Libraries as engines for social and economic empowerment: Best practices and results from a partnership project between Tanzanian, Namibian and Finnish libraries

Alli Mcharazo
Tanzania Library Services Board, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
 E-mail address: amcharazo@hotmail.com

Minna Koskinen
Finnish Library Association, Helsinki, Finland
 E-mail address: minna.koskinen@fla.fi

Kingo Mchombu
International University of Management, Windhoek, Namibia
 E-mail address: kjmchombu@gmail.com

Namutenya Hamwaalwa
Namibia Library Services Board, Windhoek, Namibia
 E-mail address: hnamutenya@gmail.com

Abstract:
Developing people's living conditions through investing in relevant library services has been the leading principle in a partnership project: Libraries for Development. The project has been run between three partners: Tanzania Library Services Board, Namibia Library and Archives Service and the Finnish Library Association since 2012, and will continue until the end of 2017.

The core idea of the project has been to bring the information society to the grassroots level through libraries. This has been done by equipping project libraries with ICT facilities and training the library personnel in ICT and information search skills, in order to enable them to impart these skills onward to people in their local communities. Results achieved are promising: after learning to access information at the libraries, people in Tanzania and Namibia have found new opportunities in life. An evaluation report shows that many have improved their academic performance, enhanced their small-scale businesses and obtained jobs. On the basis of the assessment of the project's outcomes, we argue, that libraries can act as engines for social and economic empowerment.

In our paper, we thus aim to present the best practices and the achievements of the project, and to inspire others to apply similar methods in their endeavours.

Keywords: access to information, Agenda 2030, public libraries, social and economic development, empowerment

Introduction

It has been established for some time now that when poor people are supported adequately with appropriate information and other resource inputs they have the capacity to achieve rapid socio and economic progress and empowerment (Mchombu, 2004). The opportunity to reach communities with information can be achieved through public libraries providing information support targeting socio-economic development and empowerment focusing on agriculture, health, education, entrepreneurship and income generation has great possibilities for social and economic change in communities (Fairbairn, 2012). The public libraries can also host lectures where the community can interact with change agents in society including government extension workers in health, agriculture and community development in general to raise their level of awareness and take informed action to solve socio-economic problems in their community and thus become change agents in their own right (Mchombu, 2004; Fairbairn, 2012).

Overarching policies both in the continent of Africa and individual countries recognize the developmental role of information and ICTs. This role is also recognized in Namibia's Vision 2030 and Tanzania's Vision 2025. Both countries believe that information and ICTs are vital for creating an ICT and knowledge driven society. At the continental level, the African Union (AU) in its long term vision called "*Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*" also recognizes the important role of information and ICTs in socio-economic empowerment. In paragraph 77, section g, it is stated that Africa requires a world class ICT infrastructure, while paragraph 66, section f, calls on the need to become part of the information revolution in order to join the world information society.

The Agenda 2030, i.e. the new sustainable development goals of the UN, are also in line with the above mentioned national and regional visions in recognizing the power of information and ICT access. The Agenda 2030 mentions specifically the following four goals to which libraries can contribute:
- Goal 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.
- Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- Goal 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
- Goal 17.8: Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology.

Given such wide recognition of the powerful socio-economic role of information and ICTs, it is however disquieting that the public libraries have not always been active players in supplying these twin services to their communities. Fairbairn has noted that the public library is largely viewed as a quiet place for reading books and studying only rather than an active player in socio-economic empowerment of the communities in which they are found (Fairbairn, 2012). Given such stereotypes, it is not surprising that the public library has thus been an underutilised resource for supporting national development.

The collaborative Finnish-Namibian-Tanzanian Project: Libraries for Development, on which this paper focuses, has been tackling the above-mentioned stereotypes and has aimed to

change the view how public libraries are commonly seen in Namibia and Tanzania. The main purpose of the project has therefore been to establish the extent to which the socio-economic empowerment and living conditions of poor people including women could be improved through investing in public library services.

The Libraries for Development project is a joint one between three partners: *Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB), Namibia Library and Archives Service (NLAS) and the Finnish Library Association (FLA)* since 2012, and it is coming to an end in 2017.

The purpose of this paper is to present the best practices, achievements and limitations of our work, and hopefully allow others to learn from the experience in future endeavors.

Aims, objectives and model of Libraries for Development Project

The project has both long term broad objective and short term specific objectives. The broad objective is to promote the knowledge based society and public use of information technology at libraries in Namibia and Tanzania, so as to support socio-economic empowerment of the communities involved and render better services to the residents of the recipient countries. The above goal is in unison with the development goals of the recipient countries which are explained in Namibia's Vision 2030 and Tanzania's Vision 2025.

The following are the specific objectives of the project:

- To create a sustainable model for ICT access through community / public libraries and ICT instructors training the library personnel in ICT matters and information search in Namibia and Tanzania

- To build capacity of NLAS and TLSB by training library personnel in ICT skills.

- To make the library personnel able to teach basic ICT skills and information search to individual customers as well as to members of various community groups (e.g. women, small and medium sized entrepreneurs, unemployed and out of school youth, new literates and those needing health information (such as HIV/AIDS and other communicable and non-communicable diseases) both in Namibia and Tanzania.

- To involve decision makers both in Namibia and Tanzania to raise their awareness of the role of libraries in supporting national development goals.

To reach these specific objectives, the project has applied an implementation model which consists of the following phases:

1. Project libraries were identified in Namibia and in Tanzania. Each project library was equipped with an internet connection and computers, if these were non-existent earlier.
2. In Tanzania, two to five staff members of each project library were identified to be trained as ICT instructors of their libraries. These staff members were sent to local institutions to receive further training on computer use and information retrieval. In Namibia, an ICT expert was hired instead, and the expert was responsible for training the local ICT instructors.

3. Once the training was completed and the ICT infrastructure was in place, the project libraries started the user trainings on basic ICT skills and information search.

In addition, the project staff arranged seminars for decision makers to raise their awareness of the role of libraries in supporting national development goals. Study tours were organized for selected staff of the project libraries, both from Namibia and Tanzania to visit Finland as well as between Namibia and Tanzania as South-to-South cooperation. The purpose of the study tours was to open eyes for fresh ideas of rendering library services.

In Tanzania, the project covered the National Central Library in Dar es Salaam and Morogoro Regional Library during the first phase of the project in 2012–2014. Since 2015, also the following regional libraries have been incorporated into the project: Dodoma, Tanga, Arusha, Kilimanjaro, Mtwara, Mwanza and Mbeya. Thus, nine libraries are currently included.

From the very start of the project, Namibia has been able to provide an internet connection and computers to its libraries at own cost, and therefore it was possible to include more libraries in the project. Altogether 27 libraries have participated during 2012-2017. The regions covered are as follows: Erongo, Hardap, Karas, Kavango, Khomas, Kunene, Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto, Otjozondjupa and Zambezi.

Literature review summary

Most of the literature reviewed recognizes the key role of free access to ICTs in the promotion of a knowledge society, particularly for disadvantaged groups in society. Achievement of a knowledge society is essential for a country to join the knowledge and information age and develop, but ICT access is problematic given the challenges of infrastructure and costs (Beyond Access, 2012). The main users are mainly young, male, with relatively higher levels of education, and women are often excluded. Public access ICT services are mainly used for personal and social needs, including communicating with friends, family and entertainment and doing homework (Etta and Parvyn-Wmahiu, 2003). Cabanila, (2014) however investigated a successful project in Philippines to involve women in library based entrepreneurship programme through a non-farm economic activities.

UNESCO (2005) and World Bank (2009) have championed the creation of knowledge society and knowledge based economy respectively. The two concepts complement each other stressing broad access to information, widening educational opportunities, production of local content, and global and local knowledge sharing (Ponelis and Holmner, 2015). It is generally accepted that African countries lag behind the rest of the world, in access and use of ICTs to achieve development goals in the context of knowledge societies and knowledge based economies.

Many governments in Africa have set up ICT based services, such as e-government, ICT based health services and agriculture information services but use of such services is generally low by the general population who lack ICT literacy, and they attract the more educated groups in society (Kumar and Best, 2006).

To speed up the process of access and use of ICTs, it is essential to build the capacity of community members, NGOs and institutions providing opportunities for free access to the Internet. Quereshi (2014), Mcharazo, Kauaria and Lahti (2014) and other writers have stressed the importance of providing opportunities for ICT and digital literacy training for the

general population to raise the level of ICT literacy in society, particularly among marginalised sections of the population.

In conclusion, we argue that projects such as *Libraries for Development* are needed in order to come up with sustainable models for developing countries to provide access to ICT based information services to achieve development goals in the socio-economic and cultural sectors of society.

Evaluation of the project achievements

Methodology

The main sources of information for this paper are project reports, statistics, published papers and testimonies from project beneficiaries. Mchombu (2014) conducted an independent evaluation of the project's activities from 2012 to 2014. Mchombu, together with Namibian and Tanzanian research assistants, analyzed statistics provided by project staff, interviewed stakeholders and scrutinized project reports from both Namibia and Tanzania, in order to form a wide picture of the project´s progress. The full report, explaining the research methods and findings in detail, can be viewed separately at http://kirjastotjakehitys.suomenkirjastoseura.fi/in-english/.

In addition to the external evaluation, a constant internal monitoring and reporting process has been in place. The project's evolvement and the realization of its outcomes have continuously been monitored by the project staff in Tanzania, Namibia and Finland. Quarterly and annual project reports have been provided by the Namibian and Tanzanian project staff to the staff of the Finnish Library Association, which in turn has reported annually for the main funder of the project, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. At the time of writing, a final evaluation of the project is being prepared, and it will also be available on the above-mentioned website.

Findings

When the project was planned, a set of targets was specified. The project applied a result-based target-setting method, which is explained in the form of a logical framework matrix (LFM). The LFM demonstrates the expected results chain of the project, and it is summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1: Libraries for Development project: Expected Results Chain

Activities ►	Outputs ►	Immediate objectives ►	Development objective
- Identifying a staff member to work as an ICT Librarian for TLSB, coordinating the work of other instructors - Employing an ICT instructor for NLAS - Training TLSB and NLAS library personnel in ICT skills and information search, training given by	- TLSB and NLAS library staff have been trained in ICT skills and information search, training given by the TLSB ICT Librarian and instructors in Tanzania; by the NLAS instructor in Namibia	- To create a sustainable model for ICT access through community/public libraries and ICT instructors training the library personnel in IT matters and information search in Namibia and Tanzania	To promote the knowledge based society and public use of information technology at libraries in Namibia and Tanzania, so as to support socio-

the TLSB ICT Librarian and instructors in Tanzania; by the NLAS instructor in Namibia - TLSB library personnel attending ICT courses at Tanzanian Computer Training Colleges - TLSB personnel attending training arranged by the Tanzania Library Association (TLA) - Training TLSB and NLAS library personnel in ICT skills and information search by Finnish mentors and ICT/Library Consultants; other services of Finnish mentors: - Training community members in basic ICT skills, training given by the TLSB and NLAS library staff - Training NGO and other groups (women, SME, unemployed youth, subsistence farmers, new literates, health), training given by the TLSB and NLAS library staff - Arranging Study tours for TLSB and NLAS staff members to Finland to learn about modern librarianship - South to South cooperation - Acquiring material - Information in Finland	- The TLSB library staff have been trained in ICT skills, training received at local commercial computer training colleges and by Tanzania Library Association - Library staff has been trained in ICT skills and information search by Finnish mentors and ICT / Library Consultants; other services of Finnish mentors - Training sessions in basic ICT skills for community members have been arranged by the library staff - ICT training sessions for NGO and other groups (women, SME, unemployed youth, subsistence farmers, new literates, health) have been arranged, training given by the TLSB & NLAS library staff - Information about the project issues has been given out to the public in Finland	- To build capacity of NLAS and TLSB by training library personnel in ICT skills. - To make the library personnel able to teach basic ICT skills and information search to individual customers as well as to members of various NGO´s (e.g. women, entrepreneurs, unemployed and out of school youth, new literates and those needing information on HIV/AIDS and other health issues) both in Namibia and Tanzania. - To involve decision makers both in Namibia and Tanzania to raise their awareness of the role of libraries in supporting national development goals.	economic empowerment of the communities involved and render better services to the residents of the recipient countries.

The realization of the outputs and objectives has been under our analysis on a yearly basis. The actualization of the activities and outputs has been measured numerically (please view tables 2 and 3), whereas the attainment of the objectives has been assessed on the base of that numerical data, and, very importantly, also through interviews conducted e.g. during the evaluation processes.

Part one of the findings below consists of the tables reflecting the realization of the outputs, and part two consists of questionnaire / interview data reflecting, rather, the realization of the final objectives of the project.

Part 1: numerical data, project outputs

Table 2: Project 2012 – 2016 in Namibia Library and Archives Services (NLAS)

PROJECT OUTPUTS	PLANNED OUTPUT			ACTUAL OUTPUT		
	Year	Total Training	Total Participant	Year	Total Training	Total Participants
Library staff trained in ICT skills by Instructors	2012	5	17	2012	11	58
	2013	10	30	2013	5	46
	2014	10	30	2014	3	49
	2015	23	40	2015	6	45
	2016	23	40	2016	10	40
	TOTAL	71	157	TOTAL	35	238
Training sessions for community members	2012	120	960	2012	122	1322
	2013	120	960	2013	109	1022
	2014	120	960	2014	97	971
	2015	138	966	2015	97	996
	2016	138	966	2016	145	977
	TOTAL	636	4812	TOTAL	570	5288
Training sessions for NGOs and other groups	2012	20	250	2012	27	344
	2013	20	250	2013	28	262
	2014	20	250	2014	23	265
	2015	25	188	2015	22	302
	2016	25	188	2016	31	233
	TOTAL	110	1126	TOTAL	131	1406

Table 3: Project 2012 – 2016 in Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB)

PROJECT OUTPUTS	PLANNED OUTPUT			ACTUAL OUTPUT		
	Year	Total Training	Total Participant	Year	Total Training	Total Participants
Library staff trained in ICT skills by Instructors	2012	5	20	2012	8	47
	2013	10	30	2013	10	33
	2014	10	30	2014	15	83
	2015	2	14	2015	12	22
	2016	4	20	2016	4	29
	TOTAL	31	114	TOTAL	49	214
Training sessions for community members	2012	2	40	2012	5	27
	2013	10	200	2013	40	558
	2014	12	240	2014	20	488
	2015	16	140	2015	137	726
	2016	22	170	2016	166	1779
	TOTAL	62	790	TOTAL	368	3578
Training sessions for NGOs and other groups	2012	4	80	2012	9	157
	2013	20	360	2013	29	456
	2014	20	360	2014	20	431
	2015	12	45	2015	86	395
	2016	21	84	2016	163	2952
	TOTAL	77	929	TOTAL	307	4391

As can be viewed from the tables (2 & 3) above, the numerical targets for trainings and participants in the trainings were in most cases met and often even surpassed. This formed a good basis for the attainment of the project's broader objectives.

Part 2: Community members interview data

Below, the findings of the survey are summarized.

Change of lives
One of the objectives of the project has been to change the lives of people through the use of ICTs. The evaluation study therefore attempted to find out what changes have taken place in the lives of the people who took part in the ICT courses organized at the project libraries. The majority of the interviewed people (hereinafter referred to as respondents) in both Namibia and Tanzania had either never used computers before or used computers very little (87%). The project may have therefore served well one of its basic purpose to introduce disadvantaged members of society to the information society through the use of ICTs.

Feelings about computers after training
In both countries, the respondents who said they can use computers without help after the training at the library were fewer than those who said they needed more training or they could use computers with little help. It is possible that the duration of the training was too short for people who were handling computers for the first time in their lives to have developed the necessary confidence hence the request for more training.

Perceived helpfulness of the course
Approximately 93 % of the respondents in both countries found the ICT courses organized at the project libraries in Namibia and Tanzania either helpful or very helpful. The study was also interested to find out what participants liked most about the course. The top choice for both sets of respondents was on how to use the Internet.

Feelings of respondents on how the training received have changed their IT skills.
The responses of participants as to whether the training they received has changed their IT skills were very positive. 99 % of the respondents reported they had either received basic IT skills or said they had improved their IT skills. The training thus, according to participants´ responses, has had a major impact in terms of changing IT skills of participants.

Another question to respondents was whether the ICT training they received had improved their potential for employment. The majority of respondents in both countries (76% and 91% for Tanzania and Namibia respectively) felt strongly that the ICT training had given them a better chance to be employed. The response therefore shows success in this particular objective which has created confidence among respondents that they have improved their chances of employment.

Use of the Internet to look for income related information
The evaluation also looked into the extent respondents used the internet to look for income related information. The responses indicate that approximately half of respondents claim to have accessed the internet through computers in the library.

Starting or improving respondent's small business as a result of this training?
The study wanted to find out what impact the ICT training may have had on the participants in relation to improving small businesses. The responses indicate that ICT training did not have this effect on the majority of respondents. However, there was a significant percentage who said they had carried out improvements in their small business as result of the ICT training (24% and 27% for Namibia and Tanzania respectively). We consider this figure reasonable and significant given the short span of time of the project.

Improvement of respondents' school/university grades through research in the library
The study was also interested to establish whether any of the respondents managed to improve their grades at school/college/university through research and information seeking in the library. In both countries respondents who said they had used their library to improve their education grades was higher than those who said either no or not applicable. The respondents, who said yes, were 66% and 71% in Namibia and Tanzania respectively.

Use the library to seek information about further education
The study was also interested to establish whether any of the respondents used the library to seek information for further education opportunities. In both countries respondents who said they had used their library to further their higher education opportunities were a slight majority at 54% for Tanzania and 49 % for Namibia respectively.

Respondent starting further education as a result of the information you found at the library
The respondents were asked whether they had started further education, as a result of information they found at the library. 42 % of the respondents in Tanzania and 27 % in Namibia answered yes to this question.

Use of library to look for health information
When respondents were asked whether they had used the library to look for health information, the responses were balanced between those who said they had done so and those who did not seek health information through the library. Overall, however, a slight majority of respondents (39 % in Namibia and 29 % in Tanzania) reported they had used the library's e-resources to seek health information.

Seeking information about civic rights and e-governance on the internet and apply it
Respondents were asked whether they had sought information on civil rights and e-governance in the Internet and applied it. In both Namibia and Tanzania, there were clear differences on how respondents responded. While in Tanzania, a small majority said Yes (53%), in Namibia, it was the opposite as the majority said No (72%, compared to 14% who said Yes). While in Tanzania only 47% of respondents said no. A slightly smaller group in Namibia did not respond to the question (6%). One of the explanations of this difference might be that during the research there were many political debates going on in Tanzania on constitutional changes and gender equality while in Namibia there were no such hot political debates.

Perceived positive changes in respondents´ lives as a result of attending the training
A key concern of the project was to identify what impact the training has made on the lives of participants. Data on this question is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Perceived changes in respondents´ lives

Positive change in the life of respondent	Tanzania	Namibia
I can type documents on my own	44 =75%	134=68%
I know how to use email now	20 = 34%	38=19%
I can read newspapers online	0 = 0	11=6%
I can create quotations & invoices for my business	11 = 19%	5=3%
I can create flyers & posters or business cards for my business	0 = 0	4=2%
I can search & apply for jobs online	0 = 0	18=9%
I can search for information on the internet	26 = 44%	102=52%
My fear of computers is gone	5 = 8%	0 = 0
I trained others to use computers	5 = 8%	0=0
I have had no change as I can't practice without computers	6 = 10%	0=0
Other	3 = 5%	3=2%

In assessing if any changes had occurred, participants were asked to briefly describe the changes they had experienced as a result of attending the training. The described changes show a similar pattern in both countries with Microsoft word typing skills, use of the internet, and use of email topping the list in both countries.

Importance of your public library to respondents and to the community
One of the goals of the project was to increase perception of the importance of public libraries to community members and their leaders. When asked how the importance of their public library has changed over the last 12 months, an overwhelming majority in both countries said their public library had become more important (90% and 82% in Tanzania and Namibia respectively).

Summary, discussion and conclusions

The Libraries for Development project was set up to experiment on the extent public libraries in two African countries could partner with a Library Association of Finland which is a developed country to provide information and ICT access to support disadvantaged communities in Namibia and Tanzania in their effort to achieve social and economic empowerment. The overarching policies framework in support of the project includes Namibia's Vision 2030, Tanzania's Vision 2025, and the Africa Union long term vision, Agenda 2063. Included in the overarching policy is the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), i.e. the Agenda 2030.

The rich policy landscape is testimony of the urgency and importance of information and ICTs to support socio-economic empowerment of disadvantaged communities. Various studies had already shown women are among the most disadvantaged group who are often

marginalised in information and ICT projects which favour young and educated urban males (Beyond Access, 2012; Cabanila, 2014). A major lesson from this project was therefore designing an information and ICT access project through public libraries which made women the prime target group thus enabling a majority of women to participate without any form of marginalisation.

Another key lesson of the project lies in the realisation that disadvantagted users who may have never used the public library for searching information on socio and economic empowerment would not be able to do it on their own (Kumar and Best, 2006; Quereshi, 2014). Therefore, the ICT, information search and teaching skills of the staff play a vital role in securing lasting results.

Another valuable lesson which was identified concerned the lack of local content creation as part of the project. In order to achieve rapid socio-economic progress and empowerment, robust local knowledge content creation is necessary to address the poverty and social disadvantages in society. Fairbairn (2012) and Mchombu (2004), among others, point out the need for content creation in agriculture, health, education, entrepreneurship and income generation. Fairbairn (2012) also adds that public libraries would increase their social relevance by hosting public lectures where community members can interact with change agents including governemnt extension agents in health, agricuture, community development in general to enable the community to take informed action and particpate in development as change agents in their own right.

On the basis of the assessment of the project's outcomes, we argue that libraries can act as engines for social and economic empowerment. The achievements of the Libraries for Development project show a strong evidence of the power of public access to information.

Libraries for Development started as a project but its principles have now become a part of everyday activities at libraries. Through capacity building over the years, the sustainability of the functions can be guaranteed.

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