
Collaborative innovations – Making Libraries more relevant in Society

John Stephen Agbenyo

Savana Signatures, Tamale, Ghana.

steve@savsign.org

Aaron Kuwornu

Northern Regional Manager, Ghana Library Authority, Tamale, Ghana.

aaronkuwornu@gmail.com



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Abstract:

There are more than 230,000 public and community libraries in developing and transitioning countries. With the advent of technology, many libraries appear to have become irrelevant and are gradually losing their position and role. Further, with heightened focus on Millennium Development Goals as the 2015 deadline becomes imminent, libraries need to position themselves to play a role in meeting these goals. The contribution of public libraries to the development of countries is undervalued and un-tapped. This assertion is noted in a communiqué¹ released at the African Public Libraries Summit in Johannesburg in September 2012 that challenged African Libraries to:

- 1. Be essential hubs for development, and be catalysts for community development with potential to transform people's livelihoods;*
- 2. Develop partnerships with other development workers to ensure that they remain relevant to the needs of the communities;*

The presentation provides an analysis of a partnership between Northern Regional Library in Ghana and Savana Signatures, a Northern Ghana based NGO. The presentation will show how this partnership has contributed to the Library, which is now seen as a major stakeholder in developmental discourse and practice.

Analysis focuses on two activities resulting from the partnership: (1) On the Last Thursday of every month, Savana Signatures partners the Library to organise the Northern ICT4D Forum. This open event is hosted by the library and brings together development experts and members of the general public to discuss the role of ICT in community development. (2) The Technology for Maternal Health Project². Launched in 2012, the Project sends SMS messages with health information to the mobile phones of pregnant women. For both projects, the partners have put in place rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes. The paper is based on results of these processes.

Keywords: Partnership, Catalyst, Development

¹http://african-public-libraries-summit.org/ressources/APLS2012/div/Communique_Framework_African_Public_Libraries_Summit.pdf

²<http://www.comminit.com/africa/content/technology-maternal-health-project>
<http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/news/features/13320-technology-for-maternal-health-project-launched-in-tamale>

1 INTRODUCTION

With the advent of technology, many libraries appear to have become irrelevant and are gradually losing their position and role. Many more people have access to technology and therefore do not see the need to visit the public libraries when they can get online and have access to any information at all they would want, download and store for future reference.

Further, with heightened focus on the Millennium Development Goals as the 2015 deadline becomes imminent, access to information is seen by all as a priority especially as in the 21st century information is a powerful development tool that supports communities in many ways.

While it is important for libraries to position themselves to play a role in meeting the Millennium Development goals, it is also noted that the contribution of public libraries to the development of countries is under-valued and un-tapped. This assertion is noted in a communiqué released at the African Public Libraries Summit in Johannesburg³ in September 2012 that challenged African Libraries to:

- Be essential hubs for development, and be catalysts for community development with potential to transform people's livelihoods;
- Develop partnerships with other development workers to ensure that they remain relevant to the needs of the communities;

The Millennium Development Goal 8 emphasizes the importance of partnerships as a strategy for development and poverty alleviation⁴. Challenged by these and many other factors, Savana Signatures, a Northern Ghana based ICT for Development (ICT4D) NGO entered into a partnership with the Northern Regional Library of the Ghana Library Authority. This partnership was of mutual benefit to both the Library and the development organisation geared towards building a knowledge sharing society and diversifying the services provided by the Library.

The Library and Savana Signatures partnered on two key projects. These are the Northern ICT4D Forum and the Technology for Maternal Health Project.

2 THE NORTHERN ICT4D FORUM

The Northern ICT4D Forum is the brain Child of the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing and Savana Signatures. The Forum started in 2007 and was initially held at the Institute for Local Government Studies in Tamale.

In 2010, following the change in leadership of the Library, Savana Signatures and the Library entered into discussions for possible collaborations. In the end, while the Library saw the Forum as one of the projects that could help in drawing a lot of attention to the Library and also adding value to its services, Savana Signatures saw the Library as strategically located and more appropriate to relocate the venue for the Forum to the Library. The library then

³ http://african-public-libraries-summit.org/ressources/APLS2012/div/Communique_Framework_African_Public_Libraries_Summit.pdf

⁴ Millennium Development Goals 8: Develop a global partnership for development:
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

gave out its conference facility to be used for free to organise the ICT4D Forum. The Forum is now organised on the last Thursday of every month at the Library.

The ICT4D Forums aim to deepen understanding of the value and potential of ICT for Development and encourage people to use ICT. It brings together people from diverse sectors – health, education, Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), agriculture – and the general public.

Prior to the Forum, SMS is sent to previous participants to remind them of the forum and the topic to be discussed. A radio announcement is also made on one of the local radio stations. A poster of the event is also made and strategically distributed in the community.

INVITATION! INVITATION!! INVITATION!!!

**NORTHERN ICT4 DEVELOPMENT FORUM
(NORTHERN ICT4D FORUM)**

The Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) in collaboration with its local partner, Savana Signatures (SavSign) and The Northern Regional Library invites you to its monthly ICT4D Forum.

The ICT4D Forum is a knowledge sharing platform that has been created to enable all persons and institutions interested in learning and Sharing Knowledge on how ICTs can be used for development.

Participation is free and is open to the general public.

The ICT4D Forum is a monthly forum scheduled for the last Thursday of every month. This month's forum will be held on Thursday the 25th of April 2013.

DATE: Thursday 25th April 2013
VENUE: Northern Regional Library Conference Hall
TIME: 3.30 pm – 5pm

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC
**Web 2.0 Tools
for Development**

The Forum is attended by an average of 30 participants each month and male to female ration of 70:30



Some participants at the ICT4D Forum

3 THE TECHNOLOGY FOR MATERNAL HEALTH PROJECT

The Technology for Maternal Health Project is an outcome of one of the health discussions at the Northern ICT4D Forum. Coincidentally, it came at a time that there was also a call for proposal from EIFL. Savana Signatures then supported the library to submit a project proposal that was finally approved and a grant awarded.

With EIFL-PLIP support, the Technology for Maternal Health Service aims to help reduce maternal and child mortality by using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to improve communication between health-workers and pregnant women. It is aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality by providing information and advice.

A maternal health corner was set up as part of this project with a set of computers programmed with maternal health related content.

A number of health workers were trained on using the health corner to deepen their knowledge in the subject area as well as make use of the content for their outreach education activities.



Some health workers undergoing orientation on the use of the maternal health corner

Expectant mothers were also educated via mobile phone text messaging (SMS) each week.

Savana Signatures staff provided technical advice to the Library and supported the Library to do implementation.

Savana Signatures is scaling up the project that was piloted with the library. The scale up is as a result of the receipt by Savana Signatures, US\$220,000 grant from the funding agency STAR-Ghana. STAR-Ghana is funded by the international government agencies, DFID (UK), DANIDA (Denmark), the European Union and USAID (USA).

The Library is playing a key role in the scale up that would see the project in 4 other Districts in Northern Ghana. The Library is serving on the Project Monitoring and Support Team of the project constituted by Savana Signatures.

4 WHAT WORKED WITH THE PARTNERSHIP

Development projects that are working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals are most effective when they leverage existing resources and local institutions that people already know and trust, such as public Libraries.

Libraries have staying power because of ongoing public support and dedicated funding, and therefore governments and development agencies should seek to strengthen and expand the services public libraries offer, rather than funding new, unproven infrastructure or investing in narrow, technology-based approaches. Development practitioners should seek to partner with libraries wherever available as a way to sustainably support initiatives in a variety of fields, including health, agriculture, civic engagement, education and others.⁵

One of the reasons why this partnership worked is because both parties brought something to the table. The Library did not come into the partnership empty handed. The Library brought on board its existing available space, staff and other partnerships. It is important that to have such partnerships work, both parties brought to the table something tangible. Where both parties have a stake and or an 'investment' into the relationship, there is a higher chance of the partnership working and getting sustained.

Also, in the case of the ICT4D Forum, there were clearly defined unambiguous roles and responsibilities; the Library was responsible for the provision of space for the events and Savana Signatures was responsible for getting resource persons, doing the reminders and providing refreshment.

The commitment level of the leadership of both partners is one very important factor. The Library headed by Mr. Aaron Kuwornu for instance was very open and keen on seeing the Library diversify its services and be seen as a development partner. This enthusiasm, falls perfectly in line with the new phase of global libraries.

5 CHALLENGES

There were some challenges with the partnership. It appeared to the development partner, Savana Signatures as though there was a gap between the Librarian and his other staff in terms of the understanding of the partnership.

⁵ Libraries as a development partner: <http://beyondaccess.net/blog/2012/03/09/report-how-public-libraries-contribute-towards-reaching-the-millennium-development-goals/>

The inexperience of Librarians and Library staff in project Planning and Management is a huge challenge. As a development organisation, Savana Signatures understood the need to work within timelines and to deliver as promised. It appeared to Savana Signatures as though the Library was not too bothered about delivery on time and per agreed specification. This if not checked could result in big conflicts between Libraries and development organisations.

6 CONCLUSION

While there is a huge potential for Libraries and development organisation to partner, Librarians need to be on the same page with their staff and be as transparent as possible with their staff in all partnerships they enter into.

There is the need to cover the huge skills gap in project management and development communication. This can only be done if there is donor support for capacity building of Librarians and Library staff in this area.

For libraries to sustain development projects and partnerships, it is a must for Librarians to have new sets of skills.