

Australian libraries and regional development

Robyn Stokes is totally immersed in a wide range of international activities

There is nothing new about the involvement of Australian libraries in the development of our Southeast and East Asian region. What is new is the rate at which new development strategies are being formulated.

For example, the NLA has long collaborated in various IFLA, UNESCO, Commonwealth government and university programs concerned with education and training, preservation and document delivery. Its Jakarta office will expand these roles further. A more market-oriented approach is the State Library of NSW's program to sell its services in Malaysia and China.

There is a tradition of contacts between library and information people in the region, many of whom were trained in Australia. In a broader context, the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP), through its involvement with the educational sector in the region, is managing a number of projects which have substantial library development components. During the past three years Robyn, who is in the ALIIS secretariat in IDP (see below), has been assisting in the Indonesia-Australia Provincial University's Development project in a university library in Central Java. IDP has had similar projects in the Philippines, Thailand and Papua New Guinea.

Also ACPAD (the Australian Centre for Publications Acquired for Development), which is under the umbrella of IDP, is sending publications provided by Australian libraries, organisations and individuals to developing libraries in the region on an on-going basis.

These activities have been funded by AIDAB as part of Australia's bi-lateral aid. More recently IDP has been involved in managing aid projects for multi-lateral agencies. In these, and in the emerging commercial contracts with institutions and government bodies in the region, the library component is often buried within a larger project and would therefore not be available to the single agent.

The challenge is to harness the

expertise of Australian libraries and information professionals to take advantage of both the cooperative aid opportunities and the purely commercial opportunities. In many cases, the two now overlap.

Australians are being forced into being more competitive, proactive and outward-looking. Australia is a small country with limited human resources and we are finding that we have to cooperate among ourselves if we are to take full advantage of the opportunities for the provision of services in the region.

A recent development to meet this need for a cooperative approach is the formation of ALIIS (Australian Library and Information International Services). ALIIS aims to establish a network of key librarians and information professionals in Australia in order to increase the input of Australian library and information science expertise in the region. With its secretariat at IDP, the range of information intelligence available to IDP can also be scanned for opportunities in the library and information sector.

ALIIS combines the expertise and experience of all library and information sectors in Australia - the professional association (ALIA), the national agency (NLA), libraries in the educational sector, public and state libraries, senior librarians and information professionals, as well as IDP, Australia's international education organisation. Services offered include education, training and technical assistance through consultancy advice, training attachments and study visits, etc., both in the

region and in Australia.

One example of a recent ALIIS project was the provision of an Australian librarian for a team of international consultants to develop the library component for a university system in Nepal with funding from the World Bank.

Late last year the ALIIS Secretariat was asked to develop a bid for a project to assist Kuwait in restoring libraries after the Gulf War. ALIIS is now seeking short-term consultants for possible participation in the World Bank funded Book and Reading Development Project in Indonesia.

Australia has the expertise, experience and goodwill necessary for a worthwhile contribution to library and information development programs in the region. We are finding that we need to cooperate within Australia to maximise our skills and our expertise in order to market them successfully. If we fail to export our expertise and our experience in the tough market in our neighbouring region, other countries, such as the UK and USA, will fill the gap. ALIIS has been formed as a means of ensuring a strengthened, cooperative approach to achieve this.

It is intended that ALIIS will also aim to act as a clearing-house of information on projects and activities in the region, on the key players both in the region and in Australia, and on visits to Australia of professionals and trainees from the region. In this way, we consolidate a cooperative approach and keep each other well informed. ■

inCite deadlines

<i>Issue No</i>	<i>Copy Friday</i>	<i>Ads Wednesday</i>	<i>Events Monday</i>	<i>ALLAppointments Wednesday</i>	<i>Cover date Monday</i>
6	28 May	2 June	7 June	16 June	28 June
7	25 June	30 June	5 July	14 July	26 July
8	23 July	28 July	2 August	11 August	23 August
9	20 August	25 August	30 August	8 September	20 September
10	17 September	22 September	27 September	6 October	15 October
11	15 October	20 October	25 October	3 November	15 November