Editorial: Community-driven and social initiatives

Juan D. Machin-Mastromatteo

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Concerns about the need for researchers to make an impact on society, by conducting community activities and providing solutions to social problems are not new. However, such values are increasingly gaining attention, and stakeholders are now more vocal than ever about such a need. This general topic is what had motivated the development of this special issue on community-driven and social initiatives.

However, speaking of the social impact of research might be problematic. As Smit and Hessels (2021) put it, impact implies the evaluation of the resulting presence of intended changes and hence they prefer using the term social value, which may be more open to also consider intangible results, such as helping to deepen our understanding of a given social phenomenon. Indeed, this could be the most reasonable way to look at this, because not every worthwhile contribution will have tangible outcomes that can be precisely measured, particularly not in short periods of time, which is the main issue involved in trying to measure the social impact of research. I also believe that for most researchers, despite their best efforts in proposing solutions to social problems, they may find it especially difficult to make a lasting contribution to society through their research, particularly if there are no appropriate mechanisms and resources for implementing and replicating their experiences, or to influence policy-makers and society at large to adopt their solutions. The latter is related to a difficult link to establish or even to restore, as the image of science and researchers in the public opinion is not in a particularly good standing nowadays. Hence, social stakeholders' willingness to reach out to scientists for solving problems or their eagerness to receive and implement researchers' solutions might be one of the most delicate issues we are facing.

One thing would be attempting to solve a problem through research, another could be to find and provide a solution for a given case under a certain context, and yet another would be for others accept the application of a given solution. It would not be out of the realm of possibility, nor it would necessarily mean subscribing to conspiracy theories, that some social problems have not been solved, not because their solution is complex or because such solution has not been proposed before, but because there may be political and/or corporate interests that do not want these problems to be solved and they might be actively opposing or blocking their solution. In these cases, one might ask: why should researchers work on solutions that have already been found, or on those that others will not allow to apply? Are researchers being distracted under (apparently) good intentions while they are prevented from thinking about and working on problems emerging from their own research? Some social problems highlighted by stakeholders outside of the academia could fit into these categories, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive: a) problems with known solutions but that are somehow not implemented and are still researched; and b) problems that

should be solved and their solution might exist, but its implementation is being obstructed by some hegemonic powers. However, we can conduct research with a clear social value and propose solutions, even if they are not further developed or massively implemented.

Despite local or national mandates and globalist political agendas that might be out of touch with societies' will, hopes, and their specific and more urgent needs, which may also ignore professionals' own perspectives on how they can better contribute to alleviating the most pressing problems, a discussion such as the one presented by gathering the articles in this issue might be more effective. This is because they represent bottom-up approaches that could be more democratic, and also because colleagues, despite the length of their careers, are still members of their own societies.

When speaking about social value, we might also find problems with the concept. However, Wenner (2013) concludes the following, after drawing from Rawls' argument about the counter of the blades of grass:

> "The value of knowledge – much like the value of other goods – is at least in part subjective. And just as personal values will play a large role in the value one ascribes to a piece of knowledge, social values will play a large role in the value a society ascribes to a piece of knowledge" (p. 6).

Here, we should understand that knowledge is the general result of research, which may take the form of various products or outputs (articles, books, chapters, patents, videos, blogs, guidelines, or policies). Moreover, Wenner (2013) states that although knowledge itself has value, for it to have a social value, it should have an *instrumental component*, meaning that it should be useful for various social stakeholders. As remarked above, value is subjective, and the usefulness of knowledge is contextual, it may depend on the characteristics, limitations and resources of a particular society.

Establishing the social value of research may not be so simple and given its magnitude, it is not possible to fully define it in an editorial such as the present. Indeed, this is not as straightforward as saying *contribute something to society* or to *solve a social problem* and making it happen through the powers of will and research, because we may face serious limitations of resources and public reception. Conducting research with social value may also involve a careful consideration of the interaction among several epistemological, ontological, and ethical aspects of science and research. For instance, Mills et al. (2020) discuss the value of research by centering their attention on the ethical considerations involved in research on terrorism. They argue that apart from ethics, social scientists must consider questions of a) social power; b) academic freedom; c) the politics of knowledge production; d) the public function of the university; e) the integrity of scientific knowledge; f) their responsibilities to the society; g) relations with extra-academic actors as the audience for the knowledge produced, including "the policy makers, but also social movements, 'civil society' actors, as well as broader 'publics'" (p. 129).

Given the above considerations and even if they are ignored, when researchers or practitioners from any field are, for whatever reason, pressed to think and develop a kind of research that contributes to society, some of them might be confused as to where to start and what can they do to achieve this general goal. This would be no different among library and information science (LIS) researchers and practitioners. There are several perspectives around this issue and for assessing whether or not a given research project fulfills this promise. An extreme view might argue that if researchers are

not fully immersed in their work within a marginalized community, they are not making any social contributions. Not to underestimate the importance of doing this, but there are vast amounts of social issues outside of fixed locations and groups that also need solving, hence, such a simplistic view of determining what socially-aware research is might not be so helpful.

For LIS researchers and practitioners, this might be a *no brainer*, as we deal with information and we are closely linked to educational processes of various kinds and levels, so all that we do must be helpful for society and this might be the case. However, let me try to set a non-exhaustive list of principles, which together with all the considerations that I have mentioned above, may help in providing a better idea about the research that may help society and to think about which projects we can develop: a) addressing social challenges and improving the well-being of individuals and communities from their needs and concerns, by developing insights, solutions, and innovations; b) engaging the community in research, as this can also develop a sense of ownership and empowerment in people, which at the same time allows promoting science (e.g. citizen science projects and participatory methods) and its value, by proving that it can include the community's perspectives to address their priorities; c) conducting research with a social value can lead to positive, informed and evidence-based social change and policy development, and hence address community needs, promote equity, and support sustainable development; d) conducting community-based research can improve trust and strengthen the relationships between researchers and the community; and e) conducting social research may also provide educational value for the community, e.g. reducing illiteracy, developing information and digital literacy, while also encouraging knowledge sharing, and capacity building.

Social value in this special issue

The 16 articles on this special issue report research findings that promote inclusivity, equity, and justice, while they also represent a good sample of research conducted with the general aim of having a positive contribution on communities and society in general, some of them even aimed at aiding marginalized groups. As such, the social groups studied in the contributions presented here included: female students, Indigenous peoples, virtual communities, families and children, librarians, nomadic children, underserved communities, rural communities, and farmers. All articles and their authors are from developing countries, and they reveal several areas of opportunity to develop LIS research and initiatives with social value. Some key points that I have summarized from them are the following, which obviously is not a comprehensive list, but may provide some insights and ideas for colleagues to help their communities through their know-how and work:

- Information and communication technologies (ICTs) dominate almost every facet of our lives. Hence, it is relevant to educate on digital citizenship, which is related to the safe and responsible use of technology, and it is important to include this topic in the LIS curriculum, as it has much to do with our profession. This would hopefully help raise awareness in society about digital citizenship and the need for developing an ethical, secure, and responsible use of technology, while reducing digital illiteracy.
- Nowadays, there are discussions among social stakeholders about the need for raising awareness about the knowledge base of Indigenous peoples (cultural practices and art, beliefs, and ecological and medicinal knowledge), as well as recommendations for preserving, retrieving, and employing it. The challenge lies in the fact that much of this

knowledge is orally transmitted from generation to generation, and some of it might be considered to be lost. However, recent research from the LIS field has focused on managing Indigenous knowledge using contemporary tools, such as repositories, in order to preserve this rich heritage and make it accessible. There are interesting challenges involved with this kind of knowledge, such as studying sharing practices, as well as supplying solutions for its digitization, management, dissemination, and promoting access to it.

- The study of virtual communities tends to be interdisciplinary, as shown in the related article included in this issue, as it may bring together marketing, behavioral finance, e-commerce, information systems, and the social sciences in general. By incorporating such disciplines, we can gain a better understanding of users' behavior, decision-making, and perhaps most importantly, the significance of social interactions and community engagement within virtual communities, which is key to the development of social capital, knowledge transfer and information-sharing, thus furthering social ties and fostering collaboration. To better understand how users develop these activities or traits within a virtual network might allow developing powerful digital environments where users can unite around a common cause.
- Public libraries can enhance their role in promoting parent and family engagement, especially in underserved communities, which they can achieve through the development of various collections and services that cater to families and children. Moreover, they can address early literacy and family engagement through ICTs. Libraries have somehow been losing their place in society regarding their importance, especially the physical library and among young generations, particularly after the lockdowns enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but retaking family-oriented services might be a way to recover the ground they lost. This may also be relevant in current times, when the family and the moral and ethical values must be promoted and rescued. Moreover, public libraries are important for providing equitable access to information, promoting individual development, technical progress, and social advancement, while also enabling community building and development by providing free access to information, learning and personal advancement support, and engagement for people of all ages, genders, and social classes.
- Distributed leadership is not a commonly developed area in LIS studies and practice; however, its successful application may help improve library operations. This is because I believe that, by orienting library management in such a way, we might enable more active dynamics in the workplace, mainly by improving staff's work, compromise, motivation, and their sense of belonging, which can then positively transform the services offered, as staff are then allowed to develop a deeper sense of ownership of their ideas, work, and projects.
- The education of nomadic children who have limited access to formal schooling represents a difficult challenge in several countries, and through the use of information as well as analog and digital technologies, we could find some solutions to address this issue. Such solutions would seek to enhance their well-being, development and skills, which may include decision-making, problem-solving, creative thinking, social responsibility, critical thinking, self-esteem, self-awareness, coping with emotion and stress skills, empathy, and interpersonal relationship and communication skills, while also respecting and preserving their social identities.
- Developing community networks can help us to increase internet connectivity in underserved and excluded communities, which could in turn help transform people's

capabilities and livelihoods, as such networks may foster public support, encourage participation, empower local community members, while also bridging the digital divide, and improve access to information, education, and opportunities.

- Establishing and studying online health communities, which contain valuable online resources for individuals seeking help with health difficulties, might allow us to find ways to enhance their sustainability and effectiveness. LIS studies would center on aspects such as knowledge-sharing and information behavior, which can also help in improving the quality of the platforms, their services, and the information within.
- Traditional media, such as radio, and more specifically community radio, can play a role in providing marginalized groups with a platform to express, promote and preserve their cultural heritage and affinity. It can also present educational opportunities, disseminate critical information, and provide a channel for the community to participate in the national discourse and to publicly express their opinions.
- The triple helix, understood as the collaboration between academia, industry, and government, is sometimes dismissed by certain governments as a valid alternative to develop community-driven and social initiatives. However, if there are appropriate policies regulating each stakeholder's reach and responsibilities, valuable projects that we can further study, improve and develop might arise from such collaboration.
- Several recent and upcoming *Information Development* issues (and this one is not the exception) show that there is a large and continuing interest from LIS researchers to conduct and develop research aimed at studying and improving farmers' conditions, which is obviously pertinent, given their significant contribution to food production worldwide. LIS research around farmers is mainly related to studying their information behavior (particularly in digital platforms), designing systems specializing in timely access to the information they need (e.g., weather, seeds, species, agricultural practices, water management, pest control) and providing related digital services, while also aiding illiterate farmers to prosper regardless of this condition, implementing ICT-based community building, and providing them with opportunities to further develop their endeavors, such as by facilitating their access to government funding.
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) global agenda brings interesting challenges and opportunities for information services, particularly for enhancing the access to information related to them, aiding researchers in finding opportunities for aligning their research according to them, and in general to contribute in promoting citizen engagement within this framework.
- Other lines of LIS research with social value, which are not explored in this special issue (at least not fully), but that can be suggested, include the following: a) aiding the government and society to improve levels of transparency, access to information and adequate accountability; b) provide platforms for the effective participation of citizens and civil society organizations; c) promote and improve the use of ICTs to make government services and civil society institutions more efficient, and ensuring that their information is of quality, measurable, reliable, and transparent; d) encourage the generation, promotion, dissemination and use of information for the creation and strengthening of the creative economy, as well as for civil protection and violence prevention; e) work on scientific dissemination content, media and channels, and generate initiatives for promoting science

for children, youth and disadvantaged populations; and f) promote and generate initiatives to develop literacy, information literacy and digital literacy, while fighting against disinformation and fake news. In the remaining part of this editorial, I present the 16 articles conforming this special issue in greater detail.

Sixteen community-driven and social initiatives

The first article in this issue, *Exploring the level of digital citizenship awareness among female students in the information science department at Umm Al-Qura University*, by Lotfia Mahmoud Refaat Shenishen (Ain Shams University, Egypt, and Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia), explored the level of digital citizenship awareness among female students in the Department of Information Science at the Umm Al-Qura University in Saudi Arabia, as the author argued that there was a need for a curriculum dedicated to teaching a safe and responsible use of technology (which was the working definition of digital citizenship used by the author). This quantitative study employed a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection and included questions about the level of awareness, the curricula involved, and opinions on the necessity of a digital citizenship curriculum. The highlight of this instrument was the inclusion of nine themes of digital citizenship used to measure this construct, which included: a) digital access; b) digital market; c) digital communication; d) digital etiquette; e) digital laws; f) digital rights and responsibilities; g) digital security; h) promotion of digital culture; and i) digital health and safety. The findings revealed that the overall level of digital citizenship awareness among female students was at a medium level, the lowest score corresponded to promoting digital culture, while the highest was in digital security. Moreover, 96.9% of the female students had a digital device, 85.0% expressed their preference to take a course on digital citizenship, and 82.9% had a social media account. The author highlighted the significance of targeting youth students and enhancing their information awareness to ensure the safe and responsible use of technology.

Tolulope Balogun (University of South Africa) presented *Data management of digitized Indigenous knowledge system in repositories*, in which the author examined the data management of digitized Indigenous knowledge (traditional ecological knowledge, medicinal knowledge, cultural practices, and beliefs) in South African repositories by focusing on its preservation and accessibility. The author found a lack of data management strategies for long-term preservation and accessibility of digitized Indigenous knowledge and hence aimed to assess the current state of data management, storage, description practices, challenges faced, and data authenticity. A qualitative and multiple case study methodology was employed, so that eight staff members from Indigenous Knowledge Documentation Centers were interviewed to know about their perspectives about these issues. Findings revealed that Dublin Core metadata and ISAD(G) were commonly used for data description in the repositories. The challenges identified included language barriers, unauthorized copying of Indigenous knowledge materials, and communication gaps between information technology specialists and Indigenous knowledge staff. The author recommended to adopt a uniform data description method, such as Dublin Core, to ensure consistency in data management, and increase the involvement of LIS professionals in Indigenous knowledge data management to enhance its preservation and accessibility for future generations.

Next, *Virtual communities decision model (VCDM): An empirical validation in online social networks (OSNs) adoption among capital market investors* by Md. Ziaul Haque (Noakhali Science and

Technology University, Bangladesh), Aimin Qian (University of International Business and Economics, China), Md. Rakibul Hoque (University of Dhaka, Bangladesh) and Suraiea Akter Lucky (Ministry of Public Administration, Bangladesh) quantitatively validated a decision-making model for virtual communities (VCDM) aimed at investors in Bangladesh by incorporating constructs from information technology, social science, marketing, and behavioral finance theories into their VCDM, notably the technology acceptance model and the theory of planned behavior. They employed a questionnaire to survey 420 investors and performed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis. Findings included that the VCDM explained variations in decisions and investments, while users' experience was identified as a significant moderating factor. The VCDM can serve as a useful tool for managers, service providers, and other users to assess decision effectiveness in virtual environments.

Hui-Yun Sung (National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan), Noorhidawati Abdullah (Universiti Malaya, Malaysia) and Ngo Thi Huyen (Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam) presented *Early literacy and family engagement: A cross-country analysis of caregivers' perceptions of the public library's role in the digital age in Taiwan, Malaysia, and Vietnam*, in which they explored caregivers' and librarians' perceptions about the role of public libraries for supporting early literacy and family engagement. They sought to understand how public libraries can effectively promote family engagement in different cultural contexts, so they employed a mixed methods approach consisting of interviews with nine librarians about their family engagement practices, which informed the development of a questionnaire used to survey 454 caregivers of children (five to twelve years), distributed among respondents from Taiwan, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Findings included that caregivers valued the role of public libraries in promoting family engagement, there is a need for libraries to improve their leadership by actively engaging families in decision-making processes. The authors suggested that libraries should proactively understand and address the interests and needs of families, involve them in planning and feedback, and offer them literacy programs to support early learning. From the authors' experience, I might argue that libraries can improve their social position by engaging with these issues.

From the University of the Punjab (Pakistan), Murtaza Ashiq, Farhat Jabeen and Khalid Mahmood contributed *Workplace creativity and job satisfaction of academic librarians: A perspective of distributed leadership theory*, in which they explored the influence of distributed leadership dimensions on workplace creativity and job satisfaction, by employing a quantitative questionnaire to survey 241 Pakistani professional librarians. Their findings revealed that librarians favored distributed leadership, specifically the decision-making and motivation dimensions, which significantly influenced workplace creativity and job satisfaction. However, delegation of authority did not affect workplace creativity. The authors emphasized the importance of cultivating a shared vision and involving librarians in decision-making processes to enhance creativity and job satisfaction.

In *Comparative analysis of the effectiveness of interactive radio and interactive television instructions on improvement in life skills among out-of-school nomadic children in Northern Nigeria*, Ozioma Patience Nwokedi (University of Nigeria), Ngozi Bibian Okeibunor (Benson Idahosa University, Nigeria), John Chidi Ugwuanyi (Madonna University, Nigeria), Peter N. Nwokolo (University of Nigeria), Joel C. Ugwuoke (University of Nigeria) and Verlumun Celestine Gever (University of Nigeria) focused on the importance of life skills for nomadic children, who make up a significant

portion of Nigeria's population aged between 0 and 14 years, and how these skills might be aided by interactive radio and television. They employed a quasi-experimental quantitative design with a sample of 235 out-of-school nomadic children in Northern Nigeria, with an age range of 6 to 11 years. Participants were randomly subdivided into two groups: interactive radio and interactive television. A life skills scale was used as the data collection instrument, which is particularly used with children, and consisted of nine components: a) critical thinking; b) interpersonal relationship and communication skills; c) creative thinking; d) self-esteem; e) self-awareness; f) empathy; g) coping with emotion and stress skills; h) social responsibility; and i) decision making and problem-solving skills. They conducted an intervention that involved exposing the children to 10 episodes of instructional content through either radio or television. Results showed that both interactive radio and television had a significant influence on life skills development, but the participants in the television group scored higher. The authors recommended using interactive television as an instructional tool for these Nigerian children.

Next, Leon Gwaka, Müge Haseki and Christopher S. Yoo (University of Pennsylvania, United States of America [USA]) submitted *Community networks as models to address connectivity gaps in underserved communities*, in which they reported the potential of 21 community networks from various countries (Brazil, Canada, Congo, Greece, India, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Nepal, The Netherlands, Peru, Slovenia, South Africa, USA and Vanuatu) for addressing internet connectivity issues (structure and components) and ways to enhance their sustainability. In this qualitative research, the authors interviewed leaders of community networks involved in their setup and operation, but they also worked with data gathered from project documents that were publicly available. Findings included that community networks primarily relied on Wi-Fi technology and adopted various organizational approaches, specifically, strategic partnerships turned out to be crucial for success. However, non-sustainable business models represented a challenge to their long-term viability. The authors emphasized the importance of regulations and infrastructure for shaping the success of these networks. This research can be relevant for policymakers responsible for telecommunications and digital policies to foster the development of community networks.

In *Understanding knowledge sharing in online health communities: A social cognitive theory perspective*, Xiaoliang Bi and Xuejing Cao (Tongji University, China) examined knowledge sharing intentions in Chinese online health communities (OHCs) by focusing on the imbalance between the supply and demand of health information, while they identified the factors that influenced users' willingness to share information. Data were collected through questionnaires based on social cognitive theory and sent it to 324 users with at least three months of experience in OHCs. Findings revealed that both the platform environment (system quality, information quality, service quality) and the user environment (informational support and emotional support) influenced users' trust, commitment, and attitudes, thus affecting their willingness to share information. The authors highlighted the importance of their findings for ensuring OHCs' sustainability and effectiveness, something that community managers should consider.

From the National University of Science and Technology (Zimbabwe) and the University of South Africa, Esabel Maisiri and Patrick Ngulube, respectively, contributed *A framework for knowledge sharing in the art world in Zimbabwe*, in which they explored knowledge sharing dynamics in Zimbabwean Indigenous communities of practice within the context of artistic engagements, specifically the production, distribution, and consumption of artworks. Using a phenomenological

perspective, they interviewed 16 Indigenous artists involved in stone sculpture, operating in Indigenous communities of practice, then conducted a series of observations and analyzed information sources related to participants' biographies. Findings included that knowledge sharing interactions included mentorship, collaborative engagements, advertising and marketing, branding, public presentations, residency programs, social networking, teaching engagements, workshops, and art reviews. Knowledge exchanged included tacit knowledge, experiential or physical knowledge, social knowledge, emotional knowledge, and aesthetic knowledge. Authors structured the exchange of such kinds of knowledge in four stages: a) socialization; b) externalization; c) combination; and d) internalization. They highlighted the importance of their study in understanding the institutionalization of informal art practices in Zimbabwe through community development initiatives, such as art schools, art villages, and roadside art cooperatives.

K Onyenankeya (University of Fort Hare, South Africa) and A Salawu (North-West University, Mafikeng Campus, South Africa) presented *Community radio acceptance in rural Africa: The nexus of language and cultural affinity*, in which they reported the role of community radio among groups that have been historically excluded from the public sphere, namely those living in North-West Province of South Africa. In this qualitative study they conducted 40 interviews with participants from four communities who were regular listeners of four community radio stations to investigate the significance of Indigenous languages in fostering cultural affinity and enabling listeners to express their heritage. The authors emphasized the importance of participation and ownership in community radio, distinguishing it from commercial radio, and discussed its advantages in terms of accommodating people's oral tradition, while representing an affordable and accessible alternative for rural communities. Findings included that community radio provides a platform for marginalized communities to challenge dominant narratives and representations, while allowing them to engage in national dialogue, and express their cultural heritage. By employing Indigenous languages, community radio plays a crucial role in fostering listeners' cultural affinity, which also builds trust and connections between the audience and the radio stations. Community radio can be an effective tool for illiterate and marginalized communities to find alternatives for their development, education, empowerment, communication, and information dissemination, and it may aid in facilitating attitudinal and behavioral changes on issues of public interest.

In *A financial inclusion app and USSD service for farmers in rural Colombia*, Néstor A. Nova and Rafael A. González (Pontifical Xavierian University, Colombia) quantitatively studied the implementation of a financial inclusion mobile app for farmers in rural Colombia, which was developed by an initiative within the so-called triple helix (collaboration among the academia, industry, and the government) that aimed to make public financing instruments more accessible to farmers. They applied a questionnaire based on the technology acceptance model to examine the factors that influenced 63 farmers' decisions to adopt and use such an app, by analyzing perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, facilitating conditions, and behavioral intention. Findings pointed toward the app's benefits and ease of use, along with some perceived affordances and constraints. The authors argued that such initiatives may aid in improving digital and financial inclusion and thus reduce the rural-urban divide and achieve the SDGs related to ending hunger, promoting food security, and sustainable agriculture.

From Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (Bangladesh), Md Mahbubul Alam and Sharjana Akter Shaba submitted *ICT-enabled agricultural extension: How to promote and sustain?* Their qualitative

research, conducted in Bangladesh, consisted in interviewing 11 professionals involved in ICT-based agricultural projects to identify the priority areas where ICTs can aid such projects and propose measurable indicators for designing and developing these initiatives (economic, quality of life, community development, and service quality, and technology acceptance indicators). These key areas where ICTs can be used to aid agricultural activities resulted in nine categories: a) creating agricultural knowledge hubs; b) providing extension services; c) developing decision support systems; d) developing agricultural databases; e) initiating capacity building programs; f) developing farming alert systems; g) establishing agricultural market information systems; h) implementing ICT-based community building; and i) formulating ICT strategies for agriculture. The authors highlighted the importance of considering the economic and non-economic drivers of ICT adoption and emphasized the need to assess these projects beyond economic indicators. This research can provide insights for policymakers and information systems developers to design and evaluate ICT interventions in the agricultural sector.

Next, Gobinda Chowdhury (University of Strathclyde, Scotland), Julie McLeod (Northumbria University, England), Paul Lihoma (National Archives of Malawi), Solomon Teferra (Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia), and Richard Wato (Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service) presented *Promoting access to indigenous information in Africa: Challenges and requirements*. This qualitative research, conducted in Africa, focused on promoting access to Indigenous and cultural information for sustainable development, given the lack of online access to government and cultural heritage information in Africa. Hence, the authors examined the challenges and requirements for developing a Digital Public Library of Africa (DPLAf) that would provide access to such information. The authors conducted workshops, in which they employed a participatory methodology to gather data from their direct engagement with participants, which included experts, professionals, and user communities from Kenya, Ethiopia and Malawi. Findings highlighted the challenges and requirements related to the development of a DPLAf, which may be categorized in the following main topics: a) ICT infrastructure; b) financial and human resources; c) policies and practices; d) research and development; and e) collaboration and stakeholder engagement. Moreover, the authors stressed the importance of following the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable) when designing the DPLAf, which obviously should also govern the development of any digital library or repository, particularly those intended to operate within the open access and open science movements. The authors concluded by providing a roadmap for developing a DPLAf, which include, but should not be limited to the following steps: a) establish a joined-up approach with various stakeholders; b) follow the FAIR principles; c) develop appropriate information and digital literacy skills programs; d) conduct further research and innovation capacity building; and e) promote national and international networking activities.

In *Access to information for sustainable development in the digital age: Librarians' perspectives in two Nigerian universities*, Charles O. Omekwu, Felicia N. Ugwu and Anthonia N. Ejikeme (University of Nigeria) analyzed Enugu State's (Nigeria) librarians' views on the access to information about sustainable development. Their questionnaire was responded by 72 academic librarians from both the University of Nigeria Nsukka and the Enugu State University of Science and Technology, then they interviewed a subset of this sample. Findings indicated that while librarians had access to information on the SDGs, users and services may be limited by challenges such as poor information infrastructure, lack of electricity and internet connectivity, inadequate publicity of government

programs, and limited citizen involvement in decision-making. Librarians thought that the benefits from an improved access to information about SDGs would include healthier decision-making, enabling and promoting basic education opportunities, promoting gender equality, enabling citizens to know more about government development programs, enabling farmers to know best methods, drawing government's attention to issues, and preventing harmful consumption patterns. Furthermore, the authors highlighted strategies for improving access to information for sustainable development, which may be useful for other developing countries. Regarding the government, it should: partner with libraries, consider and adopt citizens' opinions, integrate relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes, offer transparent information through the media, promote the right to freedom of expression, and increase the funding allocated to libraries. Libraries and librarians may help promote information about the SDGs, supply electricity and internet connectivity, and verify government information.

Next, Obvious Mapiye, Annelin Molotsi, Kennedy Dzama and Cletos Mapiye (Stellenbosch University, South Africa), together with Godswill Makombe (University of Pretoria, South Africa) submitted *Information and communication technologies: The potential for enhancing the dissemination of agricultural information and services to smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa.* This literature review explored how ICTs may address the challenges faced by smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa and how to improve their access to agricultural information and services; the authors also identified existing mobile applications used for disseminating such information and services, highlighting their advantages, limitations, and opportunities. These applications could help improving access to information about markets, production, weather, and by providing mobile banking services. However, the challenges identified included illiteracy and digital illiteracy, language barriers, gender disparities, inadequate training and lack of awareness campaigns, which the authors suggested to counteract by promoting ICT adoption and public-private partnerships, developing user-driven mobile applications that encourage feedback, providing skill-sharing platforms, and promoting the participation of women and youth in agriculture. In general, ICT solutions must strive to improve the productivity and livelihoods of farmers in the region.

The last article in this issue, *Undervalued, understaffed, underdeveloped, and underutilized? The status of public libraries in the eleven municipalities of rural Iloilo Province, Philippines* was presented by Eugenia Estrullo-Suaga and Michelle Joy Miaque-Crucero (both from the Iloilo Science and Technology University, Philippines), together with Daryl Lustracion Superio (Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Philippines). To conduct this qualitative study of 11 municipal libraries in the Iloilo Province (Philippines), the authors gathered data through interviews with key informants, observations, and documentary analysis by focusing on the lack of compliance and support regarding these municipal libraries, which have resulted in their undervaluation and underutilization. Key informants responded a questionnaire based on the Philippine Standards for Public Libraries, which the authors used to assess library administration, collection management, services and usage, physical facilities, financial resources, networking, and collaboration. Findings indicated that most libraries are non-compliant with the standards, managed by non-professional librarians with inadequate knowledge and skills, and face budget and resources limitations as they lack support from the local government. Hence, the authors highlighted the need for improving how library laws and standards are implemented, ensuring the availability of proper funding and resources, and increasing community awareness of the value of public libraries.

I hope that this special issue will be interesting and useful to our readers. Many of the issues discussed in the articles can help addressing common challenges we face in developing countries. I am sure that the ideas presented here can shed some light on the kind of research and initiatives that LIS professionals can conduct with the general aim of aiding society and their communities.

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