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Library Legislation in the Developing Territories of Africa

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Library legislation varies considerably in different countries. It may make the provision of public libraries permissive or compulsory, it may make them the responsibility of the state, regional or local government or a combination of two of them, it may allow libraries to be subsidised by direct or indirect taxes, by local rates or by subscription. Earliest legislation in connection with public libraries was probably in the early nineteenth century—one of the most quoted acts of government support being the proclamation of the 20th March, 1818, by Lord Charles Somerset, Governor of the Cape in South Africa at the time. Somerset directed that the proceeds of a gauging charge of one Rdr. on each cask of wine passing through the Cape Town market should be used to create a fund for the formation of a public library. But it was from the middle of the nineteenth century that the most progress was made, despite varying amounts of opposition in certain countries against what was thought to be unnecessary pandering to the needs of the working classes. Some of the earliest legislation allowed only for the provision of buildings—no books, no staff, and even in what are recognised today as developed states, improved legislation is still being passed.

Libraries have now become recognised as an essential part of education, and the need for legislation to ensure that where they are established they should be properly supported has become a recognised fact internationally. The Unesco Public Library Manifesto states that "As a democratic institution, operated by the people for the people, the public library should be established and maintained *under clear authority of law* "

In 1953 the Public Libraries Section of the International Federation of Library Associations prepared a working paper on the Development of Public Library Services, and I should like to quote the appropriate sections which deal with legislation:

The author is Unesco library expert, Colombo, Ceylon.

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