

Information Literacy: An Issue which Requests Urgent Action in Developing Countries and Countries in Transition

Zdravka Pejova

Head of Information and Library Service

International Center for Promotion of Enterprises, Ljubljana, Slovenia,

White paper prepared for UNESCO, the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the National Forum on Information Literacy. See recommended bibliographic citation format at the end of the paper for use when quoting from or reproducing this paper.

Abstract

This paper discusses the lagging behind of the less developed countries in taking initiatives and carrying out projects for developing, promoting and implementing information literacy education and training programs and projects. Pointing to the information literacy situation in both academic and corporate context as well as in the context of business and management education, it emphasizes that without a push of external help through financial aid and professional expertise, less developed countries would not be able to properly address both the information literacy issue and the prerequisite issues of upgrading and developing their information and library infrastructures. It gives suggestions for addressing the information literacy issue by launching and carrying out joint projects which would help individual countries to intensify and broaden their existing activities in the field of information literacy promotion and implementation and start new ones where necessary.

1. INTRODUCTION

The big development gap between developed and developing countries and countries in transition (or in other words less developed countries) has been particularly striking in the asymmetry in the access to and the use of the vast repositories of information and knowledge in the world. Despite the widely spread use of the information and telecommunications technology in these countries, it seems that the situation has not significantly ameliorated. These countries continue to suffer from general very low utilization of the most important resource of the present time: information and knowledge. One of the reasons for this is the information illiteracy of all segments of their societies. Lack of knowledgeable, skilled and efficient use of information and knowledge causes waste on the other resources and directly affects the productivity in all spheres of life and work—in education, research, business and administration. Less developed countries are handicapped in their development because they are short of the multiple impact of the efficient use of the information and knowledge resources. Therefore, urgent and energetic addressing of the information literacy issue in less developed countries is necessary so that further widening of the gap between developed and less developed countries is avoided.

2. FROM SHORTAGE TO ABUNDANCE OF INFORMATION

Generalizing about developing countries and countries in transition is difficult and even more so when making comparisons between them. There are many and big differences in geo-political, economic, social and cultural backgrounds which condition the level of their development and consequently the level of information literacy among their citizens. However, going through similar political, economic and social changes over the last couple of decades, most of these countries, regardless their development level, have certain common points of relevance regarding the information literacy issues, such as:

- new political structures, new functions for state administration, opening of the mass media, and in the case of the countries in transition, the process of integration into the structures of the European Union;
- economic reforms, industrial and organizational restructuring, privatization, mass establishment of new private firms, liberalization and internationalization of the economy, free market principles which call for more entrepreneurial behavior;
- extensive creation of new legislation in all spheres of life as a result of the political and economic changes and the need for compliance with and adoption of international standards;
- development of the telecommunications infrastructure, introduction of the latest information and telecommunication technologies, development of the information services industry;
- adaptation of their education and training systems to the international standards which makes them targets as potential markets of the education and information services industry of developed countries;

- exposure to the unprecedented availability of printed and electronic information sources and the ever increasing number of end users who are conversant with the latest information and telecommunication technology.

All these changes resulted in a dramatic shift in these countries from shortage to abundance in information. At the same time, this has opened a whole series of new problems and has brought into focus the issue of information literacy. So far, however, the issue of information literacy in less developed countries has not been addressed with the necessary attention by information and library professionals or by others.

The term information literacy used in this paper is understood as per the ALA 1989 definition with emphasis on the “content part,” that is knowledge and skills for accessing and using information and knowledge resources. My observations in this paper are based on my work experience in the Information and Library Service (ILS) of the International Center for Promotion of Enterprises (ICPE), an international research and training organization devoted to management development in developing countries and countries in transition and from serving the users (undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, MBA students, managers, entrepreneurs from the corporate sector, etc.), coming from various less developed countries and having various academic backgrounds, and who have, in a very high percentage, exhibited lack of even basic information literacy knowledge and skills. My observations are also based on my insight in the situation of the host country Slovenia and the other ex-Yugoslav countries from the early years of user education efforts to the present. The ideas and recommendations for addressing the information literacy issues given in this paper are from the perspective of an international organization dealing with developing countries and countries in transition. I would like to point out that in this paper “addressing the information literacy issue” refers to the “privileged” segments of the population in the less-developed countries, that is about those who are in the process of education, who are employed, have decent incomes, can afford ITC gadgets and access to the Internet. The information illiteracy problems of the other segments of the population (who are unemployed, poor, uneducated, etc.) are much more serious and complex and request engagements of different dimensions and approaches.

3. THE INFORMATION AND LIBRARY SECTOR AND THE INFORMATION LITERACY ISSUE

Despite the political, economic, social and technological changes, the information illiteracy problem in less developed countries was not and actually could not be addressed adequately. The economic reforms, through which most of the less developed countries went through, appeared to be rather painful processes with many setbacks, social and political tensions, increased unemployment, decline of production and unsatisfactory distribution of income. All that has further exacerbated an already unfavorable situation in the information and library sector. The chronic lack of finance, poor information resources and lack of possibilities for needed continuous upgrading of the professional knowledge and skills, have prevented information and library professionals from making bolder steps in pursuing their role in the information literacy promotion and implementation. The small number of professionally trained librarians and information specialists manages with great difficulties to run, maintain and develop the complex and demanding information and library systems and networks.

Being too few and professionally not strong enough they could not have been more successful in lobbying and fighting for political, financial and other necessary support they need in order to initiate and carry out projects for improving the information and library sector. Consequently, they are neither in a position to use their unique information literacy knowledge and skills to realize meaningful information literacy programs and projects which would lead towards optimal exploitation of the available information resources, as it is usually the case with developed countries, nor to develop the needed co-operation with the faculty.

4. ADDRESSING INFORMATION LITERACY ISSUE IN DEVELOPED AND LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Information illiteracy is considered to be a problem in developed countries with much larger per-capita incomes, well-developed library and information infrastructures, and large population of energetic, highly educated and professionally trained information and library specialists working on the promotion and implementation of various information literacy programs. One can easily get the picture of the dimension of the information illiteracy problem in the countries towards/on the other end of the development spectrum and among the different segments of their societies.

Just a mere checking on Internet about information literacy programs and projects in developed countries shows a very strong competition among universities and schools in the opportunities they give to students to develop their information literacy skills. The number of consortiums, organizations, associations, committees, bodies, schools etc. who are working on the promotion and implementation of the information literacy is overwhelming. Thousands of well-educated and trained, motivated and self-motivated professionals are focusing their understanding and knowledge on addressing the information literacy issues.

When comparing developed and less developed countries regarding the situation of promotion and implementation of information literacy, we see in developed countries the following:

- strong, massive movements and networks of organizations and professional associations engaged on the information literacy promotion and implementation;
- well developed library and information systems and networks;
- a significant turning of the schools and universities' attention to the lifelong skills of learning how to learn, that is of educating pupils and students to find, evaluate, and effectively use information;
- well educated and trained information and library professionals and enthusiastic educators acting energetically and in many cases on self-initiative;
- plethora of information literacy curricula and syllabi, many of them available on Internet, accompanied by innovative approaches of how to teach information literacy (objectives, standards, measures);
- users who have through all their schooling been exposed and have been taught to use the rich and well organized information resources.

As opposed to:

- lack of co-operation among professional organizations and lack of well articulated and/or promoted information literacy policies and programs;
- underdeveloped library and information systems and networks;
- expensive telecommunication infrastructure services;
- shortage of information and library educated and trained professionals who would give the necessary impetus to the information literacy promotion and implementation;
- intimidated users who are not so well acquainted with the nature of information and its creation, how information is published and disseminated (the pattern of flow of information within a discipline), that is without the mental map of the information and publication world.

The digital divide between developed and developing countries should be added to this as well.

5. INFORMATION LITERACY ISSUE IN THE ACADEMIC CONTEXT

Although the governments of almost all countries in the world are already very much engaged in the preparation of the so-called “e-strategies,” within which the “e-literacy” training programs have been massively included, the “content part of information literacy,” is missing. Except for some initial policy statements, some basic curriculum and syllabi formulations, there are not yet substantial training programs mainly due, as already mentioned before, to the shortage of the needed professional input from the information and library sector. Of course, there are exceptions. One example of advanced and well-pursued information literacy programs is Estonia, where there is strong information and library professional education. Some countries, like Slovenia for instance, have developed good information and library literacy programs for their elementary schools, which by the ninth grade provide pupils with sound information literacy skills. More rigorous carrying out of these programs in practice is not pursued due to the lack of teachers and financial resources. Another handicap in the case of the development and offering of the “content part information literacy” training opportunities is that the private sector is not in a position to take initiatives in setting up training centers, like is the case with the ones for computer literacy and foreign languages.

As we speak now about the information literacy, hundreds of thousands of school and university students are finishing their education and are entering the new world of work of e-commerce, e-governance, information societies, economies based on information and knowledge, without mastering the basics of the information literacy. That is, they are practically information illiterate. The systematic under-investment in the information and library sector, as a matter of fact in education and research spheres in general both in the past and at present, as well as the lack of cooperation between the faculty and librarians, have resulted in a situation in which most students earn their university diplomas without receiving any formal information literacy training, except perhaps for some introductory tours to libraries and some incidental instruction and training events. It often happens that many students miss even these introduction tours and courses (which usually take place in the first year of their university education), miss to pick up the library leaflets and guides and learn

from them, fail to figure out by themselves what would be the relevant information sources for their studies, etc. The faculty, not being fully acquainted themselves with the richness and complexity of the information resources and themselves not possessing information literacy knowledge and skills, are not in a position to request the same from the students. The result is that the students “successfully” accomplish their studies without absorbing the necessary information literacy skills. Subsequently these graduates enter the contemporary work world, which is based on information and knowledge. Knowing about the developments that take place in the information services and products in the standard span of four-year university education, the developments which even the librarians and information professionals themselves can hardly cope with, one can imagine how much the students are short of the potential of the information and knowledge use opportunities. The widespread lack of information literacy in less developed countries is a serious problem, which causes a highly negative economic drawback. It is one of the major reasons for a very poor return on the investments in the information and library sector, in particular in the purchasing of expensive information resources, which remain to be heavily under-utilized.

6. THE INFORMATION LITERACY ISSUE IN THE CORPORATE CONTEXT

A similar situation of poor return on investment is also present in the corporate sector, where due to the lack of computer literacy, massive investment in information technology fail to yield the desired results of improved performance and better economic effects. This is becoming particularly striking with the latest developments of Internet/Intranet solutions, which obviously demand much more than computer literacy only. Despite an ever-increasing use of information and telecommunication technology in less developed countries, it is too early to speak about work based on information and knowledge. Organizations carry out many processes (restructuring, re-engineering, revitalizing, introduction of the latest information and telecommunication technology, setting up new enterprises, etc.) without properly taking into consideration the crucial question of the information and knowledge management strategies and within that the information literacy skills of employees. They still do not consider the fact that higher productivity and value added per employee nowadays directly depend on their information literacy skills in both the manufacturing as well as in the service sector.

The ever-developing information and knowledge management, which increasingly determines the efficiency and competitiveness of organizations, make the information literacy a major strategic issue for both the private and public sector organizations. Information and knowledge management, which imply high level of information literacy, are not yet sufficiently recognized as a critical factor for successful performance of organizations.

Although doing business in the global economy depends on fast and efficient access to information and knowledge, most businesses do not appear to be making any concerted efforts to develop institutional or individual information literacy. Due to such situation, even with the availability of highly developed and user friendly information products and services, large number of enterprises still do not know how to locate vital information (about products, markets, marketing, technologies, finances, etc.) for their businesses.

Important reasons for underutilization of the information resources in less developed countries (besides lack of information literacy) are:

- high access costs and high prices of these services relative to low purchasing power
- most international services are primarily tailored to the needs of the users in western developed countries
- language barriers.

The bottom line of the low levels of information literacy and consequently the low level of the use of information is a poor understanding of the business reality among the business agents and public in general.

7. THE INFORMATION LITERACY ISSUE IN THE CONTEXT OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION—THE EXPERIENCES AND INITIATIVES OF THE ICPE-ILS

The lack of specialized information literacy education and training courses at management development and business education schools (and at faculties of economics in general) is an important reason for a very low use of the wealth of available domestic and foreign printed and electronic information by the corporate sector. Students graduate and start working without being prepared for efficient use of information which would help them to understand better the business environment, economy and economic trends. Use of computers, management information systems, decision support systems, etc. are topics which have been included for quite some time in the curricula of most management development and business education schools in less developed countries. However, specialized training courses on the sources of business information and their use have not been developed and carried out despite the fact that management development organizations and business schools, by the nature of their work, are supposed to closely follow industries and businesses and interpret the business and economic activities in their surroundings and wider.

The range and complexity of the business information resources created by the fast growing information industry and their efficient exploitation have strong influence on both the performance of companies and on the general economic activities in countries. Appropriate understanding and use of the wealth of information resources created by the business information industry has to be one of the major goals of the business and management education and training. The very teaching, studying and research activities such as preparation of lectures, case studies, master theses, assignments, research and real-world projects, etc., in business and management education by both faculty and students, as in any other field anyway, presuppose very high level of information literacy knowledge and skills in order to be able to efficiently draw on both locally and globally available business information resources, in various forms and on various media.

The International Center for Promotion of Enterprises – ICPE as an international intergovernmental research, training and consultancy organization devoted to West-East-

North-South co-operation in the area of management development has been conducting an international MBA program over the past twelve years. In the process of providing information and library support to this program, in which the students come from various parts of the world and have different backgrounds and levels of information literacy, the ICPE Information and Library Service was confronted with problems of their ability to access and use of information. In order to address these problems, ICPE carried out two projects on the use of information resources within the management development and business education context. The first one was concerned with the organization of an international workshop on “Information and Library Support to Management Development Programs in Central and Eastern European and Former Soviet Union Countries” which took place in December 1996 with the financial support of the Open Society Institute – Network Library Program. At this workshop, sixteen information and library services of management development organizations from five western developed countries (Austria, Belgium, France, the United Kingdom, the United States) and eleven from Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Ukraine) took participation. The second one in 1999, also financially supported by the Open Society Institute, was concerned with developing and testing a training course in the use of business information sources.

The workshop “Information and Library Support to Management Development Programs in Central and Eastern European and Former Soviet Union Countries” highlighted a striking discrepancy between the levels, the range and sophistication of the information support in well-established management development organizations in western developed countries and their counterparts in countries in transition. While in developed countries there was a kind of standardized information and library support comprising state-of-the-art-information-services-and-products packages of books, periodicals, reference publications, publications and databases on CD-ROMs, audio-video cassettes, company reports, access to information sources via on-line and Internet, etc. accompanied by many instruction guides and training opportunities for their use, in countries in transition there was a very limited range of information services and products available and used. The workshop also pointed to the information literacy problem in the sense that even the modest available information resources in these countries were not used enough due to the lack of almost any training opportunities in the access to information and its use. While over the last few years the possibilities for access and use of information resources have significantly changed, mainly due to the wide spread of Internet, the problem of low and inefficient use of the information resources, mainly due to the lack of opportunities for acquiring and upgrading information literacy skills, has remained.

This inspired the Information and Library Service of ICPE to launch the other project on business information resources and their use. The project consisted of developing and testing a training course and of producing a Trainer’s Manual on Business Information Sources and Their Uses.¹ This Trainer’s Manual was intended as a guide to potential trainers/instructors from Central and Eastern European countries for helping them in organizing and conducting training courses. The manual was tailored to accommodate desirable modifications as per the needs of different environments and target audiences, practicing librarians and information

¹ Ruth A. Pagell and Zdravka Pejova. 1999. *Training Course on Business Information Sources and Their Uses: Trainer’s Manual*. Ljubljana, International Center for Promotion of Enterprises, [var. pag.]

professionals who provide business information services. Libraries in preparation of training events could also use separate modules of it for their end users in promoting the use of certain categories and sources of business information. The manual could be also used as a guide by the end users (business and economic researchers, faculty and students of economics, business management, librarianship, information sciences etc.). Adapted version of the training course “Research in Economics and Business: Resources and Strategies” was organized by the International Information Programs of the US Embassy in Vienna, in October 2001. The target audience was researchers and information professionals from CEE countries.

Over the recent years the Information and Library Service of the International Center for Promotion of Enterprises shared the fate of many libraries which got affected by the changes in the their immediate and wider environment. Pressed by the financial constraints it had to cancel many of its periodicals, reduce the purchase of books, fire staff and consequently loose many of its important external users. At the same time, it has been continuously under pressure to recover its costs and even bring some revenues. The Information and Library service of ICPE reached a point when something radical had to be done in order to survive. A solution for not only survival but also for revival and further development was seen in the transformation of the ICPE Information and Library Service into an e-learning and information literacy promotion centre. The ever increasing needs for preparing academics, researchers, professionals and general public for active participation in the information society was considered to be a niche which might open development opportunities for both the Information and Library and other ICPE activities. Further confirmation that this would be a right direction came from the findings of a current EU project on e-learning in which ICPE is participating. This EU project among other topics also included a survey on the demand and general state of the e-learning in a number of EU and EU accession countries. The findings revealed that the basic barriers to taking advantage of the e-learning opportunities, besides the lack of knowledge and understanding of the e-learning phenomenon as such, was the lack of essential computer and information literacy, and thus confirmed that so far the education and training organizations have been providing too little of the necessary preparation for active and efficient functioning of people in both education and work environments of the “information society” reality of nowadays.

The ICPE project on transformation of its Information and Library Service into an “e-learning and information literacy promotion center” which at present is under elaboration, envisages the role and activities of this e-learning and information literacy promotion center within the general mission and mandate of the International Centre for Promotion of Enterprises, which is assisting its member countries, developing countries and countries in transition in management development. The activities of the center will be focused on promoting (demonstrating education and training products and services), transmitting and disseminating knowledge and experience about the e-learning and information literacy in human resources development related fields.

The ICPE will be using its wide collaborating network for both preparation of the training courses (recruiting developers and lecturers for developing and conducting of various information literacy training events, promoting and testing e-learning packages etc.) and for getting as many participants/attendees in these events as possible. In this regard ICPE will be collaborating, through its focal points in its member countries, developing countries and countries in transition with various entities ((academic organizations (faculties pedagogy, information and library sciences, public administration, business, economics, etc.); ministries of education; information and library associations; chambers of commerce and industry;

employment services; centers for adult education; other education and commercial organizations, etc. Special emphasis will be given to the cooperation with the authoritative international and national agencies for information literacy, e.g., international library associations, USA National Forum for Information Literacy, UNESCO, etc.)).

A part of the promotional and training activities will be offered as fee-based services to external clients from the commercial sector. Offering fee-based training courses and renting its computerized classroom facilities are a modus for securing the sustainability of this venture, after the support for the initial set up with the help of funding agencies and sponsors is over. Also for achieving sustainability closer cooperation with ITCT and commercial education firms is planned. This project so far has received full support from the governing bodies of the ICPE (the Assembly and Council) and the Ministry of Education and Science of the host country. The people involved in the elaboration of the project have been working hard and enthusiastically and we hope that we shall succeed in the realization of the project by either gaining the necessary support from international funding agencies or by going into a joint venture with some commercial firms which would be interested in this kind of joint venture.

8. SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDRESSING INFORMATION LITERACY ISSUE IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

The experience of these modest efforts of ICPE in improving the use of information resources in management and business education context in Central and Eastern Europe showed that despite the general realization and confirmation of the acute needs for information literacy/information resources use education and training courses, things move too slow in this direction. Without a push of external help in financial aid and expertise, less developed countries would not be able to properly address both the information literacy issue and the issues of upgrading and developing their information and library infrastructures. Therefore, addressing the problem of information illiteracy in less developed countries, in particular under the difficult circumstances of underdeveloped infrastructures, poor information resources, shortage of information/library manpower and finance, demands closer cooperation between developed and less developed countries, either under the auspices of international organizations and/or through bilateral relations. A very good example is the DEDICATE project on developing a “Training for Information Literacy” distance education course carried out within the EU Fourth Framework Telematics for Libraries Program. Other EU programs like PHARE Open and Distance Learning, TEMPUS etc. incorporate among other things, courses on computer literacy for the teachers. However, these do not cater for the “content” part of the information literacy, and are anyway just a drop in the ocean of the many initiatives and programs needed to be carried out in the area of information literacy.

The best way would be launching and carrying out joint projects on which professionals from developed countries and less developed countries would work together, drawing upon the valuable experience in information literacy promotion and implementation achieved so far. These joint projects should be tailored to help individual countries to intensify and broaden their existing activities on information literacy promotion and implementation and start new ones where necessary. By covering a wide range of issues such as awareness raising, policy definition, articulation and carrying out concrete implementation projects, they should include:

8.1. Carrying out surveys and studies which would help individual countries to:

- assess what has been done and by whom so far and what is to be done on information literacy promotion and implementation;
- find out how well information literacy is understood among librarians, faculty, employees and general public;
- evaluate the plethora of approaches, ideas, projects, practices developed and carried out in various parts of the world so that they could consider what is feasible and what is not under their circumstances.
- formulate comprehensive information literacy policies and strategies;
- define the roles and duties of the national and local governments (of various ministries in the government), professional associations and organizations in promotion, developing and implementation of information literacy programs, etc.

8.2. Designating a National Focal Node in the networks of education and library organizations and associations, which would:

- take responsibility for information literacy promotion on the national level and act as a focal point from which an integrated approach to information literacy initiatives, programs and projects will be encouraged;
- take care that formalized information literacy programs are sanctioned with the education authorities at the highest levels;
- maintain continuous reconsideration of the information literacy programs in response to the new developments;
- assist colleges and universities in determining information literacy competencies throughout the curricula and making them a graduation requirement for students;
- coordinate the co-operation among the major agents in the information and library sector which provide the necessary infrastructure for the information literacy;
- coordinate the faculty-librarian partnerships in their sharing of the responsibility in the implementation of the information literacy programs, by stimulating:
 - the faculty to redesign their courses in order to integrate information literacy modules in their subjects curricula, at all grade levels;
 - the librarians in preparing library media programs and various forms of information-resources based learning opportunities;
 - encourage and stimulate organizations to persist in their efforts of developing and implementing information literacy projects and programs from early age at school to lifelong learning, e-learning, etc. on individual, local, and regional bases;

- endorse closer co-operation between academic and research sector and the industry/business sector in promotion and implementation of information literacy.

8.3. Organizing training of trainers seminars and workshops for librarians and faculty in order to:

overcome the acute shortage of expertise needed for implementation of information literacy programs. These seminars and workshops should be organized for transfer of know-how, which should be focused on:

- upgrading the information literacy knowledge and skills of both librarians and faculty;
- learning how to transmit information knowledge and skills onto the end users;
- how to integrate the information literacy training modules in individual subjects curricula;
- understanding, translating, adjusting, redesigning existing and available information literacy tutorials/courses, tests for evaluation of the students' information skills, etc. as per local education circumstances and available information resources;
- creating original stand alone or subject integrated classes, workbooks, course related and course integrated instructions;
- using the Internet appeal as an opportunity for incorporating the content part of the information literacy training courses.

8.4. Creating opportunities for conducting information literacy courses for the private and public sector organizations, responding to the needs of:

- the large population of individuals, entrepreneurs, managers, employers, employees and civil servants who have missed to become information literate while at school who need acquiring, refreshing and upgrading of information literacy skills;
- both the civil servants and the general public involved in the on-going projects on state reforms and modernization of the public administration, the so-called e-government projects;
- all others involved in the government projects of massive efforts in direction of making public and private sector embracing strategies and projects for "e-everything," which by definition presuppose universal skills of locating, communicating and sharing information.

There are already many well positioned organizations, development agencies, promotion centres, such as the ones that support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, which due to their mission and infrastructure capabilities, are excellent medium for offering, in co-operation with the library and information professional organizations, various information literacy training opportunities.

9. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Teaching information literacy makes sense and can achieve desirable effects in economically and socially developed environments which develop and maintain sound information and

library infrastructure and which can and are accommodating the new forms of electronic work based on intensive use of information and knowledge. With regard to this, it is obvious that developing capacities and capabilities for information literacy promotion and implementation programs and projects would demand considerable resources which, as it is well known, are very limited everywhere, in particular in less developed countries. In less developed countries, however, the real expenses are in securing the main preconditions for information literacy to happen, that is in building/upgrading and maintaining information and library systems and networks based on advanced ITC technology and on the information profession achievements.

Thus addressing the information literacy problems in less developed countries would inevitably mean parallel addressing the many problems in the information and library sector like securing more financial resources, intensifying the education and training of the information and library staff, improving the organization and management of the information and library systems and networks, increasing productivity, upgrading the ITC technology, etc. Only with a considerably increased financial aid and professional assistance less developed countries would be able to address the complex and accumulated problems in their information and library infrastructures and be more successful in their efforts of:

- fighting for priority position of information literacy programs in national policy documents concerning education, economic development, social and administrative reforms, etc;
- encouraging and stimulating the development and implementation of various information literacy programs everywhere from early age at school to lifelong learning;
- integrating information literacy into the curricula of academic institutions and including information literacy competencies as a graduation requirement;
- lobbying for information literacy programs to be backed up by education laws so that budget and other sources and mechanisms could be secured for continuous support to further development and implementation of the information literacy.

It is generally recognized that information literacy is a modus for maintaining and developing the knowledge acquired at whatever grade of education and a means which helps people relate to the universe of knowledge. Information literacy defines the quality of education, the quality of research, the quality of work and life in general. Although the technological advances contributed to a significant leapfrog enabling many users to have access to numerous sources of information – evaluating, using and acting upon that information – calls for specialized information literacy knowledge and skills. No matter the user-friendliness and other advantages offered by the advanced ITC technology, the efficient access and use of the versatility and richness of the information resources would still request a high level of information literacy knowledge and skills. This should make less developed countries to realize the urgency of addressing the issue of achieving higher levels of information literacy knowledge and skills. In response, they should start looking more intensively for solutions in the formal education and training systems, and encouraging a wide front of other training opportunities for professionals and the general public who are out of formal education and training systems.

Contact: zdravka.pejova@guest.arnes.si

Suggested Bibliographic Citation:

Zdravka Pejova, "Information Literacy: An Issue which Requests Urgent Action in Developing Countries and Countries in Transition " July 2002, White Paper prepared for UNESCO, the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the National Forum on Information Literacy, for use at the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts, Prague, The Czech Republic.

Available at:

<<http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/papers/pejova-fullpaper.pdf>>

Quoting from or reproduction of this paper is permitted when accompanied by the foregoing citation.