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Helping Teacher-Librarians Help Themselves

—Asif Khan

LONDON—Teachers in schools in developing countries often have to play the role of a librarian as funds are seldom available for qualified staff to do the job. And the teachers often take on this added responsibility without training or previous experience.

The Commonwealth Secretariat in London has published a guide to help just such teachers. It covers basic rules of library science and gives tips on how to organise and run a school library.

Handbook for Teacher-Librarians is a publication with a difference in that it can be reproduced locally from a master copy supplied free to governments by the Secretariat. The master copy consists of camera-ready pages of the original edition in a form in which they can be photographed and printed at a low cost.

Developing countries do not therefore need foreign exchange—a precious commodity—to acquire original copies from Britain where

they cost £3. Countries can even make amendments to the text to suit their own requirements.

The handbook provides answers to such questions as what should a school library contain, what support it can give to the educational programme of a school, how it should be organised and how can children be encouraged to use it. It includes an outline programme for teaching library skills, and contains examples and diagrams for easy learning.

Accommodation and space for books and periodicals, storage of materials, ordering stocks, recording of loans and the problem of overdue books and classification and cataloguing are among subjects covered by the book.

Procedures are explained in simple and straightforward terms, and are set out step by step so that they can be easily followed.

"This does not mean that a beginner who tries to read the handbook from cover to cover will immediate-

ly comprehend everything it contains," says the introduction to the handbook. "It is not intended for use in that way. Instead, it resembles a cookery book or a car servicing manual in that the full meaning of its instructions will become clear only when they are being put to use in planning or carrying out a specific task in the library."

Designed primarily for self-study by teacher-librarians, the handbook can also be used as a basic text by students in teacher training colleges and by those attending in-service courses in school library management.

Two Commonwealth developing countries—Fiji in the South Pacific and Kenya in East Africa—have already taken advantage of the Secretariat's master copy to prepare their own editions. Fiji was first, followed by Kenya. Fiji changed some of the pages to suit local requirements. The Kenya edition, supplied to schools free of charge,

provides an example of a non-Commonwealth aid agency assisting a Commonwealth project.

The Kenya Library Association was looking for a publication for secondary school teachers to supplement a training course organised with assistance from West Germany. The association identified the Secretariat's handbook as suitable for the purpose.

The Kenya Institute for Education then asked DSE, Deutsche Stiftung für Internationale Entwicklung (German Foundation for International Development), for assistance in providing 1,500 copies. A telephone call from the DSE in Bonn to the Secretariat in London secured the release of the master copy. And the books were ready for distribution within two months of Kenya's request. The DSE undertook its own printing and binding. The German Agency for Technical Co-operation shipped them to Kenya and obtained customs clearance. (Commonwealth Feature)