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# Introduction

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The current state of poor access to knowledge and information in Africa is symptomatic of the continent's widespread political instability. The domino effect of this instability and poor access to knowledge and information is the economic paralysis of Africa and the concomitant negative social impact.

Yet, the political events of recent years bring new optimism for the growth and development of a beleaguered continent. The slow though constant end of dictatorships and the rise of a new democratic order on the continent bring hope for the ending of the downward spiral and the creation of new energies for an upward swing. Optimists view the new African citizen as one who is knowledgeable and has unhindered access to information to enhance his or her contribution to the growth and development of the continent.

African library and information services will be a latecomer to the developed, twenty-first-century information provision and dissemination environment. But when it does arrive, it will bring unprecedented value and impact on society, an enhanced contribution to sustainable development of African countries, and extraordinary opportunities for librarianship in Africa.

This issue of *Library Trends*, "Library and Information Services in Africa in the Twenty-First Century," challenges the legacy of colonial library and information provision in Africa and determines the new imperatives that will contribute to the development of the continent through opening up and increasing access to knowledge and information. Eminent authors on African librarianship, including professors Peter Johan Lor, Kingo Mchombu, and Paul Sturges, have contributed to the issue, bringing in-depth insights, highlighting challenges for librarianship in Africa, and

probing new ways for the growth and development of Africa commensurate with improved access to knowledge and information.

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