

# Concept of Eritrean Academic-Public Library Consortia: A Step toward the Information Society of an African Nation

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**Abstract:** *The increasing price of electronic journals, indexing and abstracting database along with the traditional published print subscriptions has forced library community to explore alternative means of subscription. This is information era, no library, however big it may be, is able to satisfy all the needs of its users due to various constraints. It is because of this phenomenon that the concept of library consortium has developed. Consortium of libraries is well known for sharing of resources all over the world. The trend of consortia or group of libraries maintaining information resources together has become very common these days. The Advent of E-publishing has brought a revolution in journal's publication, subscription and access to scholarly literature and the age of library consortia is at the doorsteps to prove cooperation locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. This study aims to explore the concepts, issues and facilities offered by the library consortium and shows how the (Indian) library consortium is making resources available among the member libraries. Eritrea has few of libraries but the concept is still at a nascent stage in library. It believes that establishment of Academic-Public library consortium will make Eritrean libraries more productive and effective to their user community.*

**Keywords:** Library Consortia/ Eritrea/ Information Society/ UGC-INFONET/ N-LIST

## 1. Introduction

In 1993, Eritrea became the world's 181 independent country measuring about 45,000 square miles with an estimated population of 4,01,000 in July 2001 [1], given its population density of 96 persons per square mile. Eritrea is located in the horn of Africa; a region badly affected by conflict, war and drought. Despite of serious natural and war faced obstacles; the country is trying to move towards development in all sectors including economy and social services.



(Eritrean Map, MoE, 2012)

The Government of Eritrea is mainly giving focus on education. There are 1175 schools across the country [2]. In Eritrea, University of Asmara and the Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT) as well as several other colleges and technical schools are functional. The other educational colleges affiliated to Ministry of Education includes the marine engineering college, Massawa, the college of Agriculture, Hamalmalo, the college of Arts and Social Sciences, Adikeh, the college of Business and Economics, Halhale, College of nursing Barentu, College Library Adkeih, Winner Institute Library Nakfa, and the college of

Nursing and Health, Asmara [3]. Ministry of Education of Eritrea, Eritrean academic Institutes or Public libraries like British Council, World Bank Library, Powani Social Center library, American Centre, French Library, Italian Library, Swedish Library, Arabic (*Jalia*) Library, Chamber of Commerce of Eritrea Library, Ertro-German Library, Massawa Public library, Agordat Public Library, Tessenei Public library, Assab Public Library, Dacamare Public Library and Asmara Public Library are not able to hold the full stock of information resources or to procure all information, which may be in demand by its clientele. Even not a single library or information center can meet the thrust of knowledge of all the readers from its holdings. To solve this problem, library cooperation has not been started in Eritrea, such as interlibrary loan, document delivery, library networks, etc.

## 2. Objectives of Eritrean Academic-Public Library Consortia

- 1) Increase the cost benefit per subscription.
- 2) Promote the rational use of funds.
- 3) Make sure the continuous subscription to the periodicals subscribed by the consortia without any failure.
- 4) Guarantee local storage of the information acquired for continuous use by present and future users.
- 5) Build up technical capabilities of the consortia staff in operating and using electronic publication databases.
- 6) Planned alliance with academic and public library institutions that have common interest resulting
- 7) Reduced Information procures cost.
- 8) Improve Information/library Resource Sharing.

## 3. What are Consortia?

The idea of consortium is not new. There were instances of several libraries coming together voluntarily for the mutual

benefit of respective users just like cooperatives, it was the earliest stage of library cooperation. In the second stage, computerized networks come into vogue for sharing of resources. Till this period, the library resources were mainly in traditional printed format. The networks created their bibliographical databases. The users of the participating libraries could get the required documents from other libraries through document delivery services. With the initiation of e-resources, the concept of consortia has been mooted mainly for acquisition of e-journals. As the resources that are procured today through the consortium are mainly e-resources, it has become possible for the users to access and download the required materials without even going through the elaborate process of inter-library lending. Though library consortia have been created with narrow purpose, these can be turned into efficient instruments for sharing all types of library resource.

### 3.1 Definition of Consortia

At present, the more accepted system of library resource sharing is called library consortia. Consortia approach is one of the many ways of maintaining cooperation and coordination among the libraries and in fact, it has emerged as the 'state of the art' in library cooperation in recent years. The aim of the consortia is to achieve what the member of the group cannot achieve individually. A consortium is said to be "a cooperative arrangement among group of institution," or "an association or society" (American Heritage Dictionary). Consortia are commonly formed to increase the purchasing power of the collaborating institutions to expand the resource availability and to offer automated services.

In the age of information society, the most challenging tasks for the Governmental Organization, information professionals and information centers all over the world is to supervise/manage the huge information that are being produced and developed in the world. It is impossible for a single library to monitor all the explosion of knowledge fields and accumulate for the users. To cope up with this situation, the phenomenon of consortia has become very important in the last few decades. In 1930s first library purchasing consortia originate in USA. It was publisher consortia. Initially the term used for resource sharing activities was library cooperation. Though cooperation theoretically could embrace almost all library activities, practically it was confined to inter-library loan of library documents. But due to physical distance and other reasons even this limited system of cooperation was not being practiced widely. However, with the advent of ICT and its application in library activities, new opportunities opened up for greater cooperation among libraries. At the global level Internet and at the national and local level several library networks came in vogue and databases created for information sharing. In recent years availability of information resources in digital or electronic medium has further facilitated exchange of information resources among libraries, thus creating favorable condition for increased resource sharing. Emergence of library consortia is a very promising development in this direction [4].

According to Oxford English Dictionary "Consortium means temporary cooperation of a number of powers, companies

etc. for a common purpose. It is an association of similar type of organization / institution who are engaged for producing and servicing the common things / for providing services for a specific purpose of its users." Library consortium is a "community (a cooperative) of two or more information agencies which have formally agreed to coordinate, cooperate or consolidate certain function" to achieve mutual objectives. It is an association of a group of library to achieve mutually the joint benefits. Consortia may be formed on a local, regional, national, or international basis; on a functional or format basis; or on a subject basis.

Before pursuing specific discussion a brief consideration of the term would be useful. The 'Consortia' is the plural form of 'consortium' but is often used in place of singular form. The term is delivered from the Latin word for 'fellowship'; the meaning emphasizes the coming together of separate groups for a purpose. Homogenously it is used as, 'alliance', 'coalition', 'collaboration', 'cooperation', 'partnership', etc. Consortia are complicated organizations. It is "an association" in the sense that is not commonly understood; i.e. a consortium is not a library association, although some association of libraries engages in consortial activity [5].

### 3.2 Consortia Models

The types of consortia are generally based on its area of coverage and services. Various models evolved in India in variety of forms depending upon participations' affiliation and funding sources.

- **Open Consortia**

This type of consortia is very flexible and it is the wish of members of consortia to join and leave at any time when they please. As we know that, the developing and under develop country's library resources are very limited in this situation open consortia must be preferable. INDEST (India) Consortium is an example to this.

- **Closed Group Consortia**

It is within defined group either by affiliation and collaboration, among them like CSIR, DAE, and IIM (India) Consortium and the formation and operation of the consortia guidelines and its administration are fairly simple and easy.

- **Centrally Funded Model**

In this model, consortium will solely depend on the parent body. A few examples are INFONET by UGC, ICMR, CSIR by DSIR (India).

- **Shared-budget Model**

In this model, the participating libraries take the lead and form the consortium. IIM and FORSA are examples of this model.

- **Publisher Initiatives**

The Emerald Full-Text Library published by the Emerald Publishing Group (formerly MCB University Press) is recent example. Here, consortium members will get deep discount price to the participating libraries. After the deep discount it is not affordable for the African libraries, because of its high membership subscription.

- **National Consortium**

The end of this model is national level licensing of products, like INDEST, UGC INFONET (India). There are a number of other national networks and library networks;

1. Australia – CAUL CEIRC (1998). Council of Australian University Librarians Electronic Information Resources committee. Involves 39 academic libraries.
2. Brazil – ANSF (2000). Academic Network of Sao Paulo. Involves 6 academic libraries.
3. China – CALIS (1998). China Academic Library and Information System. Involves 70 academic libraries.
4. Israel – MALMAD (1997). Israel Center for Digital Information Services. Involves 8 academic libraries.
5. Italy – INFER (1999). Italian National Forum on Electronic Information Resources. Involves 15 academic and special libraries.
6. Micronesia – FSM (1999). Federated State of Micronesia Library Service Plan 1999–2003. Involves all libraries and agencies.
7. Spain – REBIUN (1996). Committee of the Conference of Spanish University Principals. Involves all (47) academic libraries.
8. UK – JISC DNER/NESLI (1996). Joint Information System Committee, Distributed National Electronic Resources / National Electronic Site Licensing Initiative. Involves 175 academic libraries [6].

- **International consortium**

In this consortium, libraries belonging to different countries participate. This may be formed either by individual libraries, such as OCLC, or by bringing different national consortia under one umbrella. Such federation of consortia is known as Meta consortia, such as International coalition of library consortia, which comprises nearly 150 library consortia from around the world.

### 3.3 Importance of library consortium in the Eritrean Information Society

Access to resources is now considered more important than the collection building. The consortium facility for the Eritrean Academic-Public libraries to get the benefits of wider access to electronic resources at affordable cost and at the best terms of license. A consortium, with the collective strength of resources of various institutions available to it, is in a better position to resolve the problems of managing, organizing and archiving the electronic resources. The phenomenon of information revolution has posed several problems and this has far reaching implications in the society. The nation or society like USA, which possesses more information, will lead the world. This is also true in case of individuals. The persons have more information will guide a group or society and they will be superior to others. This power of information has induced the nations and individuals to acquire and control more and more quantities of information. But in this race, the poor nations (like Eritrea), societies, institutions or individuals will be back as compared to the others. This has created a big gap in the availability and use of information. The library consortia can be an ideal solution in this context. Perhaps the most

important advantages of library consortia would be their enhanced ability to serve the society by giving better library services.

### 3.4 Need of Library Consortium in Eritrea

Scientific and research based information would be a significant contribution for rapid promotion of research, education and development of various other sectors of the Eritrean economy. It would save a lot of human effort, financial input as well as application of physical and logistic resources otherwise needed to re-invent the wheel every time. It will provide vital technical support to keep going on all the scientific endeavors. Sharing of research information through consortia would be a significance of its own. It would be both economical and time saving not only for users but also for the information professionals and documentalists. For the cause of economy information data would be prepare, enter, process, store and retrieve at a very high speed. Therefore its utility will be many times higher than the conventional means of information sharing.

However, it has been observed with regret that the concept of consortia is generally missing among Academic-Public libraries in Eritrea. Most of the libraries are working on the policy of self-sufficiency. In some instances it has been found that some academic and research libraries (like British Council, World Bank Library, American Centre, Asmara Public Library) located at a distance of 5-15 minutes walking distance are spending substantial amounts from their budget on the subscription of same journals and procurement of same books, whereas they can easily share their resources with each other. Therefore, there is a need to motivate librarians and information professionals for resource sharing and networking of libraries to ensure optimum utilization of available financial, physical and manpower resources.

### 4. Academic and Public Libraries of Eritrea face many challenges

The negative consequences of the long war that ended many years ago are still felt in the sector. Some of the challenges are:

- Inadequate funds to develop library services like consortia, research and education. Eritrea is faced with numerous pressing social needs which compete for very few resources.
- Eritrean academic-public libraries are finding it hard to maintain the subscriptions even for core journals due to ever increasing cost of the journal subscriptions and also a shrinking budget.
- The average number of subscriptions to international journals by Eritrean institutions is very less (.01%) than the western countries.
- Academic and research users can now hope to have access to their learned journal articles in electronic form.
- There are no standards to distinguish between professional and para-professional training for library and information service. Consequently, there are practicing librarians which hold only undergraduate diplomas, but claim to be professional librarians.



- Greater buying and increased access to sources would be beneficial.
- Reduction in the staff strength and cost savings for library budget would be useful.
- Finding trained staff with adequate research and publications to serve the Library Institute is a serious problem. This shortage of adequately trained staff is coupled with rapid promotion of staff generated a gap of library practioners that needs to be filled only to the professionals but also by the students undergoing library training. Library Institutes in developing countries suffered with the problems to recruit experienced staff from abroad because of non availability of experienced local staff.
- Librarianship as a profession has a low rating in Eritrea, as in other developing countries. The library and information field is unable to attract the brilliant and promising students with science educational background. The low rating is due to such factors as poor salaries and scarcity of library jobs.
- Librarianship is rated very lowly by government as an area of training need and sponsorship.
- The Eritrean Library Association currently lacks specializations and special interest groups that can promote modern library developments and the continuing education for library professionals.

## 5. Status of College Libraries in Eritrea:

The existing colleges of the State of Eritrea to provide tertiary education are as follows:

- (1) University of Asmara (UoA)
- (2) Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT).
- (3) College of Marine Science and Technology, Massawa, (COMSAT)
- (4) College of Agriculture, Hamalmalo, (CoA)
- (5) College of Arts and Social Sciences, Mai Nefhi, (CASS)
- (6) College of Business and Economics, Halhale, (CoBE)
- (7) College of Nursing, Barentu (CoN)
- (8) Winner Institute, Nakfa (WI)
- (9) College of Nursing and Health, Asmara (CoNH) [2].

### 5.1 Public libraries in Eritrea

- (1) The American Center,
- (2) British Council,
- (3) Powani Social Center library,
- (4) World Bank Library,
- (5) French Library,
- (6) Italian Library,
- (7) Swedish Library,
- (8) Arabic (*Jalia*) Library,
- (9) Chamber of Commerce of Eritrea Library,
- (10) Erthro-German Library,
- (11) Massawa Public library,
- (12) Agordat Public Library,
- (13) Tessenei Public library,
- (14) Assab Public Library,
- (15) Dacamare Public Library
- (16) Asmara Public Library

### 5.2 The major issues of Eritrean Academic- Public Library consortia approach are:

- Selecting a coordinating agency to deal on behalf of the entire group of participants and executing and monitoring the work. In Eritrea it may be done by the Ministry of education of Eritrea. It should work as coordinator of consortia.
- Sources of funding to meet the subscription cost.
- Identifying and negotiating the potential publishers/vendors or aggregators to provide access under consortia purchase.
- Legal issues involved in contracts and usage of material within the consortia.
- Identification of libraries interested in participating and agreeing on common terms and conditions.
- Identifying the necessary infrastructure for electronic access to resources.
- Issues related to backup and archival of databases.
- Documentation and training to staff.

### 5.3 Advantages of consortia for Eritrean Society

The advantages of Consortia are many:

- A comprehensive collection is possible, Facilities to build up digital libraries
- Building communication among different academic and public libraries
- Avoid duplication of core collection especially for core journals
- Scope of electronic archives
- Easy access to resource sharing on Internet by developing common resources database
- Reduce cost of information and time saving , Consortia-based subscription to electronic resources provides access to wider number of electronic resources at substantially lower cost;
- Improved resource sharing. The consortium have been offered better terms of licenses for use, archival access and preservation of subscribed electronic resources, which would not have been possible for any single institution; and Available 24/7.
- More professional services to users and help to develop a competitive professionalism among LIS professionals.

### 5.4 Success stories of Library Consortia in India

#### 5.4.1 N-LIST

The “National Library and Information Services Infrastructure for Scholarly Content (N-LIST)” was formally launched. The N-LIST project provides access to more than 2,100 electronic journals and 51,000 electronic books to students, researchers and faculty from colleges and other beneficiary institutions through server(s) installed at the INFLIBNET Centre. Authorized users from colleges can now access e-resources and download articles required by them directly from the publisher’s website once they are duly authenticated as authorized users through servers deployed in the INFLIBNET Centre.

Faculty, staff students and researches from colleges covered under section 12B of UGC Act are eligible to access e-

resources through the N-LIST project. These colleges are required to register themselves on the N-LIST Website. Currently, 665 colleges are registered members. Registered colleges are issued Log-in ID and passwords for their authorized users including faculty, staff, researchers and students. Colleges that are not covered under 2F/12B Act of the UGC may join as N-LIST Associate Members.

The N-LIST Project is being jointly executed by the UGC-INFONET Digital Library Consortium, INFLIBNET Centre and the INDEST-AICTE Consortium, IIT Delhi. The project provides for i) cross-subscription to e-resources subscribed by the two Consortia, i.e. subscription to INDEST- AICTE resources for universities and UGC-INFONET resources for technical institutions; and ii) access to selected e-resources to colleges.

**Indian National Digital Library of Engineering, Sciences, and Technology (INDEST)**, is a consortium set up and funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in India. The ministry provides funds required for providing differential access to electronic resources subscribed to the members. It has its headquarters at IIT Delhi. Its members include 38 core institutions viz., Indian Institute of Science, IITs, IIMs, IIITs, NITs and a few other centrally funded Government institutions. The membership is open to all other educational institutions under its self-

#### 5.4.2 UGC-INFONET

The University Grants Commission (UGC), India has launched a consortium of e-journals for its member universities to provide access to journals through its nationwide communication network, UGC-INFONET. It is overlaid on Education and Research Network (ERNET) infrastructure to provide assured quality of service and optimal utilization of Bandwidth resources. On behalf of the UGC, the INFLIBNET is executing the UGC-INFONET project in collaboration with the ERNET. This Consortium aims to promote the use of electronic database and full text access to journals by the research and academic community in the country. Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) Centre, is the nodal agency for coordination of the UGC-INFONET. It facilitates linkage between UGC, ERNET and universities and coordinates the programme. It is also administering the entire programme including monitoring of bandwidth utilization and releasing the annual recurring cost of 149 universities. This Consortium subscribes to journals published by American Chemical Society, American Institute of Physics/ American Physical Society, Institute of Physics, Annual Reviews, Cambridge University Press, Project MUSE, Royal Society of Chemistry, etc. In all areas of learning like Science, Technology, Medicine, Social Science and Humanities. UGC-INFONET is a boon to the higher education system in the country. The programme helps in mitigating the severe shortage of periodicals faced by university libraries due to the ever widening gap between the growing demand for literature and the shortage of available resources. The consortia model gets the discount of 85% to 90% of list price. As per 2006 statistics, it offered e-resources from 25 major publishers/ vendor aggregators content to 100 universities and the consortia members have downloaded

supported category. The access to the resources is being provided directly from the publisher's websites. The consortium offers a price advantage on subscription to e-resources that exceeds 80%. Electronic resources subscribed by INDEST consortium are full-text e-resources like (ASCE) American Society of Civil Engineers, ACM Digital Library, EBSCO databases, Elsevier's science, Emerald full-text etc. and bibliographical databases like INSPEC, J-Gate, MathSciNET, Web of Science, Scifinder Scholar etc. The consortium is also a member of International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC).

**Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)** has also formed a Consortium for which National Institute of Science, Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), a constituent establishment of CSIR formed with the merger of INSDOC and NISCOM, has been identified as the nodal agency. To argument CSIR research and development activities, NISCAIR implemented an agency for the process of providing access to globally available electronic journals to the entire S&T staff of CSIR. On behalf of CSIR, it has entered into an agreement with Elsevier science to access its odd 1,500 e- journals and intends to strengthen further its information resources base by subscribing access to more journals published globally. CSIR consortium extended its access by creating appropriate on consortium basis with the other provider of e-journals.

2945074 full text articles in 2005. In the year 2006, there is tremendous growth in over all usage of e-resources.

**5.5 Besides these, many consortia are being run successfully by different organization also these include:**

FORSA (Forum for Resource Sharing in Astronomy) [<http://www.iiap.res.in/library/forsa.html>]  
IIM LIBRARY Consortia, [<http://www.iimb.erner.in/>]  
ICICI Knowledge Park, [<http://www.iciknowlwdgepark.com>]  
DAE Library Consortium, [<http://www.rifr.res.in/~libws/>]  
ICMR Library Consortia, [<http://www.jccc-icmr.informindia.co.in/about/about.sap>]  
HELINET (Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Karnataka) [<http://www.rguhs.ac.in/hn/newhell.htm>]

## 6. Future Implications

As we know that, Eritrea is an underdeveloped country and facing lots of political, humanitarian and natural problems (i.e. drought, feminine, United Nations sanctions, European Union Sanctions). If ministry of Education of Eritrea and any funding agency will take initiative for creation of an academic consortium, this step will be very fruitful for all academic institutions/students of Eritrea.

## 7. Conclusion

The advent of e publishing has brought a revolution in journals publication, subscription as well as access to the scholarly literature. The age of library consortia is at the doorsteps to prove the library cooperation locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. It is the one of the emerging tool kit for the maximum libraries to survive if the libraries have to provide information to their users. The very

concept of Academic-Public Library Consortia in Eritrea is very fertile one. But the success of consortia like other cooperative efforts depends on the proper mix of enthusiasm, innovative thinking, and caution and skepticism. There is no doubt that consortia will be able to deliver the goods far more effectively and efficiently than individual libraries. However, it remains essentially a cooperative tactical response of the group. The existence of various library consortia in different parts of the world has illustrated one principle i.e. a successful consortium has to have clear goals, a coherent membership and a structure that matches its goals and membership.

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