

# Transformation of ICIMOD's Traditional Library into a Mountain Learning and Information Centre

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper discusses share the transformation process if ICIMOD's library into a regional mountain learning centre including developing a connected regional library platform on the environment and climate change with the librarians of the Himalayan University Consortium.*

**Keywords:** Library transformation, Regional library connectivity, Open source, Library applications, INVENIO, DSpace, KOHA/Greenstone

## INTRODUCTION

ICIMOD is a facilitator of knowledge transfer across the region and has served as a knowledge, learning, and enabling centre for the past 3 decades. ICIMOD works within the mountain perspective framework, characterized by an understanding of the imperatives of mountain conditions such as fragility, inaccessibility, marginality, diversity, specific niche opportunities, and the human adaptation practices that hill and mountain communities have evolved while making livelihood decisions. Within this framework, the library of the International Centre of Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) plays a pivotal role collecting and categorizing information on mountain ecosystems for ICIMOD's research staff, visiting students, and for scientists from the region and beyond. It's a rather unique collection on the socio-economic and environmental development of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. ICIMOD's library collection comprises books, journals, documentaries, video, photo's, thesis/grey literature collection on mountains and its people. The collection is infused through a resource exchange programme with over 140 regional universities and research institutes in the region and various parts of the globe. ICIMOD is also the driving force of establishing a Himalayan University Consortium aimed at harmonisation of courseware, student

exchange, and collaborative research and knowledge and information sharing. ICIMOD's Geospatial division has, since its inception in the mid 80s contributed to the application of geospatial information covering the HKH region.

In recent years, we have witnessed an impressive shift towards information resources on the Internet and users applying clicks instead of bricks. For most libraries in the world this shift to e-resources has resulted in a drastic change in their services. ICIMOD's library faced the same issues and a small team of ICIMOD Knowledge Division discussed extensively how to respond to the challenges set forth by information technology developments and changes in user behavior.

The changes triggered ICIMOD's knowledge division to draft a proposal for management to shift the Library away from its industrial foundation towards a more advanced virtual Mountain Learning and Information Centre which provides electronic access through the Internet to its collection:

- strengthens delivery of information and knowledge exchange services to its users in the centre and stakeholders in the region
- implement open source application and explore connectivity with related external libraries, especially the libraries of Himalayan University consortium
- identify and make specific mountain collections accessible in specific new formats
- digitize its unique collection of grey literature on mountains.

Through a grant from the Elsevier Foundation ICIMOD is now realizing its vision to transform ICIMOD's traditional library into a mountain learning information centre using an open source platform to disclose its information and media collection and use this open source platform to create connectivity among the libraries of the Himalayan university consortium to disclose their collections through an HKH Mountain Information Gateway.

## **RATIONALE**

"The library is a tremendously valuable resource that is hugely underutilized", and "I have been working here for two years but I have never visited the library, I use the Internet only". These quotes were captured from staff interviews conducted in 2008 and these quotes can most likely be heard in any library around the world. The growing realization is that the decades-long industrial age models traditionally associated with libraries as physical spaces where people go to find books, are becoming less effective in servicing the needs of staff engaged in knowledge-era work environments. Since the late nineties the workforce started to get used that information can be easily accessed electronically and a large number of national libraries in the world have started to digitize their collections, partly in a response to Google initiative to Google scholar and Google books.

Since its inception in 1983 ICIMOD's library has played a significant role in the country and region mainly due to the fact that ICIMOD's library contains valuable information resources for ICIMOD's staff and to visiting researchers and students. Simply stated, if access to a large collection, relevant, credible, and authenticated information on HKH mountain development were required to conduct research, ICIMOD's library is potentially the single source in the region. Toward the end of the 1990's, early 2000, the country and region's wider adoption of the Internet signaled a

shift in the way information could be accessed. Publications from development institutes such as World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations, Development Gateway Communities, FAO to name a few, became accessible through the Internet. Users (ICIMOD staff and external visitors) became empowered to use the Internet and are enabled to self-serve their information needs without passing through an intermediary. Recent external developments such as the Programme for the Enhancement of Research information (PERI) indicate the shift from collections to connections to bridge the digital divide. PERI is one of the important programmes of International Network for the Availability for Scientific Publication (INASP) to provide access to scientific information particularly to the developing nations.<sup>1</sup> ICIMOD has also established a resource exchange program with other over 140 regional institutions and universities. Up until now ICIMOD provides free copies of its printed publications to the 140 Networks on a quarterly basis.

The desire for independence in finding information quickly and without having to go through an intermediary service or step requiring intervention is the nature of ICIMOD's workforce. This desire is facilitated and propelled by Internet search services such as Google and Yahoo, which provides answers or redirects users to other resources. The development community at large has shifted its entire collection to the Internet<sup>2</sup> and added new information services such as e-alerts and notifications. Staff in general subscribes to these free alert services to keep abreast of new developments in their respective area of expertise. If this approach fails, staff turns to internal and/or external colleagues and social communities and networks.

The changes in the outside world did not pass by unnoticed by the library staff. The library already started to change its journal collection to online subscription services. However, the trend is irreversible that more and more information will become direct accessible on the Internet and users will be more empowered to use the Internet as their primary information resource. The library cannot compete with the wealth of Internet resources available to staff and for the library to remain relevant and responsive to the need of its users it needs to focus on adding value to existing information resources and to provide a window to information resources which are useful, reliable and relevant in support of ICIMOD's goal.

## THE WAY FORWARD

What makes ICIMOD's library unique and demand-driven? As stated by one visitor to ICIMOD's library, "The amount of information we have access to is overwhelming. To use the information we have access to, is like trying to take a sip of water from a fire

<sup>1</sup> Tribhuvan University Central Library (TUCL) is the National Coordinating Institute for INASP and ICIMOD has access to all journals listed under this program. This program ends however at the end of 2008 and as of this moment it is unclear whether Western Scientific Publishers will continue to provide free access.

<sup>2</sup> Disclosure Policies of the World Bank (2005) and the Asian Development Bank (2006), DFID; UN, Oxfam, Eldis, Development Gateway, SIDA, IDRC.

hose.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing that today's and tomorrow's staff and users prefer to self-serve their information needs when possible; the Library needs to change its scope and services to remain relevant for its primary ICIMOD users and outside visitors. The Internet development has learned that users moved away from 'bricks to clicks'. The new library should respond by moving its capacity from collections to connections and in addition to provide pro-active information services to divisions and external networks and seek cooperation with likeminded libraries and their collections on climate change and mountains.

New information services by the library will be focused on filtering, synthesizing and repackaging information from the outside world on certain thematic topics and disseminate through the Internet and e-mail to distinct user groups. The "new" – Mountain Learning and Information Centre, should focus on proactively delivering demand driven information services and brokering externally and internally available information for its staff and stakeholders, and disseminating the information accordingly.

The first step in our journey in transforming our library was to review and assess a library platform capable of servicing the current and future library requirements and can act as future content management application. These requirements were partially captured from interviews with staff and visitors to ICIMOD's library in 2008, 2009 and input gathered from visiting various regional library meetings such as the conference on Library and Information Science in the Digital Era, organized by the India Library Association in 2008 and the third International Conference on Digital Libraries in Delhi, 2010.

The existing library application CDS-ISIS was not suitable to take up the additional requirements and a small team comprising IT, Librarians and KM experts decided to explore KOHA Greenstone, NewGenLib, DSpace and Invenio as potentials to act as our future data platform. Specific functionalities we were looking for was full text indexing, easy to modify user interface, capable of managing multimedia, one environment for bibliographical records and (this point I think is repeated with full text indexing), and security features. After an initial literature review and discussions with libraries our shortlist comprised KOHA-Greenstone, DSpace and Invenio. We downloaded all applications for testing purposes and after long discussions the Centre decided to go ahead with INVENIO, developed by CERN, Geneva, Switzerland. The main reasons for our decision to select INVENIO was the fact that it is an integrated system, complies with OAI-PMH, it has a powerful search engine capable of searching external collections, flexible user interface, and includes many additional features in demand by end-users such as creating your own sub-library and end-note, strong user right management system and above all bibliographical records and management of full text publications. INVENIO (formerly CDS Invenio) is a suit of applications which is developed by CERN (Switzerland) and Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne.

<sup>3</sup> The demand in this case suggested that an information intermediary would be useful to assist staff with information alerts, to search for information for staff, do analysis and develop portals to relevant and useful resources in the context of mountain development.

## **CURRENT STATUS**

In December 2010 the INVENIO system was internally released for testing purposes. All records have been converted from the former AGRIVOC application to HIMALDOC, the name given to the application after its initial testing. It is expected that HIMALDOC will be released for outsiders by February 1, 2011 and the HIMALDOC will comprise bibliographical references, journals, full text thesis materials. A dedicated user right system gives staged access to the collection. ICMOD staff can for instance access full text materials and outsiders only that material which is either free on copyright or copyright is waived. After some more testing we will look into integrating separate collections into HIMALDOC including linking with libraries from the HUC. In 2012 we can provide an update on the progress we have made in 2011 towards the single data management environment and HUC connectivity.