

# **Effectiveness of National Union Catalogue in Sharing the Bibliographic Information in Sri Lanka**

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## **Introduction**

The volume of information being published in the world during the last couple of decades has grown rapidly. Due to new research inventions in almost every field, new information generates through out the day and at the same time information gets obsolete quickly. This situation directly affects the libraries, because library is the place where this newly generated information being collected, stored and disseminated. Due to constantly changing methods of technology and high cost of materials, libraries are unable to acquire all the knowledge being produced in the world and it has become an unattainable goal for all libraries in the world. Acquisition of all desirable materials and continuing published knowledge in almost every field , has generated a difficult situation in libraries, specially in the developing countries. Sharing of information or resources through the library cooperation provides a best solution for this critical issue. Sharing of information helps the libraries to perform a balance and up-to-date information service for its clients.

Union Catalogue is one of the important bibliographic tools which is widely used in library cooperation activities. Union Catalogue is different from a library catalogue with regard to the objectives and services. Library Catalogue provides bibliographic information of a collection of a particular library where the Union Catalogue provides the bibliographic information about the collections of range of libraries with the physical location of information. Union Catalogue is available in different types such as local, regional, national and international. Among these types National Union Catalogue is the most significant type due to its objectives, goals, format and specially the coverage of geographical area.

National Union Catalogue (NUCAT) provides the bibliographic information about the published and recorded knowledge available through the library system of a country. The main objective of the compilation of a NUCAT is to facilitate library cooperation between the libraries of a country. Shared

cataloguing is also an objective of NUCAT and it helps to avoid the duplication of information sources and also it will help librarian to get maximum usage of resources at a minimum cost.

Compilation of a National Union Catalogue is one of the major tasks which is performed by the National Library of any country. This fact is emphasized by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), famous library and information scholars such as Maurice B. Line in 1980 and Professor Al- Nahari of Jeddah University in 1984 have emphasized the absolute necessity for library cooperation and National Union Catalogue.

### **Definitions**

International Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science define Union Catalogue as

“ A catalogue that contains not only a listing of bibliographic records from more than one library, but also locations to identify holdings of the contributing libraries “. ( Feather & Sturges1997, p. 451).

According to the Harrods' Librarians Glossary Union Catalogue is “a catalogue of the various departments of a library, or of a number of libraries, indicating their locations.” (Montague 1986, p. 832)

International Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science define National Union Catalogue as follows  
“A generic term for a catalogue which aggregates records of the holdings of libraries in a particular country, so as to provide a particularly comprehensive national bibliographic tool, and to list locations of copies of publications held by the contributing libraries, to facilitate access and interlending. “. ( Feather & Sturges1997, p. 314 ).

### **Union Catalogues in Sri Lanka**

Introduction of open economic policy led a new dawn and changes in social, economical and technical fields in Sri Lanka. These changes had positively effected to the library and information set up in Sri Lanka at that time. Peris ( 2002, p. 39 ) has quoted that “The national library of Sri Lanka commenced a

NUCAT of monographs in 1986. Prior to this, there had been five union catalogues in Sri Lanka. They were UNICAST, UNIDEV, UNICEB, ENLINET and two union catalogues in Law and thesis respectively. “

These union catalogues were started with the main objective of sharing each others library and information resources through library cooperation and this concept of library cooperation directed to set up a National Union Catalogue in Sri Lanka latter on.

***UNICAST ( Union Catalogue of Scientific and Technical Books )***

UNICAST is the first union catalogue compiled in Sri Lanka and it was compiled by the SLSTIC (Sri Lanka Scientific and Technical Information Centre) of the National Science Council (NSC). This union catalogue was limited to the fields of science and technology and the member libraries of SLSTINET (Sri Lanka Scientific and Technical Information Network) were the members of UNICAST. UNICAST was established in 1977 with 07 members and latter membership were gradually increase up to 20. The then Director of Information of the National Science Council, Mr. N .U. Yapa was the pioneer of the UNICAST. ( Peris 2002 , P. 39 )

***UNIDEV ( Union Catalogue of Social and Development Science )***

UNIDEV is the union catalogue of Social and development studies. Centre for the Development Information (CDI) at the Department of National Planning was the focal point of this union catalogue. There were 09 member libraries who contributed to the UNIDEV by sending their bibliographic information related to the fields of social and development studies.

***UNICEB ( Union Catalogue of Environmental Books )***

UNICEB was started with the support of the libraries under ENLINET (Environmental Library Network) and central Environmental Authority is the focal point of this union catalogue (Yapa 1993 ). UNICEB is the first task conducted by the ENLINET and there were 21 libraries contributed to this project under 09 subject streams.

## **Union catalogue of Law Books**

This union catalogue was operated in the period of 1985-1989 with the help of Attorney General's Department and the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo. Lawyers, Judges and law students were the main user groups of this union catalogue.

## **National Union Catalogue of Sri Lanka**

National Union Catalogue of Sri Lanka was first established in the 1986 by the National Library of Sri Lanka with 06 member libraries. National library of Sri Lanka is the main focal point of the National Union Catalogue. The present membership of the NUCAT consists with 77 member libraries and they are contributing to the NUCT by sending the bibliographic records of their collections. These member libraries are representing the different types of libraries such as public, universities, postgraduate institutes, technical colleges, special and departmental libraries spread all over the country. The user communities of the National Union Catalogue can identify as a range of students, University researchers and professionals from various fields and age groups.

In 1997 there were 38,610 of bibliographic records included in the NUCAT and by the end of September 2007 this figure increased up to 448,258 bibliographic records. ( Fernando 2007, p. 16 )

Several stages can be identified with regard to the development and reorganization of the NUCAT after its beginning. In 1995 there were 31 member libraries who have contributed to the NUCAT and at the end of 2000 this figure increased up to 66. Also in 1997 there were only 25 libraries who have sent out their bibliographic records in a computer based format and it increased up to 54 in 2006. Libraries send their bibliographic records to the National Union Catalogue in several formats such as catalogue cards, acquisition lists, computer files, diskettes and ISO files.

National Union Catalogue provides several benefits and privileges to its member libraries. National Library gives priority to the member libraries of NUCAT specially in the training workshops and other

events organized by the National Library. Also member libraries are getting the publications published by the National library free of charge. Inter library loan facility is the other benefit which member libraries are getting as a part of the National Union Catalogue. Also, If a member library lost its catalogue by any damage, they can obtain a free copy of their catalogue through the NUCAT. ( Fernando 2007, P. 21 ).

At the beginning, the National Union Catalogue of Sri Lanka was available in the print format and subsequently it was available on CD formats and currently it is available as a web OPAC on [www.natlib.lk](http://www.natlib.lk) and member libraries can share their library catalogues with the world via this service now.

### **Objectives of the Research**

The main objective of this study was to identify the effectiveness of the National Union Catalogue as a bibliographic tool in sharing of information in Sri Lanka. NUCAT could play a wide and important role in terms of sharing information and it is essential to explore the possibilities to upgrade the effectiveness of the NUCAT. Due to scarcity of funds and infrastructure facilities there is a high tendency among libraries to sharing of information. Sri Lanka as a developing country, sharing of information provides a solution for most of the information requirements of the library users. National Union Catalogue is the best tool or the method to locate the published information sources spread out within the country, as it provides the physical location of the items covered by the NUCAT.

This article is also attempts to identify some of the problem areas with regard to facilitate effective National Union Catalogue service to all the user communities in Sri Lanka, in terms of sharing the information and knowledge and suggest measures to overcome the issues raised .Therefore NUCAT could functions effectively and usefully to the users.

## **Research Methodology**

In order to collect data, survey research technique has been used. During the research it was noted that questionnaire survey method was the best method to collect data economically, accurately and effectively with least time.

Primary data was collected by distributing two sets of detailed questionnaires to the librarians of member libraries of the National Union Catalogue projects and to its users. In addition to the questionnaire methods, questionnaire oriented interview method also utilized for the data collection specially with the librarians and occasionally with the users. While conducting face to face interviews with librarians and users certain questions which were not appeared in written questionnaires were raised with regard to the effectiveness of the NUCAT in terms of sharing information in Sri Lanka.

The populations of this study were the individual libraries of the NUCAT project and its users. The sample selections were mainly based on the types of libraries and the types of users. Based on the above criteria the study selected two samples for the research by using random sampling method.

First sample consisted with 68 member libraries which covered 04 Public Libraries, 15 Departmental Libraries, 17 University Libraries, 28 Special Libraries, 02 Technical College Libraries, 01 Pirivena Library and the National Library of Sri Lanka.

Second sample represented the 50 users of the NUCAT. 8% of the user sample was represented the students while 12% showed the students who were studied for higher education. 24% of the user study sample represented the researchers and the majority of 40% from the professionals of different fields and library professional represented the 16% from the study sample.

68 questionnaires were distributed within the sample libraries of the NUCAT and out of this 50 were sent out through post mail while the rest were filled by using face to face interviews and discussions with the librarians.

In setting the questionnaires larger consideration was made on getting facts related to the central problem, research questions and the objective of the study. Close and open ended questions were included in both questionnaires and considering the convenience of respondents, most structured questions were included. Both questionnaires and interviews were conducted in the Sinhala medium.

Most of the interview and discussions were used to collect data from the second study sample and 35 users being interviewed by the researcher while the rest of the data was collected through the questionnaires. These discussions were based on the questionnaire which was focused on to the user sample.

## **Research Findings**

Study findings revealed that the majority of the member libraries of the National Union Catalogue project represented the special libraries and it was 41% of the study sample and 25 % of the contribution to the NUCAT represented the University libraries. Though Sri Lanka has a widely spread system of Public Libraries in the most of the areas of the country, public libraries gave a minimum contribution to the NUCAT project. Survey results showed that public libraries provided only 6% contribution to the National Union Catalogue. National, Pirevena and Technical college libraries gave a 6% contribution to the NUCAT while Departmental Libraries gave the contribution of 22 % to the NUCAT.

As NUCAT is a national cataloguing project it is the responsibility of the other libraries in Sri Lanka to be a member of the NUCAT and it will be a good opportunity for them to share their bibliographic sources with the other libraries. Due to inadequate contribution from the library system in Sri Lanka, NUCAT had to depend on limited number of contributors and this situation directly effect to facilitate a better bibliographic information service through NUCAT.

According to the study, the following factors directly effect the services provide by the NUCAT.

- Inadequate publicity on National Union Catalogue
- Lack of coordination and inadequate dialogue between member libraries and the NUCAT
- Insufficient support from the relevant authorities to the NUCAT project
- Financial difficulties
- Lack of a national cataloguing policy
- Discrepancy on common communication formats (CCF) regarding the data transferring to the NUCAT
- No fixed time frame with regard to the data sending to the NUCAT project

Due to inadequate publicity, people have limited knowledge and idea about the National Union Catalogue and its service and benefits which they could gain in terms of fulfilling the information requirements.

#### **Usage of the National Union Catalogue**

<b>Usage</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Frequently	32%
Occasionally	10%
Never	58%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table: 1**

**Source:** Survey Results 2007

According to the table 1 there are 58% never used this service and only 32% frequently used this service to find answers for their information needs. These 58% had an idea that if they could be aware about this bibliographic service they were able to accomplish their information needs in a better way.

As a result of unsystematic way of coordination generates isolation between the member libraries and the NUCAT project. This survey identified that this situation is directly affecting the service carried out by the NUCAT. 85 % of the libraries prefer to have workshops, progress review meetings or awareness programmes periodically, with regard to the progress about the NUCAT. Providing an up to date service will directly affect the user awareness on resources available in various libraries of the country. To facilitate an effective information



service through the NUCAT this kind of dialogue between libraries , users and NUCAT project are very much essential. Study also identified that the relevant authorities still not identified NUCAT as the national project and this is badly effect to its the future developments and activities.

#### **Duration of sending data to the National Union Catalogue**

<b>Duration</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Monthly	6%
Once a 3 Months	44%
Once a 6 Months	34%
Once a Year	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table: 2**

**Source:** Survey Results 2007

Survey results indicated that majority of the sample which was 44% used to sent the cataloguing records to the NUCAT project in once a 03 months time. According to the figures of the table 2 34% sent their cataloguing records of its collection once a 06 month time while only 06 % used to sent the bibliographic records of its library collection monthly. Research findings identified that different time Schedules of data sending generated problems to the NUCAT . As the obsolete nature of information, it is the responsibility and the duty of the member libraries to sent their cataloguing information to the NUCAT according to a fixed time schedule. It will help NUCAT to provide up to date and effective National Union Catalogue service to the library users in Sri Lanka.

#### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

The study concludes that the National Union Catalogue could play a significant role in Sri Lanka with regard to the bibliographic control and library cooperation. Systematic contribution and live participation is very much essential from all the stakeholders of the NUCAT project to provide an up to date bibliographic information service to all the citizens in Sri Lanka. Though this is a national

project only 77 libraries are contributing to the project and it is the responsibility of other libraries in Sri Lanka to give their utmost support to a successful National Union Catalogue project.

Libraries in Sri Lanka still not understand the timely value of NUCAT as a national level project and the facilities which they can obtain in terms of sharing bibliographic information within the country. Therefore National Library must take the initiate step to build a national cataloguing policy and this national policy will leads to a national bibliographic control in Sri Lanka.

To increase the effective usage of the National Union Catalogue with regard to the sharing of information, NUCAT should expand its publicity by using print and electronic Medias. Also NUCAT must broaden its online service, then people can search the NUCAT instead of coming to the libraries or to the Nation Library in Colombo and it will save the time and money of the users.

This study strongly recommends that relevant authorities must provide the necessary and relevant support and guidance such as equipments, technical, financial, advisory and management assistance to the NUCANT and to the member libraries. Such support will definitely help to increase the usability of the NUCAT in future.

Finally the National Union Catalogue project, National Library of Sri Lanka and the relevant authorities must take all the necessary steps to increase the usage and popularity of the National Union Catalogue.

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