

## The story of the Pacific Libraries Network

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*Script for keynote presentation at APLIC, Gold Coast, August 2018*

What does the title mean for you?

From my apartment here on the Gold Coast I wake to the sparkle of the ocean. In Auckland we celebrate the sparkle of the beautiful Waitemata Harbour as an icon. No one aspires to be a drop, a puddle or even a pond. We can be bigger than that.

Yesterday Lucy Bloom encouraged us all to search the same google term repeatedly to cause "Librarians are the secret masters of the world" to trend as top search about librarians. That's the power of many working to a common goal. Imagine if we turned our minds to something bigger that we wanted to change.

As librarians we are good at developing shared bibliographic systems which enable international resource sharing. We are not nearly as good at sharing our energy as people; we are too proud or too modest; we try to go it alone and therefore lack impact.

Yet we are a profession open to sharing, passionately committed to a shared vision, and we have strong collegial networks. Working together with shared purpose we could make waves, we could be as powerful as an ocean, we could be the Pacific Ocean. We could roar.

So, "individually we are but one drop. Together we are an ocean". During this session we want to explain some more about the significance of this saying in relation to libraries in the Pacific, and your role.

Firstly, some brief background.

INELI, the International Network of Emerging Library Innovators was a program funded by the Gates Foundation's Global Libraries program to invest in the next generation of library leaders internationally. This program grew to over 120 people, 14 of whom were from Australia and New Zealand.

We could see the potential for the South Pacific so in 2013, Chris Mackenzie, Jo McGill and I secured half a million US dollars from the Gates Foundation to bring the first regional version of INELI to Oceania.

Our goals were firstly, to identify and develop the talents of emerging library leaders across Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific: secondly to build stronger linkages between key library associations and institutions across the Pacific region: and thirdly to prove that a regional version of the Global INELI program was workable.

Since 2014 until it's conclusion in June 2018, 34 young leaders from 6 different Pacific countries have been nurtured through INELI Oceania, supported by 6 mentors and 10 sponsors. The innovators included Maori and Aboriginal peoples, other Australians and New Zealanders, and people from Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Fiji.

As a result of the INELI Oceania program, they have all learned how to advocate, how to innovate, and how to lead change. The evaluations show that their self-awareness and self-confidence has increased markedly. Many have secured new roles and have become confident presenters at conferences. A number are presenting here at APLIC for example.

Above all they have become part of a strong network with strong friendships. The program has also generated its own momentums of ongoing network building, buddying, visits and learning initiated by the innovators themselves.

Additional funding and support has been provided by 11 different agencies across the South Pacific, including the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand, The State Libraries of Queensland and Victoria, NSLA, PLVN, the National Archives of Fiji, LIANZA and ALIA, as well as Steering Group members and everyone's employers.

We started with 3 people. Now we are a strong regional network of at least 80 INELI Oceania people.

We have been a catalyst for strengthening of TransTasman and Pacific relationships and a number of joint initiatives, including strengthened connections between LIANZA and ALIA.

In terms of our 3rd goal we did prove the concept and there are now 6 other regional INELI programs in Africa, the Middle East, South America, the Balkans, India, and ASEAN. We were actively involved in supporting a number of these to get started.

There are now also a growing number of national INELI programs as a further offshoot in countries such as Egypt, Turkey, and Indonesia. As a result the IO networks extend globally across more than 500 people.

During the program we became increasingly aware of the extreme challenges faced by library colleagues from the Pacific Island nations, where lack of infrastructure and basic training and other leadership barriers made it difficult to even apply to be part of INELI Oceania or to participate fully. Therefore, when we found that we had budget left over, we decided to try a different approach.

What/who is the Pacific Libraries Network

The Pacific Libraries Network is one of the outcomes of the Summit, reflecting the desire and commitment of those present to continue to work together to achieve the goals that Chris has outlined.

The intent of the Pacific Libraries Network is to be inclusive of all who are interested. Although the focus started with public libraries, it has broadened to include all. It is for all nations in the Pacific, the tiny northern states of Micronesia; the Melanesian nations of the Western Pacific, the Polynesian nations of the eastern Pacific, as well as Australia and New Zealand to the south, sometimes known in this context as Macronesia.

The Network recognises that Pacific peoples move and live across the whole Pacific, and that the needs of all Pacific communities matter; for example that resources developed by Auckland Libraries for Cook Islands language week or in the language of Kiribati for Auckland residents can be resources that are also shared with those communities in the wider Pacific.

Why does this matter?

Pacific Island nations face complex challenges. They are among the most vulnerable nations in the world, already facing the impacts of climate change, sea level rise and pollution of the oceans: they are tiny and isolated in terms of location, transport and telecommunications connections; still dealing with post-colonial challenges including loss of indigenous languages and heritage while now also grappling with new forms of economic and political "influence" from superpowers keen to exploit Island resources.

Yet the Pacific Island nations are unique and have an important voice that needs to be heard; They bring important perspectives to contribute to global thinking, and they are taking leadership roles on some of these issues in global fora, for example the future of our oceans. They have seized the Sustainable development goals as a strong planning platform to help move forward.

In the midst of all these challenges, it is very hard for libraries to compete for attention and funding. Therefore libraries tend to be poorly funded, there is no professional recognition and career planning is uncertain. The number of librarians in each country is small and Library associations struggle to survive. The greatest needs are leadership development, capacity building, professional recognition and advocacy, gaining a voice. Not container loads of old books from well-meaning neighbours.

In spite of all these challenges, Libraries and Archives in the Pacific are doing amazing things for their communities. You saw some of this yesterday in Opeta's presentation about taking archives to their communities, truly groundbreaking approaches.

We have been blown away by the innovative ideas for service delivery such as the Sunday Bookclub, the Bok Bilong Pikinini program which is exceptional in reaching isolated communities. Amazed by the sheer resilience and determination, and the strategic approach, for example the national strategy for library development adopted by the Government of PNG - how many other nations can claim that. AND huge congratulations to PNG for bringing so many delegates here.

During the Forum, and hearing these stories, the stakeholders from education, culture and development backgrounds began to realise how much libraries could contribute to the sustainable development goals, not just directly through reading and learning, but also indirectly as providers of information and as places for discussion and sharing of knowledge about these topics. Their eyes were opened. They realised they could be more effective by working through libraries and that libraries have to be at the table, part of the wider conversation.

So establishment of the Pacific Libraries Network matters immensely as a vital next step to seize and shape this momentum, to be ready to be at the table, to be able to roar with one voice by working collaboratively. By sharing what we are able to share as equal partners. There is a real sense of readiness for this next step. The time for Pacific Libraries is here.

There were extraordinary moments during the 2 days of the Summit. We talked, we sang, we cried, we debated, we sat in awe, we learned and we were inspired. We committed to stay connected and to act.

My extraordinary moment:

The most extraordinary moment for me was when the definition of Pacific was challenged. What do we mean when we say Pacific? I had thought that this Summit would be the island nations of the Pacific deciding their priorities while those of us from Australia and New Zealand listened and then figured out how we could step in to assist. Very politely, the inherent colonialism in my assumption was shown to be flawed. So, after some debate, conducted with deep thought and soul searching, from a position of absolute respect, came the moment when the Pacific Island participants agreed that we are all the Pacific, all equal partners, contributing what we can to support our common aspiration. Speaking equally, deciding equally, contributing as we are able. Micronesia, Melanesia, Polynesia and Macronesia. Essentially, they invited Australia and New Zealand to be part of this as equal partners. Our facilitators and OP have since told us that in other similar meetings for other disciplines, this debate usually comes later and can be very contentious, taking a long time ie months to resolve. We did it during the afternoon of day one, because we had already built a sense of trust in each other and desire to be an ocean. Thereafter, when one of the participants said "Pacific Libraries - this is our time", we knew it was about all of us, that we were all welcome and all in this together.

Now we are sharing this outcome and the move to establish a Pacific Libraries Network with all of you, because those of us from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Islands are all of the Pacific. The potential of libraries in the Pacific matters, our ability to roar with one voice, to be an ocean, can be a catalyst for learning, literacy, knowledge, democracy, civic participation, equity, cultural identity, sustainable development. If you care about libraries in the Pacific, please join us. If you have strengths and resources to offer and want to be involved, please let us know. If you want to become part of this ocean, welcome.

