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It was indeed an honour, as President of the Fiji Library Association, to be asked to write for *Front Line*. I have been active in FLA for the last five years as a Council Member, Vice-President in 1992, and now President. I have managed the Pacific Information Centre at the University of the South Pacific Library in Suva (Fiji) since 1989. Before that I was head of cataloguing at the Solomon Islands National Library.

Colleagues in Australia probably think about libraries and librarianship in the South Pacific in terms of remoteness, lack of trained staff, or poor collections. So it might come as a shock to visit the USP library, or attend the FLA biennial convention. Yes, there are people who care about libraries and librarianship. Yes, there are libraries, not all architect-designed, but they are there.

Library education or training as we know it, is the key. In the twenty years since the first library course was established in Fiji, many developments have taken place in the area of training at a regional level. Those who graduated from the first Fiji Library Certificate course came from Fiji and elsewhere in the region, and formed a dedicated core of para-professionals in the South Pacific, many of them now heading libraries.

The Certificate developed into the USP Certificate in Librarianship in 1981, offered as a distance education course, and by the end of 1992, in just over ten years, close to 200 people had successfully completed it. The Certificate filled the need for basic training for para-professionals and became the base qualification in a number of countries for entry into the library profession. Increasingly though, people began to want something between the Certificate and the only other option, an overseas graduate diploma or degree-level

course. In 1990, with help from Canada, the USP Diploma in Library/Information Studies was launched, replacing the Certificate course.

The Diploma is a University program and so can be a step towards a degree at the University. Twenty-five students from Fiji and the region enrolled for the course in the first year. The following year, in 1991, it was offered only as a distance education program, and more than one hundred students throughout the region are currently taking part. Since last year FLA has offered scholarships funded by donations from overseas and extensive fundraising locally, to students of the Diploma Course in Fiji and within the region.

Many would like to reinstate the earlier Certificate program as an entry point to begin library studies. As well, a degree program has been mooted, but for now, library schools in Australia are mainly used for professional level studies.

As library training has strengthened, so have the libraries and the services they offer. Fiji, of course, has by far the largest number of libraries in the region, more than two hundred at the last count. Many of the other countries in the region are small island nations, with few libraries or trained personnel. As these countries develop, the need for well-developed library and information centres will increase, especially school and special libraries.

Computers have made a significant impact on the library and information world. With the exceptions of the libraries of the USP and the South Pacific Commission, other countries in the region have lagged behind in technological advancement. There is insufficient training for users of these technologies, and there appears to be

A partnership of Maori and Pakeha must work together in matters of ownership, conservation, guardianship, and the issues of equity: literacy, access, education, training for librarianship.

an inadequate structure for information management. Some major databases are now accessible, but to only a relatively few users in the region. A major concern facing library associations and governments in the region today is how to make these resources more readily available.

Library associations in general should play a strong role in supporting library development and training. However, here in the South Pacific, they are not always able to play a supportive role. Four associations exist, of which the Fiji Library Association is by far the strongest with a record membership of 170 this year, including some overseas members. And yet this figure by no means reflects the total number of 'librarians' (professionals and para-professionals) in the country. This year the Association has tried to attract more members by introducing new activities, encouraging active participation, and assuring members they get value for money. There is a constant need for fund-raising activities just to survive.

The other three associations, in Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, have fewer than fifty members each. Often there are just not enough people involved or interested in libraries to sustain association activities. All three associations are still young but each one has promoted National Library Week in their respective countries.

The FLA is now in its twenty-first year, and this year had its fourteenth National Library Week. A Committee is busy preparing guidelines for writing standards for libraries in Fiji, which could also be used by libraries in the region. A great deal has happened in the twenty years since library training first started, and we look forward to increased numbers and growing professionalism.

Ni sa bula to you all, from members of the Fiji Library Association. ■