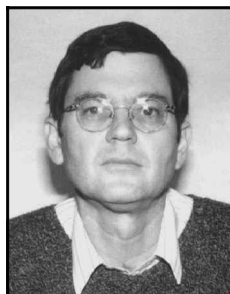


# Recent developments in interlending and document supply with a focus on the South African situation

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## Keywords

Interlending, South Africa, Computers, Resources

## Abstract

Considers the changes that have taken place, particularly during the past two years, and the impact that these changes have had on the interlending and document supply field in terms of the use of the service by libraries, the quality of the service, bridging the information and digital divide, players in the field, access to information and overlapping services. The focus is on South Africa, but information and experiences from other countries have been used to illustrate the South African situation.

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## South Africa – background information

South Africa covers a vast area of 1,219,090 km<sup>2</sup> (Central Statistics Service, 1995) at the southern tip of Africa and the country has nine provinces. The population of 41,000,000 is composed of Africans, whites, mixed race coloureds and Asians.

There are densely populated urban areas, where approximately half of the people live, and also vast rural areas. Some of these areas are sparsely populated with no basic technological infrastructure, such as electricity and telephone lines. Although many people live in poor conditions, some well-developed parts of the country can be compared with first-world countries. South Africa ranks, for instance, as the 16th largest user of the Internet in the world (Bennett, 1997) and is also high in terms of cell phone usage. Although there are 35 tertiary education institutions, the illiteracy percentage of the country is relatively high.

The socio-economic profile of the country is also reflected in the library and information services (LIS) field with the more sophisticated libraries being mostly in urban areas and large parts of the country being relatively poorly served by library services.

## Major interlending developments in South Africa

Interlending has a long history in the LIS field, both in South Africa and in the rest of the world, and has played a vital role in facilitating access to information for library clients. It has been one of the most important resource sharing activities of librarians everywhere.

It is evident that in South Africa resource sharing in the information environment has for many years been shaped by factors within the political, technological and economic environment of the country and developments in the global library and information environment.

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Although interlending was available before the 1950s in South Africa (Lor, 1990), libraries served clients mainly from their own stock and there was very little financial pressure on acquisition budgets. In the 1960s journals were accessed via secondary journals such as *Chemical Abstracts* and photocopy machines enabled copies of relevant articles to be sent via the ILL service (Kinnucan, 1993).

In the 1970s and 1980s the focus on the availability of publications, especially through the IFLA Universal Availability of Publications (UAP) programme, the establishment of the Document Supply Centre of the British Library for the supply of copied material on demand (Lor, 2001) and the introduction of the fax machine (Everett, 1993), which led to more rapid document delivery, was important in interlending, also in South Africa.

In the 1980s the State Library of South Africa, which served as a depository for information resources emanating from and relating to South Africa, moved from card and microfiche catalogues to online databases. The location tools such as joint catalogues for monographs, theses, serials and journals were incorporated into the South African Bibliographic and Information Network (SALIENT) and later an ILL module was implemented (Raubenheimer, 1998a). This development facilitated the interlending of materials in South Africa, as the holdings of all member libraries were available on the network (Du Plessis, 1997). The introduction of CD-ROM technology (Lor, 1992) and the Internet contributed significantly towards enhanced access to information in the 1980s, which impacted on interlending and document supply services, as clients became aware of material through online public catalogues of libraries (OPACs), catalogues of booksellers and periodicals agents, electronic tables of contents and bibliographic databases. This led to an increase in requests through interlending and document supply.

In the 1990s, many libraries in South Africa implemented the Ariel electronic document delivery system (Raubenheimer, 1996). After the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994, the National Commission on Higher Education's (NCHE) key policy directions emphasised lifelong education and training, open access, improved equity, democracy and accountability, cost-effectiveness and efficiency (National Commission of Higher

Education, 1996), which stimulated co-operation and resource sharing amongst institutions, resulting in the formation of library consortia. Deep budget cuts at South African tertiary institutions were also a strong incentive for co-operation. A national plan for higher education in South Africa was released in 2001 and contains economic, social and educational goals, which cannot be met unless South African students have access to effective library and information services.

It was against this background of new demands, developments in electronic technologies and an outcry for equitable, better services to all in South Africa that an investigation of the following seemed opportune:

- Recent developments regarding role players in the ILL and document supply field.
- Factors affecting the quality of interlending and document supply services.
- The impact on interlending services of developments in electronic technologies and subsequent improved access to information.
- General trends in interlending and document supply.

## Methodology

It was the intention to obtain insight into recent trends in interlending and document supply services in South Africa as a "new" phenomenon rather than using written documents only for information. The methodology used in this investigation encompassed both an empirical survey and a literature study. In order to obtain the most relevant literature on this subject a search was conducted on the CD-ROM database library literature. This provided references to journal articles on this subject. Access to the South African consortia's World Wide Web server on the Internet provided up-to-date information regarding the consortia's strategic plans and membership.

The empirical survey was done by means of a questionnaire, subdivided into several categories, with each category aimed at a specific aspect of interlending and document supply services. The questionnaire was sent to all academic library consortia in South Africa, as these include the tertiary education

libraries, which can be considered the most active role players within the South African interlending environment. Representatives of all academic library consortia in South Africa, namely Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC), Free State Library and Information Consortium (FRELICO), Cape Library Co-operative (CALICO), South Eastern Academic Library System (SEALS) and Eastern Seaboard Association of Libraries (ESAL), were requested to complete the questionnaire. A total of 35 libraries are represented in the consortia – almost all tertiary education libraries.

The questionnaire was also distributed to libraries within the government sphere, i.e. the National Library of South Africa, Tshwane Community Service and the Gauteng Provincial Service, in order to gather the views of these library and information services.

In order to obtain the views of libraries in the Southern African Development Countries (SADC), the questionnaire was distributed to the following libraries:

- Swaziland National Library Service;
- National Library Service of Malawi;
- National University of Lesotho;
- Botswana National Library Services; and
- the National Library of Namibia.

In order to gain insight into developments outside Africa, the questionnaire was distributed to the Library of Congress, British Library and also selected libraries in Asia and Eastern Europe.

Consortia and libraries were asked to express their views on recent developments, defined as developments since 1999. The response rate was as follows: three of the five consortia responded (i.e. GAELIC, CALICO, and FRELICO); libraries within the government sphere responded, i.e. the National Library of South Africa, the Gauteng Provincial Service and the Tshwane Community Service; two libraries from the SADC responded, i.e. the National Library of Namibia and the National Library of Botswana; the Library of Congress responded; two libraries from Asia responded, i.e. the Library Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the Chiang Mai University Library, Thailand; one university library from Eastern Europe responded, i.e. the University Library in Bratislava, a member of the NRW library consortium.

As the study is descriptive in nature, the data analysis was based on descriptive statistics, as they included the analysis techniques and statistical measures that are best suited to this type of study. Frequency distributions were used to determine the frequency of occurrence of certain responses and categories, and a statistical package for social sciences was used for this purpose. The distributions were divided in terms of the type of institution, e.g. consortia, investigated in the research. This aided the comparative analysis of data (Retief, 2001).

## Survey results

Significant developments in the ILL and document supply environment in South Africa are illustrated by selected results from the survey and information from the literature study and are reported in the following categories:

### Role players in the ILL and document supply environment

*Government, non-government organisations and business*

Although government departments, provincial and local authorities, parastatals, non-government organisations and business concerns participate in interlending and document supply (Gauteng Inter-Governmental Forum, 1999), the main role player is the national library. In 1999 the State Library and the South African Library were amalgamated as the National Library of South Africa (NLSA). The NLSA makes resources available through interlending, bibliographic services, reference services and the exchange of publications at national and international levels. Upon amalgamation, the NLSA stated in its vision that it would endeavour to bridge the gap between the information-poor and the information-rich.

### Library consortia

*Academic library consortia*

The establishment of five academic regional consortia led to a synergy of the resources of the member libraries. Most interlending and document supply activities are in the academic consortia, in particular the university libraries which hold the bulk of the national bookstock of a scientific and

scholarly nature and half of all titles (Lor, 1992). With regard to the total number of national interlending transactions, transactions between university libraries amount to 73 per cent in terms of requests sent and 85 per cent in terms of requests received (Raubenheimer, 1998b). Most consortia interlending transactions are made by GAELIC (48 per cent of all consortia requests sent and 61 per cent of all requests received). Service benefits for consortia members include:

- a common computer system;
- speed of interlibrary loans;
- access to jointly owned electronic text and databases;
- access to a wider range of research materials than is available in one library via a virtual access catalogue; and
- the maintenance of service quality levels despite severe cuts in information resource and staffing budgets.

#### *Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC)*

The library consortia in South Africa have taken co-operation a step further with the establishment of COSALC in 1999. Its main operational and strategic focus is at national level. It aims to promote and support national co-operative initiatives, e.g. interlending agreements (GAELIC, 2000).

#### *Multicountry library consortium*

The Open Society Institute (OSI) promotes the development of open societies around the world. In 1999, in conjunction with the Soros Foundation's network, the OSI created eIFL Direct, the world's largest information consortium consisting of 2,000 university, public, national and governmental libraries and research institutions in 39 countries. South Africa became part of the consortium in 1999, as it belongs to the Open Society (<http://uofs.ac.za>)

#### **Publishers**

Publishers have become important role players in the ILL and document supply environment, as electronic publishing has become more entrenched in the library world and requests for information are often supplied from full-text databases. The pay per view option has not taken off in South Africa, although libraries are aware of this development and consider it a viable option for the future. One consortium indicated that

this option was already in use for the supply of requests.

#### **Sabinet Online**

An important role player in the South African interlending and document supply environment is Sabinet in its capacity of information facilitator.

As South Africa became more accepted in the international arena, Sabinet formed a new private company, Sabinet Online. It became possible for Sabinet Online to introduce more international databases (Du Plessis, 1997) and during the past two years it has become a database publisher on the Web. Its databases include SACat (library stock in Southern Africa), SANB (national bibliography of material published in South Africa), UCTD (South African theses and dissertations), SA tenders, SA gazettes and SA citations.

#### **Access**

The most significant developments which may impact on the interlending and document supply environment are evident in this category. The questionnaire tried to establish to what extent South African library and information services are utilising the latest technology and electronic sources for the processing of requests.

#### **New technology**

The survey revealed that most of the catalogues of the consortia libraries are online and that libraries have moved away from unique library systems to open library systems such as Innopac Innovative Inc. The catalogues of many consortia member libraries are on the World Wide Web and thus accessible to foreign countries as well. A GAELIC member library indicated that there has been an increase in international requests from 84 in 1998 to 778 in 2000.

Sabinet Online's MagNet interface links the interlending module for ILL with several databases and commercial suppliers of information and has moved South Africa into the global information world; for example, a link to a periodical index database and article delivery service, Uncover, exposes the user to 6 million articles from approximately 17,000 journals. It also provides access to OCLC's bibliographic database, WorldCat, which contains over 43 million records in more than 400 languages (OCLC, 2001). MagNet can be seen as a virtual library accessible from a

user's desktop, because it allows seamless access to a wide variety of databases in different locations through a single common interface (University of South Africa, 2001). Two of the three consortia indicated that they keep abreast of new developments in electronic access to material from specific countries. GAELIC indicated that certain member libraries, which prefer direct access to the British Library, use Art E-mail and BLPC (Web). FRELICO and the NLSA access these services through Arttel, and OCLC (Prism) is also often used.

### **Full-text databases and the Internet**

All three consortia indicated that they use consortium discounts to subscribe to full-text databases and that this has enhanced access to information significantly. For example, GAELIC/FRELICO libraries subscribe to General Business File International and Expanded Academic Index (vendor: Gale Group), Emerald (vendor: Emerald), MathSciNet (vendor: American Mathematical Society) and Science Direct (vendor: Elsevier). The National Library of Namibia subscribes to Eric. The two Asian libraries also indicated that they subscribe to full-text databases (the Malaysian library to Science Direct and the library in Thailand to Science Direct, Lexis-Direct, Lexis-Nexis, Grolier Online, Social Science plus Springer Link), but that printed material is still mostly used (70 per cent in the case of the Malaysian library and 80 per cent in the case of the library in Thailand). The respondent from Eastern Europe subscribes to Proquest, EBSCO and Springer.

As patrons are trained and become more familiar with the use of the databases, an increase in use has been noted. The GAELIC usage statistics for General Business File International increased from 14,971 searches and 20,066 full-text retrieved articles for the period July 1999 to June 2000 to 101,184 searches and 46,183 full-text articles during the period July 2000 to June 2001. Usage statistics of all other databases also indicate a significant increase, although there is duplication of journal titles in some instances.

In addition to the subscriptions of GAELIC to electronic databases, certain member libraries also subscribe independently to both bibliographic and full-text databases in order to improve access to electronic information services.

It should, however, be noted that documents from electronic resources for interlending services can only be provided, should licence agreements permit. This issue will need to be addressed by the NLSA, probably via its representation on COSALC.

During 2001, as a result of South Africa's participation in the Multicountry Library Consortium, 94 sites in South Africa have gained access to international scholarly journals in five full-text databases through eIFL Direct. This database endeavours to bridge the digital divide by providing economically disadvantaged countries with electronic access to information that was previously unavailable. It contains over 5,000 full-text electronic journals covering social sciences, humanities, business, economics, current affairs, science and technology, both online and in CD/DVD format (Soros Foundation, 2001). In 2001 South Africa's usage was measured as 33 per cent of the total usage within eIFL. Usage statistics for the period January to July 2001 indicate a total of 360,000 searches and the retrieval of approximately 270,000 full-text articles (EBSCO, 2001).

Two consortia indicated in the survey that some member libraries provide Internet facilities to students free of charge in order to improve access to information. The Provincial Library and Information Service indicated that 60 per cent of all requests are supplied from sources on the Internet.

Electronic access to information is very dependent on national connectivity. In 2001 tertiary education institutions decided to switch over from Uninet to Tenet. In August 2001 it was reported that 43 connections were made, with an aggregate bandwidth of 44,820 Kbps. A total of 12 sites still need to be connected (Lawrie, 2001). The benefit of this conversion lies in improved connectivity at half the original cost.

Most respondents were uncertain as to whether subscriptions to electronic full-text services would result in a decrease in interlending requests. It was, however, mentioned by the NLSA and Provincial Library Service that, in the light of the fact that many South African libraries still do not have the necessary infrastructure as well as the fact that many library clients may not have the time to access full-text databases, interlibrary loan services may still be the preferred service for some time. Library of Congress's view was

that bibliographic databases stimulate the demand for other materials and that there should, therefore, not be a decrease. The Thailand library and respondent from Eastern Europe indicated that no decrease in interlending requests due to electronic full-text services was envisaged, as the electronic full-text service is too expensive.

### Quality

Questions in this category related to performance objectives for ILL and document supply services, developments in terms of delivery services, payment for services and strategies to narrow the divide between the information-rich and information-poor.

The survey revealed that most of the respondents have performance objectives for interlending services and that they were focused on the quality of these services during the past two years. Two of the consortia, the NLSA, the Botswana library (SADC), the Thailand library and the East European library indicated that performance objectives were revised during this period. This should result in improved service levels, e.g. the National Library of South Africa's objective for the supply of documents was revised from two days to one day. The fill rates of these libraries also improved, e.g. for the National Library of South Africa from 80 per cent (1999) to 85 per cent (2001). One of the consortia indicated that performance objectives for the supply to member libraries differ from those set for non-consortia libraries. This is a cause for concern, as the delivery of services to libraries outside the consortium may take longer than that to member libraries. This may result in interlending services to all South Africans not being equal and contribute towards dividing further the information-poor from the information-rich. The establishment of COSALC should, however, contribute positively in addressing this problem, as both the National Library of South Africa and the Library and Information Association of South Africa, LIASA, concerned with the needs of all groups in the country, have representation on this consortium.

In order to narrow the divide between information-rich and information-poor, the survey revealed that there is significant free interlending and/or discounted interlending to information-poor institutions, e.g. one

consortium, two respondents from the SADC, the respondent from Eastern Europe and an agreement for free services between libraries in Namibia and neighbouring national libraries. The respondent from eastern Europe reported that journal articles from free electronic journals were supplied on demand to those libraries with no Internet access. However, high costs do in some cases affect interlending, e.g. the Tshwane Community Library and Information Services reported a steady decline in interlending services outside the Provincial Library and Information Service during the last three years because of the costs involved. Only a minimal cost is charged for material supplied by interbranch libraries. The two Asian libraries charge patrons for interlending/document supply services. The Namibian Library only charges patrons for requests filled by foreign information providers. The NLSA indicated that a free telephone service regarding the holdings of material is provided to libraries which are not members of Sabinet Online.

In order to balance improved access with rapid delivery services, GAELIC and CALICO make use of vehicles to deliver material between member libraries and the two consortia, which are 1,400 kilometres from each other, in order to speed up delivery of loans. The postal service is used for only a small portion of deliveries by all three consortia. For the delivery of copied material, Ariel (version 3.0) was adopted as the standard by all three consortia, although the postal service and fax were also used. GAELIC sends 85 per cent and CALICO 75 per cent of copied material by Ariel. Ariel was also adopted by the NLSA with 60 per cent of requests delivered in this way. The Provincial Library and Information Service mainly faxes copied material. The Thailand library and the respondent from Eastern Europe deliver requested material mainly by post. The respondent from Malaysia also sends material largely by post, but indicated that a vehicle service and commercial courier are also used.

One of the consortia, GAELIC, indicated that, unlike the situation in the past, distance is no longer a restriction or factor to be considered when requesting material due to improved delivery mechanisms. Requests are, therefore, placed at libraries that provide the

best service rather than those closest to the requesting libraries.

### **Recent trends in interlending and document supply**

The questions in this category focused on emerging ILL trends. Participants were asked about developments regarding the interlending system and the need for library material.

Recent developments in interlending and document supply in South Africa were mainly within the academic library consortia. All consortia respondents indicated that interlibrary loans were mostly sent by means of an online system. Only a small percentage, e.g. 5 per cent in the case of CALICO, was still sent by a manual system to libraries which are not members of Sabinet Online. There was a major development in the interlending system provided by Sabinet Online, as it changed from a uniquely South African system used mainly for the requesting and supplying functions, to a new Web-based interlending system called ReQuest. This new system now makes provision for requesting, supplying, administrative, statistical and financial functions for returnable and non-returnable items. It is a complete management system for interlibrary loan and document request activities nationally and the provider has plans to make it international. The system makes provision for mediated and unmediated requests. There was a great increase in usage of the system from approximately 2,000 requests in 2000 to 110,000 requests in the first seven months of 2001. The Library of Congress indicated that all requests received by it were online and, since 1999, it has implemented the RLG (Research Libraries Group) ILL manager, an automated request tracking system. The two Asian libraries and the East European library have both online and manual systems. In the case of the former, the majority of requests (Malaysia 65 per cent and Thailand 75 per cent) are through the online system, whereas the latter processes 60 per cent of all requests manually. The respondents from SADC have manual interlending systems.

A positive response to the question of whether consortia have an increased need for non-South African documents published in Africa was received from only one of the three consortia. It was suggested that

documents from Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Nigeria are often in demand. The National Library of South Africa indicated that there was a need for conference papers from all African countries. There was no specific need for African material from other libraries.

Sabinet Online reported that the top ten journals mostly used by South Africans included the subject areas of medicine, in particular, AIDS, agriculture and water science.

All three consortia indicated that a growth in lending and borrowing of material has been experienced since 1999 and that this trend is likely to continue in the future. The two Asian libraries and the Eastern European library also indicated a growth in both book and journal requests and the Botswana library indicated an increased need for books. The impression of two of the three consortia was that the system will be used mainly for books in the future. The third consortium's view was that it will be used for a combination of books and journals, specifically old journals. The other respondents also indicated that it will be used for a combination of books and journals.

A positive response was received by one of the three consortia to the question as to whether the services of the interlending department overlap with those of archives, museums and book distributors. The respondents representing the government sphere indicated that there was still no significant overlap in services of their interlibrary loans departments with other organisations. The two SADC libraries and the two Asian libraries had a negative response in this regard and do not provide patrons with access to material at those institutions.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that since 1999 there have been numerous developments, specifically in terms of co-operation amongst role players in the South African interlending environment, improved quality of interlending services and better access to information. Although there has been greater use of full-text services, there has also been growth in interlending, suggesting a possible link between the two activities. These developments should

contribute positively towards the South African Higher Education National Plan, Goal 2, section 3, p. 5:

... to promote equity of access and fair chances for success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities.

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