condition suitable for use, either in their original format or in a form more durable, through retention under proper environmental conditions or actions taken after a book or collection has been damaged to prevent further deterioration is what is known as preservation. More emphasis, due to the type of material emanating from the WSF, should be placed on methods of preserving material in digital formats. The task here is the availability of the necessary tools, which is compounded by the fact that some digital storage media deteriorate quickly ("bit rot"), and the digital object is inextricably entwined with its access environment (software and hardware), which is evolving in a continuous cycle of innovation and obsolescence. As librarians and information workers, we can only say that digital preservation will need to be a distributed responsibility. This is partly because of the scale of digital material being produced, and partly because of the nature of digital technology. Decisions which will affect the long-term viability of a digital object need to be taken so early in the lifecycle, that those creating them are logically the ones best able to

undertake that initial activity Jones, 2004). Primary responsibility for initiating the life cycle management of digital resources to ensure long-term viability begins with the creator of the resource. As scholars create increasingly sophisticated multimedia research and teaching resources, they need to capture, collect, and create the documentation or metadata – descriptive, administrative, and structural – necessary to migrate, emulate, or otherwise translate existing resources to future hardware and software configurations (Cantara, 2006). Compiling this detailed information is a task outside the realm of expertise of librarians, but we are always ready to give the necessary support towards long-term preservation of digital material.

2.4 Dissemination of the WSF information

In almost all countries of the world, public libraries are the most widely spread and therefore, tend to serve a wider range of the population than any other type of library. These libraries have special collection sections like the UN collection/section, HIV/AIDS sections and Africana sections. This is so because these information materials are considered important and they have an intrinsic value to society. Each public library could also have a WSF collection section so as to enable a wider population to benefit from this information. The WSF information materials address relevant issues affecting the majority of our library users.

2.4.1 Benefits of disseminating WSF material

The paper argues that information from the WS should be documented, preserved and disseminated because it is important especially for the developing countries, as it provides an understanding and empathetic approach to our situation more than other world bodies that deplete and abet the suffering through harsh conditionalities that disenfranchise workers, kill industries, exploit our farmers, enrich a few, to name but a few of the ills we have experienced. It is from this platform that it should be noted that the benefits accrued from disseminating the WSF information materials include:

- Human rights awareness
- Social, economic and political justice
- Education
- Networking
- Making people aware that they are not alone in their struggles
- Creates solidarity

3.0 Conclusion

The management of the WSF information is as crucial as giving treatment to an ailing patient. If documented and disseminated well, the information is capable of transforming the world, hence creating a new and comfortable world for every one to live in.

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