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Opportunities and challenges of regional co-operation in library education in the developing world

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Abstract

Discusses the concept and philosophy of co-operation. Examines the advantages, disadvantages and constraints related to cooperation. Reviews partnership initiatives in LIS Education in developed and developing world with particular reference to their objectives, activities and constraints. Further examines the success and failure factors of these ventures. Finally proposes new strategic approaches based on the experiences of the planned Pre-conference Workshop of the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central, and Southern African (SCECSAL XVI) to establish the Library and Information Schools Network in the Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Region. (LISNET-ECS) due 4th-5th July 2004, in Kampala Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

The clichés “unity is strength”, “two heads are better than one”, and “divided we fall, united we stand” suggest need for co-operation. The concept co-operation connotes that individuals or organizations or nations amicably agree to work together for common purposes. The pre-requisites of co-operation are mutual agreement between parties going into partnership; a common destiny and therefore engagement in similar activities or services; willingness to two-way traffic dealings through pooling of resources; and adoption of a coordinating mechanism for

management of resources and activities of co-operation. Amongst the benefits of co-operation are: optimum use of resources, avoiding duplication, cross-fertilization of expertise and experience, increase in efficiency and effectiveness and promotion of social interrelationship of a community. Co-operation has constraints as well. These include encouragement of dependency syndrome, blunting initiative and making organizations shy away from their basic responsibility of developing their organizations, financial problems, partners' reluctance to surrender independence of their organizations; and fear of breakups.

COOPERATION IN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION EDUCATION

Co-operation in Library and Information education has been a topical issue of concern for quite a long time among the policy makers, educators, researchers, students and users. Cooperation initiatives will be looked at from two different angles: those in the developed countries and those in the developing world respectively.

COOPERATION IN THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Cooperation has been a song for survival and efficiency in the developed countries both globally and regionally. The discussions below testify to this.

The International Network of Schools of Library and Information Sciences (SLISNET)

SLISNET was established in 1995 with the support of UNESCO. The SLISNET project support had been approved for the year 1996-1997 and was to be fully funded through the six years period covered by the Medium-Term Strategy 28 C/4)

The focus of SLISNET was to establish the North-South, as well as South-South links along the lines of the Technical Cooperation for Developing Countries (TCDC) concept. The following objectives of SLISNET were agreed at its formation:

- Establishing and developing a global electronic network of LIS education institutions with particular emphasis on South-South and North-South linkages, in order to facilitate a more efficient and effective response to the needs and demands of the changing information environment in which they work
- Enhancing the teaching learning, research, publishing and service capabilities of LIS education institutions, through bilateral and multi-lateral cooperative initiatives, in the context of globally networked information environment.
- Exploiting the collective expertise of LIS education institutions to provide an innovative response to the challenges and opportunities that are emerging in an increasingly complex and turbulent information environment. (<http://www.enssib-sites/SLISNET/report.html>)

UNESCO is the co-coordinating body as well as the main funder. Present membership are Library and Information Schools of recognized universities offering degrees. There is wide and balanced geographical representation. Activities include organization of courses, production, dissemination and use of educational materials, preparation and revision of curricula among others.

The European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID)

EUCLID was established at a meeting in Stuttgart, Germany in 1991. The Association promotes European Cooperation within the library and information education and research and provides a body through which it can be represented in matters of European interest. Within that framework the Association seeks to:

- Facilitate exchange of staff and students among members
- Encourage mutual recognition of curricula or parts of curricula
- Develop co-operation on research projects
- Develop co-operation with other international organizations
- Exchange mutual information on developing/reviewing curricula
- Arrange meetings about the topics of the Association
- Encourage support from stronger to weaker members
- Represent membership to European and International bodies
- Undertake activities of interest to the Association
- Maintain archives and publishes a Newsletter

Membership comprises of LIS institutions and persons with detailed knowledge about development in their own and other countries so that there is always a colleague or colleagues in a country to compare with LIS education issues.

The Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE)

The origin of ALISE was the setting of the Round Table of American Library Schools, which in 1915 voted to launch the Association of American Library Schools. The Association changed its name to the present form in 1983 to reflect more accurately the mission, goals and membership of the Association. The Association provides a forum for library educators to share ideas, to discuss issues and to seek solutions to common problems. (<http://www.alise.org/about/history.shtml>)

The mission for ALISE is to promote excellence in research, teaching and service for library and information science education

ALISE purpose is five pronged:

- Promote an understanding of the values and ethos of library and information science.
- Support the professional and intellectual growth of individual members.
- Advance research that contributes to and enlarges the knowledge base of library and information science and education in the field.
- Provide mechanisms for the exchange, dissemination, and receipt of information about issues, events, trends in such areas as curriculum, research, funding, consulting, continuing education, government, and society as these influence and inform library and information science.
- Strengthen the Association's leadership role in library and information science education. (<http://www.alise.org/about/mission.shtml>)

Membership of ALISE comprises of:

- Institutional members
- Faculty members by Institutions

- International Affiliates
- Personal members.

ALISE transacts its business through committees.

EFFORTS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

The history of co-operative ventures in the Library and Information Education organizations in the developing world particularly Africa shows some success. Nevertheless, many have been frustrated by a multitude of problems. A review of these organizations is made below

The Association of African Library Schools

This was the very first venture. It was established in 1978 in Dakar, Senegal. The aim was to bring together library schools in Africa to discuss and identify strategies of tackling problems of LIS Education. But it never survived the formative years because of logistical reasons. (Kigongo-Bukenya: 2001)

Setting Partnerships in Library and Information Education between France, French Speaking and English Speaking Africa

New efforts were made this time in Nairobi Kenya 26th-28th April 2000; the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored the above meeting. The aim was to identify possible areas of co-operation between the LIS Schools and Departments in French and English speaking African countries. Professor Kigongo-Bukenya was mandated to produce a proposal, which he did. The envisaged partnership never got off the ground because France never funded the project as had been expected. (Kigongo-Bukenya: 2001)

The Africa Regional Center for Information Science (ARCIS)

The Center was established in response to needs for higher-level training and improved research capacity in socioeconomic information in Anglophone West Africa. The programme produces postgraduate training in information science, produces higher trainers for the countries of the region and carries out continuing education programmes for information professionals. ARCIS programmes and activities include:

- Postgraduate education in Information Science (MInfSc, MPhil, PhD)
- Short term training and re-training through seminars and workshops
- Research on the problems and prospects of IS in Africa's socioeconomic development; and
- Consultancy and advisory services in systems analysis, design and evaluation; database construction and management; information policy formulation and implementation; and solutions to operational problems in information technology.
- IDRC, the University of Ibadan and Unesco fund it. It is stipulated that the sustainability of the Committee rests with the International Consultative Committee and in doing so it is expected to promote and sustain the regional character of ARCSIS, advise and assist in raising funds for recurrent and capital expenses and ensuring that ARCIS is continuously relevant to all facets of African development. (Aiyepoku 1999)

The School for Information Science in Africa (SISA)

UNESCO took the initiative of establishing SISA as Regional School of Information Science in Africa in 1979. UNESCO and IDRC made the funding available. It was established that acute shortage of skilled information personnel was the main stumbling block in the development of library and information systems in the developing countries. To rescue the situation donor agencies had been sponsoring students from these countries to LIS education institutions in the developed countries. The outcome was unsatisfactory because much of what they studied was irrelevant to the developing countries; worse still those who qualified looked for greener pastures elsewhere and never returned to work in their countries. So UNESCO came with the idea of developing SISA to help develop indigenous manpower trained in information and technology to meet the specific needs of the region. A team of experts from around the globe developed its curriculum, which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of information science and covers the range of knowledge in depth. By 1994 the School had produced 29 graduates from Ethiopia (14), Kenya (2), Malawi (2), Sudan (2), Swaziland (1), Tanzania (3) Uganda (2) and Zambia (3). This project seems to have joined the queue of stalled projects, which have ceased operation because of exhaustion of donor funding. (Olabode Aiyepoku and others:9)

THE CONSORTIUM OF AFRICA SCHOOLS OF INFORMATION SCIENCE (CASIS)

The Library and Information Schools in Africa including School of Information Science in Africa (SISA), the African Regional Center for Information Science (ARCIS), University of Ibadan, Nigeria, the Department of Library and Information Studies, University of Botswana, and Ecole de Sciences de l'information (ESI), Rabat, Morocco, formed CASIS. The main objective was to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of different schools of information studies/sciences in the continent, leading to the promotion and advancement of information science and its use for development.

The Consortium specific objectives are:

- Enhancing humans resource capacities
- Sustaining the programs
- Utilizing resources optimally
- Strengthening information infrastructures
- Promoting regional co-operation and integration
- Coordinating development assistance for information science education in Africa.

Five interrelated programs have been identified for implementation within CASIS:

- Strengthening the infrastructure of the member institutions of the Consortium to facilitate sharing and exchange of information resources
- Establishing continuing education programs aimed at information users and professionals from other disciplines and training trainers
- Developing faculty and student exchange programmes
- Coordinating a consultancy and advisory services program in information science for African Institutions
- Developing a coordinated research programme relevant to indigenous development, priorities. (<http://collection.ulc.bnc.ca/100/202/300/infocomm/94-no-02/concort.txt>)

The Consortium established a Trust Fund to sustain the implementation of CASIS.

The Addis Ababa University (AAU) through SISA hosts the Secretariat. CASIS is administered through a simple structure, composed of Board of Directors and a Secretariat. Responsibility centers or working groups consisting of member institutions each assigned with specific responsibilities have been created. Such would involve planning and monitoring, research support, consultancy/advisory services, public relations, promotion and fundraising. CASIS plans for the future are not well documented.

THE NIGERIAN PROJECT- BUILDING GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN NIGERIA.

An interesting partnership was forged between the School of Library and Information Management (SLIM) at Emporium State University (ESU), Kansas, University; Bayero University, Kano; Ahmad Bello University, Zaria and the University of Maiduguri under sponsorship of the Bureau for Cultural and Education Affairs; College and Affiliation Program and U.S State Department. The project objectives are subdivided below viz: “For all Partner Institutions; for “Nigerian Partner Institutions” for “Emporium State University” and “Mutual Benefits”

For all Partner Institutions

- Establish telecommunications links between the institutions to facilitate communication for teaching, research and program administrations.
- Undertake collaborative funded research to investigate the impact of civic education community analysis, information and computer literacy workshops on civil organizations in Nigeria

For Nigerian Partner Institutions

- Provide faculty and staff with opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills in community information and computer literacy and global studies
- Revise curricula to better reflect local and global perspectives
- Organise research and service workshops to impart civic knowledge, skills and attitudes to civic organization in Nigeria

For Emporia State University

- Foster scholarly, professional and social interactions with diverse groups of people and ideas
- Strengthen the global studies courses and the curriculum in general by providing information on the African Information Infrastructure
- Recruit international faculty to teach courses through the Internet

Mutual benefits

The activities of the programme will establish a self-sustaining partnership between the institutions to create for institutions faculty a learning environment that mirrors the multicultural and global information society and contribute to civic communication and reforms in Nigeria and cultivation of a global civic society.

Among the project activities are needs assessment, program design, planning visits and faculty exchanges.

The uniqueness of this model of partnership is the encouragement of mutual working relationship between the North and South Divides unlike the hitherto one-way traffic to the North - the sponsors who allegedly seemed to have benefited more from the partnership.

The project evaluation is due in 2004. One hopes funding will be continued. (<http://slim.imporia.edu/globenet/Nigeriaprojectinfo.htm>)

LESSONS LEARNT FROM REVIEWED COOPERATION INITIATIVES

The above overview of co-operation initiatives in LIS Education in both the developed and developing world shows clearly that there are advantages in these ventures particularly for developing countries. First, they are economy measures against duplication of resources – financial, physical, material and human. The second, which derives from the first, is optimum use of resources. Third, is sharing of expertise and experience in solving unique problems in LIS education fields. Fourth, the exchange of staff and students, which affords participants experience through working in varied environments. Fifth, is the philanthropic philosophy that the strong institutions should help the weak ones. Finally facilitating the borderless flow of information and knowledge enforces the global village concept.

Furthermore, the overview testifies to success in developed countries and failure in the developing countries. It can be deduced from the case studies that success in the developed countries (Europe and USA) is due to several factors including conviction and willingness of partners to co-operate; partners' full participation right from the conception of the ventures; the partners' voluntary spirit to offer services and management of the partnership; the apparent benefits for the institutions, staff and students: and available and sustainable funding. The success of EUCLID, SLISNET and ALISE are adequate testimony.

The high failure rate of similar co-operation initiatives in the developing world countries particularly in Africa are the reverse of the above success factors in developed countries. It would appear that the theory "what is good elsewhere should also be good everywhere" has led to mushrooming of co-operation initiatives without vital conviction, commitment and capacity to give the ventures the support without which they are doomed from the start. Funding has been available for the ventures without proved commitment and conviction from the founding partners. It is also feared that in some cases funding has been given without proper pre-planning of how the projects would be sustained when the donors' support ceased. The result has been stillborn initiatives as demonstrated by the failures of the Association of African Library Schools, CASIS and SISA.

THE WAY FORWARD - THE NEW STRATEGIC APPROACHES

That there is need for co-operation initiatives in LIS Education in the developing world does not need over emphasizing. Rather the question is how could feasible and sustainable cooperation initiatives be conceived, developed and sustained? Perhaps the proposed Library and Information Schools Network in the Eastern, Central and Southern Africa region (LISNET-ECS) could provide some answers. The author wrote a successful proposal to set up (LISNET-ECS). IFLA-ALP has approved a grant of US\$ 15,000 to fund a two day pre-conference workshop preceding the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Librarians (SCECSAL) XVI due in Kampala, Uganda July 6th to 9th 2004. (Kigongo-Bukenya: 2004). Major issues to

resolve in order to ensure a successful venture have been carefully thought about and put on the Workshop agenda. They include:

1. Hoped for out-come, which should consider
 - Agreed objectives of LISNET-ECS
 - Agreed agenda of activities of a two year period, 2004-2006
2. To explore the needs of the library schools for discussion, comparison and exchange of ideas in areas such as:
 - Roles of library schools
 - Entry and exit qualifications
 - Curriculum content (modernizing, localizing, enhancing)
 - Teaching methods
 - Evaluation of performance and impact
3. Methods to use in order to achieve the needs
 - Exchange of staff programme
 - Sharing of curricula and course outlines
 - Meetings/short courses
 - Outside assistance
4. Finally ideas on finance and management. Where will the money come from? Who will undertake the co-ordination?

Some sort of commitment to the proposed LISNET-ECS has been established through prior consultations with the potential partners – Library and Information Schools in the ECS region and other stakeholders. It is hoped that commitment will be re-expressed and consolidated at the workshop where a participatory approach among potential partners and stakeholders will resolve the above issues.

The adage “the spirit is strong ... the body is weak” should now be turned around to emphasize that the conception and implementation of LIS co-operation initiatives in the developing world must be matched with partners’ commitment and planned financial resources for sustainability. NO LESS!!!

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