



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF JAMAICA

CONFERENCE

Libraries: Networking for National Development

November 22 – 23, 2007

JAMAICA CONFERENCE CENTRE

14 – 20 Port Royal Street

FRIDAY, 23rd NOVEMBER 2007

SESSION 1

THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED LIBRARY INFORMATION NETWORK TO VISION 2030 JAMAICA

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THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED LIBRARY INFORMATION NETWORK TO VISION 2030 JAMAICA

Congratulations on the hosting of this conference but more specifically on locating it as part the development agenda focusing, as you are, on the *Value of Information for National Development*.

“Jamaica the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business” not only embodies the wish of many Jamaicans but also the dream of every patriotic Jamaican who yearns for and sees a brighter future for the country and her people. For such Jamaicans, however, there is nothing esoteric about **Vision 2030 Jamaica**, the long term national development currently being worked on. Nor is it a pipe dream, it is a timely signal of what we must do and what we must become, and it is a blue print for realizing these.

*Exploring the dream motif, in Vision 2030 we identify prosperity and sustainability as the main themes, main planks, the denouement. These are supported by four sub-themes or four inter-related and mutual reinforcing areas *viz.*, society, economy, environment and governance. Essentially what these anticipate is that in the pursuit of Jamaica being *the place of choice*, we are all working on a holistic sustainable model of development. In this model, there are anticipated minimal states to be achieved in each sub-theme if the dream/vision is to be actualized. See diagram below:

Figure 1: Elements of Vision 2030



Note that the states listed in the sub-themes, represented by the squares, are not exhaustive. For example, a sustainable and prosperous society also requires the citizenry to be creative, disciplined, culturally aware, well trained, flexible and adaptive. Likewise, the economy requires that appropriate technology is in place supported by enlightened policies, management and leadership. More important, is the inter-relatedness of the model. No one element can by itself lead to prosperity and sustainability. Thus, economic achievement will be dependent of the quality of the citizenry; and it will also be directly related to how we treat the physical environment, how we plan for and manage environmental risks; the responsiveness of the state apparatus; organizational effectiveness and efficiency; the investment climate and so on.

NILIN and the Plan

How does the library and information network fit into **Vision 2030 Jamaica**? The easy answer is that to give effect to **Vision 2030**, every facet of the society is called to action and every contribution is of critical importance. To say then, that the role of the information sector in achieving **Vision 2030** is of critical importance would be to state the obvious because all stages of **Vision 2030** - preparation, implementation and monitoring - are information and data sensitive and intensive. At a basic level, the library/information network is the main source to facilitate research on what others have done, the positives, negatives etc. because libraries are “the memory of the human race” and “have on their shelves the record of everything which man has thought, dreamed or invented” (Ifidon 1995). Moreover, as the library officials themselves put it “information for action is needed each day by every individual in the society”¹. So for this long term planning process, NILIN is expected to:

Provide information – research and monitoring

Document experiences for the future – processes followed, successes achieved

Disseminate information – re the goals, objectives and targets of the plan, who is responsible for what, progress, achievements etc. Here independent exhibitions, discussion fora are envisaged

Effectiveness in carrying out these activities/functions requires the availability of information and other library resources, and foresight and vibrancy in the organizations purveying information. In this regard the information provided must pass the simple ABC test being: **accessible**; **accurate**; **available**; **beneficial**; **broad-based**; **current**, **complete** and **cost-effective**.

¹ Plan For A National Documentation , Information and Library System for Jamaica, NACOLADS, 1978

To look more closely at the potential contribution of NILIN to **Vision 2030**, the NILIN network diagram² (Appendix 1) was examined against Figure 1. This comparison was done to establish whether the four sub-themes associated with **Vision 2030** are at least represented in NILIN and whether there is some information facility within the six networks which could acquire and provide substantial information on the subject areas in a fairly responsive way. (Figure 2) The comparison was done to determine the extent to which each area is covered (**coverage**) in the networks rather than to assess the quality of coverage. Quality of coverage would be understood as the size and range of collection, currency of information and retrieval methods etc. Two assumptions are made, one that the networks are reliable and allow for speedy access and sharing of information and secondly that duplication is kept at a minimum, consistent with the overall thrust of NILIN.

Figure 2: Alignment of NILIN and Jamaica Vision 2030

AREA	NETWORK					
Society	SECIN	STIN	COLINET	G-RIM	JADIN	LINET
Economy	SECIN	STIN	JADIN			
Environment	STIN	SECIN				
Governance	LINET					

The comparison shows that in terms of coverage, there is information on social issues in all six networks. Economic issues also seem to have fair coverage while there seems to be less focus on environmental and governance information. These two areas are very critical to the goals of **Vision 2030** but the understanding is that they are not of **primary focus** in the networks in which they are 'located'. For example, both STIN and SECIN carry environmental information but the bulk of the information in these networks does not relate directly to environmental issues. Similarly, LINET has extensive information relating to the legal element of governance, but information on broader governance issues might not be readily available through this network.

A second area of relevance of NILIN to **Vision 2030** has to do with the **ease of access** to information. The NILIN diagram shows a system in which the networks lead to the National Library and each to the internet. Interestingly, outside of the internet these networks do not seem to be inter-connected. Thus to the user operating at his or her desk, quick access to information in any of the networks is limited to that uploaded to the internet. Perhaps a personal example might demonstrate the point better. I recently had an urgent assignment related to governance in Kenya. Not having found the information I wanted on the internet, contact was made with the PIOJ Documentation Centre. The specialist searched the PIOJ database and the SECIN network catalogue but came up blank. Telephone calls were subsequently made to someone in LINET and some two-

² Supplied in the letter of invitation

three days after, relevant information was identified. A driver was sent to collect the information (**at peak hour some distance away in the Kingston traffic!**). Needless to say, with an urgent assignment, a lag time of two days for retrieval is at best, sub-optimal - the deadline had passed but could not be missed.

Vision 2030 anticipates that Jamaica is operating as a modern state in a modern world. In such a world, things operate in real time, decision making has to be quick but it also has to be informed, to be based on evidence and to be reasoned. Thus the information network has to be configured for quick and easy access. Acceptably, money has been and is a constraint but delays in decision making and uninformed decisions are far too costly to contemplate in a modern world. The nine-step access experience (Figure 3) outlined above, even with the most helpful and genial library professional, has to be altered to keep the library system relevant. Three alternatives could be considered but

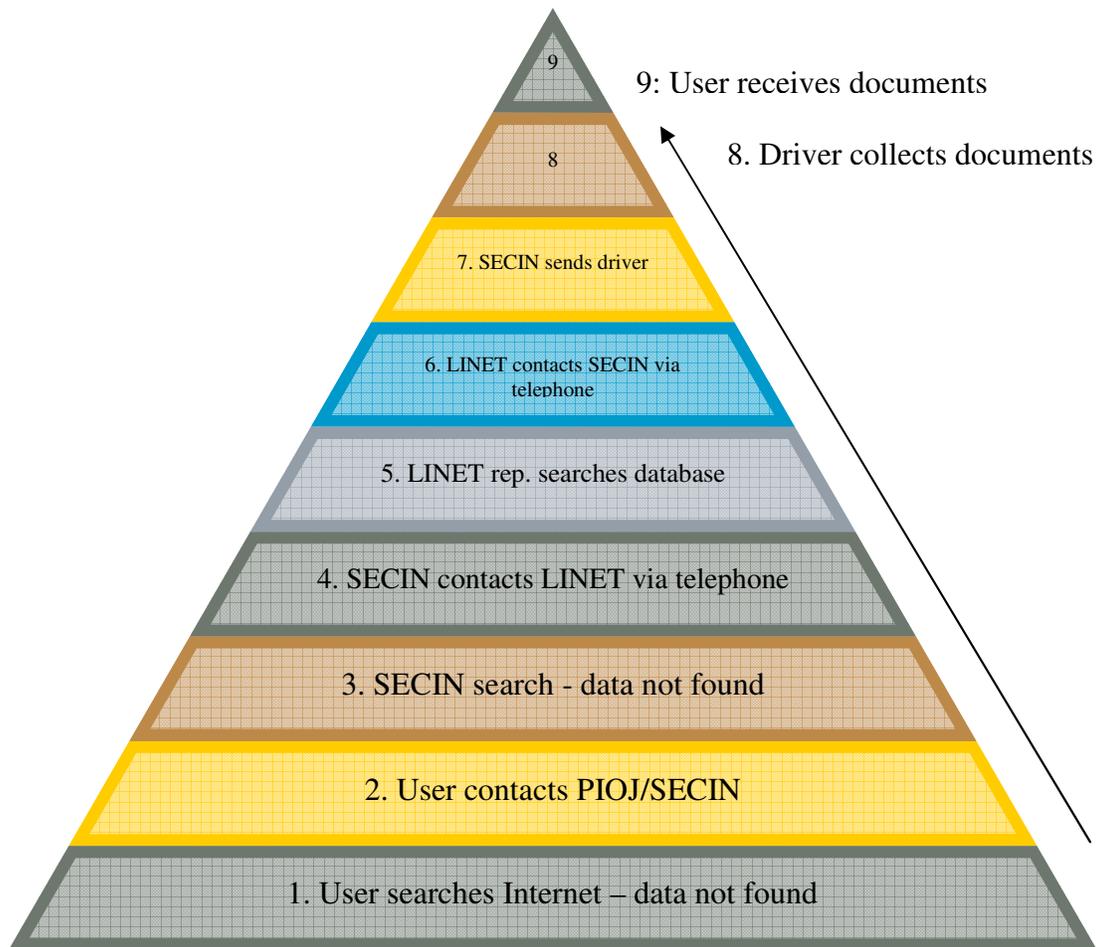


Figure 3: Nine-step process to retrieve information

would each require improved automation and inter-connection among the networks. These would also require that there are some agreed minimum standards of records attained by all member units of the network in keeping with the view that the “library network is only as strong as its weakest player” (Gorman and Cullen 2000). The first alternative would allow a library to search catalogues not only within its network but also within other networks (Figure 4). The user would be a little removed but the process could be relatively quick. The second alternative would require that the catalogues of each network be uploaded to the net and linkages being established between the NLJ website and the individual networks of NILIN. This option would allow the user to search the catalogues for relevant documents (Figure 5) and then go through the inter-library loan arrangement to retrieve the document.

The third alternative is somewhat a massive NATCAT. However, this ideal would see all the networks being highly automated; uploading information to and periodically updating a large NILIN web-based database. (Figure 6) The end-user would effectively be able to search all the NILIN databases with a few clicks of the mouse. User charges could help to underwrite the cost of maintaining the database with access being managed through user subscription. Issues related to preserving data integrity could be addressed through controlled access via the individual networks. The important upshot is that the user would not only be able to quickly identify where documents are located but also whether they are available. This certainly could reduce the number of steps required for accessing documents and would certainly help to reduce frustration.

Science and technology is one of the drivers of **Vision 2030**, and with respect to ICT, Jamaica has made tremendous strides in improving the ICT infrastructure. In 2006, for example, Jamaica ranked 9 of 122 countries on the Network Readiness Index indicating, among other things, that there is technological readiness and infrastructure to facilitate competitiveness. In 2006 also, the country had an internet penetration rate of 39.4 percent. These statistics suggest that the platform is in place for NILIN to move to another phase of automation and connectivity. With the base infrastructure being in place, the cost of network improvement to the library sector should be lower than it was several years ago. Besides, the opportunity exists for better use of the internet to access the catalogues within and across the networks.

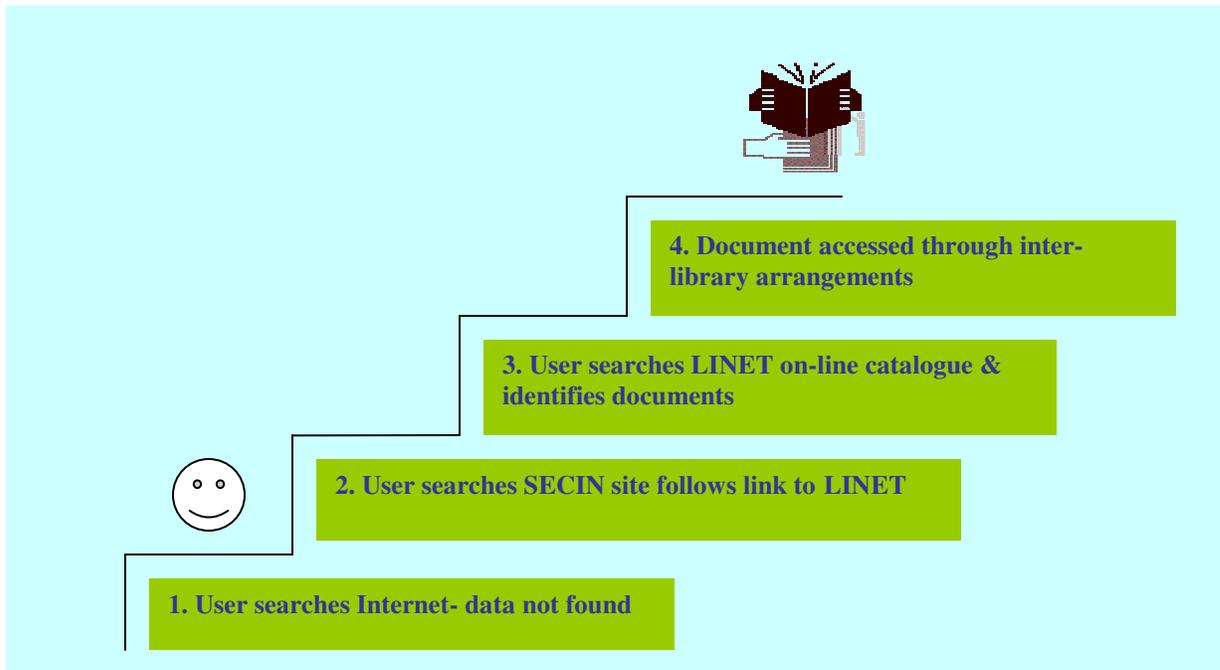


Figure 4: Alternative 1 - Example

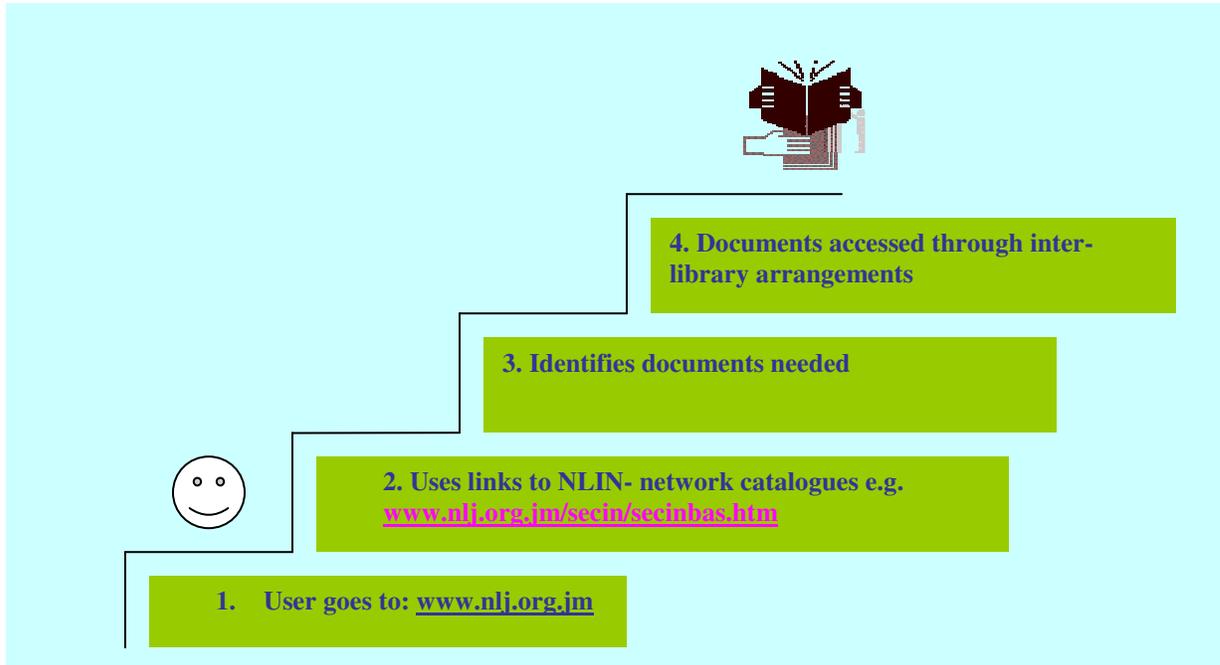


Figure 5: Alternative 2

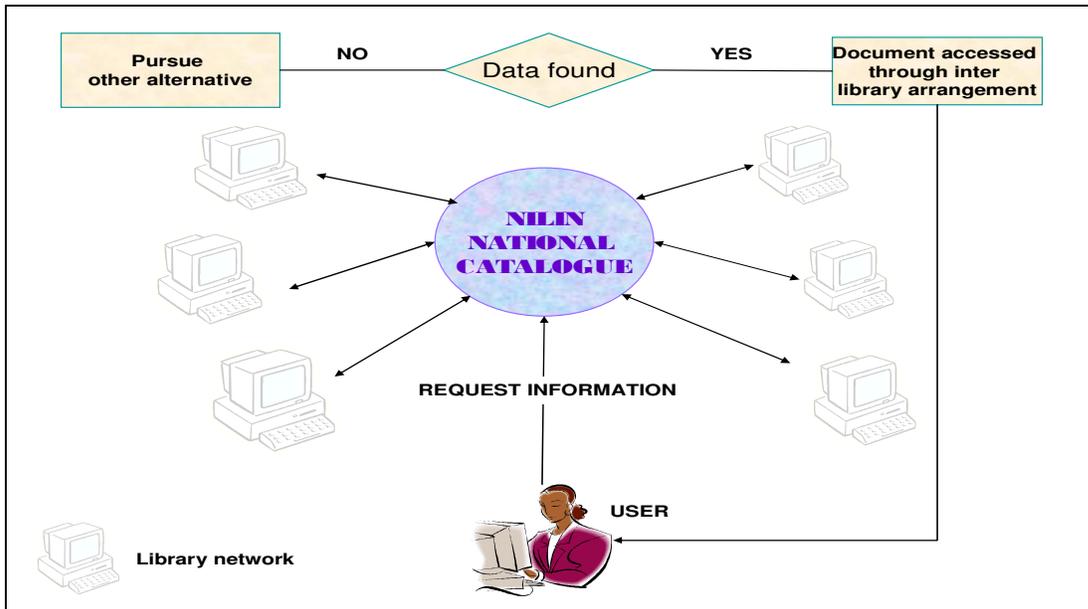


Figure 6: Alternative 3

Conclusion

Dream fulfillment does not take place while the dreamer is in slumber; it obliges the individual to be awake and aroused and willing to take advantage of opportunities. Likewise, actualizing **Vision 2030** requires a citizenry which is alert and ready for action. It presupposes a movement away from slumber be that defined as inactivity, indifference, going through the motions, not taking responsibility, or holding fast to the status quo. Creative thinkers, visionary leaders and political will are essential to the success of **Vision 2030** but the *sine qua non* is access to and dissemination of good quality, relevant and timely information. NILIN has a major role to play in this but it must upgrade itself in the process.

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National Library of Jamaica as focal point of the National Information System

