National Library of South Africa
Mzansi Libraries On-Line Project

Libraries usher in a new era

The Hon. Deputy Minister of Arts and Culture, Rejoice Molodufoini said significant steps have been taken to improve access to information by opening the doors of learning and creating a culture of reading and writing for everyone.

"In the availability of the conditional grant that has revived the library and information sector, this provision has allowed the transformation of libraries into instruments of learning with the aim of eliminating illiteracy, over-45ing incapacity and promoting social cohesion," said Molodufoini.

Another important development is the forging of relationships with provincial governments by the Department of Arts and Culture. These new relationships will ensure that through the Department, funds are invested in the building of new library infrastructure.

"This is not only about upgrading existing infrastructure, but also the provision of reading material and improved information and Communication Technologies across the country," Molodufoini added.

Providing free Internet access to communities was improved through participation in the Global Libraries Programmes, through the establishment of the Mzansi Libraries On-Line (MLO) Project.

The MLO Project, a partnership between the National Department of Arts and Culture and the National Library of South Africa, has contributed to bridging the digital divide by providing free access to information technology at libraries.

With the aim of MLO projects to provide access to free Internet connectivity to all South Africans at all public libraries, thereby creating a informed and information-literate society," Molodufoini concluded.

Social cohesion and nation building

NATIONAL Libraries & CEO of the National Library of South Africa, Professor Rocky Rabiepi-Simela, said the introduction and inclusion of Information and Communication Technologies into Libraries was an opportunity to create a dynamic, networked and connected society.

"There is a growing acceptance of libraries as knowledge and cultural institutions, because they provide the public with a space for information and learning. "They are accessible to all parts of society, regardless of gender, age and ethnicity," said Rabiepi-Simela.

In Mzansi, public libraries have a critical role to play, not only in nurturing and growing the country's democracy, but also as gateways to participation in society through access to information and acquiring lifelong learning.

Rabiepi-Simela said was a widespread awareness that the best way to address and support the transformation of libraries into community hubs was to invest in staff training and development so that they were able to educate communities on the effective use of libraries.

"The Library and Information Association of South Africa has adopted professional development as a strategy to make sure that library and information workers have access to current skill trends and development," she said.

The MLO Project, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is supported by the Department of Arts and Culture and business partners including Cabinet Online, Microsoft SA and Business Coalition.

"We are both excited and humbled by the generous support the MLO Project has received. With this support, public libraries in South Africa are able to participate in the development of an educated and engaged citizenry," Rabiepi-Simela said.

This concept was also adopted in the Cape News Declaration where 13 African countries committed to the development of Libraries as a way of responding to the modern challenge of providing access to emerging technological.

This programme is an opportunity to demonstrate how public Libraries may be used as community development partners and how they contribute to national goals related to education, youth unemployment, community development, as well as training and re-skilling library professionals at a local level," Rabiepi-Simela concluded.

For more information call 012 401 9704 or visit www.mzansilibrariesonline.co.za
Knowledge is the future

NZANSI Libraries On-Line (NLO) Project is a programme of the National Library of South Africa in collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture and provincial library services in all nine provinces.

The objectives of NLO Project are to empower rural communities by providing them access to information in order to achieve the following outcomes:

- Increase access to information and Communication Technology (ICT) particularly by the youth, unemployed, women, elderly and people living with disabilities as well as visually impaired.
- Through digital technology training, library users will learn how to use technology to meet their needs.
- Increase social and economic benefits through access to health, education and economic information.
- Improved skills and capacity among library staff for better service delivery in their communities and to position libraries as critical community assets.
- Produce a sustainable public library sector that will continue to meet the needs of the community.
- Of the 1 668 public libraries in South Africa, NLO Project targets 400 sites, selected based on specific criteria including:
- No public access to computers
- Alignment with existing plans and policies
- Sufficient infrastructure to host the programme and house additional equipment, where necessary.
- Sufficient network points or wi-fi services, or resources to acquire these
- Sufficient provision for users with disabilities and
- A shared vision for the country's public library system that reflects the needs and priorities of the communities.

The Hon. Deputy Minister handing out braille material during World Book Day Celebrations in Elliot in Limpopo.

The National Library & CISO helping pupils from neighbouring schools in Bokhorong to test the library's newly delivered ICT equipment.

Upgraded libraries will be certain that offer wi-fi, Internet and computer training for people who would not normally have access to this much needed modern technology.
Libraries transforming local communities

The National Library of South Africa (NLSA) has transformed the Mpongwe Library into a digital library. The Mpongwe Library, like other public libraries, was underfunded and underserviced. The library needed urgent support to satisfy the technological needs of its users.

Today, we live in an era where education, economic growth, health and social opportunities depend on access to the Internet. Indeed, most Mpongwe community members are connected to the Internet through cell phones, but lack the skills to navigate the Internet. The Mpongwe Public Library had five computers, one of which was for the visually impaired. The library provided good service, but there were not enough computers and data was limited.

The MLO (Mzansi Library Online) Project allowed the Mpongwe community to bring the digital divide. The library staff received information communication technology (ICT) equipment and were trained on how to access, maintain and use these. The facilities Mpongwe Resturant and Library was also included:

- Computer with free Internet access
- Tables with free Internet access
- Waiting room

The future of public libraries in Mzansi is exciting. With resources made available by MLO Project, the traditional concept of libraries will change. Traditionally, libraries were just a place where books and documents were stored.

The future will see the introduction of libraries where almost all information will be digitised.

Libraries changing lives

Researchers for the Mzansi Libraries On-Line Project conducted an impact assessment survey. Users from 27 libraries from the MLO Pilot Project programme and 23 libraries taken from a representative sample across South Africa were surveyed.

Interesting results of the survey include:

- A quarter of the respondents visited a library in the last 12 months.
- Young people and those with secondary education or higher were more likely to be library users.
- Almost a third of all users reported visiting a library at least once a week and half reported going less than once a week but at least once a month.
- Users visited the library to read books or newspapers, use a Photocopying machine or go online.
- In five (25%) of all libraries, the library was visited by what a significant number of library users were unable to access the Internet for free anywhere other than at a public library.
- Most (56%) of library users reported having used library services for business purposes.
- One in five (20%) of all library users reported having used the Internet to search for a job.
- One in six (16%) said their agricultural income increased due to library services.
National Library of South Africa
Mzansi Libraries On-Line Project

Mzansi libraries in action

Librarians undergoing training to equip them to better serve their communities.

The Hon. Deputy Minister for Arts and Culture, Reajiko Mabudafhasi (left) and Executive Mayor, Mongi Nkemelani of Thohoyandou District, Pina Boks opening the Robinseng Public Library at the MILO Project Country Grant Launch.

Distribution of books during World Book Day in Gauteng.

A mobile library in support of the MILO Pilot Project launch, visiting the community of Komatsesene.

Members of the community including local traditional authorities, representatives from various government levels and scholars converged at Ga-Plesa Library in Limpopo to celebrate Library Month during March 2016.

Emergency Medical Services staff visit the mobile library in Komatsesene.