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The Value of Library Services in Development

End of Libraries?

We live in the “end-of-everything” era: the end of time and space, the end of ideology, the end of geography, the end of history, the end of the nation state, even the end of hope for Africa. In this same vein, the end of libraries has been proclaimed. Libraries are supposedly being swept away by the digital revolution. Yet, library power is still very alive, and has become even more potent in this new age. This priceless power leverages accumulated human intellect efficiently into human progress. From this power issues the springs of literacy and knowledge, the seeds of democracy, and the fuel of productivity. The library as a catalyst for human progress is irreplaceable (Akeroyd, 1991; Potella, 2001).

In spite of their enormous power to propel human progress, libraries are increasingly asked to justify the resources spent on them, to justify even their very existence. In this climate, libraries must be accountable, responsive, and effective in portraying the value of their services to funding authorities, be they public or private. These imperatives have led to a new emphasis on quantitative assessments to provide hard evidence about the extent of their value to the society or their sponsors. Secondly as online information become more and more available, arguments against funding of libraries are increasing in number and loudness. Therefore, assuring the proper functioning of libraries depends on demonstrating their value in the widest sense and to their widest audiences.

2. Libraries Add Value even in Monetary Terms

Research has produced hard facts that libraries pay fully for their existence, and even produce positive returns on the investments made on them. For example, long-term studies of technical libraries using return on investment analysis (ROI) established that in monetary terms libraries produce 515% annual return on investment, that is five times more than what is invested on them per annum (Keyes, 1995; Griffiths and King, 1993). Cost-benefit analysis also showed that the benefits derived from library services outweigh the cost of providing them. (McClure et al, 2000).

These results were mainly based on the following value dimensions:

- The cost of library users' time, weighed against the cost of providing professional library services;
- All costs associated with obtaining a piece of library service on an ad-hoc basis weighted against the costs of obtaining it from a professionally organized in-house library service;
- The value of having the right information at the right time to increase the speed of an operation or prevent the undertaking of a potentially useless or wasteful process or project, modifying work, or stopping an unproductive line of work; and
- The cost a person is willing to pay for library services to enable him or her to successfully complete a project.
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Return on investment analysis of public library services also show evidence of high value-added. For example, the table below, which is from an annual report of a public library district of a developed country, shows how investment in library service yielded more than five-fold returns when compared to the monetarily valued outcomes.

Estimated Return on Investment on Services of a District's Public Libraries: 1998-99

| Materials and Services | Estimated value of benefits |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 4,751,514 books and materials borrowed at an average retail price of \$20 each. | \$95,030,280 |
| 4,614,903 books, periodicals and newspapers were used in libraries, if purchased the average retail price of each would be \$10. | 46,149,030 |
| 5,435,095 reference questions were answered in person by library Staff, if each charge were \$2 per inquiry. | 10,870,190 |
| 625,292 Internet sessions (45 minutes per session) at a \$2\per session access fee. | 1,250,584 |
| 420,581 persons attended special programmes and exhibitions, if there were a \$2 admission fee. | 841,162 |
| 19,000 children and teenagers participated in the Mayor's Summer Reading Programme , if there were a \$5 registration fee. | 95,000 |
| 279 literacy tutors provided 10,015 hours of one-on-one tutoring to 239 project participants, if each charge were \$25/hr. | 250,375 |
| Total Benefits | \$154,486,621 |
| Less Taxpayers' Investment on libraries -\$24,645,113 | -\$24, 645, 113 |
| Total Return on Investment from Libraries. | \$129, 841, 508 |

Adapted from McClures et al (2000)

From research reports reviewed, it may be deduced that depending on the type of library, and the cost of a professional's time in relation to the cost of reading materials, the savings achieved by an organization or a community that has a well-functioning library, may range from 2 to 8.5 times if the cost of running the library is weighed against the cost of obtaining library services from outside sources, libraries of high technology firms, research centres and institutions working on mission-critical projects may achieve savings of up to 8.5 times. The magnitude of the value-added reported by the studies is quite striking, as is the high degree of their consistency, both across different measures, and across different library types and cases. This gives a high degree of confidence that the findings reflect a genuine phenomenon. It can therefore be concluded that library services pay for themselves by orders of magnitude (Keyes, 1995). When library services are non-existent, the costs in terms of lost long-term productivity are infinitely high.

3. What Development?

Yes, libraries achieve high value-added at the level of the institution, but of what value are they in community and national development? The answer to this question depends on what we think the goals of development are.

In classical terms, the purpose of development is to attain increased productivity for economic growth. Economic growth has not however, provided solution to rural exodus, marginalization of the weak, galloping urbanization, proliferation of shanty-towns, mass unemployment, increased poverty and spread of deadly diseases. As Julius Nyerere stated, "the truth is that development means the development of people. Roads, buildings, the increases in crop output, or other things of that nature, are not development, they are only tools of development" (Nyerere, 1974). This and similar thread of thinking lead to the notion of human development: the increasing of people's chances to acquire knowledge and have access to resources that would

enable them to lead healthy, gainful and dignified life (Unesco, 2000; Lundu, 1995). To be pragmatic, development efforts should be aligned with the current regional and global development strategies such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which are multidimensional and lay emphasis on human development and sustainability (United Nations, 2002).

Libraries can play direct as well as catalytic roles in contemporary development initiatives. The many dimensions of these roles are outlined below.

4. Libraries Harness Information and Knowledge

Libraries increase the value of human intellectual outputs by increasing access to them through professional processing, storage and dissemination. Processing and organisation moves ideas, data and other primary intellectual outputs from raw bytes to information. The world's intellectual outputs would be useless, even constitute a nuisance, if libraries were not there to gather, analyse, classify, catalogue and provide access to them. The hundreds of bibliographic records of published and unpublished materials ensure their use and reuse to satisfy commercial, educational, cultural and recreational needs.

5. Critical in the Educational Process and Continuing Development of Intellectual Capital

The educational and research role of libraries cannot be over-emphasized. Research has found that libraries make significant contributions to the effectiveness of the education process. Learners from institutions where library use is part of the learning process are more likely to become equipped for the society and occupational effectiveness than those without proper library habits. Libraries are also central for the development of literacy, a critical component of the development of intellectual capital of a community, an attribute which initiates a ripple effect on an individual's ability to become gainfully employed, increase his or her income and make effective contributions to society. Community members use library services and library programmes for everything from introducing their children to the habit and joy of reading, to tapping into their professional networks (McClure et al, 2000).

6. Catalyst for Economic Development at the Local and National Levels

Economic development effort is simply any activity that raises real incomes, thereby offering new hopes of expanded opportunities for people, communities, and enterprises. As both the global and national economies become more and more knowledge-driven, specialized knowledge has become the indispensable asset for further economic development. Local businesses benefit greatly in specific ways from libraries, including access to new ideas, knowledge and information. In particular, relocating businesses, start-up businesses, and small businesses of all kinds are perceived as enjoying the greatest benefits from library products and services. Indeed, existence of libraries has been cited as a reason for a business' decision to relocate to a particular community. Studies also found that business information resources were significantly more valuable with expert help of library staff. In other words, not only are information sources themselves viewed as important resources for people seeking mission-oriented information, but professional services provided by librarians are believed by many to be critical factors in finding, accessing and utilizing information resources to the fullest extent, especially with regard to electronic resources.

Studies further suggest that for any nation to be effective in the global economy, its institutions of higher learning must do more than just prepare an educated workforce and expand knowledge through research and scholarship. They must get involved in local economic

development (Matson et al, 1995). Libraries in these institutions can play an important role in effecting extension of economic development knowledge to the community. The main physical manifestations of economic knowledge extension services by higher institutions are economic development information centres (EDICs). The type of information provided in EDICs includes: general economic and industry-specific statistics, economic forecasts, trade statistics, market surveys, census data, tax and regulatory requirements, cost-of-living and cost-of-doing-business data, information on general business practices, financial planning, as well as employee benefits and compensation. “How to” materials ranging from starting a business to entering foreign markets are also an important part of a typical core collection (Miele and Welch, 1995). Training in basic business planning and management could also be provided. A library may offer extension services as part of its service portfolio or develop an EDIC unit to focus on local economic development services.

7. Direct Economic Benefits to Members of the Community

Many direct benefits from library services accrue to individuals. These include cost savings from borrowing materials rather than having to buy them; borrowing of such items as audio books and videotapes, which save significant expenditures; and the use of periodicals and newspapers which result in financial benefit. There is a dual nature to this: first, users save the cost of purchasing these items themselves; and second, many users have been better able to manage their lives as a result of information obtained. In fact, some quality of life indexes, for example best places to live, best places to raise children, and best places to retire, include “library books per capita” statistic when profiling communities (McClure et al, 2000).

Libraries enhance productivity of individuals and organisations. Access to the right information is a very critical component in the productivity of information workers, and consequently the productivity and good decision-making of the organizations employing them. For the self-employed knowledge worker, use of libraries make them more productive on their jobs, especially as they can obtain job related training in the areas of computer and information literacy skills and good business practices (Bolt, 1991; Keyes, 1995)

8. Social Inclusion and Cohesion, Participation and Empowerment

Libraries perform an important role of social inclusion when they serve the needs of disadvantaged populations such as the poor, the elderly, the physically disabled, the unemployed and those with learning disability, because these are exactly the groups least likely to have the means to acquire such assets as information sources, computers and Internet access (CILIP, 2002). Libraries also serve as agents of social cohesion. In one study, a participant said: “we are brought closer to other members of our community through the very act of sharing books with them” (Usherwood and Toyne, 2000). For this reason, social inclusion and life-long learning agenda of most developed countries include the founding of new public libraries and increased information and library provision for learners at all levels and of all ages.

9. Civic Centre and Community Information Service

For many communities and organizations, libraries serve as civic centres, which assist them in meeting their civic duties by offering meeting space for civic organizations, assisting with voter registration, and making government forms available, including tax forms. Libraries also serve as a posting place for proposed changes in local ordinances, and other local government proposals. As a community centre, the library introduces users to new systems of doing things during changeover programmes. A variety of other programmes are offered, such as story telling, technology

education, and recreational activities. Valued in most places is the availability of meeting rooms for voluntary groups, which represent monetary savings to them.

Libraries also serve the public by providing assistance in finding answers to many basic questions: from how to find jobs to where to find up-to-date health and legal information. The information the library provides to answer some of these important questions can lead to significant economic benefits and impacts. (McClure et al, 2000; Walzer and Gruidi, 1996).

10. Essential Element of Physical Development

Research also found that communities value their libraries as physical assets and a source of community pride. Indeed, libraries, especially public and national libraries, are important landmarks in many cities and other communities. Participants in a survey stated many times that the presence of a new library, or the redevelopment of an existing one, favorably impacted on its immediate surroundings (Albenese, 2001; CILIP, 2002; McClure et al, 2000).

11. Libraries and Citizen Empowerment, Democracy and E-Government

Effective citizen action is possible only when citizens know how to gain access to information of all kinds and have the skills to become responsible, informed participants in democracies. This is especially so as e-government evolves. Libraries offer real and virtual civic spaces where citizens can speak freely, share similar interests and concerns, and pursue what they believe are in their public's interest. Ultimately, free discourse among informed citizens assures civil society; and civil society provides the social capital necessary to achieve common goals. Through this role libraries prevent the lack of information and idea exchanges which in a closed society stifles creativity, suppresses the imagination and creates a barrier to social, economic and technical progress (Berger, 1991).

E-government is about using the power of information technology to provide better public services. The main dimensions of an e-government strategy include: building services around citizens' choices, making government and its services more accessible, ensuring social inclusion and ensuring two-way communication between the government and the governed. Governments have always depended on libraries to collect and disseminate government information, but e-government adds very new and valued dimensions: the citizen empowering potential reinforced by virtual access and the possibility to hold governments accountable without physical confrontation.

For librarians, a special challenge by e-government is to obtain recognition as the professionals best suited to provide guidance on e-government's need for information analysis, indexing, organizing of digital documents, and the design and development of versatile interfaces for information retrieval as well as for data harvesting and communication.

E-Government with Libraries: a Best Practice from Canada

In 1999, the Canadian government announced a vision for e-government:

"By 2004, our goal is to be known around the world as the government most connected to its citizens, with Canadians able to access all government information and services on-line at the time and place of their choosing."

One of the first of programmes established towards the realization of this vision is SchoolNet, a co-operative initiative of Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments. Its main aim is the interconnecting of all public libraries and schools in Canada through providing them with Internet access. Under this programme, 3,000 libraries and more than 14,000 schools were connected to the Internet. Over 250,000 computers were also distributed to schools and libraries

across Canada. To connect remote sites and isolated rural communities, satellite technology was used.

Another pragmatic programme initiated is VolNet, the Voluntary Sector Network Support Programme. VolNet was established to enhance the capacity of voluntary organizations to use technology and connect to government information. Through this initiative, the federal government allocated 20 million dollars over a period of four years to provide 10,000 voluntary organizations with access to computers, Internet connectivity and network support. Training was also provided to 17,000 staff and volunteers.

The Canadian Government also created the Smart Communities Programme, a kind of national knowledge development programme to help Canada become a world leader in the development and use of information and communication technologies for economic, social and cultural development, especially for the benefit of community organizations and families.

The Canadian Parliament also effectively uses its library as a tool for e-democracy and e-government. The Library's array of electronic information services enhance the policy and legislative capacity of legislators, and enable the public gain access to legislative information. To start with, all senators, members of the House of Commons and their staff have desktop access to a great deal of information sources and services provided by the Library.

These e-government initiatives that use schools (actually school libraries) and libraries have helped various communities to develop local-global links to information resources and gain markedly improved access to government information. A special feature of the programmes is the two-way communication taking place between the people and government agencies, which helps the various levels of government to improve their efficiency and accountability in addressing the demands and priorities of Canadians.

The Canadian Government has largely achieved the goal it set for itself. It is now a leader in e-government when measured by citizens' ability to access a wide variety of government services online.

[Source used: Paré, Richard. 2002. *E-democracy and E-government: how will these affect libraries?* Presented at the 68th IFLA Council and General Conference. Glasgow, Scotland. August 18-24, 2002].

12. Bridge Digital Divide along with the Economic Gap

Studies show that, only people and businesses in the higher income brackets are able to afford the hardware, software and connectivity costs required to participate in the information revolution, including e-commerce (McClure et al, 2000). The need for access to the Internet is however not limited to people and businesses with discretionary income, and it is here that libraries are well positioned to help bridge the economic gap along with the digital divide. From individuals who might not be able to afford computer technology at home to many small and home-based businesses, the library can provide the necessary connections to help prevent the division of our society into information "haves and have-nots."

The western-style universal access is not a practical reality in African countries where much of the population cannot afford individual access. Instead, focus should be on providing access through community facilities like libraries and schools (Gamboa et al, 2001). In this role, libraries can help in poverty alleviation since information poverty often is the basis of economic poverty. In the information age, access to information has a place alongside adequate food, health care, education, and other basic needs. This phenomenon has broadened the definition of poverty to include information poverty. More so, when it has become clear those people and nations who cannot or will not participate fully in the new information economy will find it all the more difficult to climb out of poverty. Just as today, books are a chance for ordinary people to better themselves, in the information society, access to cyberspace will be a route to better prospects. But just as books are freely available from libraries, the door of libraries should lead everyone to cyberspace

toll-free. In the information society this real chance for equality of opportunity through libraries should remain.

13. Libraries and the Information Society

Despite the popular misconception, libraries have never confined themselves to books (CILIP, 2002). Indeed, libraries pre-dated the invention of the book, collecting papyrus scrolls (the original Alexandria Library was a good example) and manuscripts (the mediaeval monastery libraries, for instance). For libraries therefore, content is much more important than the medium. In fact, the information revolution is aiding the library movement by reinforcing the material-virtual duality of knowledge and information and helping in transforming our society into an information society based on a strong foundation of knowledge which is universal, objective, timely and drawing from a variety of sources.

In developed countries, libraries are taking the lead in Internetization, digitalization and virtualization of access to knowledge. Special online services are being developed to support lifelong learning, provide health advice and information, and give citizens access to official documents free of copyright restrictions. Thus libraries are becoming not only Internet access points, but also places where people may receive help in using the Internet and other information sources. Governments implementing digital opportunity programmes do them in cooperation with libraries. For example, in implementing its policy to ensure universal access to the Internet, the UK Government located two thirds of the 6,000 ICT learning centers billed to open in 2002 in public libraries (CILIP, 2002).

Libraries are helping to build viable global communities based on local-global networks that enable individuals and groups to explore their respective and common futures, and create synergy through sharing of knowledge and experience. Local-global networking will become a means of making globalization to suit local conditions, as knowledge and information sharing will make globalization desirable through universalism, a new form of understanding that results from shared values engendered by constant exchange of experience.

14. With the Internet, Do We Still Need Libraries?

Yes, because, although a great deal of information is available from the desktop of anyone with a computer linked to the Internet, much of it is spurious and disorganized. Some of it is of course misleading. Much of the information that is authoritative is available only to paying subscribers. Such information can be accessed usually through libraries with site licenses. Thus users seeking value-added information need to access information sources through libraries, resources selected and organized by professionals. Besides, libraries enable users to learn to search the Internet efficiently, as well as help to identify free authentic sites.

15. Are Today's African Libraries Capable of Playing their Rightful Roles in Development?

To this question we can answer both yes and no, depending on the locality, but the fact is that the majority of African libraries are in real crisis. They were not always in this situation though. Between 1960 and 1980, libraries in Africa were built and resourced with determination in the hope that they would support the rapid development of their communities. Rightly, then national governments, organizations and donors funded libraries as basic needs. However, since the early 1980's, libraries across Africa have experienced a very deep decline in resources and services. The so-called "great African library decline" can be characterized as follows:

- Funds provided are grossly inadequate. In fact, most libraries do not get up to half of their minimum requirements. In most of the places, available fund just cover staff salaries;
 - Libraries lag behind global trends due to inadequate resources, reliance of process inefficient processes, and weak professional networking;
 - Lack of current books, journals and other information sources;
 - Total lack of, or inadequate application of library information technology;
 - Unavailability of, or unreliable access to the Internet;
 - Empty reading rooms due to lack of library habit resulting from years of poor customer service;
 - Rusty professional skills and outlook affected by lack of resources for training and development;
 - Demoralized management and poor co-ordination within their parent organizations;
 - Poor or absence of library support of the learning process across all types and levels of educational institutions across much of Africa, with student to book ratio as low as 30 students to 1 book in certain places;
 - Library shelves in public libraries with old and irrelevant books that gather dust;
 - Little or no physical development to match current needs;
 - Little or no professional library activism and advocacy; and
 - Where in existence, library boards that overshadow the libraries they govern.
- (Chifwepa, 1993; Chisenga, 2000; Arnold, 2002; Enyia, 1998; Nwalo, 2000; Lundu, 1995)

In this situation, libraries in Africa are in a very weak position to effectively play their roles in economic and human development. This is an unfortunate situation since libraries do not yet have viable substitutes and may not have any in the near future. Do policy makers and leaders perceive this crisis? May be, yes! May be, no! But not much is being done about it. Foundations and development organizations interested in libraries and educational development in Africa, such as the Carnegie Corporation of New York, have called attention to this crisis and invited in all stakeholders to join hands in dealing with it (CCNY, 2000). Some of those organizations are actively funding or implementing projects aimed at alleviating this decline, but the situation may not improve significantly without the attention of all levels of government in Africa nations. This is because of the enormity of the need and the fact that eventually, government whether by design or by chance, determine the course of human progress wherever they operate.

16. The Place of Libraries in National Information Policies and Infrastructure Plans in Africa

National information policies can be viewed as the embracing framework to put into practice the basic notion that social and economic systems will function more efficiently if the right information resources are available to individuals, households, civil society, businesses and government agencies whenever they are in need of them (Lamberton, 1974). Placing libraries and other repositories of knowledge prominently in this framework is the pragmatic starting point, but studies show that in Africa, national information policies usually do not put libraries within the mainstream of issues addressed, instead technology is overemphasized (Arnold, 2002).

National policies and frameworks for information in most countries are fragmented, leading to limited coordination and ineffectual strategies. For example, in most of the countries where library laws have been enacted, national library boards with overly political dispositions were created, resulting in a situation where the boards draw attention to themselves rather than to the libraries they were set up to promote. In these situations, vision and strategic directions are not well articulated or neglected.

17. Policy Implications for Africa

The foregoing analysis has policy implications both for developing national and local strategies by governments and their agents; and for managing resources, services and operational relationships by institutions, library boards and librarians. Identified implications are outlined:

- i) It should not be taken for granted that the value of libraries is widely recognized. This value should be demonstrated to all stakeholders, as often as possible. Return on investment analysis is particularly powerful in demonstrating the monetary value of libraries to their parent organizations and communities. This calls for efforts from library managers and boards to develop detailed frameworks to ensure data collection and communication of impact.
- ii) Funding of libraries should be viewed as profitable investments in development, and as provision of public goods which help in efficient use of scarce financial resources.
- iii) Library administrators and boards should recognize their economic & human development mission by developing programmes that directly impact on their local economies. In this respect, they should participate in projects that further local and national development, such as export promotions and youth skills development projects. Specialized outfits such as economic development information centres (EDICs) provide focused means of delivering such services.
- iv) To be effective e-government programmes must rest on viable libraries and information networks. Therefore, governments at all levels, should strengthen libraries, including university, school and public libraries to enable them to play their central role in strengthening the interactive exchange of information that is the essence of e-government.
- v) It is good policy to use libraries as agents for bridging the digital divide because libraries ensure wider access to information technology, the Internet and specialized information networks. In fact modern library services concretize the benefits of the information society to the grassroots of communities.
- vi) Library governance in much of Africa needs a reappraisal. Library boards in a number of African countries are preventing libraries from developing as strong brands. Successful libraries around the world are recognizable brands. Such libraries attract funds from a variety of sources and have the confidence of information seekers. A board should occupy the background so as to project the library it governs, to such a not overshadow it. This call may also go to any department to which a library is attached.
- vii) National information policies in Africa should have substantial library services component. An information policy without the provision for libraries as the main purveyors of information resources and services is bound to lack substance in the long run. Libraries may not appear glamorous, but any information policy not based on this foundation of knowledge will normally not succeed to serve the aims of development.
- viii) It is implied that any legislative agenda for the development of a national strategic information framework must include elements for library development in the areas of infrastructure, funding, human resources, technology, information sources, services and governance. Effective legislative and strategic framework for library-friendly policy environment should include the following elements:
 - a) A ministerial level organization with responsibility for policy, resource allocation, introduction and administration of relevant laws, as well as representation of the interests of libraries at the highest level of government. This ministry may cover other related sectors such as science and technology, research and culture.
 - b) A national commission on libraries that provides strategic leadership and cross-ministerial advocacy on libraries, ensures policy and technical focus on how to

maximize resources by coordination and networking across types of libraries as well as governmental departments and the private sector.

- c) A national library established by legislation as the repository of all publications issued in a given country. A national library may have a wide range of responsibilities depending on the complexity of its operating environment.
- d) A system of public libraries, supporting communities of all sizes and recognized as a vital component of the national strategic information management framework. Legislation may be used to define their roles.
- e) A public records access legislation that establishes the structures for selecting, conserving, processing and giving access to records and documents of all levels and branches of government.
- f) Intellectual property laws, which cover the ownership and use of copyright, patents and other forms of tradable intellectual assets. Provisions on lending rights for published materials may be included in this set of laws.
- g) Professional body or bodies chartered or recognized by law and authorized to promote professionalism and standards.
- h) Professional education and accreditation system that ensures dynamic human resources development in this area.
- i) National conference on library services that discusses policy issues related to libraries. A good example of this format is the White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services convened by the President of the United States.
- j) Prominent provisions should be made for the place and roles of libraries in national and regional information policies and infrastructure plans in Africa.

18. Conclusion

May I conclude by reinforcing this presentation with the précis of the *Statement on Libraries and Sustainable Development* submitted by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, South Africa. Libraries:

- form a network that connects developing and developed countries and ensures the development of information services that supports equity policies and the improvement of quality of life of all peoples;
- act as gateways to knowledge and culture, by providing access to information, ideas and works of imagination in various formats;
- provide essential support for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development for all;
- help people improve educational and social skills indispensable in an information society and for sustained participation in democracy;
- further reading habits, information literacy, public awareness and training;
- contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom by providing unbiased access to information;
- are helping to tackle information inequality demonstrated in the growing information gap and the digital divide; and
- use their network of services to provide information with which research and innovation are executed to advance sustainable development and the welfare of peoples worldwide.

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