Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe developments and results of the Global Libraries Initiative project in Botswana, popularly known as Sesigo project, which started in 2009.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper provides an analysis of the results of the assessment of the impact of the Sesigo project so far among the public libraries of Botswana.

Findings – The findings, among many others described, reveal that libraries with public access to ICT experienced an increase in membership, while those without it experienced an overall decline.

Originality/value – The paper provides a wide range of improvement examples that can be easily transferred to other countries.

Keywords Global Libraries Initiative, Sesigo Project, Public Libraries, Botswana

Paper type Case study

Background

The implementation of the Global Libraries project in Botswana popularly known as Sesigo project started in 2009 over a four-year period. The project is a collaboration between the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships (ACHAP) and the government of Botswana through the Botswana National Library Service (BNLS) who manage the public library network in Botswana. (Maswabi et al., 2011)

Recent progress

Since implementation started in 2009, the project has completed two impact studies: the baseline study to set a reference point against which future assessments will be compared in order to measure progress and benefits; and the first annual impact study, conducted after 12 months of implementation to gather evidence of any change or difference brought about by the project. (The third study, being the second annual impact study, is currently being finalised. It was conducted in 2011 after 24 months of implementation to gather evidence.)

The focus of this progress report is be on the first annual impact study conducted in 2010 to determine the difference or impact the project has made after 12 months of implementation since the baseline study results were published in a recent article (Sawaya et al., 2011).

The Sesigo project first annual impact study focused on gathering information about libraries, library users, general public, non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

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local leadership and local web sites. Table I provides details of the study methodology and sampling approach.

Results and findings
The first annual impact assessment study revealed the following findings:

- In 2009, prior to the introduction of Sesigo project, no public library offered computer and internet services. In 2010, 12 months into implementation of Sesigo project, the first annual study revealed that 19 of the 40 public libraries surveyed had computers and internet. This implied that only 19 out of 78 (24 per cent) public libraries targeted to provide public access technology provided such services. While VRRs comprise a larger percentage of the public library network in Botswana at 68 per cent, it was revealed that no VRR provided public access to technology at the time of the study. The VRRs however, present a significant opportunity for the rural populace to get access to information and technology, being located mainly in the rural and remotest parts of the country.

- Respondents considered formal training in computer and internet use with 55 per cent and 46 per cent of members of the general public reporting to have undergone formal training in computers and the internet respectively. The focus of the training was reported to have been on basic computer use by both groups.

- Users and members of the general public have not yet considered the library as the first place of choice for computer use but instead they preferred to use other places such as home, work, school, and internet cafes. The library was however ranked fourth and fifth by the respondents. A total of 49 per cent of library users preferred to use computers at home compared to 26 per cent of members of the general public. A total of 36 per cent of members of the general public and 7 per cent of library users preferred to use computers at work. Library users and the general public equally preferred to use computers at school.

- E-mail and basic computer applications like word processing, spreadsheets and presentations are the most common uses of computers and internet for library users and internet. The three main uses of computers and internet as reported by users e-mail (53 per cent), basic computer applications (45 per cent) and accessing information on business or work opportunities (42 per cent). Members of the general public on the other hand reported their three main uses as e-mail (68 per cent), meeting people online (29 per cent) and communication tools such as internet telephony, instant messaging and social networking (28 per cent).

- Library users and members of the general public believe computers and internet play a key role in their daily lives such as improving the quality of work, helping them work faster, accessing information etc. The respondents further showed a strong interest in learning more about computers.

- Libraries were not considered the number one place to go for information: they were however ranked among the top seven or above as primary sources by library users and the general public who were asked to rank 15 options ranging from teachers, colleagues, library and others. Computers and internet were also ranked seventh and above as a primary source of information.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Brief description of survey</th>
<th>Target group</th>
<th>Sampling approach</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library users</td>
<td>Collected data on library use, computer and internet use, sources of information, knowledge of Sesigo project and perceptions of libraries and librarians</td>
<td>Library users who visited the local library during the time of the study</td>
<td>Users were selected from 40 public libraries including 19 village reading rooms (VRRs). One in five users were selected and interviewed at the bigger public libraries while one in there users were approached and interviewed at the VRRs</td>
<td>535 library users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>Collected data on library use, computer and internet use, sources of information, knowledge of Sesigo project and perceptions of libraries and librarians</td>
<td>General public found at common meeting places such as the Kgotta, shopping centres, clinics, schools and others</td>
<td>Respondents were picked randomly, one in every five passers-by</td>
<td>1,054 respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kgotla leadership</td>
<td>Gathered data on perceptions about the use of libraries, the value of libraries including access to computers and internet as well as knowledge about Sesigo project</td>
<td>Kgotla leadership at 40 study sites across all the nine administrative districts in Botswana</td>
<td>All Kgotla leaders at the main Kgotta in the rural areas while purposive sampling was used to select Kgotla leaders at one of the customary courts in the urban areas</td>
<td>38 Kgotla leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO leadership</td>
<td>Gathered data on perceptions about the use of libraries, the value of libraries including access to computers and internet as well as knowledge about Sesigo project</td>
<td>100 non-governmental organisations registered with the Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
<td>At least one NGO was purposively selected at each of the 40 study sites</td>
<td>48 NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web site</td>
<td>Evaluated data contained in local web sites in terms of relevance and usefulness to the lives of the people of Botswana</td>
<td>202 web sites found at <a href="http://www.abcmundi.com">www.abcmundi.com</a></td>
<td>Web sites found to contain content aimed at serving the needs of Botswana people especially in the areas of culture, education, health, agriculture, government services and business</td>
<td>200 web sites which contained information relevant to the study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Gathered data to reflect on unique experiences of individuals and communities in different library environments where there are computers and internet, computers without internet and no computers and internet</td>
<td>Different library environments in Botswana</td>
<td>Based on the library environments in Botswana</td>
<td>Six case stories of individuals and groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• The three main library uses are reading, borrowing books and using library resources for education. A total of 91 per cent of library users and 81 per cent members of the general public reported their main use as reading newspapers, magazines and books. A total of 69 per cent of library users and 27 per cent members of the general public reported using the library for borrowing books while 49 per cent and 28 per cent respectively reported using library resources for education.

• Of the activities that libraries organise, users and the general public preferred homework assistance, educational events, reading clubs, arts and crafts activities, public meetings, health events and storytelling.

• The main factors cited limiting library use are library opening hours, difficulty to get to the library and the library service as a whole.

• Library users and the general public generally believed libraries are important and play a key role in the improvement of the community with over 70 per cent of both library users and members of the general public respectively affirming the importance of libraries. Libraries are said to contribute to community improvement mostly through improving general knowledge, improving literacy and providing access to up-to-date information. This was further substantiated by the case stories gathered from focus groups and individuals in different library environments who believed that libraries are very useful for supporting education, promoting computer literacy, improving social networking and providing up-to-date information among others.

• There are strong indications that working relations between libraries and the community leadership and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) remain weak. A total of 17 Kgotla leaders rarely engaged with libraries with 11 having never engaged with libraries at all. Of the 48 NGOs surveyed, only 16 indicated having worked with libraries in the development of content, dissemination of content through the library and holding workshops and seminars at the library.

• Despite the weak working relations between libraries and community partners, the Kgotla and NGO leaders still believed that libraries can play a key role in community development as a source of knowledge and information. The key areas which partners thought the library could support include, inter alia, ICT training and use, providing information on community governance and justice, supporting non-formal and distance learning, provision of up-to-date and relevant information as well as dissemination of content.

Most interesting finding
While not surprising per se, it was revealed that libraries with public access to ICT experienced an increase in membership while those without it experienced an overall decline. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the finding.

While there appears to be weak working relationships between libraries and their community partners, the partners still hold libraries in high regard, believing that they can play a key role in community development through provision of information.
Conclusions
The results and findings of the annual impact study suggest that libraries and computers and internet play a key role in community and national development as sources of information and knowledge. It is however worth noting that more public libraries are still to provide computer and internet services with only 24 per cent of the targeted 78 providing access to technology. The study was conducted at a time when public access to ICT was mostly available at public libraries at major population centres. It will be interesting to conduct another study when public access to ICT is now available in the rural areas and remotest parts of the country where access is almost non-existent, be it through internet cafes or any other public access venues. It would therefore be interesting to observe and study how rural communities use and perceive public access to technology in their smaller public libraries in the form of VRRs. The third and fourth annual impact studies to be conducted in 2012 and 2013 are expected to reveal more interesting findings.
Next steps
The results and findings continue to be used for advocacy and sustainability efforts to ensure the government and other partners continue to support provision of computer and internet services at public libraries. To this end, annual studies will be conducted in 2012 and 2013 to gather evidence of the importance of libraries in the community and in national development.

References

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