The National Librarian and CEO of the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), Professor Rocky Rabiepi-Simela, has acknowledged the opportunities and challenges of aligning public libraries to the National Development Plan (NDP) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The National Development Plan requires public libraries to align their products and services to national imperatives. In turn, the alignment will ensure that libraries deliver services in line with the needs of communities.

As part of the Global Libraries Programme, the Mzansi Libraries On-Line (MLO) Project is a co-investment and collaboration between the National Library of South Africa, the national Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and all Provincial Library Services in South Africa to address the challenges of access to information through technology.

The MLO Project is based on the reality that libraries have the potential to serve and engage the entire community through targeted outreach programmes aimed at improving the lives of information-deprived communities who currently lack adequate access to information needed to live healthy and productive lives.

Numerous surveys have confirmed the dire state of communities in South Africa in terms of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and education, health, etc. A lack of information and/or access to information lies at the heart of our socio-economic plight.

The National Library of South through the Mzansi Libraries On-Line Project contributes to the realisation of national development goals by enhancing the quality of life in local communities through the facilitation of activities, such as e-governance, health information, job and labour related issues, including education and recreational services, youth unemployment, community development and scarce skills amongst library practitioners at local level.

**MZANSI LIBRARIES ON-LINE PROJECT**

**Project Mission:**
The Mzansi Libraries On-Line (MLO) Project seeks to empower South African communities by providing free access to the Internet as well as ICT equipment at public libraries. MLO is a project of the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), in collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the provincial library services in all nine provinces. The MLO Project is a part of the Global Libraries Programme, which is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

As part of the implementation plan, the MLO Project will provide technology to enhance free access to information at 667 identified public libraries across South Africa. The objective of the MLO Project is to empower South African disadvantaged communities through:

- Increased access to ICT particularly for children, youth, the unemployed, women, the elderly, and people living with disabilities (especially the visually impaired).
- Increased social and economic benefits through access to health, education and economic information.
- Enhanced skills and capacity among library staff, resulting in better service delivery to their communities.
- A sustainable public library sector that will continue to meet the needs of the community into the future.

The NLSA has developed a training programme to ensure that public library staff understand, and have the capacity to meet, the information needs of their communities. This training programme also aims to develop librarians and librarianship with a view to improve service delivery, ensuring that libraries remain relevant and beneficial to communities.

**NLSA SALB MINI LIBS**

A partnership between the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) and the South Africa Library for the Blind (SALB) is set to reinforce free access to information, through technology, for people living with disabilities.

The focus of the project is to implement the following interventions at 27 identified public libraries across the country:

- To enhance access to library facilities and resources for people living with visual impairment through the provision of the necessary assistive technologies, reading material and other facilities.
- To train library staff to better serve the needs of visually impaired library users.
- To impart information literacy skills to blind and visually impaired people.
In March 2017, the NLSA partnered with Business Connexion (BCX) to launch a Graduate Internship Project for unemployed youth in the field of Information Communications Technology (ICT). The aim of the project is to upskill unemployed graduates and improve their opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

A total of 65 interns were recruited from various communities nationwide. Upon completion of the 11-week internship project, the successful interns were deployed to provide ICT support at the 27 Mzansi Libraries On-Line (MLO) pilot project libraries. Not only did most of the interns pass the Microsoft Accredited International Examinations, six of the successful interns have since found permanent jobs in the private sector. Thanks to the innovative collaboration between the NLSA, BCX and Netcampus, positive strides have been made in upskilling and empowering our unemployed youth.

MEET SOME OF THE GRADUATE INTERNS

PHUMUDZO DONGOLA
(Wedela & Winnie Mandela Library, Gauteng)
- Has a National Diploma Information Technology from the University of Johannesburg.
- She completed four of the five Microsoft modules during the Internship Project, and has since joined NIC as an IT Service Desk Consultant.
- She has since joined NIC on a two-year programme.

THABO LETSWALO
(Rustenburg – North West)
- Has a Diploma in Information Technology.
- He completed all five Microsoft modules during the Internship Project, and has since been employed as an IT Technician at NetCampus.

LINDA SIKWATI
(Western Cape Provincial Library Services)
- Has a B.Tech Diploma in Information Technology.
- He completed all five Microsoft modules during the Internship Project, and has since joined Emerald Life as a Software Tester.

AKANI KHOZA
(Wedela Library - Gauteng)
- Acquired an IT Diploma from Cameroon.
- He completed five Microsoft modules during the Internship Project, and has since joined Nomad Support as an IT Field Technician.

The remainder of the 65 interns are currently assisting with ICT facilitation at various provincial, district and public libraries across the country.

SA LIBRARIES TACKLING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

A total of 65 unemployed ICT graduates from across the country have been recruited and trained as ICT Interns to provide much needed support at selected public libraries in South Africa.

The ICT interns underwent an eight-week training programme from March to June 2017. This was facilitated by Microsoft SA/Netcampus in collaboration with the Mzansi Libraries On-Line (MLO) Project at the Telkom Learning Centre.

ICT skills play a crucial role in assisting young, disadvantaged South Africans to create more opportunities for themselves in terms of employment and entrepreneurship. By empowering unemployed youths with ICT skills and certification through the Student-To-Business Internship programme, the employment prospects of these individuals are enhanced.

The interns will spend some time working in community libraries, where they will be the custodians of knowledge and much-needed ICT skills. This will provide them with the opportunity to impart their knowledge and skills onto the communities, and allow the National Library of South Africa to effectively bridge the digital divide in communities across our country.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SOUTH AFRICA AND BUSINESS CONNEXION PARTNERSHIP ACHIEVES EXCELLENT RESULTS

A partnership between the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) and Business Connexion (BCX) has met objectives and achieved excellent results.

- The pilot internship project was implemented in 2017, with an intake of 65 unemployed ICT graduates.
- Interns were recruited from public libraries across the country participating in the Mzansi Libraries On-Line (MLO) Project.
- The success rate has been high, with close to 60 interns successfully completing all five Microsoft International Exams (MCSE).
- Phase 2 of the Internship, which began in November 2017, targeted an intake of 200 interns nationally.
THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SOUTH AFRICA (NLSA) PARTNERS WITH LULAWAY HOLDINGS TO Tackle COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

The National Library of South Africa (NLSA) through the Mzansi Libraries On-Line (MLO) Project has partnered with Lulaway Holdings to launch the Job Readiness Project. This initiative seeks to reduce the scourge of youth unemployment in South Africa through the use of technology in community libraries.

The project was ceremonially unveiled at an event hosted by the Gauteng MEC for Arts and Recreation, Ms Faith Mazibuko at the Sharpeville Library on 12 September 2017. At a total of 69 ICT graduates who were successfully trained through the NLSA BCX ICT Internship Programme were also trained by Lulaway Holdings on the Job Readiness Portal. Once deployed to the 27 MLO pilot project libraries, the graduates will assist library users to access the on-line Job Readiness platform, register, develop their profiles, create CVs and explore work opportunities using the free Internet and ICT equipment at the libraries.

The collaboration between NLSA and Lulaway Holdings will go a long way towards contributing to skills development and employment opportunities in line with the National Development Agenda (NDA) 2030. The project will also increase the capacity at public libraries, putting libraries in a better position to tackle the developmental needs of the communities they serve.

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE SILOE SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND IN LIMPOPO

The Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Mr Michael Masutha handed over special equipment and furniture to the Siloe School for the Blind in Limpopo on 28 November 2017. The school, situated outside Polokwane, currently accommodates 110 pupils with complete and partial blindness.

The Department of Arts and Culture in partnership with the National Library of South Africa and the Polokwane Public Library invested approximately R1.2 million into the project. These funds will be used to enhance connectivity and access to information through technology for people living with visual impairments.

NLSA IMPACTS COMMUNITIES

A Focus group session held in the Province of Limpopo.

The findings of the survey highlighted an overwhelming need for free Internet access in all communities. Respondents acknowledged that libraries are a critical source of information and Internet connectivity especially for school learners, students and unemployed community members. Libraries serve as information hubs where community members can easily access enabling tools and information regarding:

- Research and apply for job opportunities
- Access government services
- Research health matters
- Complete applications and registrations to tertiary institutions
- Conduct research or complete assignments and projects

Good Experiences at Libraries:

- Our librarians are very helpful!
- I got a job after applying using the library’s platform.
- The librarian helped me to develop my CV
- I secured a seat at university having applied at the library
- The library provides space to study for exams
- The library space enhances social interaction
MZANSI LIBRARIES ON-LINE IN ACTION

The MLO Training Programme

The MLO Project developed a training programme to ensure that Library and Information Services are delivered by skilled library staff who understand, and have the capacity to meet, the ever changing information needs of their communities. The following training interventions were successfully implemented:

1. Advocacy
   A total of 548 librarians-in-charge at 867 libraries (in all nine provinces) participating in the MLO Project underwent Advocacy training. The objectives of facilitation included ensuring an understanding of the meaning and role of advocacy in the Library and Information Sector; learning how to implement the Advocacy Planning Process; and an creating an understanding of how librarians can positively enhance the lives of the communities they serve. After the training, attendees were tasked to establish Advocacy Work Groups in their libraries and to work with stakeholders and role-players in the local community to promote the library’s interests. A total of 86% of the 241 respondents in the post-training feedback survey confirmed the relevance and importance of the training. One librarian attending the training stated: “I have learnt a lot from the workshop and am now able to come with a plan to improve my library’s services.”

2. Impact Planning and Assessment Training
   Twenty-seven MLO Trainers conducted Performance Measurement and Impact Evaluation training for 591 librarians-in-charge at 667 libraries participating in the MLO Project. Beyond the classroom training, they were required to conduct focus group sessions to ascertain the information needs of target groups in their communities. A total of 91% of the 252 attendees confirmed the importance of knowledge sharing among library and information practitioners. One librarian at the training commended: “Sharing the new ideas, knowledge and skills gained will equip other librarians to be in a better position to provide good quality services. This will also give them opportunity to have sense of belonging to the skilled/ informed and serve with pride.”

The new ideas and concepts shared that had an impact on the trainees include the establishment of library focus groups; the collection of impact data as a tool for advocacy; storytelling; alignment of statistics gathering with regard to the LIN Sustainable Development Goals and SAs National Development Plan. The general feeling amongst the MLO trainees was summed up in the words of one trainee: “I would like to thank the NLSA for bringing the course to us. It was inspiring. The course made me love my job (all) over again.”

3. Core ICT Compentence Training
   Librarians participating in the MLO Project are expected to effectively use the electronic devices and equipment at their libraries which have been provided by the Project and also to promote the devices and equipment to the benefit of communities they serve.

For this reason, the training courses offered to librarians introduced them to the electronic environment in which the technology operates. Course modules on core competencies included desktop and mobile devices, email, social networking, web technologies, Internet, digital wellness, user training and informal instruction on public access technology.

4. Core Interpersonal Competency Training
   Library staff are given the opportunity to hone their interpersonal and library management skills with modules on Communication and Collaboration, Ethics and Values, Customer Service, Marketing, Report Writing, and Project Management.