

Lubuto Libraries in Zambia: Sustainable Development through Library and Information Services

Mukonde, Kasonde Thomas

Lubuto Library Partners, Lusaka, Zambia.

E-mail address: kasonde@lubuto.org



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Abstract:

Lubuto Library Partners is an international nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., which works with local professionals to establish sustainable library services and increases the capacity of African public libraries to provide quality library services to children and youth. Lubuto Libraries in Zambia are public libraries which serve all children and youth, with special focus on those who are either out of school or live in low income or rural communities. In partnership with local host organizations and supported by the government of Zambia, two libraries have been established in the capital Lusaka and one other in the rural village of Nabukuyu in southern Zambia. Youth make up 60% of Zambia's population but in Zambia had not as yet had specialized services. Furthermore, Zambia faces a host of social, economic and political challenges including a high HIV incidence among girls and young women, low secondary school enrollment and one of the highest levels of gender based violence in the world.

Lubuto recognizes that while these challenges are formidable, Zambia also has tremendous assets, including an energetic young population willing to be engaged in development and institutions that are already serving young people in other ways. Lubuto is built upon the concept of sustainable ownership of the libraries by the community and these libraries are designed to address the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This presentation will outline the partnerships at the heart of the the Lubuto model and give examples of how Lubuto Libraries are responding to the SDGS. Lubuto Libraries contribute to almost every SDG but in this presentation particular emphasis will be placed on SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 16. Lubuto Library users gain a basic education through LubutoLiteracy and other programming. Additionally, Lubuto's efforts to improve children's health will be discussed through its award of the DREAMS Innovation Challenge, a global partnership that aims to reduce HIV infection in girls and young women. As information providers, Lubuto Library Partners plays a crucial role in building strong and inclusive democracy through our library services to children. While libraries alone cannot achieve Agenda 2030, they will, as trusted community institutions, play a critical role in achieving the SDGs.

Keywords: Lubuto, Zambia, Africa, Youth, SDG.

Introduction

Libraries are trusted community institutions that are uniquely positioned to tackle some of the biggest developmental challenges faced by society; this paper will attempt to demonstrate the facticity of this claim, by using the Lubuto Library Partners model in Zambia as a case study. We will begin with a short overview of LLP, and contextualize the services offered by this organisation through a brief discussion on the state of developmental affairs in Zambia. The rest of the paper will look at three SDGs and how they are addressed by LLP. The SDGs addressed are: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All Ages (SDG 3); Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All (SDG 4); Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls (SDG 5); and Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels (SDG 16). The paper will then conclude by highlighting the library principles behind the success of this model.

Lubuto Libraries

Lubuto Library Partners (LLP) is an international non-governmental organization which has its headquarters in Washington, D.C. and operates a regional office in Lusaka, Zambia, the country that is the focus of its initial development efforts. LLP developed and opened the first Lubuto library in 2007; there are currently three Lubuto libraries, with a fourth slated to open in 2018. LLP's mission is to "provide an open system of accessible services to vulnerable African children and youth through Lubuto libraries, enabling them to develop the knowledge and skills to reconnect with their culture and community and participate fully in society." To this effect, LLP employs a partnership model in developing Lubuto libraries. The organization seeks out strong community based organizations serving children and youth who desire to enhance their services by offering Lubuto library services and programs. LLP obtains grant funding to build library structures, procure library materials and technology resources for the host organization's Lubuto library, and train their library staff. Grant funding for the construction of the fourth and fifth Lubuto libraries was obtained from the U.S. Agency for International Development's American Schools and Hospitals Abroad (ASHA) program. Host organizations provide staff, conduct outreach, keep statistics of users, and ensure that the library is open for a minimum of 45 hours per week. LLP conducts ongoing training for the library staff before, during and after library establishment and supports the monitoring and evaluation of library services.

LLP also has a robust partnership with Government, set out in a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Ministry of Education in 2014. In this MOU, the government of Zambia recognizes LLP as a national partner in the provision of library services to children and youth. LLP has been mandated to work with the Zambia Library Services (ZLS), a unit in the Ministry, to develop the Lubuto library model in the country. In particular, the government recognizes that high quality library services to children and youth can contribute to bringing about high quality education (SDG 4) and gender equity (SDG 5). All the partnerships with host organizations that LLP enters into are guided by terms and priorities outlined in this MOU. Lubuto libraries are being built alongside public libraries run by the ZLS and the government has committed itself to providing staff for those Lubuto libraries built under the auspices of government, and continues to support the further development of the model in Zambia.

Zambia

Zambia has made many developmental strides since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1964. There, however, remains a lot of work to be done in order to improve the wellbeing of its citizens. According to the 2016 Human Development Report for Zambia, the country's overall Human Development Index value, a measure that averages life expectancy, educational attainment and standards of living, has increased over the past few decades. However, "when measured against a more representative basket of welfare indicators, the average household in Zambia, unfortunately, saw its level and intensity of multi-dimensional indigence increase [between] 2006-2010" (40). The authors of the report offer an explanation for this seeming increase in overall wealth of the country but worsening of the day-to-day lives of the people. Primarily, the expansion in the economy has been due to an increase in copper mining activity, which employs only a small fraction of the unemployed. Moreover, even those in employment are underemployed in low-wage ventures.

Zambia's people continue to face many impediments to their attainment and full realization of human rights. Lubuto Library Partners recognizes this and is committed to working with the government as partners in development. Critical to note is that Lubuto engages in this work as library professionals. In the chapter "Partnering in International Development" in the book *International Librarianship*, Elizabeth Cramer notes that Lubuto's perspective is that library development organizations that enter a developing country must be led by experts in the field. Lubuto's librarians recognize that there are trained librarians in Zambia and works closely with these professionals when developing programs and services.

How Lubuto Library Partners Responds to Developmental Challenges

Lubuto libraries were established to address the needs of the largest component of Zambia's population, the youth, who are underserved. Over 60% of Zambia's population is below the age of 24. Out of this number, a large proportion experience vulnerability. Sadly, according to the country's 2010 Census of Population and Housing, one in five young people had lost either one or both parents. Lubuto's mission remains to serve these children, among them orphans, homeless children and those who are marginalized in other ways, such as children with disabilities. For many Zambian children, a good quality education remains elusive; even while school enrollment has increased, contact hours are meagre in primary school, and secondary school is still prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of Zambians. In addition to these very real difficulties, the reality for many Zambians is that intangible challenges, like a limited space for freedom of expression and regressive gender attitudes still hold the country back. Basing its work on the goals and ethics of the library profession, Lubuto's work in Zambia is helping address both intangible and tangible developmental challenges. In the following sections, we will discuss the ways that Lubuto Library Partners innovatively addresses the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the partnerships that have enabled these innovations.

SDG 3: Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for All Ages

According to UNICEF, the HIV prevalence in Zambia among adults is 14.3%. Females are more likely to be HIV positive than males (16.1% versus 12.3%) (UNICEF). Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) account for a much higher rate of HIV infection than males. For example, Dellar et al. note that in South Africa, girls aged 15 – 24, account for 24% of new infections compared to only 6% for males in the same age cohort (65). That is, an infection rate eight times higher than among their male peers. Recognizing this, a public-private partnership convened by the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) came together to mitigate this problem. The DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered,

AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) Challenge was created to address the alarming rise in HIV rates in AGWY. The DREAMS Innovation Challenge was announced in 2015 to provide the opportunity for smaller non-profit organizations to develop innovative services. Lubuto Library Partners responded to the challenge and was awarded a two year \$794,000 grant.

Lubuto's DREAMS programming was developed with a deep understanding of their library users and consists of five components. The first is a scholarship program that by the end of the two years will support 50 AGYW through secondary school, but that is designed to be sustained beyond the two-year project by social media based crowdsourcing. The scholarship covers school fees, feminine hygiene products, books, stationary and other school-related needs. It is expected that by keeping girls in secondary school, their chance of contracting HIV will reduce. Being in school increases the resilience and assets that girls have to negotiate healthier relationships. The second component is a series of mentoring programs, designed to increase knowledge of sexual and reproductive health topics, enhance gender equity and increase determination for education. Library patrons meet in girls-only, boys-only and mixed groups; there are also sessions for parents and for the community which seek to engage them as partners in reinforcing the information, knowledge and attitudinal changes fostered by the mentoring programs. A family literacy program has also been created under this grant, enabling young mothers to attain literacy skills with their children while opening up a path to education. Finally, the DREAMS Innovation grant has also made possible an expansion of sexual and reproductive health and gender equity promoting resources, and the use of Lubuto libraries as a platform for other organizations to share information on DREAMS-related topics.

SDG 4: Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All

A baseline survey of a Save the Children program in the Lufwanyama District of the Copperbelt Province of Zambia found that children with an average age of 9.85 were lagging behind in their literacy skills. Children had not mastered the majority of letters of the alphabet and had even more work to do to meet expectations on higher-level literacy skills like fluency and comprehension (Friedlander et al.). According to Creative Associates International, Zambia has the highest rate of youth illiteracy in the Southern African region, at 35%. Efforts by the Ministry of Education and others have often missed the key component of developing reading skills: a well-developed library infrastructure. Lubuto libraries provide a space where children can find interesting books to read and professionals who can help them navigate their information needs. Additionally, Lubuto libraries are a platform for programs that provide a foundation for literacy. Lubuto libraries were the first libraries in Zambia to offer storytimes for children. These storytimes bring the joy of children's literature to hundreds of children a month. The selected books are both international classics and local books, in both English and Zambian languages. Children have recognized the role of Lubuto libraries in helping develop their literacy skills, whether through story-time or one-on-one help with a librarian. In a 2016 Focus Group Discussion with young women who used the Lubuto libraries, one of them remarked: "Even if you don't know how to read there is someone there to help you read. If you are determined, you can learn. And this library is free, so anyone can just walk in and read" (Nkwengele).

Recognizing that children learn to read best when they are taught early reading skills in their native language and that technology could supplement classroom teaching as well as reaching children who are not in school, Lubuto Library Partners was awarded an All Children Reading (ACR) Grand Challenge grant in 2012. This grant was awarded by the ACR

consortium of USAID, Australian AID and World Vision, and enabled the further development of a pilot group of reading lessons that LLP had earlier created with support from eIFL. Lubuto*Literacy* is an innovative set of over 700 Zambian language digital early reading skills lessons. Notably, the lesson development team worked closely with Zambian experts including a senior reading skills scholar from the University of Zambia. The lessons were in line with the Zambia National Literacy Framework (2014) that, following the best practices that have emerged from early reading research, established the teaching of foundational reading in native languages as the government policy. Lubuto*Literacy* has lessons in the seven major Zambian languages.

SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls

Zambian women face some of the highest rates of Intimate Partner Violence in the world. In a meta-analysis of data from national Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) from a sample of low and middle income countries, Decker et al. found that Zambia was only second below the Democratic Republic of Congo in the rates of physical partner violence against adolescent girls and young women aged 15 – 24. The rates of sexual partner violence were equally disturbing. More than 40% of those surveyed in Zambia’s DHS reported being physically assaulted by their male partners. Indeed, a cursory glance at the news will reveal the widespread public humiliation of women. The government of Zambia recognizes that the state of affairs is retrogressive to the advancement of the rights of all people and has established the Ministry of Gender, whose goal is to reduce gender disparities.

In a recent speech at the launch of LLP’s DREAMS programs to empower and reduce the risk of HIV infection in adolescent girls and young women, the Minister of Gender stated that, “low-self-esteem and lack of confidence in women as well as limited or zero negotiating skills for safe sex” contribute to the disproportionate rate at which adolescent girls are infected with HIV (Mulenga). LLP’s DREAMS programs are geared to address exactly this lack of crucial life skills. Based on the Peace Corps Girls Liberating Our World (GLOW) curriculum, topics include basic information about STIs, contraception and offer a chance to explore gender as a social construct. In typical Lubuto Library fashion, adolescent girls and young women are given a space to express themselves freely and to exchange ideas with peers and role models.

SDG 16: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels

Writing in his monograph *The Library in the Service of Society: Philosophical Foundation*, Zambian librarian and former University Librarian at the Copperbelt University, the late Maurice Chimfwembe Lundu stated that:

The overwhelming limitations on the freedom of expression in a country like Zambia have so far made any thorough discussion on the right to information trivial and even extravagant. These limitations have also suppressed the expansion of essential information infrastructures and manpower resources by severely restricting the demand for the supply of information. In this scenario, it is the rural areas that have remained devoid of any meaningful channels of communication through which they could be guaranteed the right to information. Paradoxically, it is the people in these “backward” areas that are subject to political and economic manipulation by the ruling and educated elite (185).

More than 20 years have passed since Lundu penned these words, but they could very well describe the Zambia of today. The Washington based watch dog Freedom House rates Zambia's press as "Not Free." The Internet in Zambia is only "Partly Free" (Freedom House). Encumbered by vestiges of the weight of colonial laws meant to restrict free expression and a further two decades of a one party state, there is little in the way of platforms for freedom of expression in the country. Although there has been some progress towards a truly pluralist society, this is difficult when major press outlets are still owned by the state. This state of affairs is worsened by an education system that still largely relies on rote memorization and does little to teach creative thinking. Working with local stakeholders, LLP has embarked on the promotion of access to information both in the rural and urban areas.

In addition to providing targeted HIV and gender information under partnerships such as the DREAMS Innovation Challenge, Lubuto Libraries also provide information on elections (in partnership with the Electoral Commission of Zambia) and agricultural information in LLP's rural library (in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Agriculture Information Services). Lubuto libraries provide a 'third place' for young people to meet and learn from each other and from the library resources. At the library, youth from different backgrounds, religions or socio-economic statuses meet and break down stereotypes. Library patrons have access to free Internet, through the Lubuto Library Portal (<http://lubuto.org/library-portal>). The portal is organized according to the Lubuto Classification System and has been well received by library users. Plans are underway to partner with the Library and Information Association of Zambia and the Zambia Library Service to work with local ISPs in promoting free public Internet in the country.

Conclusions

This paper has outlined several of the many ways that Lubuto libraries contribute to the attainment of the SDGs. Particular emphasis has been placed on programs and services that address the goals on health, quality and equitable education, gender equity and goal 16, the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, justice and strong institutions. We discussed a few of the various partnerships into which Lubuto Library Partners has entered to further its work in promoting sustainable development in Zambia. These partnerships have included the Zambian government, the local library association, donors (both state and non-state), universities, and most importantly the library patrons themselves. This paper has also demonstrated some ways that Lubuto libraries are addressing these SDGs and contributes to the achievement of others.

The Lubuto Library Partners model is led and implemented by librarians, who bring with them international professional ethics and standards, and who, importantly, work with local professionals. The experience of Lubuto Library Partners has shown that public libraries are the heart of the community. Free and open to the public, Lubuto libraries are positioned to serve the needs of those on the margins and to learn from them in developing new services. The library buildings, the "third place," are critical to the success of this model. Professional library standards also call for a user centered approach to programs and services. Lubuto Library Partners' focus on meeting the needs faced by the Zambians living in poverty has also inspired it to respond successfully to funding opportunities to expand services, primarily because Lubuto librarians already know what challenges their patrons face, or know to ask them. Finally, librarianship is a service profession. Libraries are a public good and those people working in them serve the public good. The work that librarians and para-professional librarians serving in Lubuto libraries do is difficult, but the challenges are inherent to the work. Sustainable development will not happen overnight with the stroke of a pen from those

in power. Nay, the work of development happens here in the trenches with the quiet, and often invisible, labor of these frontline librarians.

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