Foreword

This book is a collection of papers by 23 authors focusing on various aspects of information needs and information-seeking behavior of users in developing countries. In the preface, Mohammed Nassar Al-Suqri, Linda L. Lillard, and Naifa Eid Saleem, the editors of the book, highlight a major need for this book. Their main concern is that there is a lack of research on information needs and information seeking behaviors of users in the non-Western world.

Although there is a substantial body of research on the information needs and information-seeking behavior of users and a number of established theories and models, most of the studies have been conducted and theories and models developed in the English-speaking developed countries. The editors of this book question the applicability of these models and theories in the developing world and believe that they do not reflect the nuances of cultural context and different ways of thinking and behaving. However, the importance of contextual factors in information behavior has been highlighted by several authors, including the characteristics of the information seeker and the nature of their environment. This suggests that local conditions might have a significant impact on information behavior, and information needs and information seeking behavior may be different in the developed and developing world.

The editors of this book are concerned that library and information professionals in the developing countries lack a robust evidence base for designing products and services that fit real user needs and face difficulties in determining how to prioritize their already limited resources to maximize their value and return on investment. Users in developing countries face particular barriers and constraints in information seeking that are not generally experienced in more developed countries. In addition, there is also a need for research into the challenges and opportunities offered by the new digital and social media within the developing country context. Thus, a paucity of empirical studies focusing on information behavior influences negatively the development of high quality library and information services that are crucial for professional and personal development as well as for economic and social development, and effective participation of developing countries in the global economy.

Therefore this book is of utmost importance for offering a variety of perspectives and examples of research in the developing country context. The book brings together research on the information needs and information seeking behaviors of various groups of users in developing countries, and the ways in which the library and information professionals in these countries are adapting to the changing information environment. Twenty three authors attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of key issues relating to information needs and information seeking behavior in developing countries and challenges that library and information professionals need to address in order to play an effective role in designing and delivering of library and information services and facilitating and supporting personal
and professional as well as socio-economic development. The book also provides practical guidance and information to inform the design and delivery of library and information science curricula as well as library products and services.

The book contains 14 chapters, each covering a different issue or perspective of information needs and information seeking behavior in developing countries, or discussing the challenges being faced by library and information professionals and how they are being addressed. A variety of countries and regions are covered in this book; for example, the Arab Gulf states, various African countries, Venezuela, Uruguay, Mongolia, and Romania.

The editors provide a good overview of the chapters of this book in the Preface. The topics discussed in this book include the changing nature of the information environment and its implications for library and information science in developing countries in general and the Arab Gulf states in particular; the ways in which library and information science schools in developing countries can contribute towards promoting the integration of culture, tradition, and technology to support socio-economic development; the influence of social networking and Library 2.0 in providing access to information and knowledge sharing in Africa; an examination of multilingual information users’ information behaviors when using a Cross Language Information Retrieval system in the framework of Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process model; an examination of various elements of an environmental context using the Katz, Levin, and Hamilton model of diffusion of innovations; the applicability of the Ellis Model of Information Seeking Behavior to the scientific community of Venezuela; the needs and behaviors of real and potential information users in Uruguay; the importance of digitization in improving access to Indigenous Intellectual Resources in Sub-Saharan Africa; a comparison of information needs and information seeking behavior of entrepreneurs in developing and developed countries; the information-seeking behavior of social science faculty in developing nations; an examination of information seeking behavior in Mongolian scholarly communities; the information behavior of older adults in Romania; contextual factors influencing information seeking behavior of social scientists and the impact of disciplinary traditions in non-western environments on patterns of information seeking and retrieval, and the information needs and information-seeking behavior of undergraduate students in Oman.

The book reflects different perspectives and research approaches as well as research styles and therefore offers good food for thought about the challenges and opportunities in developing countries. This book is a good reading material to library and information science professionals as well as to students of library and information science interested in various aspects of information needs and information-seeking behavior of users in developing countries. However, the primary target audiences for the book are library and information science professionals in developing countries.

Sirje Virkus
Institute of Information Studies, Tallinn University, Estonia

Sirje Virkus is a Professor of Information Science at the Institute of Information Studies (IIS) at Tallinn University. She has worked at TLU since 1985; she has been the head of the Department of Information Studies and vice dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences. She is a coordinator of the Erasmus Mundus Master programme “Digital Library Learning” (DILL) (2007-2013) at TLU and teaches information and knowledge management within this programme. Since October 2012 she is a head of the Centre for Information and Knowledge Management. She has an extensive experience working with educational innovation and research in the higher education sector in Estonia. She has been taking part in more than 30 national and international
projects, aiming at methodological research, e-learning, course development and networking. Her research interests are focused on the development of information-related competencies, ICT innovation in education and internationalisation. She received her PhD from Manchester Metropolitan University (“Development of Information-related Competencies in European Higher Open and Distance Learning: An Exploration of Contextual Factors”). She has written more than 150 research publications and is a frequent speaker at international conferences. She belongs to the editorial board of several international journals (e.g. Information Research; Education for Information; Library Review; Nordic Journal of Information Literacy in Higher Education; Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries; QQML; Journal of the Bangladesh Association of Young Researchers: JBAYR) and book series Knowledge & Information: Studies in Information Science. She has been involved as a member of expert teams in evaluating higher education in Greece and Croatia. She is a member of the Board of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU). In 2012 she was elected as an Erasmus Ambassador in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Erasmus programme by the European Commission.