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Non governmental organisations (NGOs) and library development in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The state of libraries in Africa has not been the best for quite a long time. Libraries have often been one of the first casualties of budget cuts of governments suffering from downward economic fortunes. NGOs have come into African libraries to assist in strengthening them to perform the functions expected of them. The roles NGOs played from their first appearance on the African library scene, what they have done and are doing now in the creation and dissemination of information are discussed. Mention is made of the activities of some major ones. An analysis is made of activities of the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) and Electronic Information for Libraries Network (elFL.net) which are prominent NGOs currently working with some major African libraries to buttress the fact that NGOs are partners in development and that there is the need to explore and strengthen such partnerships for the good of African libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Most constitutions of countries guarantee societal and economic freedoms. This include the individual's right to be informed in order to participate meaningfully in decision making fora. There are some institutions which exist for the common good of the citizenry which must be funded by the tax payer through the government, and also from private funds, most of which are channelled through Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). One of these is Libraries.

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Government funding for libraries is dwindling gradually the world over. This situation has made libraries to launch out for alternative funding. A survey by Boadi and Harvard-Williams (1984) showed that many libraries in Ghana (and it may be true for several other African countries) have had a reduction in funding as a result of economic crunches.[1]

African libraries are poorly funded and a one time Vice Chancellor, Professor I. Addae-Mensah (1999) stated that "we would like to provide adequate funds for our libraries but our hands are tied"[2] This is the extent of low support for libraries even at the university level.

Mchombu (1991) also stated that "foreign aid by itself may not be the ultimate solution to the problems currently afflicting African librarianship, if African will power is missing".[3] This assertion has come to support Hailu (1989) when he stated that "facilities and services developed through bilateral and international aid usually collapse after the withdrawal of such support, since the local commitment to sustain them does not exist. It is not unusual to notice expensive equipment including PCs, photocopiers, microfiche cameras and readers collecting dust at a library for want of a spare part that costs a few dollars"[4] This is an honest observation. This problem which has been reoccurring is the lack of sustenance of projects in some African libraries when donors leave. Governments/Institutions rarely take over and continue to develop the libraries when the projects end. The best way of showing appreciation and recognition for the efforts and activities of NGOs is to take over and further develop the services being offered after they leave.

It is worthy of note here that information has become such a precious resource equal in importance to the traditionally known resources of land, labour and capital that ".… the fate of modern nations in all essentials is connected with their capacity to develop and exploit it… [that] in future, countries that do not develop this capacity will be left behind in the cultural, scientific and economic development… [and] will neither be partners in the global production of information nor will they contribute meaningfully to the common future of civilisation"[5] (Berghahl, 1989). This is the situation in Africa that NGOs have come in to assist to correct.

Most NGOs involved in African library development come from the developed world, which is well advanced in modern means of information creation and dissemination. They are therefore very useful in the transfer of technology – infrastructure, manpower development, technical expertise - to Africa which is what is needed to improve library services.

However, some negative observations have been made about the activities of NGOs in Africa that, sometimes:
* they do not provide what is needed but what they have.
* they provide outdated equipment and expect the recipient to accept them.
* they use the recipient's premises as a laboratory to test equipment which they intend to replicate.
* they do not involve the recipient in the actual planning and execution of the service so it collapses as soon as they leave the scene.
* they bring their technical expertise and neglect the development of local technical base.
* there are delays in decision making since these are taken at the Head Office of the NGO which is often out of the recipient's country.

These observations have not been subjected to thorough study and analysis so their veracity still hangs in the air. The fact still remains, based on their contributions to current library development in various countries in Africa, that NGOs:

1.   Assist many librarians to act as navigators by using ICT to acquire useful and great amount of information at a great speed out of the seas of electronic information sources for their users. Hitherto, this at best was done manually from hard print copy material at a slow pace and a small scale.

2.   Assist libraries to access current, relevant information, print and electronic, and especially electronic, through negotiation for reduced costs of licences and in some cases actually securing funding, for the resources.

3.   Assist in the provision of increased access to information which boosts the amount and quality of research among academia and researchers, hitherto limited, since libraries could not afford high subscription costs of academic journals.

4.   Set the stage and act as launch pad for the establishment of a service as they often come in with the technology, initial funding, infrastructure and training which enable the recipient to have a comfortable period to absorb the service and then take over from there.

5.   Provide facilities and funding over a period which recipients cannot afford.

NGOs IN AFRICAN LIBRARIES

Some NGOs have specific countries in Africa that they assist. A good number of them whose activities cut across several African countries are discussed here.

Books, Journals and CD Roms

NGOs first came into Africa with the distribution of books and journals, new and used, and CD Roms to all types of libraries. The NGOs solicited for books and journals from Publishers, Libraries, Associations and Individuals in the North, sorted, boxed and shipped to their offices or partners in Africa to distribute. NGOs like, **Books for Africa**[6]; **Book Aid International**[7]; **Brother's Brother of Pittsburgh, USA and McArthur Foundation,**[8] ; **International Campus Booklink, Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC), American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)**[9]; **African Studies Association (ASA)**[10]; **ADIFLOR, Agridoc, AESCO, BIBLIONEF, CODE, CTA, ICTP/TWAS, Sabre Foundation, Uni-Book, Oxfam**[11] are of great service in this area.

Other Services

There are some NGOs which are involved in the provision and dissemination of information materials in addition to other services.

Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) supports workshops on library development, consortium building, electronic information and internet management and web page design.[12]

Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) among other support services, provides volunteer library/information scientists to work, from small school/college libraries to fairly sophisticated information services (Murden, 1986)[13]

Carnegie Corporation of New York was set up in 1920s to support the building of self-reliant individuals and institutions in British Colonies and Dominions to strengthen access to and use of knowledge to participate fully in national, regional and global development. Since 1999 it has concentrated on support to Commonwealth Africa to improve access to knowledge and information exchange between Africa and the rest of the world. Specifically for libraries, it focuses on developing national libraries, revitalising selected public libraries and developing academic libraries in universities which receive its support under the university strengthening programme. Its aim in this bid is to have excellent model, national, public and academic libraries meeting the quality and standards of IFLA. Carnegie Corporation of New York is currently very active in South Africa, Botswana, Kenya and Ghana.[14]

Other Organisations

Some organisations are governmental but have been and are offering assistance that NGOs provide so they are worth mentioning here because of their great service to library development in Africa.

British Council offers long and short courses and overseas library visits to librarians; **DFID** supports provision of information and **Overseas Development Administration (ODA)** makes book presentations to libraries. They are of British Government origin.[15]

Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) of the Danish Government is actively involved in library development in the areas of equipment supply, internet connectivity, manpower training, interlibrary loans and document delivery in some countries in West, East and Southern Africa.[15]

Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and **Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC)** are also involved in Library development in Africa.[16]

These NGOs undoubtedly provide services that are lacking in African libraries. How best they satisfy or meet the desired goals of recipients is what we look at next.

HALLMARKS FOR PARTNERSHIP

It is necessary to have in mind that each NGO has its own goals and methodologies so it is not advisable to have a fixed yardstick for measuring good quality aid programmes. In spite of this, it is necessary to present some strategies which have achieved good results. Some of these are:

1. Joint preparation of project proposals as well as decision making at every stage of the project.

2. Project being within an institutional frame work with the involvement of a good number of members from the benefiting party.

3. Capacity building for all the aspects of the project being an important part of the project.

4. Project budget having built in funds to supplement the income of the people involved to ensure their full commitment and also for the acquisition of facilities for smooth communication (email, fax, telephone) and training to operate them.

5. Holding of meetings at regular intervals to evaluate the project and plan future activities.

6. Measures put in place to gradually move the project from aid to partnership and eventual ownership.[17]

In addition to the above the following points may also serve as hallmarks towards good partnership.

1. Setting of realistic and achievable goals with the existing institutional, local and national plans and policies in mind.

2. Promotion of a more efficient use of resources.

3. Provision of a method/system for improved joint efforts and initiatives to address the problems of the recipient partner.

4. Needs assessment and identification of priority areas for cooperation.

5. Development of a spirit of joint ownership and responsibility for the project which will engender true commitment and support which will produce long term sustainability.

6. Provision of opportunities for the establishment of links and networks with related organisations and institutions in the North and South.

7. Need to carry out training programmes mainly in the project country to ensure that several people are trained for continuity.

8. Strengthening of capacity for collection and active dissemination of information.

9. Putting in place monitoring and assessment mechanisms to ensure that stated goals are achieved. Need to have both internal and external evaluation mechanisms at different and clearly stated stages of the project.

These hallmarks suggest that librarians and NGOs have to move together at every stage of the project to achieve optimum results. This means librarians will have to move extra steps outside their library defined roles to take on additional roles and use both roles to improve their library and its services. Even when NGO support ceases, the acquired additional roles will help in negotiations with internal institutional set ups to ensure adequate funding. The

days of a strictly 'library- focused - non -integration –of- other- roles' librarian are over.

In reference to these hallmarks as measuring rods, the two NGOs actively involved in the creation and dissemination of information in African Libraries, which come up to the measure and which the author is familiar with, are **INASP** and **elFL.net.**

INASP (International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications)

INASP was established in 1992 by the International Council for Science (ICSU) as a programme of the Committee for the Dissemination of Scientific Information (CDSI). It is a cooperative network of partners. The network is open to interested organisations and individuals. Current partners are: British Medical Association, Carnegie Corporation of New York, ICSU/CDSI, CTA, DANIDA, Department for International Development (DFID) French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Academy of Science USA, NORAD, Reuters, Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, SIDA, UNESCO, WHO.

It has a mission to enhance the flow of information within and between countries, especially those with less developed systems of publication and dissemination.

The objectives of INASP are:

1.   to map, support and strengthen existing activities promoting access to and dissemination of scientific and scholarly information and knowledge.

2.   to identify, encourage and support new initiatives that will increase local publication and general access to quality scientific and scholarly literature.

3.   to promote in-country capacity building in information production, organisation, access and dissemination.

These objectives are carried out in the following Activities and Services and Links and Resources.

ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

1.   Advice and support for literature publication and dissemination in response to and in partnership with institutions in developing and transitional countries. (Advisory and liaison services).

2.   Acts as facilitation and focal point for organisations North and South, to improve access to reliable information for health professionals in developing and transitional countries. (INASP – Health).

3.   Initiative on networking organisations and networks in rural development which includes activities for the dissemination of research results within and between developing countries (South – South)

4.   Library support programmes which include:
     a.   promoting the development of African University Libraries including institutional support to professional associations (SCAULWA and SCANUL-

ECS)

b. access to information and knowledge for the public in Africa where INASP acts as advisor to Carnegie Corporation and its partners in their Public Library Revitalisation programme.

LINKS AND RESOURCES

1. INASP Health Links

2. Access to information – This include **Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI)**; **Publishing Support Initiatives – African Journal Publishing** (both print and electronic); and **practical manual** and **handbooks** for workshop facilitations.[18]

3. ICT Training.

SPECIFIC SUPPORT FOR LIBRARIES

What INASP is directly contributing to and is very effective in Library development in Africa are:

1. **PERI**
    This is a four component programme which supports capacity building of research. They are:

    a. **Information delivery** through subscription to electronic information sources from several journal databases as well as interlibrary lending and document delivery services.

    b. **Dissemination of national and regional research results** through the African Journals OnLine (AJOL) which lists abstracts and TOCs of some African Journals. Full text articles will soon be available on AJOL

    c. **Enhancing ICT skills** is made available through the single-site in-country training of library personnel in the use of the internet and its many functions in information retrieval including search engines and subject gateways. What is known among PERI beneficiaries as "Travelling workshops" are also used to impart this knowledge, build local skills and a critical mass of trainees for effective follow up support and training impact.

    d. **Strengthening local publishing** is the training and facilities provided to editors of academic/research journals to enable them publish high quality research results of Africans and to sustain the publications.[19]

2. **STRENGTHENING PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

    With funding from DANIDA, INASP has supported the 2 regional university /national library associations in sub-Saharan Africa to strengthen their capacities to assist and promote the development of African university libraries.[20] They are:

a.   **The Standing Conference of African University Libraries, Western Area (SCAULWA)** which was resuscitated in 1999 after ten years of dormancy. INASP has supported its 3 Conferences – 1999, 2001 and 2003, all held in Ghana; publication of 2 issues a year Newsletter since 2001; publication of the proceedings of the 3 Conferences; publication of two Directories in 2002 – A Directory of Libraries in West Africa and Directory of State of ICT in University Libraries in West Africa; commissioning of two feasibility studies for establishment of university library consortia in Senegal and Nigeria in 2002.

b.   **The Standing Conference of African National and University Libraries in Eastern Central and Southern Africa. (SCANUL – ECS)** which holds regular biennial conferences. It publishes a Newsletter twice a year funded by INASP. SCANUL – ECS and INASP have jointly published 4 case studies and a Report on Library Consortia in the SCANUL – ECS Region.

c.   INASP supported the attendance of librarians to the 2nd and 3rd meetings of the **AAU Adhoc Committee on University Libraries** in 1999 and 2001 respectively. It also supported a **Conference on African University Libraries in the 21st century** organised by AAU in Accra, Ghana in 2001 and sponsored the Secretary of the AAU Library Committee to the SCAULWA and SCANUL – ECS Conferences in 2001 and 2002.

d.   INASP supported the attendance of **9 public librarians from African countries** to the **SCECSAL Conference in 2002** and **4 and 10 public librarians to the WALA Conferences in 2001 and 2003** respectively. At these Conferences (SCECSAL 2002 and WALA 2003) it had a **day's workshop on Reader Development and Reading Promotion.**

e.   Support to some **National Library Associations** to **publish at least 2 Newsletters** annually.

3.   **PUBLIC LIBRARY REVITALISATION PROGRAMME**

        In this programme, INASP has been working with National and Public libraries in Africa to support them in their aim to provide access to information and knowledge[21] by

a.   Promoting in-country capacity building in information access and dissemination which is being done through workshops on use of ICT and Internet; publication of the Directory – Book Chain in Africa – which gives information about publishers, booksellers and various other players in the book community.

b.   Encouraging, strengthening and supporting fledgling and new initiatives that will assist library and information professionals to meet the challenges of their service. These have come in the form of meetings and workshops where proposals have been developed into strategies and forwarded to the libraries to comment on and propose additional areas where partnership will be useful.

c.   providing technical assistance and research when requests are made to them for programmes through sharing of experiences and facilitation of initiatives.

4.   **OTHER SERVICES**

a.   **Clearing House** – This was established in 1998 to collect, repackage and disseminate information related to management of academic libraries in Africa[22].

b.   **University Library Statistics** – a pilot statistical collection project started in 1997 from 3 African university libraries out of 7 intended. This resulted in the publication of a book - Annual Library Statistics 1997/98. AAU intends to continue the pilot project[23].

eIFL.net (Electronic Information for Libraries Network)

eIFL.net was established in 1999 as an initiative of the Open Society Institute (OSI) a private grant – making and operating foundation which is part of the Soros Foundation network. In 2002, eIFL became an independent foundation, partly supported by OSI and other funding partners.

Its mission is to lead, negotiate, support and advocate for the wide availability of electronic resources by library users in transition and developing countries.

Its main objective is to unite the purchasing power of large numbers of libraries, representing them and their consortia to vendors and producers of information and to policy makers and funders[24].

It focuses on negotiating affordable subscriptions on a multi - country consortia basis, while supporting the enhancement of emerging national library consortia.

In 2001, it took on an additional focus to support the creation of library consortia in member countries in order to ensure sustainability of access and effective use of the electronic resources on offer. Advising members on consortium related issues, through meetings and training, and provision of useful resources were also introduced.

In 2002, eIFL set up a grant scheme for emerging consortia which could be used for setting up costs, operational costs for the first year including office costs, additional staff, meetings, conference attendance and visits to other successful library consortia. In the same year it also expanded its network to include countries where the Soros Foundation network does not cover.

It now operates in 40 countries, 13 of which are from Africa – 7 from Southern Africa, 4 from West Africa and 1each from East and Central Africa[25]. Members of elFL.net are local library consortia that are responsible for national licences of e-resources.   New countries can be members as long as there is an identified body (National Library, Library Association or Consortium) which can prepare the country's library community for a nation – wide access to electronic journals.

elFL organises an annual General Assembly where the elFL Team, Country Coordinators and Publishers working with eIFL meet to evaluate activities and plan ahead[26].

SERVICES OFFERED

elFL.net's core services are:

1. The provision of access to commercially produced electronic journals and databases through collective negotiations with publishers and aggregators.

2. Provision of a wide range of services to support, advice and train its members in consortium building and management like integration, management and evaluation of electronic resources, copyright and licensing, marketing and promotion of consortia services.

3. Provision of model licences for resources; guidelines and technical guides on library consortia management;

4. Organisation of training and workshops, knowledge and information provision sharing;

5. Provision of grants for consortia building and development, and free access to journals[27].

6. It also cooperates with OSI to ensure the wide dissemination of the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) containing information on about 1,072 scholarly electronic journals that are freely available on the internet. This increases the accessibility of open access scholarly journals to promote increased use.

CONCLUSION

NGOs have been in African libraries for sometime now. Their assistance in the provision of reading materials, equipment, technical and professional know how cannot be underestimated. Initially, they came in with ready made packages which often left recipients high and dry when they left the scene. This situation has informed the improvement of their strategies which now have participatory approaches from the planning through execution stages. They have become strong partners in the bid to bring up African libraries and their services which have sunken low because of poor funding resulting in inadequate stock, staff and facilities. The relationship between NGOs and Libraries in Africa is therefore that of partnership and not competitors.

The strength of a library is in its ability to respond positively to the information needs of users. Information availability today come in various modes and at great cost, the majority being in electronic format. NGOs have set out to assist African libraries to meet these demands of their users. Undoubtedly, this shows that NGOs are of great service in bridging the information gap between the North and South. This is a highly commendable effort to which appreciation must be shown in terms of strengthening the partnership and ensuring that the service is sustained, when external support ends, so that their efforts are not wasted.

Much as start up funding for equipment and infrastructure are needed, much emphasis should also be put on training of local personnel so that the service will have continuity and effectiveness.

What is important to do now is for governments and institutions to look at NGO assistance in projects as start ups, rather than perpetual assistance, to allow for long term planning to take over and run them effectively. This in the end will bear the good fruits of partnership.

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