

Kiribati National Library Country Report

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Introduction

Kiribati is one of the Micronesian Island countries in the Pacific region with a population of approximately 100,000. The capital is Tarawa and it is here where the National Library is located. The National Library was originally founded by the British government during the colonial period and was opened to the public in 1979 when Kiribati gained its independence.

This report surveys the current state of Kiribati National Library and how it acting as an agent of transformation or trying to approach that state. The report's further main discussions relate to seven topics. These are; a general overview of recent major developments, relationship to government, key facts and figures, new developments in creating and building collections, new developments in providing access to collections, and examples of collaborating between reporting library and other national collecting institutions. These topics ensure that the national library will become an agent of transformation and how it will be able to maintain that development of transformation.

General overview of recent developments

There have been a few major developments which have occurred since the library was opened to the public. These developments were mainly, providing the public with good entertaining and educational reading books, local newspapers, historical information and so forth. Unfortunately, nowadays the National Library does not essentially have new and entertaining books. It only has business or political magazines from overseas and old books which people, especially adults, who are not interested in them and rely on decrepit, rundown books that have been in the library for years.

These developments have been aimed at the younger children. The only new books are children's books which and with many of them donated by AusAid. Ironically this has meant that the national library today is seen more as a place for younger generation or "Children's Library" rather than a "National Library".

The library's building has never been rebuilt since the first time it was opened. Renovation and maintenance may take place once every five years or more but still leaves the building rundown. This is mainly due to the lack of funding from donors or financial support from the government. The Library is under the Ministry of Education which is the biggest ministry in the country and therefore, assistance which is needed takes longer to be offered.

Relationship to government

The national library provides services to the public. It allows the public to access educational, entertaining, economical, and cultural books and documents.

The government uses the library to store local newspapers and other important, Kiribati published books or documents. Recently, the national library hosted an exhibition for local paintings drawn by an I-Kiribati artist.

Key fact and figures

The number of books the library has at the moment is 8660, and it mainly consists of books bought from New Zealand and Australia. There are no book shops in the country; therefore the library's stock increase extremely slowly and is not enough to keep the public interest with most of the books being old and rundown as well.

From a conducted survey on the public and customer's view of the national library's books, there is a high rate of people commenting on inadequate amount of books. The books they prefer to be provided are ones for young adults. This is because the number of customers on a daily basis averages to about 50 with most of the numbers been made up of young children.

It is clear from above that, the library would be able to provide better services if all types of books/documents catered for everyone not just provided children's books. There is a greater amount of children who visit the library compared to adults, and this is because they have a lot more resources available to them as well as having recent, up to date and interesting books. The numbers of adults that use the library facilities are low and this is a reflection of the amount of old, inadequate and boring books which are provided for their enjoyment.

New developments in creating and building collections

Currently, there are no new developments or systems in place to create and build on the current library collection. However, the national library is working on ordering more books and magazines from overseas for young adults and adults. This is a major undertaking as the books have not been ordered for many years now.

Moreover, the library has implemented an initiative for a competition between different age groups for writing local stories. This is a way of creating and building new collections for the library from the local residents. Other ideas are to get visual or tape records to record local dancing and singing as well as verbal stories and store these within the library as well. These initiatives can be easily carried out and implemented with a little funding which is needed.

New developments in managing collections

Currently there are no new developments which have been made yet in order to manage the collections. However, there are some news plans of building a new computerised system which would aid and assist in the management of the libraries collections.

Unfortunately, to incorporate this system within the current library may take a long as a lot of assistant is needed and is all dependent on the Ministry's decision on hiring a qualified person who could develop and implement this new system.

The only option is to keep pushing the Ministry for this assistance in helping the library or searching for funding themselves.

New developments in providing access to collections

Similar to the previous topic, the library does not actually have new developments in providing access to collections. It will implement a system that connects to the internet and posts books/documents online available for the public to view.

The system would be useful because most people in Kiribati have internet at home and if the library had the system that posted books and other documents online, it would be convenient way for them to access it.

Examples of collaborating between the reporting library and other national collecting institutions

The National Library is under one division with the National Archives. Important documents especially from Kiribati and other Pacific countries are also stored at the National Archives. The collaboration between the National Archives and Library is going well.

However, there is not enough collaboration between other institutions like school libraries and institute libraries with the national library. This is mainly due to lack of resources, for example, there is no staff appointed at the National Library to look after school libraries or institutions. Moreover, the National Library does not have enough books to share with the other libraries.

For collaboration, the National Library aims to improve its communication with school libraries and other institutes within Kiribati, as well as within and outside the Pacific region.

Collaboration with other Pacific countries would be useful when exchanging local books and other materials and information.

Conclusion

The Kiribati National Library has poor resources to accommodate the needs of the public as providing a poor service for the management of the books and files it does have. However, it is slowly developing to achieve the goal of becoming an agent of transformation.

The biggest improvement the library is aiming for in the short term is to provide more books for a wider audience and these new books would be offered out as soon as possible after arrival.

However these new developments and initiatives face problems from the lack of financial support. It is this therefore where the library seeks its greatest assistance from the government and other donors.