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Libraries for development: partnerships, ICT and making public libraries relevant to communities in Tanzania and Namibia

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Abstract:

It has been observed by some library and information professionals (Mcharazo, 2000) that traditional approaches to providing library, information and communication technology (ICT) services in Africa have never been successful in properly addressing the problems and needs of the communities. This is due to, inter alia, inadequate resources, failure to understand community information needs and failure to realise the significance of ICT in bringing about development.

It is a known fact that libraries all over the world are struggling for survival as they compete for funds with various equally important necessities. However, in Africa this struggle is more visible since the scarce funds have to be divided between necessities like the provision of health, education and for instance dealing with the fight against HIV/AIDS or the eradication of malaria.

Public libraries are people's universities. However, if these institutions continue to grapple for resources, the poor or the average man on the street served by these Universities will be left out in the cold. Despite the continuous struggle for resources, African public librarians believe strongly that public libraries are powerful agents in bridging the digital divide.

The recent establishment of a partnership between Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB), Namibian Library and Archives Services (NLAS), Finnish Library Association (FLA) and Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs could not have come at a better time. This partnership is not only going to provide an insight on how a collaborative project addresses issues of access to ICT and relevance for the purpose of serving and satisfying communities and library staff in Tanzania, Namibia and Finland. It will also provide the needed resources to spearhead a programme that can become a National programme beyond the partnership.

This paper discusses and analyses some of the major implications for Tanzania and Namibia and elsewhere in the developing countries as far as ICT and information provision practices are concerned. The Project is expected to provide a rich experience to even other countries in the developing world which face similar ICT and information provision issues.

BACKGROUND

The IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for Development (2001) clearly explains the purposes of libraries, or rather public libraries as to "provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and group for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure...they have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas and opinions." Raju and Raju (2010), when narrating the South Africa public library experience, saw public libraries as essential pillars of democracy. The IFLA/UNESCO (1994) Public Library manifesto goes further, in its twelve mission statement, to state that public libraries are required, amongst other things, to ensure access for citizens of all sorts of community information, provide adequate information services to local enterprises, associations and interest groups and to facilitate the development of information and computer literacy. The use and promotion of ICT by public libraries and communities also need to be emphasised. Onojaefe and Leaning (2007) have observed that:

> "Small businesses must use a combination of technical and managerial skills to develop and deploy technology effectively, and to enhance partnerships... Investment in information and communication technologies is seen as a key issue, not only for efficiency reasons but for strategic reasons as well..."

In many developing countries, Tanzania and Namibia included, after relaxation

of economic policies, a number of SMEs are mushrooming. Most of these SMEs staffs have a very low economic base that does not allow them to attend colleges in order to gain skills on how to operate their small businesses. In Tanzania, for example, the SME Development Policy (categorically states that "the situation of SMEs in Tanzania is that of limited access to information caused by lack of awareness on its importance and the prohibitive costs of acquiring the same" (United Republic of Tanzania: Ministry of Industry and Trade, (2002)). Public libraries are required to support them by providing relevant information and ICT. Public libraries need to do the same with other groups such as unemployed, disadvantaged, farmers, miners and those facing health challenges.

The above statements from IFLA and UNESCO are important in providing the necessary standards. The actual practice, however, requires more than issuance of statements. It requires resources, commitments and prioritisation.

In many African countries, there has been some improvement in academic and special library sectors. The situation in public library sector has not changed much. Analysing the literature on public librarianship, Issak (2000) observed that:

> "the situation of public libraries in Africa is deteriorating, because factors such as the economic crisis, the lack of definition of the role of libraries, an excess of centralisation in management of libraries, and lack of human resources able to run the libraries professionally…

The above observation suggests that it may take some time for many public libraries in Africa to realise the IFLA and UNESCO ideals and be truly people's universities. At the macro-level this means public libraries are rendered unsuccessful in supporting economic development, whereas at the micro-level limited provision of reading resources, inadequate skills amongst librarians, decrease in levels of literacy amongst citizens and lack or inadequate provision of ICT resources are the realities of the present day libraries.

PARTNERS

The Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB) is a parastatal organization under the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. Although it is lacking adequate funds, the emphasis of the government has nevertheless been developing education and, closely connected to it, library services. Therefore, a network of libraries, covering the whole country has been created, and there are many librarians with either a diploma or degree level education in library science working with TLSB. However, most of them have been lacking exposure to

modern librarianship with versatile ICT services in practice. The strategy of TLSB emphasizes the new approach about contributing the knowledge based society, and this gives a solid ground for the cooperation ventures with institutions and organisations in and outside Tanzania.

Namibia Library and Archives Service (NLAS), a Directorate of the Namibian Ministry of Education, is a partner which has had a big task in transforming the library services to serve the majority of people in the post-apartheid era in Namibia. The Directorate was included in the Ministry of Education´s Education Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) in 2006. This inclusion saw to it that libraries became part of the ICT in Education programme, and all the community libraries in Namibia were to be connected to the internet by 2013. Consequently, NLAS has gradually started providing computer and internet connectivity to the community libraries, but it was soon discovered that the libraries are managed by staff whose professional training is not adequate to meet the demands of the community members for information and ICT use. Therefore, this Project is a right project which came at the right time for Namibia. It will give a boost and help NLAS to develop particularly the training and in that way continue its services on its own in the future. Improving human resources will turn libraries into modern information centres, and it is to be expected that functional centres which have proved to be useful for the community, will attract more funds for the service.

The Finnish Library Association (FLA), established in 1910, is a non-governmental organization promoting libraries in Finland. It is advocating for library cooperation, improving the level of professional education of librarians, increasing the state support for libraries and international connections. It has about 2 000 personal members, most working in public libraries. It receives its funding mainly from the membership fees, publications, organizing seminars as well as from the state and other public support. International cooperation has always been part of the functions of FLA, and the present cooperation with TLSB and NLAS, financially supported by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, reflects the willingness of the members of FLA to continue the work in the field of development cooperation.

DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

There are many contrasting definitions of the term development. Some definitions echoes leftist, others rightist ideologies. Perhaps the most neutral definition of the term is provided by (Wikipedia, 2012) thus:

"It is about much more than the rise or fall of national

incomes... It is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests... Human development is thus about much more than economic growth, which is only a means – if a very important one – of enlarging people's choices..."

Libraries and information are important tools in bringing about human development, in the sense that agenda for development needs to be well articulated using available information and well communicated to the concerned parties. Hamilton-Pennell (2008) has observed that "public libraries are natural partners in local economic development efforts. They are usually located in a community and provide a variety of resources designed to foster human growth and development, promote early literacy and school readiness, and develop workforce capacity".

Tanzania's development agenda is well defined in its Vision 2025 document (United Republic of Tanzania, Tanzania development Vision 2025, 1999). The essence of this document lies in the fact that it seeks to address issues of high quality livelihood, peace, stability and unity; good governance, having a well educated and learning society and a competitive economy capable of producing sustainable growth and shared benefits.

The Republic of Namibia Vision 2030, (2004)) reflects many similarities with Tanzania's one: it seeks to have a prosperous and industrialised Namibia, developed by human resources, enjoying piece, harmony and political stability. What is even more remarkable in this Vision is the recognition and urge to turn Namibia into a knowledge-based economy.

As far as this Project is concerned, the main development objective is to promote the knowledge based society and use of information technology at libraries, so as to render better and relevant services to the residents of the recipient countries. The Finnish Library Association will assist Namibia Library and Archives Services and Tanzania Library Services Board to extend the services of the knowledge based society to the grassroots level, give tools for democratic participation, promote literacy, give information about health issues and support the economic empowerment in the local communities by e.g. assisting SMEs, especially disadvantaged groups such as female entrepreneurs.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATION

Partnerships bring in all sort of positive aspects to partnering organisations. Exchanges of ideas and personnel, financial support and emulation of ideas are but a few things a partnering partner can benefit out of partnership venture. It is for this reason that many developed and developing countries have come up with private – public partnership policies. The Government of Republic of Namibia Civic Organisation Partnership Policy (2005) seeks to bring the Government closer to the people and create partnership opportunities that benefit the Government and civil society. The Walvis Bay Corridor Group, which serves as a service and facilitation body for integrated corridor development and founded with an aim of increasing the utilisation of Walvis Bay corridors via the port of Walvis Bay to and from Southern Africa (Namibian Trade Directory, 2005) is an outcome of this policy. In Tanzania a similar policy exists. The Tanzania's National Public Private Partnership Policy (2009) has brought good things and made it possible to have many collaborative projects – one of the many examples is the partnership between Abbott Fund and the Government of Tanzania that strengthens the country's health care system (Abbot Fund Website, 2011).

Working and planning together with FLA will bring results which are expected to substantially contribute to transforming the TLSB and NLAS services to meet the present-day needs of the customers.

Tanzania, Namibia and Finland differ in size and economic resources. However, Tanzania and Namibia have in their national policies included libraries as access points for ICT services, and the Finnish libraries have long implemented these principles in practice. These factors will form a necessary foundation for a sustainable development of the ICT service provision of the libraries, and even for implementing this Project. Yet, both NLAS and TLSB lack adequate professional training and experience in implementing the tasks of a modern librarianship while Finnish libraries have already gained considerable experience in this field. By sharing this professional knowledge with NLAS and TLSB, FLA can help them to achieve their strategic objectives, particularly in developing the libraries to be learning and information centres that make use of the ICT.

However, the partnership came out of earlier small scale partnership initiatives. Tanzania is a long term development cooperation partner with the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and Namibia has had long and special ties with Finland ever since the 19th century. FLA and Finnish librarians have had close connections and worked together with the library organizations of both of these countries. Knowing each other over a long period will give a good ground for the cooperation and will make many practicalities easier to handle.

In 2002, Haavisto and Karhula (2002) conducted a survey about Namibian

libraries, and produced a report called Namibian libraries – bottlenecks and recommendations to solve them. The work was commissioned by the Namibian Library Council and the Ministry for Basic Education, Sports and Culture (now Ministry of Education). Ms Marjatta Lahti, Project Coordinator of this Project, has worked from 2003 to 2010 with NLAS in the framework of Vantaa – Windhoek project which is part of North – South Programme, administered by the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (AFLRA) and sponsored by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. With the help of this project, an innovative library concept in a suburb of Windhoek has been established. The results have been so positive that NLAS is eager to replicate the model even in its other libraries. The Municipality of Windhoek has a good and keen working relationship with both NLAS and the University of Namibia, and therefore also the personnel of NLAS have closely cooperated with Finnish librarians for many years.   Both Ms Lahti and Ms Sinikka Sipilä (current IFLA President Elect) had close contacts with TLSB during the South African National Congress (ANC) Library Project (Ms Lahti 1985 -1990 and Ms Sipilä 1991-1992) which was based at Morogoro, Tanzania. The project was sponsored by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. TLSB is running both non-graduate Certificate Diploma courses for library workers, and the ANC students participated in these courses. The ANC Library also cooperated with the Regional Library at Morogoro, and through these contacts the ties with TLSB became quite close.

The strength of this Project lies in the fact that it addresses issues of cooperation at both South-South and North-South cooperation levels. It creates an opportunity for library staff in Tanzania and Namibia to have exchange programmes. In 2011 senior staff from NLAS visited Tanzania, and they were impressed by TLSB efforts to establish a public library in every region and district in Tanzania. TLSB senior staff, when visited Namibia, were also impressed by the Katutura Community Library Model in the outskirts of Windhoek. Both parties had learned a lot from the other partner – the true spirit of South-South Cooperation. The Tanzania and Namibia's library staffs, under the project agreement, have an opportunity to also visit Finland. As the public library system in Finland is well developed, this will be an opportunity for colleagues in Tanzania and Namibia to learn new things that can be used as points of emulation.

ANATOMY OF THE PROJECT

Aim

The aim of the project is to promote the knowledge based society and use of information technology in libraries, so as to render better services to the residents of the recipient countries. By supporting the knowledge based society, the Project is automatically addressing also a number of other issues, e.g. bridging the digital divide, improving living conditions of people, supporting education,

including literacy, and promoting the skills of the civic society.

Extending the services of the knowledge based society to groups of women will particularly improve their skills in the above mentioned fields. The most vulnerable groups of people (unemployed youth, farmers, new literates) who have had a difficulty in accessing ICT services will now have a free access to them. Information on HIV / AIDS and other diseases as well as preventive health methods, made available at the libraries and disseminated to the public, will add knowledge about the health issues. The above goals are in unison of the development goals of the recipient countries, as explained in the earlier paragraphs.

Essential Project Components

The capacity building of the partners will be supported by training the personnel in ICT and information search skills to enable them to teach various non government organization (NGO) groups and individual community members. Decision makers in both countries will be involved to raise their awareness on the role of libraries in supporting national development goals. Workshops will be arranged for the personnel, customers and decision makers, expert help in implementing and training is used and study tours for the personnel arranged.

Benefits

The beneficiaries of this project are direct to all countries, Tanzania, Finland and Namibia: the library personnel as well as the decision makers of the partner countries. The library personnel will receive training in various forms, and some of them will even become trainers who will train others (a cascade method). When the library personnel are better educated and have proper resources, better library services can be rendered to all the community members. Efficient services will attract more people to use the services, and in so doing, better their lives. Particular attention will be paid to the following groups: Small and Medium size Entrepreneurs (SMEs), mainly women; vulnerable groups; new literates; HIV/AIDS and other health issues.

The following are to be achieved by the project in Namibia: creation of a sustainable model for ICT access through community libraries; ICT and IT - literacy training skills of 13 library personnel; training in basic ICT literacy and efficient use of internet for 960 people per year in 20 communities, totalling 2880 people by 2014; community members making use of the ICT services of libraries for the purpose of education, economic activities, access to e-governance, communication and access to a variety of information; provision of information resources for SME´s and related organizations; improved open and distance study opportunities have been created at the libraries; decision makers at the

national, regional and local levels have been engaged in identifying user needs and planning improved and sustainable library services. Representatives of regional and local authorities have been involved in project activities through regular reports with feedback sessions and on-site engagement in project activities (e.g. invitations to course opening/evaluation sessions); and a guide about starting and implementing the ICT services at libraries has been compiled.

In Tanzania the following are expected to be attained: creation of a sustainable model for the use of ICT services by public libraries; increase of ICT training skills of the library personnel as it is expected that 80 instructors will train 80 employees of TLSB during the course of the project; increased of numbers of community members that are making use of the ICT services of libraries for the purpose of education, economic activities, access to e-governance, communication and access to a variety of information; improvement of provision of information resources for SME´s and related organizations; engagement of decision makers at the national and regional levels in identifying user needs and planning improved and sustainable library services; involvement of representatives of regional and local authorities project activities through regular reports and on-site engagement in project activities (e.g. invitations to course opening/evaluation sessions); a study has been carried out to analyse the results of the project through impact of library ICT service towards education and economic empowerment; and a guide about starting and implementing the ICT services at libraries has been compiled.

Likely Challenges and Risks

In a Project of this size and magnitude, challenges and risks are likely to show up, and they have been thoroughly discussed and analysed by the partners.

Some of the likely challenges and risks that the Project might face include hesitance of staff to teach customers, and a possibility of a wrong recruitment of ICT instructors resulting in the possibility of his/her leaving the job before the expiry of the project since highly trained ICT staffs are in high demand in Tanzania and Namibia. It was noted that ICT equipment may break down and various technical problems occur, and that the electricity power cuts and faults in the internet connection may create difficulties for executing the services. It was also observed that attempts to steal ICT hardware (e.g. computers and other accessories) may occasionally occur. Furthermore, as the financial administration is conducted both in Finland, Namibia and Tanzania, executing uniform and accurate practices may prove challenging. Different financial years (January – December in Finland, July – June in Namibia and Tanzania) may pose an extra burden. The exchange rate of currency may also change

during the project period, and the proposed time-schedule may prove too short since functions introduced by this project will take some time to root.

Constant ongoing monitoring and evaluation of project activities, and addressing the challenges promptly, has been identified as a tool to remedy the likely challenges and risks.

EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE PROJECT

Expected Outcome

The project is at its infancy stage, but the paper speculates and attempts to articulate its implication and outcomes in the future for the above mentioned countries. The project focuses on promoting the knowledge based society and use of information technology at libraries, so as to render better services to the residents of the recipient countries.

By supporting the knowledge based society, the Project is automatically addressing also a number of other relevant issues: making the public library useful and relevant to our communities, bridging the digital divide, capacity building to library staff, capacity building to library users e.g. SMEs, unemployed and out-of-school youths, new literates, improving living conditions of people, supporting education, including literacy and promoting the skills of the civic society in both Tanzania and Namibia.

It is envisaged that the results achieved in these two countries can be applied as a model even elsewhere. As experience will be gained in countries differing in size and economic wealth, the results will be applicable in a wide context in other countries as well.

Preliminary/ Early Results of the Project

The project came into operations from January 2012. Some of the early/preliminary results of the Project have started to show up. Prior to January 2012, teams of FLA visited Namibia and Tanzania. In Tanzania the, preliminary planning meetings took place between FLA staff and TLSB staff and others. A pilot hands-on-ICT workshop for a few SMEs staff was conducted at the National Central Library, in Dar es Salaam. In Windhoek, staff from FLA were involved in providing training to community members of Katutura Community Resource Centre. Staff of NLAS also had an opportunity to visit Finland. FLA managed to invite senior staff of TLSB to visit IFLA conference in Gothenburg, Sweden in 2010, and had discussions on how the Project can be developed. All these characterise the important and positive features of South-North Cooperation.

Other preliminary results that characterise features of South-South Cooperation involved the tours of familiarisation between Namibia and Tanzania. First senior staff of NLAS visited Tanzania, and later on TLSB's senior staff visited Namibia. The tours were enriching, for they provided staff of both countries on new experiences of public library operations and other educational aspects. There were a number of experiences which were educational and points of emulation. It is worth noting here that so far a quite number of library staffs have attended computer courses in both countries: Dar es Salaam and Morogoro for Tanzania and in Namibia from Windhoek to Oshana, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshikoto, etc.

CONCLUSION

The paper has shown challenges faced by public libraries in Tanzania and Namibia. Some of these challenges include limited funding, inadequate number and training of staff (particularly in Namibia), inadequate reading resources, lack or inadequate ICT, failure to reach the grass-root in the rural areas and failure to address the needs of their communities. In fact, many of the challenges stated herein are faced by many public and other libraries in developing countries. It is precisely for these reasons, public libraries need to re-assess their role so that they come up with more active approach to providing and serving their communities. They need to be seen relevant. Issak (2000) notes that:

> "African librarians need to rethink what a public library
> is all about, I terms of what is needed, what will be
> used, and what is sustainable in Africa... public libraries
> in Africa need start to be more aggressive and
> introduce services that are attractive to the users..."

The Project Team, that involved librarians and other ICT professionals from the three countries were aware of these issues and challenges. They were determined to change the traditional public library provision and practices by focussing more efforts on imparting skills to communities by using modern technology (ICT). This could easily be realised by the development of useful partnerships: south-south and north-south. The outcome of this is the successful acquisition of project funds, ICT capacity building for library staff, introduction of ICT in libraries and, ultimately, capacity building for communities in terms of making maximum use of public libraries in Tanzania and Namibia. It is, certainly, a win-win situation.

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