

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INFORMATION POLICY IN KUWAIT

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Abstract

Scientific and Technical Information has been an important tool for development for the developing countries as well as the developed ones, due to its importance in providing vital data and scenarios for the decision-makers and assist the researchers and other users in their day to day function.

Kuwait, as a developing nation, has been striving to establish and employ all the advances methods and means to assist achieving their Socio-economic developing plans. Building a Scientific and Technical Information Center is undoubtedly means to achieve such ambitions.

The paper shall discuss various issues and concepts related to the issue and the need to develop national information policy in Kuwait.

Introduction

The acquisition and dissemination of information i.e., scientific, general or specific, necessitates a science to study various issues related to information such as its nature, origin, ,properties and production, communication and use, ,processes and systems . However, acquiring a prompt and appropriate information for several sectors in a society requires excellent information technology setup. Information technology ingeniously consist and combine human capabilities such as programmer, operator, distributor, etc. with a variety

of technological systems in micro-electronics, computers, telecommunications facilities, space technologies.

Human capabilities are also engaged with the development of appropriate software and also with computers in data processing and storage, telecommunications in transfer of needed information, space technologies in distribution of telecommunications, etc. (ICSTD).

The importance of information acquisition as a prime tool for development has been highlighted by one of the main UN agencies where it was stated that the possession and use of knowledge are essential factors for progress. Information, the communicable form of knowledge, especially scientific and technological information, has therefore come to be recognized as one of the main prerequisites for economic and social development. It is an indispensable factor in the rational use of natural resources, scientific and technological advancement, progress in agriculture, industry and services, the blossoming of culture and the enhancement of social well-being. Consequently, assimilation of scientific and technological information is an essential precondition for progress in the developing countries. Access to scientific and technological information therefore appears as an ethical necessity and as a factor of the utmost importance in bringing about a new order based on greater fairness and mutual solidarity (UNESCO).

Information Policy and the Developing Countries

The generation and dissemination of technology have been in the hands and control of the developed countries. The developing nations, particularly the poor ones, have been facing several problems to acquire the appropriate information for development on the other hand, richer developing nations have been facing the fear of becoming more and more increasingly dependent on the developed countries to obtain information and the technological know-how

associated with it.

The developing nations have, to overcome or minimize such challenge to formulate national policy for information to ensure the harmonious implementation and operation of information resources, services and systems, such that, timely access to relevant information to varying needs of users throughout the society, coordination and compatibility of the overall national information system, better complementarity and comparability between the various legislations concerning the provision of information, better responsiveness to the implications of new information development and more effective participation in regional and international information systems and networks (Montviloff).

However, the promulgation of national information policy in a country necessitates the existence and operation of well established and effective national information infrastructure in terms of manpower and facilities in addition to appropriate budget. A national information policy should be formulated to achieve the following objectives (Montviloff):

1. Provision of relevant, reliable and timely information data at a reasonable cost to all those contributing in diverse ways to the achievement of the national development goals, e.g., researchers, engineers and technicians, development planners, policy makers and administrators, extension workers, para-professionals, farmers and entrepreneurs.
2. Preparation and implementation of a plan of action for the establishment and operation of a national information systems based on existing infrastructures, the coordination of the various systems and services, the identification and correction of deficiencies, the filling in of gaps and the productive interaction with regional and international information systems and

programs.

3. Ensuring support for the components of the national information system including information manpower, facilities, and technologies through public and other forms of financing and collaborative arrangements.

4. Ensuring cohesiveness and sustained growth of the national information systems by formulating and prescribing policies and guidelines for assigning areas of responsibility, choice of means and methods, priorities, financial arrangements and coordinating mechanism in conformity with the country's development objectives and plans and its political, social and cultural specificities and government structure as these evolve with time.

5. The participation in international information activities including such problem areas as transborder dataflow, information technology transfer, information resource-sharing networks.

In addition, a national information policy should interact with policies in other fields such as information and telecommunications and should respond to specific stimuli at specific time. Montviloff has categorized national information policy as follows:

1. countries which have poor information infrastructures and no policy, which is often the case of the lease-developed countries;
2. countries which have information infrastructures but have no policy; these could be either advanced countries or developed countries which have established already some information services but have not clearly identified a national agency or legislation on the matter;

3. countries which have an information policy but no or little developed infrastructures; these can be developed or developing countries which have already worked on the formulation of a legislative framework;
4. countries which have elaborate information infrastructures and have a policy or policies; these are advanced countries which do not lack policies but lack harmonization in their proliferation.

Furthermore, Montviloff has adumbrated several key issues related to national information policy as follows:

1. the development of information resources and services including the generation and collection of information, information manpower, technology and facilities,;
2. the provision of access to information and its effective dissemination including such areas as marketing of information resources, information resource management,;
3. the promotion of the effective use of information including training users to seek and apply information and raising their perception as to the value of information,;
4. the development and coordination of national information activities including the operation of a decision support system, evaluation;
5. the participation in international information activities including problem areas such as transborder, dataflow, information technology transfer, information resource-sharing networks, etc.

When a national information policy is formulated and promulgated with the appropriate objectives and supported with suitable infrastructure and budget, it should be then geared to set up a strategy for the following series of actions (Montviloff):

1. Design of a plan of action for the development and operation of information services and systems fully integrated in the country's national development plan.
2. Launching of information programs coordinated and integrated in the plan of action.
3. Implementation of information projects at the most appropriate place and date.
4. Optimum operation of information services and systems.

The developed countries experience in formulated a national information policy might differ in their features and objectives depending on their plan of action, coordination mechanism, availability of resources and manpower, modes of operation and evaluation of the policies, etc. The following features of national information policies and programs as adopted by some developed countries and are cited as a guidelines for the developing countries (Hill):

1. it is a unified methodological guidance for the country's service;
2. continuing development of international cooperation in the field of theory and practice information activities;
3. ensuring the most efficient organizational structure of information centers;

4. ensuring adequate education and training for the manpower involved;
5. to strengthen transfer of information within science and between research and industry, aiming to intensify transfer of technology and encouragement of innovation;
6. a better mechanism for access to documentation for the public as well as state's agencies and sectors;
7. stimulate research and development in information science.

DEVELOPING OF NATIONAL INFORMATION POLICY FOR KUWAIT

Kuwait as an oil producing country, has been striving to transfer and employ several sorts and resources of technology and technological know-how and has established and developed several infrastructure in aiming to develop and promote her socio-economic-industrial infrastructures. The decision-makers in Kuwait are ascertain that scientific and technical bases, particularly information, are the backbone for any socio-economic development plans and that the key to global information exchange is to promulgate a workable national information policy. The existence of such policy is a necessity because it represents a general plan of action and a set of interrelated laws and policies concerned with the creation, production, collection, management, distribution and retrieval of information. Such policies profoundly affect the manner in which an individual in a society is a society itself and makes political, economic and social choices (Mason).

Justification for Promulgation a National Information Policy

Different nations have various reasoning, perspectives and objectives for promulgating a national information policy. However, the objectives of any policy may be clustered towards (Aman):

- government responsibility for provision of information for the overall increased productivity of society;
- introduction or modification of laws and regulation dealing with utilization of microcomputers and production of files in electronic forms.

- introduction or modification of laws and regulations involved with printing regulations, library services, government information services, dissemination of information, efficiency of audio visual services, monitoring the costs of production and distribution of information, etc.

Therefore, promulgating a national information policy for Kuwait would, undoubtedly, assist to eliminate duplication and further coordinate information resources and services. It further helps to articulate the consequent increase in funding to establish sophisticated libraries and information center, and to coordinate and develop manpower and enhance relationship between institutions in Kuwait. The policy would lead to creation of national network for scientific and technical information to serve specialized sectors and institution of science and technology which would result in a better system of inventory of the intellectual and scientific output of Kuwait. In addition, the policy would have a positive impact of enforcing a system of legal deposit of techno-scientific publications, government documents and other forms of literature in a government established centre.

The information policy could also enhance the level of cooperation between

the public and private sectors and amongst several segments of information business and industry, and representation and coordination of scientific and technical information activities and programs on the regional and international levels, particularly with specialized organizations and federations.

Means and Resources Need to Promulgate the National Information Policy

Kuwait as a developing country is characterized with several drawbacks that hinder the achievements and implementation of any socio-economic plans. Amongst such obstacles are: the absence of explicit policies, i.e., science and technology policy, information policy, research and development policy, and the heavy reliance on expatriate in technical and scientific fields due to the limitation of counter indigenous manpower.

Formulation and promulgation of national information policy might be a step to encourage promulgation of other policies and to assist in achieving socio-economic development plans. However, several means and resources are needed to assist implementation and practice of this policy as as (Aman):

- legislative mechanism to provide for and promote a coordinated development of information services;
- revision of existent and promulgating legislation for copyright, legal deposit, censorship, and other related issues.
- adopting strategy to intensify the generation of indigenous literature in all areas of national development activities.
- enact legislation and principles to facilitate access to information resources and services available in Kuwait and abroad.

- setup administrative procedures for the national registration of all data and information generated locally;
- adopt mechanism to allocate funds for setting up libraries and information centers as needed and to support present ones and information resources management and other related activities.
- standardize regulations and procedures for the processing of library documents according to international standards;
- identify obstacles facing free flow of information;
- a mechanism for cooperation among libraries regarding interlibrary loans, document delivery, etc.
- programme to accelerate employment and training for staff working in information domain in terms of quantity and quality, and should be based on need and requirements such as specialization, level of training, qualification, etc.
- a well-defined programme for research and development in library and information science (informatics, informetrics and informatology) taking into account issues such as: information-seeking behavior of users, information needs assessment, employment of new technological know-how (image processing, scholarly communication), information flow through society, developing standards for information processing and dissemination, etc.

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