

Access to UN Information in the Digital Era : Reengineering the UN Depository Libraries Programme

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Abstract:

Since July 1947 the United Nations has had a vibrant, diverse network of depository libraries around the world. Today there are 360 participating libraries in 134 countries. The programme is poised to enter into a new phase, taking into account current technology, users' needs and the results of a consultation process that depository librarians worldwide participated in. The authors present a brief overview of the UN Depository Libraries Programme (history, development, current management), discuss the outcome of the consultation process (moving towards a primarily digital deposit), and cover in detail (mandate, content scope, features and functionalities) the two digital services that have since been developed: the United Nations iLibrary, launched in February 2016, and the United Nations digital library that is still in the implementation phase. In conclusion we discuss the proposed new policy for the UN Depository Libraries Programme that was communicated to depository libraries in March 2016.

Keywords: United Nations, depository libraries, electronic publishing, digital libraries, international documentation

1. Current State of the United Nations Depository Libraries System

1.1. Origins and Development

The usefulness of having a network of United Nations Depository Libraries to receive UN documents and publications and serve as local research centres was recognized early on after the organization was created. As for many other activities and programmes of the UN, its precursor, the League of Nations, had set the example. Both the first UN Librarian, Sigurd Rasmussen, and the American Library Association advocated for such a network and the formal designation of initially 25 depository libraries in the United States was announced in July 1947.¹ The UN Library's original policy includes the mandate to arrange for the distribution of United Nations publications to depository libraries throughout the world.²

The network quickly grew over the decades, with significant spurts in the 1960s due to a growing number of Member States after decolonization and again in the 1990s after the breakup of the Soviet Union. It reached peak participation in 2006 with 408 depository libraries in 144 countries and currently counts 360 participating libraries in 134 countries (Birzeit University in the State of Palestine is the most recent addition to the network). On the other hand, 57 UN Member States still remain without a depository library.

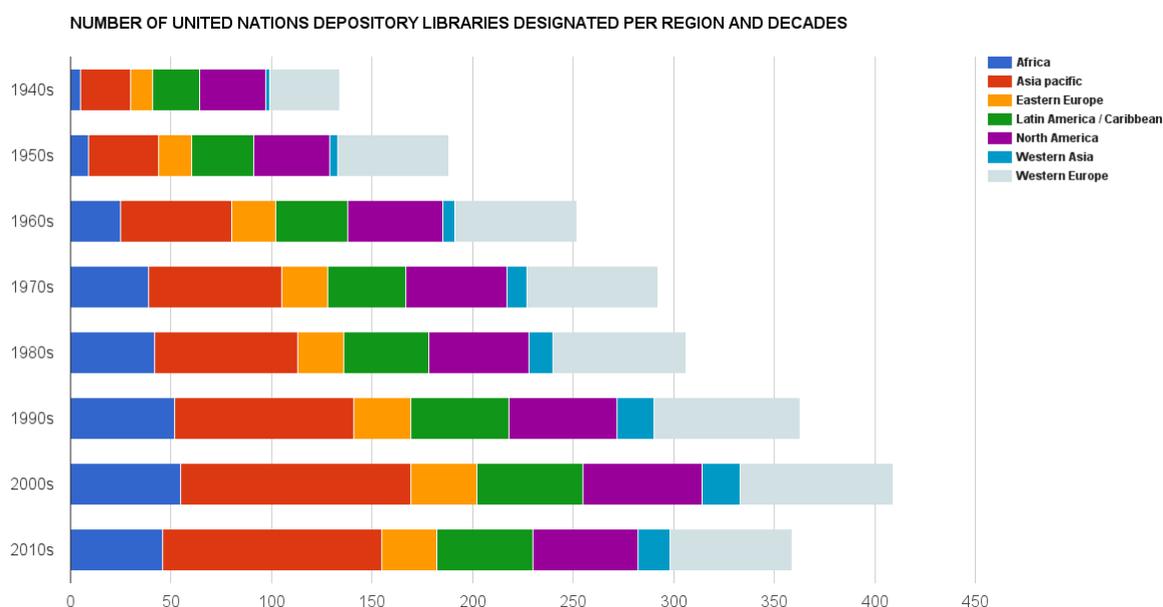


Figure 1. Source: DHL. UN Depository Libraries Programme. (June 2016)

The scope of the deposit has changed considerably over time. Whereas initially all UN documents and publications were disseminated to UN depository libraries free of charge, the scope was reduced several times to exclude publications of the UN's funds and programmes (UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF and several others) and of the UN University and its research institutes. In 1974, a modest annual fee (contribution) was instituted for approximately half of the depository libraries (national libraries, as well as parliamentary libraries open to the public would continue to receive the deposit for free). This fee has been adjusted several times to recover a portion of the costs of printing and shipping the materials and last stood at \$1,750 and \$1,000 for full and partial deposits to libraries in developed countries and \$500 and \$250 for those in developing countries.³ When the Official Document System

¹ Church, J. The Once and Future United Nations Depository. Documents to the People, Fall 2015, p. 7.

² Section 7a, Library : Library policy and organization, UN doc. [A/C.5/298](#).

³ Church, J. Op. cit., p. 8.

(ODS) became freely accessible to the general public in 2005, many depository libraries requested that they no longer receive print copies of documents available on ODS.

The current network of UN depository libraries is coordinated by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (DHL) at UN Headquarters in New York under the authority of and in accordance with rules established by the UN Publications Board⁴. Two staff members (who also have other significant duties) provide a variety of services and support to UN depository libraries (requests to join and withdraw, requests for promotional materials, dedicated website, Facebook page, briefing programmes for visiting depository librarians) and handle a variety of administrative tasks (periodic reviews of the programme, reporting, compiling statistics). They are supported by other library staff (briefings, training), as well as staff of other offices in the Department of Public Information (DPI), primarily the Sales & Marketing Section (handles accounts of depository libraries' annual contributions) and the UN Yearbook Unit (shipping of the UN Yearbook).

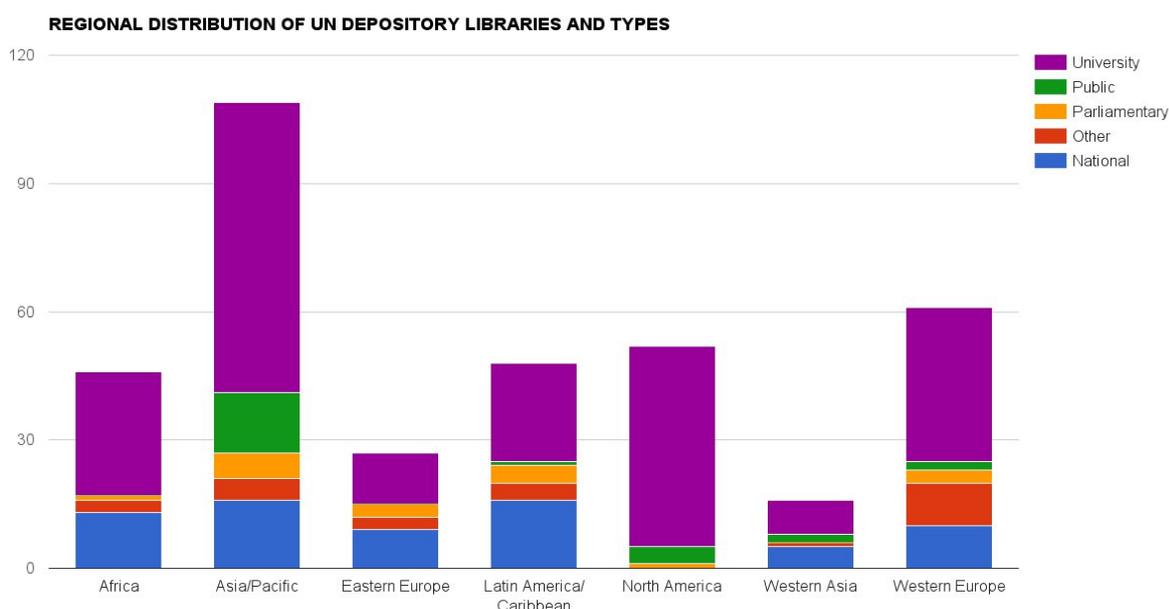


Figure 2. Source: DHL. UN Depository Libraries Programme. (June 2016)

1.2. New Strategic Direction

Library activities have been reviewed regularly as part of restructuring exercises, both internally (most notably by the Joint Inspection Unit) and externally with a view to modernize operations, increase efficiency and enhance inter-library cooperation. The Depository Libraries Programme was no exception and, while problems with delivery of UN materials from multiple locations to hundreds of libraries around the world and the urgent need for systematic training of librarians in UN documentation and the related research tools were identified early on, the value of the network as a key partner in disseminating the information produced by the UN and its myriad agencies and making it accessible and understandable through expert intermediation for researchers and citizens alike was never in question. Gradual improvements have been made, in particular a series of regional training workshops in developing countries between 1997 and 2011 (regular budget funding is no longer available for this activity) and increased outreach efforts through a dedicated website and Facebook page.

⁴ Publications Board : Secretary-General's Bulletin, UN doc. [ST/SGB/2012/2](#); Principles Governing United Nations Depository Libraries, UN doc. [ST/AI/189/Add.11/Rev.2](#); Instructions for Depository Libraries Receiving United Nations Materials, UN doc. [ST/LIB/13/Rev.5](#).

In early 2013, DHL was informed that the office at UN Headquarters responsible for printing and disseminating UN publications to the depository libraries would no longer do so. Several trends had converged to create this situation: the shift to electronic and online publishing for UN sales and non-sales publications; the call by the Secretary-General to reduce the organization's carbon footprint by holding "paper-smart" meetings and drastically cutting the amount of paper used for printing parliamentary documents⁵; the destruction of the printing facilities at UN Headquarters during hurricane Sandy in October 2012; and pressure from UN Member States for budgetary austerity leading to severe budget cuts and downsizing in some departments, including the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), between 2012 and 2015⁶.

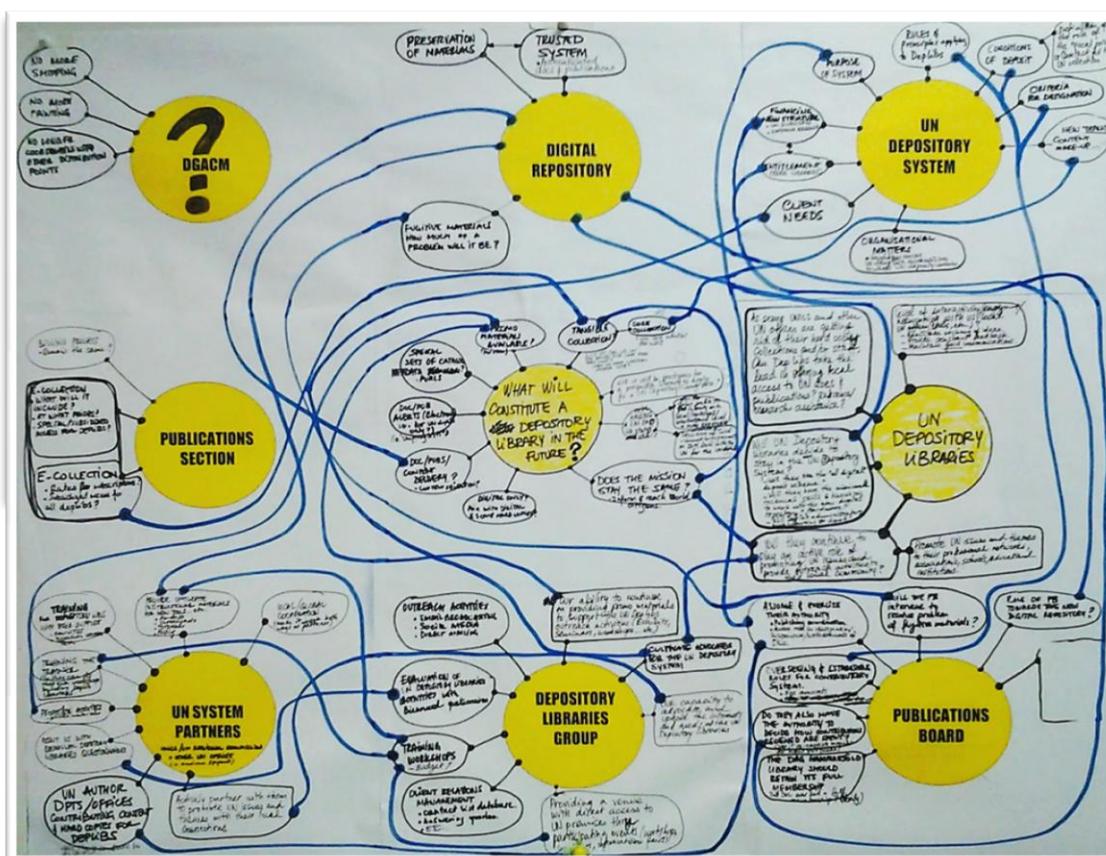


Figure 3. Mind Map - The Devil is in the Details. Source: DHL. UN Depository Libraries Programme.

Faced with the reality that the UN Depository Library Programme could not continue with the status quo, DHL went through a period of soul searching in order to establish whether the programme was still viable and had value, both for Member States and the depository libraries, and should be continued. The result of this reflection was a consultation paper "A new strategic direction for UN Depository Libraries" of 22 April 2014 that highlighted six areas of enduring value of the programme and asked whether the programme should be terminated, continued as it was, or re-engineered.

⁵ Pattern of conferences : report of the Secretary-General, UN doc. [A/67/127](#); The PaperSmart concept : report of the Secretary-General, UN doc. [A/68/123](#).

⁶ Staff in the publishing and distribution services of DGACM were cut by approx. 66 %. Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013. Part 1, Overall policymaking, direction and coordination. Section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs and Conference Management, UN doc. [A/66/6 \(Sect.2\)](#); Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015. Part 1, Overall policymaking, direction and coordination. Section 2, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference management, UN doc. [A/68/6 \(Sect.2\)](#).

The consultation paper identified six areas of value of the programme: it's relative cost-effectiveness, the specialist knowledge through which true accessibility to and understanding of UN information sources and tools is achieved, the targeting of specialist research communities resulting in wider reach of UN expertise and UN-produced knowledge on key global issues and stronger impact on national policy-making, the potential for building a knowledge sharing network between DHL and the depository libraries, the mutual prestige gained from the relationship between the UN and high-profile research universities, and the preservation of the UN's information products through redundancy in multiple locations. Consequently, DHL proposed to reengineer the programme into a primarily digital deposit and to focus its limited resources on developing local expertise and increase outreach and networking activities, and invited all 365 depository libraries to send their feedback on the analysis and proposals presented over the spring and summer of 2014. Based on the responses received from 190 depository libraries - in the majority they agreed that the programme had value and was worth the effort of reengineering into a primarily digital deposit - DHL presented an initial outline of a future programme that hinged on the development of 2 complementary digital services, the UN e-Collection and DHL's Dag Digital Repository. Depository libraries commented extensively on the proposed digital services and requested detailed information about differences in scope and content, modes of access, preservation model, export of metadata records, stable links to digital content, ability to download and share content via ILL, ability to select and customize collections, and copyright and licensing.⁷

2. Development of the United Nations digital library

2.1. Mandate

In April 2011 the Director of the Outreach Division of DPI created a Working Group on Library Improvements with the purpose to provide strategic direction to DHL and to make recommendations to manage major changes in the way the Library conducted its business. In its report of September 2011 the Working Group recommended that:

“a. The planned UN digital repository should be fully supported and promoted by the Department. It should provide long-term preservation and improved global access to the Organization's digital assets.

b. Ultimately, the ODS should become part of the UN digital repository that would include access to UN official documents as well as other UN information, such as publications and reports.”⁸

The General Assembly subsequently requested that DPI implement the recommendations of the Working Group.⁹

2.2. From Dag Digital Repository to United Nations digital library

In 2013, DHL set out to develop a pilot digital repository in-house on the DSpace platform with a small set of documents with the aim to test desired functionalities, such as a digital workflow for the indexing of UN documents and modalities for user authorization and access. In 2014, the collections were expanded to include all Security Council documents in the 6 official UN languages, a small set of UN publications on peace and security, selected issues of the UN Yearbook, the UN oral history collection and the UN Charter in 38 languages. Faceted search functionality and document linking was implemented and the user interface was translated into French and Spanish. The scope of the repository has been continually expanded and currently holds approx. 350,000 digital objects and

⁷ What's New – [UN Deposit Info](http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/deplib/whatsnew.htm), <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/deplib/whatsnew.htm>

⁸ Report of the Working Group on Library Improvement, 13 September 2011. Internal document.

⁹ General Assembly resolution 67/124, *Questions relating to information*, [A/RES/67/124](#) (18 December 2012).

associated metadata records (Dublin Core).¹⁰ Parallel to developing the pilot digital repository in DSpace, DHL launched a procurement process to select a software suite and service provider to develop a more robust digital library system. In the fall of 2015, the Invenio open source software suite was selected and DHL began to work with the service provider to implement the new digital library system.¹¹

While determining a new strategic direction for the UN Depository Libraries Programme, DHL realized that the digital library-to-be could serve as a platform to deliver the envisaged digital deposit to participating libraries. In spring 2015 a pilot digital collection was created on the DSpace platform and a diverse and international group of depository libraries was invited to test it and report back on their experiences (access, search, downloading). The test was successful and yielded valuable comments regarding the system's functionality and desired features. DHL also arranged for a webex presentation of the Next Generation FDSys¹² to get ideas for useful features for its own system. In addition, DHL analyzed the 100+ comments on the consultation paper and extracted an extensive list of features that depository libraries would find useful in a future UN digital library.

2.3. Collection policy and scope

The original library policy states that DHL has the mandate to collect and maintain “complete sets of the documents and publications of the League of Nations, the United Nations and the specialized agencies”.¹³ In 1997 the scope of UN material to be deposited with DHL and its sister library in Geneva was further expanded to include all UN materials, whether print, non-print or electronic, required to provide efficient library services.¹⁴ It is planned that DHL's digital collections will include both digitized and digital-born materials published by the UN's main and subsidiary bodies, UN funds and programmes and other related institutions, but will exclude documents and publications of the specialized agencies, and that collections will be added in phases. In its initial phase, the digital library will include all official documentation and publications.

2.4. Functionality and Features

At the time of this writing, the UN digital library is still under development. The new web-based (cloud) system will replace existing library systems used by DHL, as well as its sister library in Geneva, for two of its core operations – metadata creation for and retrospective digitization of UN content. It will also serve as a web portal for accessing UN official documents, publications, maps and audiovisual content, as well as specialized databases, such as speech and voting records, via browseable collections and a state-of-the-art search engine (all metadata fields and full texts searchable, faceted search, advanced Boolean). Each collection, metadata record, digital object and search result will have a PURL for stable linking and embedding. The user interface will be available in the 6 official UN languages and the system will support multilingual search (full text and most likely subject headings from UNBIS Thesaurus). The system is OAIS compatible and includes a number of preservation tools (format conversion, PURLs, fixity checks, audit logs). It is envisioned that we can assign roles to depository librarians to enable them to create custom collections for their respective communities, set alerts for newly added content, and generate usage statistics. Functionalities and features that depository libraries would find useful are being considered by the developers and will be implemented as feasible. Once a beta version of the system is online, depository libraries will be invited to test it and provide further feedback.

¹⁰ [Dag Digital Library](http://repository.un.org/). <http://repository.un.org/>

¹¹ [Invenio : a digital library framework](http://invenio-software.org/). <http://invenio-software.org/>

¹² [The US government's federal digital system](https://www.govinfo.gov/). Beta release: <https://www.govinfo.gov/>

¹³ Section 7a, Library : Library policy and organization, UN doc. [A/C.5/298](#).

¹⁴ Supply to the United Nations Libraries of Material Not Available Through the Regular Distribution Channels. UN doc. [ST/AI/189/Add.12/Rev.1](#).

3. Development of the United Nations iLibrary

3.1 Mandate: the Sales & Marketing Section aka United Nations Publications

The Sales and Marketing Section, Department of Public Information (Outreach Division alongside the Dag Hammarskjold Library), was created in order “to disseminate United Nations information and to maximize revenue through the sale of publications”¹⁵. This dual mandate endorsed by the General Assembly is based on several principles:

- Attributing an ISBN and ISSN or DOI as is now frequently the case, as well as a price allows us to make the publications available in a wider variety of networks and therefore increase dissemination reach
- Attributing a price increases perceived value of the content, leading to greater impact
- The UN can cover costs as much as possible in order not to rely exclusively on Member States’ contributions

3.2 From eCollection to United Nations iLibrary

For many years print publications were sold by the Sales and Marketing Section (SMS) individually or according to a “standing order” system based on sales numbers and categories. The academic and scholarly publishing market has evolved over the past years into primarily digital production and the creation of aggregated platforms in order to facilitate research and discoverability, providing functionality and access that print cannot duplicate. Recognizing the significant benefits of this type of aggregated platform in light of the United Nations’ particularly diverse and dispersed content, SMS started working on a publishing platform in 2011. The added value of aggregating content from so many sources on one platform would allow the UN to service the public throughout the world, leading to increased and global discoverability of content to all of its constituents. In addition this project is aligned with the UN’s goal to “reduce the number and hardcopy distribution of publications and to report outcomes on an annual basis”¹⁶ and of course the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG # 4 (Quality Education), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 13 (Climate Action).

The initial project was to build, maintain, market and sell the “eCollection” from scratch. At the time the possibility had been evoked to also use the “eCollection” as a vector to provide content to depository librarians in digital format as the DHL did not yet have a viable digital project. The “eCollection” had to be abandoned due to the investment in time and funds needed. In early 2015 it was decided to partner with an existing, tried and trusted platform in order to reduce time to market and provide the necessary services to the general public, academics, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, the legal and intelligence communities and librarians. After thorough market research and an evaluation of existing partners it was decided to work with the OECD iLibrary.

SMS created a workflow to collect, organize and bookmark content, bringing on board or training staff with relevant skills and expertise, and finding partners for the development and technical aspects of the project. A title management system was built in-house over the past two years in order to serve SMS’ needs, including the housing of assets and metadata to feed into the iLibrary. Specific development was necessary in order to achieve this. DOI’s were attributed to the chapterized content. This much-awaited project was initially presented to librarians at the GODORT meeting at ALA San Francisco in June 2015, promising a beta version of the platform for the Frankfurt Book Fair in October. This objective was attained and the live version of the United Nations iLibrary was announced for early 2016 and effectively achieved in February 2016.

¹⁵ Regulations for the Control and Limitation of Documentation, UN doc. [ST/AI/189/Add.15/Rev.1](#)

¹⁶ The Change Plan: Proposals by the Change Management Team to the Secretary-General, New York, December 2011

Depository libraries, as a key partner in the project, were offered a four month complementary access and a discount on the list price of the subscription. Depository libraries that are also national libraries will have a free subscription to ensure there is at least one institution with full access in each Member State. In addition to this, in order to render the iLibrary as accessible as possible an individualized pricing policy was conceived. This allows fair pricing to each institution based on their geographic location and the economic situation of the country in which they are situated.

3.3 Collection Policy and Scope

The United Nations iLibrary is a curated selection of sales publications. As of end June 2016 there were approximately 1,500 active, chapterized publications in the collection. It includes all of the most recent sales publications; a selection of the most relevant and current sales publications back to 2010, and some complete series such as the Human Development Report for the past 25 years [see list of series Annex I]. We recognize the intrinsic value in providing researchers with access to complete, historic series content and will focus on incorporating the main UN series to this end. The platform allows the ingestion of more multilingual content than was viable in print form, bringing a wider linguistic representation and permitting more diverse access. The publications originate from the UN Secretariat departments, regional offices, as well as agencies, funds and programmes, UN entities and institutes (see Annex II). In the coming months publications from additional specialized agencies will also be included (see Annex II). By end 2016 there will be 3,000 publications on the platform. Each year approximately 500 of the most recent titles in all UN official languages will be added as they are published.

3.4 Functionality and Features

Any individual with an internet connection can freely access the United Nations iLibrary for read/share/embed/citation use. This is a tremendous step forward in accessing UN content and knowledge.

The features available to all are:

- Content can be viewed by theme, country, language, year, and title index
- Granular content – users can search and click directly to components such as chapters or articles. Every content level has a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) and static URL
- Integrated search results, showing all available file formats and READ version
- A citation tool for all content, integrating with popular bibliographic management systems
- Content in context – related content is one click away
- Links to previous editions with the option to view any full text item such as chapters from the table of contents
- Users can navigate back and forth via hierarchical “breadcrumb trails”
- RSS Feeds
- Users can read and share the READ version of content on all internet connected desktop and mobile devices

Additional functionality for subscribers:

- The ability to download full-feature editions in PDF that allow copy-paste, printing, offline storage
- Bibliographic records in MARC21 XML format
- COUNTER 4 compliant usage statistics for all content - eight standardized reports as well as report retrieval via SUSHI
- Athens/Shibboleth federated authentication for US and UK institutions

- All United Nations iLibrary metadata and full text indexed by the four major Discovery Services by mid-2016: EBSCO EDS, Ex Libris Primo, ProQuest Summon, OCLC WorldCat (metadata only)
- Perpetual access to subscribed content
- Free inclusion of content in course packs without need to request further permission
- Access via Proxy server

3.5 Next steps

In addition to the ingestion of content as detailed above and approximately 500 new publications annually on an ongoing basis, the United Nations iLibrary will have significant developments in the coming months:

- The interface and search functionality will be improved (beta version available at ALA in June 2016), including browsing by theme and country and direct links to content types (books, series, journals).
- We have identified data sets to integrate into the platform and will start ingesting this content at the end of 2016.
- Working papers will be integrated into the platform in 2017.
- There is a new development phase of the iLibrary platform that will be launched in 2017. The next-generation iLibrary will be mobile-friendly and screen responsive, and will enable new, semantic-based discovery services.

4. Future of the UN Depository Libraries Programme

The future of the UN Depository Libraries Programme is currently being redefined. In March 2016 the Chair of the UN Publications Board communicated an initial proposal¹⁷ for a primarily digital deposit to all UN depository libraries that would include the following:

- Full online access to UN documents and non-sales publications via the UN digital library
- Annual DVD with selection of UN sales publications
- Yearbook of the United Nations in print
- Discount on UN sales publications in print
- Reduced subscription price for UN iLibrary
- Training
- Improved communication materials and branding

The UN Publications Board is currently developing a revised policy for the UN Depository Libraries Programme based on the elements of the above proposal.

Professional expertise was identified as one of the programme's core values that make UN information truly accessible and understandable. Librarian training is an essential part of the Depository Library programme and something that we plan to reinforce. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library is exploring options for producing on- and off-line training resources that will meet the needs of most depository librarians (certificate courses, webinars, tutorials, manuals, guides). We are also exploring the possibility to coordinate training through our network of UN Information Centres, the UN Academic Impact, as well as professional associations in order to expand this outreach opportunity to local libraries in a more cost-effective way.

Since the creation of the organization there has been strong interest in creating a worldwide network of libraries that would serve as UN information hubs for citizens and researchers alike. UN depository libraries have risen to the challenge and have provided an invaluable service as advocates for the UN

¹⁷ Letter dated 9 March 2016 from Chair, UN Publications Board, to UN depository libraries.

and its activities and by facilitating access to its information thus extending its reach to research communities, policy-makers and civil society. It is in the UN's interest that this partnership endures in the digital era.



Film screening. Photo courtesy of Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka - Russian State Library (DL-219)



Workshop for students. Photo courtesy of Biblioteca depositaria de la ONU, Universitat de Valencia (DL-248)

ANNEX I

UN Secretariat Departments currently included in the United Nations iLibrary

UNDESA United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDPA United Nations Department of Political Affairs
UNDPI United Nations Department of Public Information
UNDPKO United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations
UNECA United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNECE United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNECLAC United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOSOC Economic and Social Council
EOSG Executive Office of the Secretary-General
UNESCAP United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCWA United Nations Economic and Social Council for Western Asia
ILC International Law Commission
UNOCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNOLA United Nations Office of Legal Affairs
UN United Nations
UNCITRAL United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
UNODA United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs
UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
ICTR International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

UN Funds, Programmes and IGOs currently included in the United Nations iLibrary

ITC International Trade Centre
UNCTAD United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UN-HABITAT United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNICEF-IRC United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNU United Nations University
UN-WOMEN United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNIDIR United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
UNISDR United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNSCEAR United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation
UNGC United Nations Global Compact
IOM International Organization for Migration

Forthcoming UN Funds and Programmes

UNICRI United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
UNESCO United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
UNEP United Nations Environment Programme
UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

ANNEX II

Full Series in Scope (current and forthcoming between now and end of 2016)*

[228 series are at least partially represented on the United Nations iLibrary]

- Human Development Report (complete English)

In scope for July 2016:

- United Nations Demographic Yearbook
- United Nations Disarmament Yearbook
- UNODA Occasional Papers
- Law of the Sea Bulletin
- Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council
- Sources, Effects and Risks of Ionizing Radiation

In scope for end 2016:

- UNODA Disarmament Study Series
- World Economic and Social Survey
- World Economic Situation and Prospects
- United Nations Development Series
- Economic Report on Africa
- Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific
- Trade and Development Report
- Least Developed Countries Report
- Review of Maritime Transport
- UNDP Assessment of Development Results

* For technical reasons all these serials will be completed first in English. Language versions will be incorporated as available in subsequent ingestion phases.

Acknowledgments

Ramona Kohrs thanks her colleagues Ms. Mereani Vakasisikakala, Mr. Bojan Grozdanic and Mr. Armando da Silva for their valuable contributions to this paper and their support.

Sherri Aldis thanks her colleagues Ms. Irina Lumelsky, Mr Nicolas Bovay, and our “UN iLibrary A team” for their help in compiling the information for this paper.