Advocacy and evidence for sustainable public computer access

Experiences from the Global Libraries Initiative

Janet Sawaya, Tshepo Maswabi, Resego Taolo, Pablo Andrade, Máximo Moreno Grez, Pilar Pacheco, Kristine Paberza, Sandra Vigante, Agniete Kurutyte, Ugne Rutkauskiene, Jolanta Jeżowska and Maciej Kochanowicz

(Author affiliations at the end of the paper.)

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to draw together the evidence-based advocacy experience of five national programs focused on developing public access information and communications technologies (ICT) via public libraries as grantees of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Global Libraries Initiative.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors describe a common approach to strategic advocacy and to impact planning and assessment. They then outline the experience of each program in using a range of evidence to help meet specific advocacy objectives. They give particular attention to how each program is using specific evidence to convince key players of the importance of public access ICT provided by public libraries in meeting the objectives of the key players.

Findings – This collective experience shows that when advocating at the national level, statistical data and empirical evidence can demonstrate that public libraries contribute to stakeholders’ goals. Such data can include technology skills that users have gained as well as how users improve their businesses, become better educated, and access government services. Common denominators from the programs include a disproportionate positive impact achieved (or anticipated) in rural communities and on relatively disadvantaged groups such as older workers, old people and unemployed people.

Practical implications – Both the general approach to evidence-based advocacy described and the specific messages about targeting advocacy efforts on key players and on the service users who are most likely to benefit from public access ICT are of potential value to anyone planning a national, regional or local advocacy program focused on public libraries and their services.

Social implications – As the paper deals with global library advocacy issues, and impact planning, it is hoped it is a step towards more measurable social impact for libraries.

Originality/value – This is the first full public report of the Global Libraries approach to evidence-based advocacy as conducted in the five countries represented in the paper. It is part of a steadily growing body of knowledge being amassed by Global Libraries about effective provision of public access ICT via public libraries in a range of countries.

Keywords Advocacy, Evaluation, Impact, Information technology, Public libraries, Global libraries initiative

Paper type Research paper

The authors would like to thank David Streatfield for helping to edit this paper for publication here.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 76th International Federation of Library Associations’ General Conference and Assembly, 10-15 August 2010, Gothenburg, Sweden (web site: www.ifla.org/files/hq/papers/ifla76/87-pacheco-en.pdf).
1. Introduction

Through the Global Libraries Initiative, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is supporting efforts to supply and sustain free public access to computers and the internet around the world. Their current partners are Chile, Mexico, Botswana, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, and Vietnam. Global Libraries funds programs that evaluate local technology needs, purchase equipment, train library staff, and help libraries build public support for long-term funding. Since different countries have different needs, capabilities, and priorities, Global Libraries works with their library and government partners to create programs that are sensitive to local and national conditions.

Effective advocacy, especially at national level, to ensure sustainability of this work beyond the funding period, is a key element in the Global Libraries approach. Advocacy encompasses actions to influence decision making at the local, regional, state, national, and international level. Public libraries can use advocacy to secure ongoing support and funding and encourage a positive public policy environment that enables them to meet users’ changing needs. Through advocacy, public libraries can also attract new users, draw attention to new services, raise visibility, highlight the power of success stories, demonstrate impact and their potential to solve community problems, attract public and private support, and forge partnerships.

This paper discusses the ways public libraries and programs that support them use evidence of their impact to prove to stakeholders that they are meeting the users’ needs. Impact evidence is shared with decision makers to demonstrate public libraries’ contribution to users’ improved social and economic well-being, such as providing assistance in finding jobs, building businesses, enhancing education, accessing government services, and improving their health. The authors show that through a combination of data and stories, libraries illustrate how they meet local needs and priorities to justify continued resources.

The authors of this paper are advocacy and impact assessment specialists representing programs in Botswana, Chile, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Their programs are led by the following grantees:

- Botswana, the African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships, Inc. (ACHAP) in partnership with the Botswana National Library Service (BNLS). The program is called Sesigo.
- Chile, the Directorate of Libraries, Archives, and Museums (DIBAM), under the Ministry of Education. The program is called BiblioRedes.
- Latvia, the Ministry of Culture. The program is called Father’s Third Son (3td).
- Lithuania, the Ministry of Culture in partnership with the Martynas Mazvydas National Library. The program is called Libraries for Innovation (L4I).
- Poland, the Polish American Freedom Foundation. The program is implemented by the Information Society Development Foundation (FRSI) and is called the Library Development Program (LDP).

1.1 Research on advocacy and public libraries

There is a range of toolkits available to help people undertake advocacy work on behalf of libraries generally (Australian Library and Information Association, 2010) or public libraries (Public Library Association, 2010). However, as Marshall (2001) noted in relation
to the closely related field of public relations, “very little research has been published on the effectiveness of public relations in public, academic, school or special libraries”. This trend has largely continued, apart from occasional descriptions of national advocacy programs (Durcan and Elford, 2009) or case study on the effectiveness of a state-wide strategy (Keresztury, 2009), and excursions into peripherally related areas such as the role of library associations in communicating advocacy research to practitioners (Haddow, 2010).

Similarly, although the role of the national program evaluator as advocate has received some attention in the international development evaluation literature (Datta, 1999), this theme has so far been largely neglected by library researchers. Although this international development literature usually assumes that evaluators are external to, or independent of, their evaluation settings, some overlap in the roles of service provider, evaluator and advocate is common in national library development settings (Streatfield and Markless, 2010).

1.2 The Global Libraries approach to impact assessment and advocacy

The author’s programs use a common methodology to collect impact evidence in persuading decision makers to support public libraries. Importantly, the programs identify funders’ priorities or goals, such as bridging the digital divide, developing the economy, or improving health care. These are usually the national or local government priorities, because they most commonly fund public libraries. In some instances, a specific company’s priorities are determined since businesses also contribute to a public library’s ability to provide relevant services.

Evidence from primary sources, including surveys and case studies, and secondary sources, such as government statistics and reports is then collected to demonstrate the ways public libraries contribute to those goals. Program implementers also use this evidence to demonstrate their program’s effectiveness, including whether the program achieved its objectives.

Finally, various means are used to communicate that evidence, such as media, public relations materials, and collaborative working groups. Building relationships of trust with decision makers is a critical foundation in ensuring that the evidence is well received.

This paper provides information on programs in Botswana, Chile, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland that are planning to use or already use impact evidence to influence stakeholders to support public libraries. It explains the different goals and priorities identified, the evidence used to demonstrate that public libraries contribute to those goals, the methodology used to collect that evidence, and the ways in which that evidence was, or will be, shared to persuade decision makers to fund public libraries.

The general approach to impact evaluation in each program has evolved since Chile pioneered the approach under the name BiblioRedes. Their impact assessment model consisted of three stages. First was the baseline, which assessed the situation before the implementation of the project. Second was the intermediate stage during which BiblioRedes evaluated the processes and changes during program implementation. Finally, BiblioRedes assessed the program’s effects and impacts on users. BiblioRedes integrated and articulated quantitative and qualitative approaches to evaluate impact.

Impact assessment now follows a common pattern of baseline evaluation followed by interim and final impact assessment studies, with each stage in the process
providing evidence for advocacy. The Latvian approach is described more fully below to illustrate the general approach.

The first step to measure the value and impact of information and communications technologies (ICT)-related public library services was to develop a model in close collaboration with different project stakeholders. The 3rd project then implemented the impact assessment model, starting with a baseline study in 2007, and will continue to measure impact until 2011. These efforts will culminate in a final report on the main social and economic benefits and impacts of library services and activities.

The impact study examines the potential impacts in the areas of employment and income, education, communication, culture and leisure, health, and e-governance. The 3rd project uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to survey library directors, librarians, library users, library non-users, children, local government leaders, and other stakeholders and opinion leaders. After the project completes the impact assessment study, the important indicators will be incorporated into the national statistics and data will be collected on an annual basis, resulting in significant improvement in national library statistics. Besides, the main impact assessment studies, several in-depth studies are planned that will supplement the main studies with more specific in-depth data and evidence (Figure 1). The 3rd project uses the impact study results to advocate for public libraries at the national level, distributes the information within the public library community, and uses it to further develop and change library performance strategies.

The Global Libraries approach to impact planning and assessment for program sustainability is described more fully by Fried et al. (2010) and the importance of impact evaluation is explored by Streatfield and Markless (2009).

1.3 Advocacy aspirations
Each iteration of the program has distinct but related advocacy aspirations:

(1) One of Botswana’s national goals is to be an “informed, educated nation by 2016”. Through the Sesigo project, started in 2009, public libraries will contribute to national goals by providing access to computers and information. Impact study results will be used to advocate to national and local government to designate public libraries as the information access points and platform for all e-government services, including access to information in the areas of health, education, and agriculture.

Figure 1.
Impact assessment plan
(2) In Chile, BiblioRedes used the results of its impact assessment studies to advocate for government funding for public access to computers and the internet in libraries. The results of the first impact study had particular importance as the data allowed BiblioRedes to demonstrate that libraries, through public computer and internet access and training services, contributed to bridge the digital divide. BiblioRedes went from being a three-year project, financed in part by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, to a government program, ensuring its sustainability with a dedicated government budget.

(3) The 3td project in Latvia is assessing the impact of public library services through quantitative and qualitative evidence. Public libraries receive government funding; however, librarians must advocate for support to provide and sustain services. Impact study results can help librarians demonstrate the value of libraries to government, funders, and decision makers. 3td demonstrates how they:
   - use impact data in communication with public and private partners to convince them to advocate for libraries;
   - disseminate impact evidence to different government bodies, funders, and decision makers by using different advocacy tools; and
   - raise involvement of community into advocacy and support for public libraries.

(4) The L4I team in Lithuania conducted a nation-wide impact study that provided quantitative and qualitative evidence of the impact from the use of ICTs in libraries and society. The study results are used for advocacy and to adjust library advocacy plans, such as:
   - planning new advocacy activities targeted at and involving the government and private sectors;
   - shifting the library advertisement campaign from informing about public internet access availability in libraries to librarians communicating the benefits of internet use; and
   - shifting library outreach campaigns from targeting narrow hard-to-reach target groups to reaching out to the masses, focusing on people living in rural areas, older workers, and senior citizens.

(5) About 40 percent of rural libraries in Poland do not have access to internet. The LDP convinced the national telecom operator, Telekomunikacja Polska SA (TP SA), and the national government to connect all public libraries to the internet free. Arguments used were based on evidence on how libraries contribute to national goals:
   - the role of libraries in developing the knowledge-based society;
   - statistical data on the scale of the problem, including financial estimations; and
   - reducing the digital gap between Poland and the European Union.

The particular advocacy experience of each country is reviewed in turn below in the next five sections.
2. Botswana

Botswana’s national government priorities include economic diversification, employment creation, poverty reduction, and responding to and reducing the impact of HIV/AIDS. To sustain its socio-economic development agenda, the government has made access to information a core tenet of its strategy. This central element is embodied as one of the pillars of Vision 2016, a government manifesto that articulates specific, long-term, socio-economic goals for the country and the strategies to meet them, which calls for Botswana to become an educated, informed society by 2016. The policy framework notes that the country must “recognise the importance of information and of developing efficient information systems and networks for the support of research, education, development and communication [...].” Vision 2016 urges that information “must be harnessed to the best advantage of all citizens.” The aim is that by 2016 all citizens of Botswana can use the power of computers and the internet to access information and services that will bring benefits to the various aspects of their lives and their communities.

Botswana faces considerable challenges in ensuring equitable access to information and technology by all citizens. Private ownership of computers and subscriptions to internet services is overall very low in the country and is likely to remain low due to a variety of prohibitive factors, from availability of electricity to high costs. Public access to technology must necessarily play a crucial role if the country is to make any significant inroads in achieving these national goals. Yet, like most African countries, Botswana lacks widespread public access to computers and the internet, particularly in rural areas where public access technology is virtually non-existent. Although policies, business developments and technology advances are driving increased online access for government services and information that could help improve people’s lives in areas such as education, health, business and agriculture online, most of the population (and, particularly the rural populace) are not able to use it.

Botswana’s public libraries offer great potential as a platform through which citizens can gain access to computers and the internet, because they represent government-supported infrastructure that already operates across the country, bringing trained staff with a mission to support information access. The BNLS manages a network of 96 public libraries with a mandate to provide information services to citizens, made up of 23 branch and four community[1] libraries and 69 village reading rooms. BNLS currently offers books and periodicals and is not keeping up with the demands of the information age, and thus limits public libraries’ contribution to attainment of the national vision. A community needs assessment study conducted in October 2008 confirmed that Botswana public libraries are merely warehouses of books, which do not meet users’ information needs.

The Sesigo project is a countrywide program to install free public access to computers and the internet in public libraries, provide training for librarians and users, and raise awareness of the opportunities offered. The vision of success for the Sesigo project is a Botswana transformed into an information society with effective modern public libraries that meet the information needs of citizens. A strong public library system and improved access to information are integral to this transformation, and as such, they significantly contribute towards the attainment of the country’s socio-economic goals.
The project’s impact assessment efforts track progress and gauge the benefits that the project brings to the country and its citizens. To launch the assessment, the Sesigo project conducted a baseline study in 2009. The study not only focused on public libraries, but also looked at other public access venues, including private internet cafes and government-run Kitsong Centres (multi-use business centers that operate on a cost-recovery basis charging a small fee for computer, internet, and other services and are run by BotswanaPost), to determine the status of public access to ICT in Botswana. The baseline study entailed:

- a survey of libraries and other venues providing public access to technology which gathered data on the state of 59 ICT service venues;
- interviews with users of 847 libraries and other public access venues to gather information on their information seeking behavior and perception of the use of libraries, librarians, and public access technology; and
- as well as a national level inventory of all 164 public access venues, an examination of the library and public access environment, and interviews with 80 librarians and other “infomediaries” about their roles in supporting public access to ICT.

The Sesigo project plans to undertake annual studies in 2010-2012 to measure program impact.

The baseline report showed that:

- Sesigo project is well positioned to help the country take advantage of the library system venues that are already providing information to communities, and move them toward more technology-based services. Understanding where people go for information is important groundwork for Sesigo project. Currently, people access information in libraries, village reading rooms, and the various venues that offer public access to technology. 58 per cent of the venues identified in the study are libraries and village reading rooms, illustrating the important role that the library system already plays in information and communications access within current limitations.

- Sesigo project should take active steps to reach out to Kitsong Centres and internet cafes and build on commonalities, so that the project is viewed as a collaborator and partner in enhancing communications and information access in Botswana. The Sesigo project could help create a spirit of “being in it together” among information workers in all venues, so library staff and other infomediaries feel that they are working toward common information society goals. This may be especially valuable because Botswana is so small. Library staff and other infomediaries are similar – usually young, female, and educated – and their jobs are not that different. There is an opportunity for library staff to connect with colleagues and peers in other venues. Libraries could also collaborate with other venues and ensure availability of affordable and sustainable internet connection. Libraries and other public access venues share common goals to promote the information society in Botswana. Many non-library venues feel that cultural events are important to their work, but few actually engage in cultural activities. This is strength of libraries and village reading rooms, which could collaborate with these venues. There is a great need for libraries, perhaps in collaboration
with other public access venues, to outreach to the communities where they are located. Library staff and other infomediaries consider social services, active community involvement, and protecting Botswana’s cultural heritage to be important to their jobs, and yet they do not do much of it. Respondents most frequently mentioned cell phones (78 per cent of respondents), radio (62 per cent) and books (53 per cent) for communication and information on a daily basis – this represents an opportunity for information dissemination through public libraries.

• Sesigo project has a unique potential to reach the underserved, especially those in rural and remote areas. Only 42 per cent of the places where people are going for ICT are non-library venues; the majority of these are commercial internet cafes (62 per cent of non-library venues). Internet cafes are mostly located in urban areas and are almost non-existent in remote areas. The government is a major player in the information access space now (representing 71 per cent of the market, between libraries, village reading rooms, and Kitsong Centres), but it must wield its power carefully in that other public access venues offer different kinds of commercial services that public libraries may not be able to provide. Moreover, public libraries offer a unique service that is not only free but also includes a complementary range of ICT training through trained staff.

• The Sesigo project should utilize user perceptions of libraries to offer programs that will meet society’s needs. The overall positive response on the role of libraries, village readings rooms, and librarians is a sign that there is support for libraries. Notably, users feel libraries are important to Botswana’s development. This is an indication that Sesigo has the hearts and minds of the communities and this should help them build momentum for the library project. Similarly, Sesigo can build on the fact that users feel computers and the internet are an important function of libraries and are useful. The overwhelming interest in using technology in libraries and in training is important. Users placed a disproportionately higher value on computers and the internet as compared to their actual daily use of these tools, suggesting that they value these highly, even though they are not regularly using them. They admitted having trouble finding information and indicated that some information they need is too expensive, but they are not afraid to ask for help. Again, this is an opportunity, for providing low-cost (or free, in the case of libraries), relevant information, and for infomediaries to play a role.

Sesigo has taken note of the factors that limit technology access in other venues, and is working to address them in the library context; such as users who said that they do not know how to use technology or do not feel it meets their needs. Sesigo is also paying attention to the priorities for technology use seen in other venues and ensuring that libraries are ready to meet these needs in their programs as part of the drive to promote the use of technology for social purposes – accessing information on health, business, government and culture. There is a significant need – and an opportunity – for the Sesigo project to play an active role in promoting the creation and dissemination of local, relevant content and services by Botswana-based organizations and through local web sites.
2.1 Using the baseline findings

The public and the media have a symbiotic relationship – public perceptions can be influenced by media coverage and can be a gauge of public interest in a given topic – and an understanding of how this is playing out in Botswana could be of use to the Sesigo project as it goes forward. The paucity of news coverage on either libraries or technology also represents an opportunity for Sesigo to build public interest in the program and its role in transforming libraries and building the information society in Botswana.

Sesigo is using baseline study findings to inform project implementation and to advocate for the use of libraries as channels for public access to information. The project team reaches out to the public through its website and newsletter to build momentum for computer use in libraries. Findings of the study will also be shared with the public through the government newspaper. The Sesigo project steering committee reviewed the study’s findings and will draw on them as it continues to build and gain stakeholders’ support. The study has largely informed the review of the Library School curriculum aimed at plugging the skills gaps in librarians. With the help of Sesigo, at the local level, public librarians will also use this information to shape their work with library users and the communities they serve.

3. Chile

From 2001 to 2004, BiblioRedes was a project funded to provide public access computers, internet, and information technology (IT) training services in public libraries. One of the most important components of the project was the study, the first of its kind in Chile, to assess the program’s impact. BiblioRedes used the results of the impact assessment study to advocate for continued government support and to gain greater visibility of public libraries before decision makers.

The project’s first impact study results were particularly important as they laid the foundation for BiblioRedes to be included in the government’s annual evaluation of social programs, allowing BiblioRedes to demonstrate that, through public computer access and IT training, public libraries contributed to bridging the digital divide. This allowed BiblioRedes to transform from a three-year project to being a government-funded program, ensuring its sustainability with a dedicated annual budget.

The study demonstrated how the project increased social and cultural capital in public library users and bridged the digital divide, generating greater integration of public library users in the information society. The study also confirmed that public libraries were better positioned in the political agenda and in cultural and economic life because of this project.

The study evaluated both the project’s effectiveness, whether project achieved its objectives, and its impact, the project’s influence on individuals and communities. Thus, the evaluation put into perspective and was able to pinpoint the effect of project implementation and the benefits of this intervention in the local community, mainly in its contribution to bridging the digital divide among public library users. The study described and analyzed access and usage levels of ICT by users and the community surrounding the public library; the effects of ICT use in increasing the ICT competencies of public library users and at the community level; and innovation in the management of public libraries, as a consequence of the incorporation of ICT use.
The impact study data were shared constantly with the country’s decision makers and staff of various ministries and private companies through press conferences, reports, news articles (or other media), brochures, and publicity campaigns, to name some of the most effective activities. BiblioRedes demonstrated how it was able, within three years, to implement activities to contribute to the decline of the digital divide, increase the social and cultural capital, and enable a process of inclusion in the information society for people who had no other possibilities but the ones provided through public libraries.

The data that were most effective in demonstrating the project’s success were the following.

3.1 Use of computers and the internet
Users who reported making frequent use of computers at the public library (on all or almost all of their visits) increased from only 19.9 per cent in 2003 to 65.4 per cent in 2004 and then to 67.2 per cent in 2005 at the end of the evaluation period. This implied that, besides the high level of computer use, the frequency of such use was also high.

In the case of the internet, the percentage of users who always or almost always used the internet when visiting the public library rose from 14.6 per cent in 2003 to 68.2 per cent in 2005. In addition to a high proportion of computer use, there was also a high-rate of internet users.

Looking at overall use, Figure 2 shows the increase of the use of computers and internet in the three-years of the impact study.

In addition, the study results showed that rural public library users reported using computers more heavily than urban public library users. In 2005, the proportions were 83.2 per cent for rural users and 69.3 per cent for urban users. Similarly, the results indicated a higher percentage of users in rural areas (81.3 per cent) than in centrally located areas (74.3 per cent), which implied that ICT access in these public spaces contributed significantly to greater social inclusion in the most isolated areas that often lacked these services, such as the rural areas of the country.

3.2 ICT competence level
The impact study also surveyed the users’ self-perception of their changing ICT competence, which proved to be powerful data for advocacy activities. In 2003,
at the time BiblioRedes conducted the baseline study, nearly 70 per cent of those surveyed did not reach a “medium competence” level, while 66.8 per cent of them reported having no ICT competence whatsoever. With this information, an index was generated where zero meant there was no ICT competence and 21.4 was the highest competency level recorded in the survey. The average index for ICT competence in 2003 was 3.7. In 2004, the index averaged 7.6 and increased to 9.4 in 2005. This supported the conclusion that public library users had greatly improved their ICT competence, since, by 2005, only 14.8 per cent of the surveyed users reported having no ICT competence. By 2005, more than half of the users (51.5 per cent) cited the internet as a tool that were able to use satisfactorily in contrast with the 37 per cent in 2004.

Figure 3 shows the drop in the percentage, from 2003 to 2005, of public library users who lack ICT competence. In addition, the proportion of users who were unable to use different software programs dropped by at least 20 percentage points.

3.3 Using the findings
BiblioRedes publicized this information to demonstrate the library’s impact on bridging the digital divide, which resulted in the Ministry of Education recommending that the government select BiblioRedes as one of the projects the Ministry of Finance evaluate as a part of its annual evaluation program. Having this evaluation by the Ministry of Finance was one of BiblioRedes’ goals in its sustainability strategy, since the State was the only entity capable of absorbing the costs associated with the operation of the program in its entirety.

Following the initial evaluation in 2006, the evaluation panel recommended that BiblioRedes become a government-funded program and identified a series of recommendations for improvement for BiblioRedes to fulfill by June 2007. BiblioRedes satisfactorily implemented those recommendations and continues to receive significant government funding today.

4. Latvia
The goal of the 3td project is to improve people’s quality of life by strengthening and using the capacities of public libraries to facilitate better and proactive use of resources offered by free access to ICT and the internet. All local government authorities and their 874 public libraries are participating in the project. In late 2006, when the 3td project started, the concept of impact assessment and the idea of measuring the social
and economic impact of library services on library users and local communities was a novelty in Latvia.

3td project objectives included raising the prestige and image of public libraries in society and improving the value of public libraries in local communities. The project is beneficial to many people in Latvia, especially rural populations, and in many ways, including improving their social and economic status. The project aims to motivate existing library users and to attract new ones who could benefit socially and economically from new technologies and free internet access in public libraries.

Since all public libraries in Latvia receive government funding, librarians must advocate for support to provide and sustain services to their changing communities. The 3td project assesses the impact of its activities in part to provide evidence for those advocacy efforts. The main goals of the 3td project's impact assessment are to:

- study social and economic benefits arising from ICT use, services, and content in public libraries;
- use impact data and evidence in advocacy efforts to change attitudes and actions towards libraries;
- demonstrate the value of public library services within communities to government bodies, funders, and decision makers; and
- support efforts towards sustainability of public library services to changing communities in Latvia.

Results from the multi-perspective, longitudinal, and nationwide impact assessment studies are a powerful tool in the advocacy efforts of the project implementers and librarians.

### 4.1 Use impact data to cause an impact

The 3td project conducted a representative survey of inhabitants as a part of the baseline study to evaluate the situation prior to implementation of the main project activities. The study indicated that free internet access in the public library was used by 28 per cent of the Latvian population, almost half of all internet users in Latvia (61 per cent at that time, 2007). Although public library services were actively used by 38 per cent of the population, less than a half of the population, including public library users and non-users (48 per cent), was aware of free internet access in public libraries. Social benefits anticipated included more meaningful leisure time (64 per cent), as well as improved education (59 per cent) and communication (58 per cent), while 10 per cent anticipated economic benefits such as saving or earning money and dealing with employment issues (Paberza and Rutkauskiene, 2010).

The 3td project conducted an in-depth study on public library value and trust in the second-quarter of 2009 after 4,000 free public access computers were installed, internet connectivity was improved, and librarians were trained to consult users. Data from that study showed that the number of active library users had decreased by 4 per cent (34 per cent of population had used public library services during the year prior to the survey). However, public libraries were visited more frequently than other cultural and recreational institution in Latvia. The study also showed that public libraries attracted a high-level of trust: 43 per cent of respondents said they never needed to verify
information received from library. This level of trust was even higher than for personal networks, which are the most used information sources.

The social value of the new public library services was seen in improvement of leisure (67 per cent) and education (63 per cent). The economic value remained lower than the social value but had increased in comparison with the baseline. About 19 per cent reported that the public library helped them to save or earn money or to find a job (Paberza, 2010).

4.2 Using the findings
To promote the new services available in public libraries, the impact study results were communicated through a travelling exhibition “The World – A Click Away in Your Library”, which consisted of eight double-sided posters designed to describe public library services. The areas covered included e-services, employment issues, life-long learning possibilities, socializing, services for people with impaired eyesight, choices in using library e-catalogues, content of the Latvian Digital Library, and available databases. The posters were displayed in unusual public places, such as supermarkets, bus and railway stations, and sport centers, where as many people as possible would be exposed to them.

A linked exhibition campaign was mounted to achieve the following advocacy and public relations objectives:

1. encourage people to use opportunities provided by the 3td project at public libraries;
2. inform target audiences about the benefits people can get using ICT at libraries;
3. motivate existing library users and encourage those who have not yet come to libraries; and
4. involve local authorities and thus create their awareness about libraries’ impact and need to support them.

An exhibition opening event was held in each of Latvia’s 26 administrative regions to attract the attention of the local community, to assure publicity in the mass media and to establish a personal dialogue with every visitor.

In the third-quarter of 2009, the 3td project conducted an interim impact study that demonstrated the impact of the advocacy. The number of active public library users increased by 6 per cent and the number of those who had never been to a public library decreased by 10 per cent (Figure 4).

The study also demonstrated that after two-years of implementation of the 3td project the importance of free public internet access in public libraries has increased (Figure 5). The 3td project team uses this data heavily to advocate to local and national government officials, funders, and decision makers.

4.3 Innovative approaches and different advocacy tools
When advocating for public libraries, various tools and techniques are used by the 3td project team, public library supporters, and public libraries. In 2009, the 3td project produced and distributed a desk calendar, rather than a study report or formal newsletter, to share the latest impact data from the interim impact study. The comments and data integrated in the calendar were selected to:
The 3td project implementers have learned that promoting impact data in such an unconventional way as a desk calendar attracted more attention than traditional methods could (Plate 1-3).

The 3td project produced nine video stories (www.youtube.com/tresaistevadels) of delighted lives, fulfilled dreams, and personal wins that they used to advocate more effectively and communicate success stories taking place in public libraries around the country. The videos demonstrated how libraries help people improve their quality
of life, proved the importance of the services that libraries provide to the community, and showed how libraries respond to the needs of different social groups. The 3td project and public libraries used the videos for the following advocacy and communication goals:

- to address potential library users and encourage them to come to the library and take advantage of library services, especially the free access ICT;
- to motivate current library users to discover new opportunities at the library;
- to inspire libraries to be more active in promoting their services; and
- to address municipalities and other decision makers, improving their understanding of the role of libraries.

All the advocacy tools created by the 3td project are made available for all public libraries and are used by public library directors and librarians in their advocacy efforts at the local level. The tools have been in effective in demonstrating the value of public libraries and convincing government stakeholders to support and invest in public libraries.
5. Lithuania

One of the L4I program goals is to increase public demand for public libraries, publicly accessible computers and internet access. To achieve this goal, L4I has implemented a numbers of activities to advocate for public libraries and to increase libraries’ abilities to advocate on their own. These activities include, among others, events in the libraries, national outreach activities, contests to engage journalists to tell the public about libraries, and newsletters to local and central government officials.

A large-scale impact assessment study is performed annually to provide hard data with which to advocate more effectively. The goal of the study is to investigate outcomes and impacts arising from the use of public libraries and public access computers, content and services that can be accessed through public access computers, library staff facilitation and support, and advocacy activities performed or initiated by the project.

The impact assessment study integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods. The methods used include surveys, structured in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. L4I-designed research instruments for each target group and used various data collection mechanisms, including web tools. The study integrates the perspectives of nearly all groups that relate to public internet access at public libraries.
library managers, librarians, library public internet access users, general population (including those who do not use the library), local government leaders, government officials, media representatives, entrepreneurs, and non-government and professional association representatives. The study measures the change in perspective over time and, therefore, will be performed with the same target groups several times during the life of the program as well as after its implementation.

The initial study showed that the internet was used most often in public libraries by adults who were at social risk, such as the unemployed (24 per cent), retired (15 per cent), and low-income individuals (26 per cent). Around half (47 per cent) of library public internet users did not have access to the internet at home or at work. Groups at social risk (such as the retired, the disabled, and the unemployed) had even less access to the internet at home or at work (73, 69, and 71 per cent, respectively) and 19 per cent of public internet users only had the opportunity to use the internet in a public library.

The majority (52 per cent on average) of public library internet users employed it for social benefit, such as enriching leisure time (72 per cent) and improving communication with friends and relatives (57 per cent). In addition to enriched leisure time, older users also valued the ability to find health-related information, while young people used it mostly to help with studying. Rural residents employed the internet primarily to enrich their leisure time, whereas urban users resorted to it mainly to save money or find a job.
On average, 21 per cent of users felt the financial benefit. About 40 per cent saved money while using the internet, 7 per cent earned money, and the same number increased their income. The financial benefit cited most (20 per cent) was that it is free of charge.

Most (81 per cent) of the public internet access users had asked for library staff help. Every fifth user consulted library staff often (23 per cent) and 19 per cent never asked for help. The vast majority (92 per cent) of users were satisfied with the help staff provided.

About 41 per cent of people used public library services. Out of all culture and leisure-related services, residents were most satisfied with the services provided by public libraries. If residents were in a position to determine the level of funding to provide to culture and leisure services, public libraries would be allocated a quarter of the budget.

The qualitative study of public internet access users demonstrated that they felt positively about the changes that had taken place in public libraries over the previous year: the importance of the library as a cultural/social/community centre has been gradually increasing (this trend has been particularly apparent in rural areas), and the perception of the social benefit provided by public internet access has been strengthening.

Hard-to-reach social groups highlighted other important changes related to the development and improvement of public internet access services:

- Public internet access has contributed to the image of the library as a more attractive, modern, and open place. The library is increasingly perceived as a modern information centre and a place to spend one’s free time.
- Elderly and new visitors were attracted to the library by the internet service, which resulted in an increased flow of library visitors.
- Owing to the financial situation of Lithuanian residents, high levels of unemployment, and reduced funds for the press and books in libraries, visitors were stimulated to use the opportunities offered by modern services (for instance, read the press online).
- New ICT services and the assistance provided by the librarian created favorable conditions to develop or improve users’ computer literacy skills.

5.1 Using the findings
The studies suggest that to maintain the positive image of libraries and keep services modern and relevant to potential and current users, it is essential to continue advocacy, advertisement, and outreach campaigns. In addition, long-term programs should be developed, targeted not only at hard-to-reach groups but also at other potentially new public internet access users. These services could include:

- computer literacy courses at different ability levels, which would be organized in response to the skills and needs of each visitor group;
- campaigns to increase community members’ interest in the internet; and
- events during which the opportunities and benefits of public access computing could be introduced in a practical and comprehensive way.

Based on the study results, L4I concluded that continuous advertising of public internet access in libraries is needed to attract more users. By putting a stronger
emphasis on its social benefits, public libraries will be able to attract residents who do not use public libraries. L4I also determined that current public internet access users need to be encouraged to publicize the service, as they are often the best advocates for its use.

L4I uses the impact study results to make management decisions, including those concerning advocacy activities. For example, L4I shifted its free internet marketing campaign from targeting the public in general to addressing specific groups: older workers and seniors, unemployed people, and people living in rural areas. L4I shifted its outreach campaigns towards the same groups, from specific and smaller target groups targeted in the previous year. L4I developed communication tools targeted to involve and interact with local government representatives.

To improve the library’s image in society and to increase the ability of libraries to advocate on their own, in 2010, L4I started a new initiative in which they will develop and disseminate the concept of the modern library, trained librarians to increase their skills and confidence to advocate, and create a toolkit of advocacy materials for local libraries. L4I expects that this activity will lead to the improved use of the impact study results at the local level and enable local libraries to use the results to advocate more effectively.

6. Poland

The LDP, which began in April 2009, is designed to expand development opportunities for small town and village residents in Poland by modernizing libraries. Rural and small town libraries are to become modern facilities offering universal and free access to reliable information and knowledge through various media, in particular ICT and internet access.

As part of the LDP, libraries receive computer hardware, but they have the burden of providing internet access, which is a significant challenge because approximately 40 per cent of rural libraries in Poland lack the necessary broadband infrastructure (the “last mile” problem). In addition, many libraries with internet access face the problem of insufficient bandwidth. The cost of connecting to the internet, or significantly increasing connection throughput, exceeds the financial capacities of libraries and local authorities. It is unprofitable for Telecom companies to bear the relatively high infrastructural investment costs to bring the internet to one library in a small village, where there is little hope of acquiring other customers.

The LDP faced the challenge of most libraries being unable to benefit from the program because of lack of internet access. Therefore, the main advocacy goal in the initial phase of the program was to promote provision of broadband internet to all libraries by developing a systemic solution, in close cooperation with relevant central authorities.

The LDP focused their advocacy efforts on three bodies:

(1) The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (MKiDN), responsible for public libraries and for implementation of the library modernization program Biblioteka +, which is developing internet-based library management software to support library operations.

(2) The Ministry of the Interior and Administration, responsible for the modernization of ICT and for implementing the information society development strategy.
TP SA, the largest telecom business in Poland and the national operator with the required infrastructure and extensive investment capabilities. TP SA is interested in maintaining good relations with the central government, because it is in a long-standing dispute with the telecom market regulator, and it has a focus on the social responsibility of business.

These advocacy efforts led to a memorandum of understanding to provide Polish public libraries with internet access, which was signed between the two Ministries, TP SA and FRSI, the organization implementing the LDP. TP SA undertook to provide all local public libraries in Poland with free connection to the internet for three years and does not charge libraries for internet installation, activation, or subscription fees.

6.1 Impact evidence: data used in advocating for that goal

Advocacy efforts in Poland are most effective when supported by evidence of recipients' needs that demonstrates the potential results they can achieve. Therefore, to argue successfully that it was necessary to equip all public libraries in Poland with broadband internet, the LDP emphasized the following issues:

1. Poland’s digital lag compared to Europe. Only 48 per cent of Polish residents use the internet, compared to as many as 60 per cent in Europe. Only 13 per cent of households have internet access compared to 23 per cent in Europe.

2. The deepening social and digital exclusion of rural residents. Almost 39 per cent of the population (38 million people) lives outside mainstream social and economical life. In rural areas, only 23 per cent of residents use the internet and only 15 per cent have internet access at home, compared to 60 and 58 per cent, respectively, in cities. Digital exclusion results not only from lack of physical access to ICT, but primarily from psychological barriers, such as the lack the skills and motivation to use ICT. Using ICT is necessary to fully participate in economic and social life and pursue personal and social development opportunities.

3. Library potential. Poland has a stable network of 8,500 public libraries, 6,600 of which are located in villages and small towns. They employ 9,600 well-educated librarians (41 per cent with tertiary-level education) who enjoy public trust. Libraries are truly universal and available (free of charge) places for everyone in impoverished rural communities. Even today, the social impact of libraries is strong, and it could become stronger and play a crucial role in generating social and human capital and building citizenship. About 29.5 per cent of rural and small town residents (i.e. almost 5 million people) declared that they visited a public library at least once in the last 12 months, and a further 21 per cent had contact with the library in a different form (e.g. participation in events organized by the library).

4. The libraries’ ICT needs, which, if fulfilled, could satisfy the residents’ need for access to information and knowledge. About 60 percent of libraries have publicly available, internet-enabled computers, but the internet connection throughputs are relatively low, usually less than one megabyte per second, and they are often old (three-and-a-half years on average).
The libraries’ potential role in overcoming digital lag. The LDP will support libraries to develop new services, described in the LDP’s Menu-8 framework, which includes eight types of library activities, such as access to multimedia services, local information, and e-administration. Some public libraries already successfully deliver such services.

Consistency with national priorities, including:
- Increasing the competitiveness and innovation of the Polish economy by building the information society.
- Improving the condition of technical and social infrastructure.
- Developing rural areas.
- Increasing regional development and territorial cohesion.

Other partners’ contribution to library modernization:
- The LDP will provide ICT hardware and training (IT and management).
- The MKiDN will provide small infrastructure grants and MAK +, an internet-based library management software package.
- Local government will ensure appropriate conditions for the supplied computer hardware, extend library opening hours, cover the costs of travel to training courses, and upgrade equipment, as required by their participation in the LDP.

6.2 Collecting the evidence
The LDP conducted a series of studies that were used in its advocacy efforts. The LDP’s analysis of the program context demonstrated how the LDP relates to similar projects undertaken so far, including various initiatives aimed at delivering access to ICT in rural areas and the obstacles they encountered. A quantitative study of libraries examined the existing IT infrastructure, internet access, legal status and public library financing. The study also analyzed librarians’ IT skills, the ways in which rural residents used library services and rural residents’ needs. This study covered 902 libraries, 500 librarians, 1,021 rural residents, and 615 library users. A qualitative study used case studies to illustrate how libraries function in their 78 communities. This included interviews with librarians, local government representatives, teachers, local activists, and group interviews with residents. In addition, the LDP used data from the Central Statistical Office, such as computer availability, from all libraries in Poland; connection costs assessed by TP SA; data on all libraries collected by regional libraries to enable TP SA to develop offers and integrate data with their client database; and other data from external sources, such as Eurostat and Social Diagnosis, which collect statistics on internet access in Poland and Europe.

6.3 Using the findings
The LDP used this evidence in various ways to advocate for free internet access for public libraries. The data were presented in direct talks and negotiations with TP SA and the two Ministries, resulting in the signing of the agreement to provide free access. The data demonstrated to TP SA the scale of the problem, including estimated investment costs and the potential marketing opportunities. The data were
all communicated to the library community, opinion leaders, regional authorities, and through the media to the public.

The data were then used to make the agreement operational. The LDP conveyed knowledge about the functioning of libraries to TP SA and communicated practical information to the workgroup of memorandum signatories’ representatives. Finally, the LDP shared the information with a team in TP SA that was responsible initially for defining company commitments and later for connecting libraries to internet. This information was crucial for internal advocacy within TP SA and necessary for designing the implementation model, such as preparing guidelines on how to draw up legal agreements with libraries, how to communicate the TP SA offer to libraries, and how to conduct client interviews with libraries.

7. Conclusions
All of these programs have collected a range of evidence about the current and potential roles of public libraries, public perceptions and experience of ICT access, and the potential (or actual) impact of public access ICT. They have all made strategic use of this evidence to demonstrate the impact that library services have on users’ lives in order to persuade decision makers to support library services that meet users changing needs.

Common themes from the programs which have so far implemented public access ICT are that these services have particular impact on rural communities and that impact can be particularly powerful on disadvantaged groups such as older workers, senior citizens and unemployed people.

These common factors have led to advocacy efforts being focused on identified decision makers’ priorities, using evidence collected to demonstrate how libraries can contribute to those priorities. This evidence has then been presented to decision makers through targeted channels and conveyed by trusted individuals.

Similarly, the identification of groups who appear to benefit most from public access ICT has led to further advocacy work in drawing appropriate services to the attention of these groups.

The depth and range of the experience in these programs provides strong endorsement for this approach to evidence-based advocacy in order to help public libraries to demonstrate and maximize their value and importance.

Program web sites
Botswana: www.sesigo.org.bw/
Chile: www.biblioredes.cl
Latvia: www.3td.lv/index.php/en/par/
Lithuania: www.bibliotekospazangai.lt
Poland: www.biblioteki.org/en

Note
1. Community libraries have been established since 2007 under an initiative of the Robert and Sarah Rothschild Foundation.

References


Authors and affiliations
Janet Sawaya is based at Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle, Washington, USA.
Tshepo Maswabi is based at African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships, SESIGO Project, Gaborone, Botswana.
Resego Taolo is based at African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships, SESIGO Project, Gaborone, Botswana.
Pablo Andrade is based at BiblioRedes Program – Directorate of Libraries Archives and Museums, Santiago, Chile.
Maximo Moreno Grez is based at BiblioRedes Program – Directorate of Libraries Archives and Museums, Santiago, Chile.
Pilar Pacheco is based at BiblioRedes Program – Directorate of Libraries Archives and Museums, Santiago, Chile.
Kristine Paberza is based at State Agency “Culture Information Systems” Public Library Development Project “Father’s Third Son”, Riga, Latvia.
Sandra Vigante is based at State Agency “Culture Information Systems” Public Library Development Project “Father’s Third Son”, Riga, Latvia.
Agniete Kurutyte is based at National Library of Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuania.
Ugne Rutkauskiene is based at National Library of Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuania.
Jolanta Jeżowska is based at Information Society Development Foundation, Warsaw, Poland. Maciej Kochanowicz is based at Information Society Development Foundation, Warsaw, Poland.

About the authors
Janet Sawaya is a Program Officer for the Global Libraries Initiative at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Prior to her work with the foundation, she worked for many years improving governance in developing countries. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Economy from the Evergreen State College and a Juris Doctor from the Georgetown University Law Center. Janet Sawaya is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: janet.sawaya@gatesfoundation.org

Tshepo Maswabi is the Advocacy and Outreach Specialist for the Sesigo project. She is responsible for the development and execution of the project’s advocacy, outreach, and communications plans. She has a Master’s degree in Business Leadership and a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration obtained from the Universities of South Africa and Botswana, respectively. She has worked for Botswana Telecommunications Corporation as a Product Development Officer and was part of the pioneering team that successfully established Botswana Medical Aid Society’s marketing and key accounts sections.

Resego Taolo is the Senior Program Officer, Impact Assessment and Evaluation for the Sesigo project. Resego has a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Statistics from the University of Botswana and a Master in Business Leadership from the University of South Africa. He has worked as a Research Consultant and a Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist at Botswana National Productivity Centre and the Botswana Vision 2016 Council, respectively.

Pablo Andrade, a Chilean Anthropologist, has been the Studies Department Manager of the BiblioRedes Program for the past six years. He is responsible for social impact studies, assessment and monitoring studies and logical models. Pablo Andrade has also participated and presented papers in several conferences in Chile and abroad. Additionally, he has participated in varied national and international research works, particularly those related to information society, globalization, and heritage.

Maximino Moreno Grez is an Audiovisual Communications Specialist, in charge of the Marketing and Communications Department of the BiblioRedes Program. He has been with the program since 2003 and is in charge of designing and implementing marketing strategies and communications plans for BiblioRedes.

Pilar Pacheco is the Training Manager at the BiblioRedes Program and holds a Bachelor’s degree in Special Education and a Master’s in Organization Development. She has been with BiblioRedes since 2001 and has focused on strategic planning, e-learning, and advocacy.

Kristine Paberza currently works as an Impact Assessment Specialist and Project Manager at the State Agency Culture Information Systems. Kristine Paberza holds a graduate degree in Library and Information Science (LIS) and is currently working on her PhD in Communication. She has experience as the Project Manager of IT projects in the field of archives as well as librarian in all types of libraries, including National Library of Latvia, Library of the University of Latvia, and Library of the newspaper Diena. She has also teaching experience at the LIS program in the University of Latvia since 2004.

Sandra Vigante currently works as a Public Relations Manager at the State Agency “Culture Information Systems”. Sandra Vigante has completed the MBA program “Innovations and Entrepreneurship” at Riga Technical University. She has experience as the Public Relations Specialist at a number of businesses as well as non-governmental organizations.

Agniete Kurutyte is the Public Relations, Advocacy, and Outreach Coordinator at the Libraries for Innovation project. Under the Project Communication campaign, she manages advocacy and outreach activities, media relations and advertisement campaigns. Her experience includes non-governmental organization, government, and private sector jobs related
to communication and development issues. Her background is in political science and sustainable international development.

Ugne Rutkauskiene is an Impact Assessment Specialist at the “Libraries for Innovation” Project in Lithuania. She is responsible for managing and coordinating impact planning and assessment. Dr Ugne Rutkauskiene holds a PhD degree from the University of Vilnius.

Jolanta Jezów ska is the Advocacy and Outreach Specialist for the Library Development Program implemented by the Information Society Development Foundation. She is a graduate of German Studies of the Warsaw University, with professional experience in marketing, communication and public relations – creating and implementing communication strategies, providing crisis communication, running information campaigns, organizing conferences and congresses.

Maciej Kochanowicz is the Needs Assessment and Impact Planning Specialist for the Library Development Program implemented by the Information Society Development Foundation. He is a Sociologist, graduate of the Warsaw University, worked as an Editor in the editorials department of the Gazeta Wyborcza daily and a researcher in Pracownia Badań Społecznych. He participated in pre-election surveys and exit-poll surveys in Poland and in Ukraine.

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints