

---

---

# Librarians can play a part in overseas development projects

By **B. Robert Tabachnick**

*Professor  
University of Wisconsin Center for Education Research*

---

*Some suggestions for international cooperation.*

---

**T**he purpose of this paper is to explore some ways in which university librarians can become participants in development projects overseas. "Overseas" has a limited meaning in this discussion, referring to third world countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. There are opportunities to work in European university libraries, e.g., exchanges of bibliographers of special collections, but that will not be part of the discussion here. (More information about this may be available from the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars in Washington, D.C.) It is also very likely the case that we don't have to go overseas to find a third world country. I was at a meeting last week where one of the participants from Atlanta referred to West Georgia as a third world country; he insisted that he was not trying to be insulting, just descriptive. The needs of rural and urban poor people for access to post-secondary education are critical, if we are to avoid the creation of a permanent underclass in the United States. We have not invented as yet, either workable solutions to providing the kind of educational opportunities that best meet their interests or the kinds of library services that can support and drive these opportunities.

But that is not the subject of this paper. The paper is about being a member of a development project in Sierra Leone, West Africa, or Indonesia in Southeast Asia, or Costa Rica in Central Amer-

ica, and similar places.

While it is not possible in the short space available to discuss the historical and social contexts of development in any thorough way, it is important to recognize that development is a political, social, economic construction. What follows is the briefest possible outline of some of the background and present context for development, especially educational development. This will serve as introduction to my comments about becoming part of that development effort.

Before the second World War, development was not primarily concerned with the welfare of colonized peoples. Its aim was to exploit the natural and human resources of the colony for the benefit of the colonial power. After the second World War and through the 1950s and 1960s, country after country in Africa and Asia gained independence from European colonial powers. The new countries had enormous economic resources that were undeveloped or underdeveloped but little in the way of investment capital. Most of the newly independent countries traded economic concessions and privileges, often to their former colonizers, in exchange for a share of the economic returns of investment, often a very small share, and a promise to groom local talent as future technicians, managers, and controllers of the new industries. It was a promise that wasn't kept very well until two events occurred—one a dramatic surprise and the other a



*Some things are more  
timely than others . . .*

## **DISCOVER THE WORLD OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE with *Library Times International***

a timely bimonthly journal offering a unique single source for:

- World News
- Information Science Update
- Provocative Interviews
- Probing Editorials
- Special Reports on Conferences
- New Publications
- Calendar of National and  
International Conferences
- Book Reviews
- Articles
- And Much More . . .

There is no better medium than *Library Times International* to reach the library and information science world. It is the only journal which brings librarians, library educators, information scientists and others together from all continents. Recommended by *Library Journal*.

**Subscription rates: \$22.00 for institutions; \$16.00 for individuals, foreign subscribers add \$10.00 for airmail and \$5.00 for surface mail.**

Free sample copies are available.

**Send orders to:**

**Library Times International, Subscription Department, P.O. Box  
15661, Evansville, Indiana 47716, U.S.A.**

slow accretion of accomplishment. The first was the triumph of OPEC pricing in the mid-1970s, which demonstrated the dependence of the industrialized countries on the resources of the third world. The second was the educational revolution that began after independence in many third world countries.

In the first 10 years after independence, elementary school enrollments in Africa south of the Sahara doubled and doubled again. Secondary school enrollments jumped 6 times, and university enrollments increased by a factor of 20 in many countries of the region. When the Dutch, after 400 years of occupation, finally gave in to the insurgent Indonesians, there were fewer than 5,000 university graduates in a country of 80 million people. Today there are 45 government universities, 450 private post-secondary institutions and a total enrollment of more than a million post-secondary students. All that has happened in just 40 years.

What paid for that expansion in education? There was an extraordinary commitment of local support—20%, 25%, 30% of total recurrent government expenditures were common for educational development and maintenance of programs. In addition, there were large grants from bilateral aid agencies in the former colonial powers, from the United States, Scandinavia, and West Germany, and from such international associations as UNESCO/UNDP. While there was great potential for exploiting resources in third world countries, the scarcity of local investment capital suggested careful planning of development. Social demand for education was so great that most planned targets for enrollments were easily exceeded and the pressure to open more schools was politically irresistible.

Some very significant changes have taken place in the 35 to 40 years since most third world countries achieved their independence. Most Americans easily recognize the changes that surround them at home. Libraries have certainly changed in their physical characteristics—the use of space, the use of computerized access to information about library holdings, to mention a few obvious examples. There are profound changes in spirit as well. Nathaniel Shaler studied with Professor Agassiz, the distinguished American biologist at Yale. In Shaler's warm memoir of his life as student and instructor at Yale at the end of the 19th century, he mentions seeing the university librarian striding across campus—and smiling. He was a dour man, the librarian, not much given to smiling, and Shaler remarked, "You seem to be feeling well this morning." "Yes, I am. All the books are in but two. Agassiz has those, and I'm going to get them." That is certainly different from today's library spirit or Professor Kaiser's comment that books are academic tools that wear out when they are well used.

As easy as it is to recognize change around us, many of us expect life in other countries to have frozen into immobility. In the third world, the familiar French adage is insightful: the more things change, the more they stay the same. It is even more insightful when turned on its ear: the more things stay the same, the more they change.

One of the most significant changes has been the shift in relationship between the former "receiving" countries and the former "donors." The grants that were made for various development projects 20 or 30 years ago put those projects largely under the control of the grantor, who judged what was good to support and was more or less insistent about how the money would be spent. During the last 10 years, aid funds have felt the pressure of a tightening world economic situation. The present pattern is for very few grants to be made. Support for projects comes largely from loans from bilateral agencies and from the World Bank. That changes the relationship of host country and local participants to creditor agency and project participants from outside the country. Local people tend to articulate their own needs more definitely. When they borrow money it becomes their money. Since they are supposed to pay the money back, they tend to be more cautious in spending it and in getting as much in return for cost as they can. That all means much more control over project decisions by the host country and the host institution. The expatriate project members must be persuasive rather than coercive; they have to explain activities and convince colleagues of the likely benefits of a proposal rather than merely decide (for others) what should be done. While this can become a source of frustration, it creates the possibility for a genuine collaboration among colleagues, a kind of social interaction that most of us find particularly satisfying.

The idea of development has also changed in response to a continuing critique. The simple notion that to be rich and powerful as industrialized countries are, less developed countries must industrialize themselves has some truth in it, but it can also be a trap. The trap is a race according to rules and in a time frame that prevents the less developed countries from ever "catching up" and that rearranges the specifics while keeping the earlier structure of inequality and dependence in place. Whether they improve the quality of life of most people in a country or not, ideas for development are coming from within the developing countries as well as from outside. Decision makers within countries are becoming more assertive about what they hope to preserve and maintain, what they are willing to change, in what direction they expect their countries to develop. The major planners are insiders rather than outsiders. When outsiders participate, they are again more likely to be cast in the role

of colleague-advisor than as mentor-controller.

That local voices speak more clearly to local needs does not mean that these voices are all in agreement with each other. It is tempting to hear only those voices whose education has introduced them to the current conventional opinion about some professional issue. Indigenous knowledge has helped people survive, sometimes under harsh conditions of deprivation. Indigenous solutions may be more sensitive to local conditions and more appropriate than apparently technically superior solutions produced at a distance from the local context. For example, I understand that the current conventional wisdom is that central libraries are more cost effective and more serviceable than having mainly satellite libraries in a university. In Indonesia we worked with three universities. Central libraries were proposed by local academics for all three. On two campuses that didn't seem to be a problem. In one of them, especially, even the satellite libraries were weak to nonexistent. On the third campus, it was a hot issue. Interestingly enough, that university was the only one of the three to ask for consultant librarians to help in developing their library services.

It became evident very quickly to the library consultants in the project that this was not merely a technical question of choosing the most efficient option. The issue was saturated in politics and personalities. The controversy involved trading short-term benefits for a longer term gain, or else maintaining an ongoing program at strength at a cost to schools or faculties in the university that had much weaker library support and little to maintain. In the end, by treading very carefully and involving all the power players, the U.S. consultants helped the local participants weave together a compromise that protected satellite faculty libraries for advanced students and lecturers while establishing a new central library with a staff structure and building that could accommodate future changes and growth. The key to that compromise was respecting the local wisdom in meeting local interests and meshing local practice with alternatives to that practice.

I suppose the question is, "How can you become a part of that kind of activity or become a part of it again?" Two different ways to be involved in work overseas are to go it alone or else to form a group with others in your university or in other universities. As an individual, you can look for announcements and advertisements for positions in the usual sources. These are well known and I'll only mention one of them. The Council for the International Exchange of Scholars in Washington, D.C., manages the Fulbright program awards for teaching and research abroad. Usually requests come from within a country for scholars in various disciplines to work with universities or other government

agencies in that host country. There have been some, but relatively few requests for librarians. When they come, they are often for academics from Departments of Library Science rather than for operational librarians. For example, the latest announcement of Fulbright opportunities (for 1990–1991) lists a request from India for someone in library and information science to advise and teach graduate courses in any specialization. There is no reason why teaching cannot be broadly defined to include librarians working along with counterparts and academics. Somebody will have to educate people both abroad and at home to the value of including operational library specialists among Fulbright requests. It is more likely to happen if those who are interested pursue their goals actively.

Fulbright lists are compiled by a Fulbright Foundation in each participating country. There is not one Fulbright program but more than one hundred separate programs. Lists of requests are put together in November or December of each year. The following April or May these are announced, with appointments beginning a year and a half later. If you have already established contacts in a country, e.g., through an exchange of letters or through discussions at an international professional meeting, or through previous work abroad, then you can try to get a local person to work through his or her university to get a request to the Fulbright Foundation before November. An alternative would be for you to write directly to the executive director of the Fulbright Foundation, U.S. Embassy, in the capital city of the country (Nairobi, Kenya; San José, Costa Rica; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, etc.). A letter sent in June or September could indicate your interest in working for a 3–12 month period in an overseas university library or in linking your university library to one in that country. Some people will put you off by suggesting that you wait and see what turns up in the usual annual list. Others will become interested enough to float the possibility by some of their contacts as they travel around the country encouraging requests from local institutions.

Individuals can register with some of the private agencies that develop projects in response to requests for proposals. There are also recruiting agencies that search out and supply needed personnel to government aid or other projects. A few of these are listed in an appendix at the end of this paper. If you send them a curriculum vita, you may turn up on their computer when they need someone in your field. That is possible but less promising than building your own contacts through shared interests or social affinity with someone in your specialty in another country.

In addition to the private consulting and development agencies, universities and collaborating

groups of universities are the most likely to manage large projects overseas. Many universities have special administrative structures to facilitate the involvement of their faculty in overseas projects. If they know about your interest, they can often put you in touch with opportunities to work abroad as part of some university project.

At my university there is a university-wide Office of International Studies and Programs headed by a dean. There are separate offices in the Colleges of Agriculture and Engineering and in the School of Education. The University of Wisconsin-Madison belongs to a consortium of eight of the Big Ten universities. The consortium is called MUCIA (Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities) and it manages contracts for projects totaling tens of millions of dollars, but I would guess that fewer than one in five of my colleagues on the faculty know that we belong to it or what MUCIA does. What MUCIA does is to identify potential projects and requests for project proposals. From the eight participative universities, terms are assembled to respond to the requests. If successful (that is, if MUCIA is asked to manage a project), MUCIA chooses a lead university, one of its member institutions, to coordinate and staff the project.

MUCIA has special interest groups in agriculture, education, engineering, development administration, and tourism. Why not an interest group of librarians? Interest groups share information about possible projects overseas, develop responses to requests for proposals from donor agencies, help recruit suitable project participants, and in the case of librarians, they could also lobby the consortium directors and their own campus representatives to include library service consultants as essential elements of future projects.

It is possible to conceive of such efforts awakening recognition that a project may be needed where the major purpose is to develop an effective university library system. There are few requests at present, so far as I am aware, that have such a priority. Instead, the priority is for building departments in agricultural sciences or engineering, or creating an agricultural extension service or a distance education program through an "open" university. Now why would any of those projects need a consultant or two for library services? Is that a need worth giving up 6 or 12 months of service from engineers or soil scientists or curriculum specialists? Or is the need worth adding on to the cost of a project? It seems to me that university librarians might know convincing answers to those questions. Those answers and other initiatives need to get to your university colleagues who put projects together.

The most useful time to exert influence is when projects are being designed. That means staying closely in touch with the operative people on your

campus who head institutes for development activities (such as those at Pittsburgh or Harvard) or offices of International Studies and Programs (such as at the University of Wisconsin-Madison or Indiana University or Beloit College) or with the administrative offices of the various university consortia throughout the United States. The state universities in New York form a consortium, as do those in Florida. There is a northeast consortium (NECID) with headquarters at Cornell University, and a southeast consortium (SECID) whose head office is in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. There is a Mid-America State Universities Association (MASUA) based at Iowa State University, and a Mid-American International Agricultural Consortium (MIAC) based at the University of Missouri in Columbia. There are consortia for international activities in the southwest, the northwest, and California. There is even one on Guam (PPEC, the Pacific Postsecondary Education Council). To find the one nearest you or to discover if your university is a member of a consortium, you might start by asking someone in the campus office working with overseas programs or serving foreign students and visitors, or talk to a campus coordinator for some project in progress.

These consortia offer an obvious advantage to a donor agency. They open access to a much wider range of human experience and resources than are found on any single university campus. For the participating universities, they make participation possible for faculty where the university's own resources would not have warranted awarding them a contract for a project. The usual procedure is for position notices to circulate among faculty of the member institutions. It is rare that these can all be filled from "inside" people, and it is common for a wider net to be cast. Even if your own campus is not a consortium member or active in overseas activities, it is worth making your interest known to appropriate people who are active in international work in your field at other universities.

One needs to be patient and persistent in pursuing overseas opportunities. It is common for teams to be formed to assess needs for development before a project proposal is written. Often the assessing team lays down the outline of the project design and it is later expanded and its details refined. Being closely in touch with development activities that involve your campus colleagues puts you in position to indicate your availability and that of your colleagues in library services for a project that may eventually be developed. But the negotiations between participating country, donor agency, and contractor can drag on for months and even years. A project can seem immanent and then disappear from view. When it has become only a rueful "might have been," it suddenly surfaces again, alive and hearty, eager to begin at once when

your plans already commit you to other activities. More negotiations, this time about when and how you might take part, are possible and expected.

It also takes an active imagination to see possibilities where they are not obvious or to open an avenue that seems closed. In our Indonesia project, we were asked to supply one library consultant to spend two years at the University of Indonesia, helping to develop a central library and also upgrading staff skills and procedures. We were really intrigued by a proposal from Dean Snyder at Indiana University that indicated a deep interest on the part of several staff members of the Indiana University libraries, none of whom could be away from their positions for two years. Eventually, we agreed to their proposal that used 24 months of staff time to supply us with four library consultants over the two-year period, each offering different backgrounds and expertise and all forming one closely coordinated IU team. That is not something we would have thought up ourselves. In addition to the wide range of expertise it offered, what made it attractive was the close coordination possible because they were all colleagues from the same university library. In addition, they were able to identify Indonesian library staff who could meet requirements for acceptance at Indiana University for further study in library science and to establish a link between the two university libraries. When we realized the potential benefits of the arrangement, we encouraged similar team responses to staffing needs in fields as diverse as physics, biology, geodesy, and geography.

The United States Information Agency has a University Affiliation program through which grants are made of \$50,000–\$60,000 over a three-year period to encourage a linkage between a U.S. and a foreign university. The 1989 program was announced in the *Federal Register* in August 1988 with a January deadline and awards to be announced in June 1989. One country, Ghana in West Africa, listed library science as a specific priority. Seven other African countries, three countries of Southeast Asia, three Pacific countries and most countries of the Middle East invited proposals in “any eligible discipline.” The exchange is to encourage teaching, lecturing, and research for one- to three-month periods and pays for costs of travel and maintenance (salary is paid by the participant’s home institution). The exchange should benefit both of the participating institutions and aim toward continuing collaborative activities. While academic fields of library science easily qualify, it would only take a little imagination to find ways to have libraries qualify for exchange visits and to have operational librarians meet the requirements for teaching, lecturing, and research. Some advance discussion with USIA staff in the

United States and with the USIA or Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy involved would certainly help. Collaborative planning between staff of the two universities is a requirement.

I have tried in this brief paper to give some idea about the range and variety of opportunities for working in various third world countries. At the same time, I have suggested some strategies for becoming a part of an overseas development project. It is clear that I think that taking an initiative is more effective than a more passive response. Possibly the first step in making an active effort to connect to some overseas opportunity is to assess yourself. What is your background and your interest—practical operation of a library? scholarship and research? teaching? all of these? What are the countries that seem most appealing to you and what can you learn about their history, their cultural diversity, the state of practice and research in your own field of specialization? Can you start a correspondence with someone in a similar job in the countries that interest you, possibly through former students at your university, or through foreign participants in a professional meeting you attended? You may find that you send many letters, newsletters, other materials, and get few back. That is understandable, since you are writing in your native language, English, and your correspondent is probably writing in her or his second language. If you plan a visit or attend an international meeting in the country that interests you, you are likely to find a warm welcome even if correspondence has been limited. You can also learn more about the possibilities and conditions for working in that country or with that colleague.

When you know the area that interests you, you need to stay in touch with your local campus international project activists to know when projects are being designed and to put forward your interest in participating. Campus area studies groups are sources of information about foreign visitors and project possibilities. Area studies colloquia and lectures are useful and pleasant ways to get to know more about the places that interest you.

Patience, persistence, and imagination will eventually succeed—and there you’ll be, finding new colleagues in a fascinating new environment. To work together as colleagues, people need to understand and value one another. It is difficult enough to do that at home. Pirandello wrote about the care with which we adjust the masks that present us to the world. Behind the outer mask is another mask. “Nothing is true,” he concludes. I would prefer, “Nothing is easy to understand.” It is just those subtle differences in meaning and the struggle to share and communicate, however, that give the overseas experience its special charm and addictive appeal.

## Appendix A: Some private development agencies and recruiting companies in the United States

### *Private development agencies*

Academy for Educational Development, 1255 23rd Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037; (202) 862-1900. Contact person: Richard Lancaster. Multiple fields of interest in education.

Louis Berger International, 100 Halsted Street, East Orange, NJ 07019; (201) 678-1960. Contact person: Charles Bell. Multiple fields of interest in education.

Robert Nathan Associates, 1301 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20004; (202) 626-8138. Contact person: Deborah Shaeffer, International Recruitment. Multiple fields of interest in education.

Cecchi & Company Consulting, 1730 Rhode Island Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20036; (202) 452-9700. Contact person: Patricia McPheilm. Multiple fields of interest in education.

Experience, Inc., 1725 K Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006; (202) 659-3864. Contact person: Wes Weidemann. Mainly agriculture related projects.

Arthur Young International (Business), 3000 K Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20007; (202) 956-6476. Contact person: Dan Lounberg. Mainly business-related projects.

### *Some recruiting companies*

Clapp & Mayne, 5530 Wise Avenue, Suite 1115, Chevy Chase, MD 20815; (301) 951-4477. Contact person: Larry Posner.

Pragma Corporation, 116 East Broad Street, Falls Church, VA 22046; (703) 237-9303. Contact person: Elizabeth Thompson.

## Appendix B: Consortia and associations

### *U. S. consortia*

The following organizations are some of the consortia involved in international activities and are based in the United States.

Consortium for International Development (CID), Earl Kellogg, Executive Director, 5151 E. Broadway, Suite 1500, Tucson, AZ 85711; (602) 745-0455.

Mid-America State Universities Association (MASUA), Dennis Peterson, Acting Director, 1987-88, International Educational Services, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011; (515) 294-1120.

Mid-American International Agricultural Consortium (MIAC), J. Wendell McKinsey, Executive

Director, 215 Gentry Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211; (314) 882-4413, 882-3679.

Northeast Consortium for International Development (NECID), Larry W. Zuidema, Associate Director, International Agriculture, P.O. Box 16, Robert Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853; (607) 255-3035.

Southeast Consortium for International Development (SECID), Main Office: William Edward Vickery, Executive Director, 800 Eastowne Drive, Suite 100, Chapel Hill, NC 27514; (919) 493-4551; (800) 334-8537. SECID (Washington Office): 1612 K Street, N.W., Suite 704, Washington, DC 20006; (202) 429-1804.

### *International consortia and organizations*

The following organizations are representative of consortia and other organizations involved in international activities and based in countries outside of the United States.

Association Internationale des Universités (AIU), 1, Rue Miollis, 75732 Paris Cedex 15, France; 45-68-25-45/46.

The British Council, 10 Spring Garden, London SW1 A2BN, United Kingdom; 01 930 8466.

International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP), Kenneth Back, Executive Director, GPO Box 2006, Canberra CT 2601, Australia; (062) 497833.

Mission interuniversitaire de coordination des échanges franco-américains (MICEFA), Pierre Dommergues, Director General, Alliance Française B 511-515, 101 Boulevard Raspail, 75270 Paris Cedex 06, France; 548 08 95.

Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation (NUFFIC), T. G. Veenkamp, Director, Badhuisweg 251, P.O. Box 90734, 2509 LS The Hague, The Netherlands; 070-574201.

The Pacific Postsecondary Education Council (PPEC), P.O. Box 23067, GMF, Guam 96921; (671) 734-2962.

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 7, Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris, France; (1) 577-16-10.

