



Date : 23/06/2006

Improving The Integration Of Public Reading In Cultural Policies Of Francophone Developing Countries.

AN APPROACH BASED ON TWENTY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN 18 COUNTRIES OF AFRICA, INDIAN OCEAN, MIDDLE EAST AND THE CARIBBEAN REGION

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Meeting:	81 Libraries for Children and Young Adults with Reading (part 1)
Simultaneous Interpretation:	No
WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL 20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm	

Abstract / Resume

The question of public reading – of access to published works, newspapers, and to information in general – is a major challenge in developing countries.

Public reading does not replace education or literacy policies. It is far more important because it firmly establishes access to knowledge into day-to-day reality, and gives everyone the possibility of an opening to the world.

It meets the expectations of local populations, namely those in remote areas, as is shown by nearly three million admissions and more than one million books lent each year in the two hundred and thirteen Reading and cultural activity centres set up by the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) in eighteen countries in Africa, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and the Middle East.

In addition to giving access to books and newspapers, the centres allow access to the media (radio, television, video), to computers, sometimes to the Internet. In addition to being public libraries, these centres host cultural activities such as conferences, theatrical and musical events, training sessions (on health, agriculture, etc.).

In view of this success, many governments of developing countries want to develop a genuine public reading policy at national level.

Public libraries, public reading, national policies, developing countries, Africa, rural aera, Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, CLAC, Francophonie

AN APPROACH BASED ON TWENTY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

In spite of the rapid development of information and communication technology, books will continue to play a decisive role in the transmission and diffusion of knowledge. Access to printed materials and enhancement of reading skills are key factors of social integration and citizenship, more so because social, political and economic life is governed by print. In this sense, the ownership of the print-based tradition is fundamental. In addition, access to books has become a key element of the rule of democracy. However, in francophone developing countries, books are scarce and not often within the reach of everyone.

Until the early 1980s, public reading was promoted exclusively in important towns and cities thanks to the determined assistance of French cooperation. In rural areas, the rare activities that were implemented in public reading were addressed principally to school libraries in a few important institutions.

The setting up of networks of Reading and Cultural Activity Centres by the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie since 1986 was precisely to redress the situation as regards the almost total absence of infrastructural facilities in rural areas. The first two networks were launched in Benin. Subsequently, two others were been set up in the regions of Thiès and Kolda of Sénégal.

CREATED IN	COUNTRY	NUMBER OF CENTRES
1986	Benin	20
1988	Senegal	16
1989	Burkina Faso	17
1990	Ivory Coast	10
1991	Niger	12
	Congo	10
1992	Rwanda	10
	Burundi	10
1993	Gabon	9
	Mauritius	15
1994	Comores	10
1996	Guinea	10
1997	Mauritania	10
	Togo	10
2000	Haïti	10
2001	Chad	10
2002	Lebanon	14
2002	Madagascar	10

With more than 200 centres operating in 17 countries, the programme “Reading and Cultural Activity Centres” constitutes the main public reading initiative managed and animated exclusively by a local staff and implemented outside urban centres.

