



Libraries supporting national development goals in Namibia

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Abstract:

The paper describes the strategy of the Namibia Library and Archives Service (NLAS) to transform the public/community library network. The opportunity to transform the library network emerged when the Namibian education sector received major funding to develop its strategic framework for the implementation of education sector requirements for Vision 2030, Namibia's development strategy. In 2002 the Ministry of Education invited the World Bank to assist in developing strategies that will overcome the challenges in the performance of the education sector. Although the library network is part of the mandate of the Ministry of Education, the World Bank team did not identify libraries as a critical area to be developed but recommended leaving the countrywide library network out of the education sector reform. The paper describes the strategy that NLAS applied to get the library sector accepted into the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) and to secure funding for a countrywide library sector turn-around strategy, changing the focus of public/community libraries from recreational reading to institutions supporting education, research, economic empowerment and everyday information needs.

Keywords: Namibia; Africa; Public libraries; Community libraries; Strategic planning; Knowledge-based society; Education, National development; Library funding initiatives

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The library and information service sector has been globally recognized as a critical support structure for education, research, knowledge management, public administration, economic development, poverty eradication and knowledge-based economy (Beyond Access 2012; Britz 2007; Hamilton-Pennell 2008; IFLA 2001; Mchombu 2005; Mchombu 2008, Namhila 2011). Nevertheless, the importance of this sector is not always adequately recognised by governments neither development agencies who seem to perceive library services as a non-essential luxury. This paper analyses the successful efforts of the Namibia Library and Archives Service to counter such notions, and to transform the library network to become part of mainstream development.

Public libraries in Namibia were historically developed during the South African colonial period as a recreational service for the white settler community. At the time of independence in 1990, Namibia inherited eleven segregated administrative and educational systems for the various “population groups” that were defined in Proclamation AG 8 of 1980. The existing libraries fell under the Education Department of the Administration for the Whites, while the ten Bantustan Administrations for the black majority were not provided with resources to develop library services.³ Thus, under the apartheid era there were no library services for non-whites (South West Africa 1963; Töttemeyer 1991) who constituted 83 % of the population (SA Barometer 1989: 21).

After independence in 1990 and the abolition of the apartheid system, Namibia established a new education system based on the principle of “Education for all”. The emphasis of the education system was on redressing the inequalities created by the apartheid system with a unified system based on equality of access to educational resources to all citizens (Angula 1989; Namibia. Presidential Commission 2001)

Extending library and information services to all people in the country was planned through a participatory process of several workshops held to solicit views of all partners and stakeholders (Morgenstern 1991; Töttemeyer 1993; Töttemeyer 1995; Mchombu 1998). This process led to the development of a national policy framework for libraries and “allied information agencies” fostering the principle of extending library and information services to all people in the country. This national library sector policy framework was approved by Cabinet in 1997 (Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education and Culture 1997). Based on this policy the Namibia Library and Information Service Act followed (Namibia 2000). The Act established the Namibia Library and Information Service (NLIS) to ensure that the country has a functional library network and that public, school, national and special libraries work together under one unit in the Ministry of Education (then Basic Education and Culture). The Ministry of Education provides budget, staff structure, physical facilities and conditions for the National Library, public libraries, ministerial and school libraries as well as the National Archives under one Directorate, the Directorate Namibia Library and Archives Service (NLAS).

Efforts to spread libraries to previously disadvantaged areas of the country were made through public libraries which were renamed to “community libraries” to attract new users, especially the formerly excluded black majority. The historical legacy is still evident from the fact that many community libraries in the southern and central part of the country are situated in the formerly segregated “white” areas of towns and villages, far removed from

³ With the single exception of a library maintained by the “Government of Rehoboth”

the townships with the majority of the population. The change can however be seen through the establishment of community libraries in formerly “black” urban and rural areas during the last 20 years, and plans for additional service points. At Independence, there were twenty-three public libraries funded by the “Administration for Whites” and four privately-funded public libraries. Between 1990 and 2000, eight community libraries were established, and during the period from 2000 to 2005 twenty more community libraries were established in those areas that had previously been disadvantaged. This was mainly due to donations received from Swedish Development Aid (SIDA), Book Aid International and initiatives between the Directorate Adult Basic Education (DABE) and NLAS to establish Community Learning and Development Centres (CLDCs) supported by an Italian NGO (Comitato Internazionale Per Lo Sviluppo Dei Popoli, CISP). (Smith 2008: 33-35). Community/public libraries are however still unevenly distributed. They number currently 64, and the most densely populated northern regions where there were no libraries before independence are still underprovided. An additional problem was that although the policy framework was very modern, emphasising the library service role in are supporting the country’s development goals (Namibia. Ministry of Basic Education and Culture 1997: 8, 10-15, 25-27), it took time to put it into practice. By default, the acquisition and facilities for public/community libraries tended to continue the conceptual pattern of a recreational reading and lending institution. The prevailing concentration of library network was also evident from the fact that almost all special libraries were and are situated in the capital, Windhoek. There are more than 40 libraries in Windhoek (Namibia Library and Archives Service 2007), which meant that to have access to specialized, professional information any person had to physically travel to visit libraries in Windhoek. Except for those at higher education institutions, libraries were not provided with ICT and thus could not provide services beyond the paper-based collection. The staffing structure in both public/community and special libraries under Government Ministries was based on non-professional staff, library assistants with only secondary school education and in some cases primary education (Grade 8) as the only requirement. Professional staff was almost exclusively provided in the staffing structure of the central library administration at the NLAS Directorate. The libraries in the regions were administered under the regional structure, providing only one to three librarian posts in each of the 13 regions. These few librarians were responsible for the professional support of 2-8 public/community libraries and all school libraries in each region. Acquisition for both school and community/public libraries countrywide remained centralized under NLAS.

Because of the several problems that compounded the education system, several studies and advisory commissions of inquiry were commissioned.⁴ The World Bank was one of such bodies that were requested to provide expert advice to the education sector.

2. VISION 2030 AND THE EDUCATION SECTOR IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (ETSIP)

Between 1998-2002, the Namibian government developed Vision 2030. Vision 2030 is a national strategic plan, analysing and describing development goals to transform Namibia from a raw material and agriculture based economy to a knowledge-based economy and to overcome poverty and development country status by the year 2030 (Namibia. Office of the President 2004).

⁴ In particular the Mercer Report (Namibia. Ministry of Education and Culture 1993) which did recognize the need to expand library services, and the Presidential Commission of Education and Training (Namibia. Presidential Commission 2001) which failed to address the issues of libraries, just like the World Bank reports that will be discussed further on.

In 2002, the Government of Namibia contracted the World Bank to assist in carrying out in-depth studies to evaluate education sector performance at primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary level, as it was claimed that in spite of high government investment in education the education sector failed to provide the quality of skills and expertise required by the labour market.

The World Bank studies (Alexander 2004; Bateman 2003; Bonelli, 2003; Godana 2003; Johanson, 2003, Marope 2003; O'Hare 2003; Westergaard-Nielsen 2003) confirmed critical problems in the performance of the Namibian education system and outlined radical measures and recommendations for the improvement of the education system in Namibia in order to make the country competitive in the global economy. This process culminated in a final report (Marope 2005) with key strategic issues based on the policy pillars of access, equity, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and pro-poor approach for developing a strategic plan to reach the results required from the education system in a knowledge based society. This report did not include the library sector in its intervention proposals. Following the recommendation of the final report (Marope 2005) the Ministries of Education⁵ requested the expertise of the World Bank as technical advisors for the process of developing a strategic intervention to improve the education sector performance. The result was a 15 year strategic plan, Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP), to be implemented with additional government budget allocation and development partner support, in 2005-2020. (Namibia. Ministry of Education 2005). Following several interventions by the Namibia Library and Archives Service, the library sector was included as an addendum in the strategic plan without actual analytical programming that had happened in the other parts of the plan.

3. LOBBYING FOR INCLUSION OF THE LIBRARY SECTOR INTO ETSIP CONTINUES

The management of NLAS was strongly convinced that libraries have a role to play and can contribute significantly as part of the education sector to the realisation of Vision 2030 and knowledge-based society. This conviction goes along with Vision 2030 which recognises the role of libraries in national development, but equally acknowledges the shortcomings of libraries in Namibia. As stated in the section that deals with knowledge-based society, "Namibia's libraries are poorly equipped to play the vital role in the 'age of information'. Very few offer internet access. None have any media other than reading materials available (no videos, CDs, DVDs etc) and only a very limited number of periodicals. There is also a lack of qualified librarians." (Namibia. Office of the President 2004:78). It would have been expected that studies carried out in view of translating Vision 2030 into strategies for implementation would have analysed libraries and their contribution to the knowledge-based society. This was however not the case.

The public libraries did not feature as a specific area in the studies carried out by the World Bank consultants,⁶ hence they were also not identified as a key strategic issue to be developed and to be funded under ETSIP. Although Vision 2030 identifies libraries as a critical area with several shortcomings that need to be addressed in order for the libraries to play a pivotal role in the national development, the 2003-2005 World Bank studies failed to recognize their role completely. This lack of recognition by the World Bank team meant

⁵ Until 2005, divided into two ministries, the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Vocational Training (MHEVT)

⁶ Only in the report on tertiary education institutions (O'Hare, 2003), the need to invest on libraries was acknowledged.

that libraries would not be considered as an area that needed special funding to be improved to a level where they would be able to support national development strategies.

The fact that the final World Bank report (Marope 2005) presented to the Ministry of Education, did not include an analysis of the challenges and opportunities in the library field, proved to be a serious challenge to the library sector. This exclusion was critical for NLAS as it was made clear that the ETSIP plan would be a priority in funding the education sector. Thus, all other Ministry of Education activities would continue with the current level of basic funding while any additional funding could only be invested into activities that were part of the ETSIP strategic framework.

In this situation the NLAS management engaged the top management of the Ministry of Education at both policy and administrative level to convince them about the critical role played by libraries within the education system and the consequences of leaving them out of ETSIP. NLAS succeeded in convincing the Ministry that their inclusion is critical for the realisation of educational goals, for teaching, learning and research. Henceforth NLAS was invited to the planning process which translated each of the key strategic issues into a plan for implementation with objectives, measures, indicators and costing. It immediately became necessary to carry out an analysis of the library sector to be included in the reform process. As libraries were not part of the original World Bank blueprint, the library sector strategy was had been added only as an addendum in the 15-year ETSIP strategic plan. Nevertheless inclusion in this plan was the first successful step. The ETSIP strategic plan (Namibia. Ministry of Education 2005) was submitted to the Namibian Cabinet and was endorsed with a pledge of N\$100 million (€10 million) per annum for its implementation. Following the Government approval, the World Bank undertook to engage international development agencies to raise funds for the implementation of this plan, ETSIP. A roundtable meeting was convened in 2005 with international partners who endorsed ETSIP as the strategic plan for the education sector and pledged their contribution to this plan (Tencalla, 2011).

This situation brought Namibia Library and Archives Service Management to realize the urgency in mitigating the impact of being excluded from ETSIP, and the importance of rapidly analysing the strategic issues within the library sector to be able to develop a detailed strategic plan as part of the ongoing ETSIP process.

3.1. The Challenges

1. NLAS faced a situation where, if it continued with the basic funding that was merely enough to sustain operating its outdated library network, it would not be able to implement improvements for the next 15 years, being left out from the Ministry's strategic framework.
2. Without additional funding to upgrade the library network, NLAS would be faced with problems of complying with the e-governance policy for the public service of Namibia which envisages that, for all citizens to have ICT skills and to achieve lifelong learning, it is necessary that libraries and related units act as outposts for distance studies and public ICT access. (Namibia. Office of the Prime Minister (2005): 51))
3. Equally, the Namibia Library and Information Service Act and the policy on which it is based require NLAS to maintain and sustain adequate information resources and facilities based on the learning, study, teaching, research, and social and economic development needs of the society (Namibia (2000); Namibia. Ministry of Basic

Education and Culture (1997). It would be impossible to realise these expectations without additional funding.

4. How would NLAS respond to regional and local authority requests to establish more and better resourced public/community libraries to formerly disadvantaged villages, communities and regions?
5. How would NLAS satisfy the popular demand for providing information for professional development, study and learning materials for an education-hungry population with a large segment of distance education learners who have no direct access to tertiary education libraries?

In the face of the above mentioned challenges, NLAS management team realised that it cannot sit back and allow itself to be excluded from ETSIP. The major challenge was the lack of a baseline study proving a situation analysis, identifying the strategic issues that need to be addressed, and recommending measures for action. It became critical to prepare a clear, fully validated motivation for the consideration of the Ministry and the World Bank technical expert team. This motivation was based on the policy and legal framework as well as library experience, but empirical studies were required to justify the need for improving the library service from a user perspective, and not just from library theory and practice that was perceived as a subjective justification for self-survival and existence.

3.2. User and stakeholder perspective

NLAS dispatched several teams consisting of library staff to nine of the thirteen regions of Namibia to solicit evidence on the needs and expectations of library users, to evaluate the existing library facilities, resources and services, and to evaluate whether they matched with user expectations. This audit included observations on library facilities and usage and interviews with users encountered in the libraries during the audit, with the regional decision makers and with the library staff. NLAS also made use of the 2003 study analysing the challenges and opportunities of the library network under NLAS (Haavisto 2004) and the regional visits of the Namibia Library and Information Council undertaken since 2002 (Namibia Library and Information Council 2007). Circulation and membership statistics⁷ as well as monthly reports submitted to NLAS from libraries in the regions were also used to analyse whether users find what they are looking for. NLAS audit team was provided with recording equipment and cameras to capture as much evidence as possible. The findings of the analytical process in terms of user perspective showed a clear mismatch between the user demands and expectations and the available facilities and resources. For example students who are studying through distance education, even professionals who want to upgrade their professional skills in the regions, cannot find resources for their professional development (Namibia Library and Archives Service 2006; Namibia Library and Information Council 2007; Niskala 2008)

From the library professional perspective, the study by Haavisto and Karhula (2004) outlined recommendations ranging from staffing to study facilities and efficient use of ICT to improve access to information and improved library administration. Library staff highlighted lack of resources, lack of study places in the libraries which were heavily used by students and learners especially in disadvantaged communities, lack of study materials and information in the field of development. They mentioned that many users left the library without getting what they are looking for. (Namibia Library and Archives Service 2006; Namibia Library and Information Council 2007; Niskala 2008). Decision makers in

⁷ Community/Public library user statistics (number of visits), which are now part of the library sector results framework, have only been collected since 2007 as part of the ETSIP process

the regions were calling for the extension of the library network to villages, local communities and schools. They highlighted the prevalence of learners who cannot read – an observation that was quantified by the SAQMEC II studies which show that Namibia has a high incidence of children that were pushed through to the level of high school without competency in reading and numeracy (Makuwa, 2005). They saw the necessary synergy between problems in the education sector and non-formal educational support that could be provided by libraries – if they were adequately resourced and staffed.

These findings established the point that in spite of the strong legal framework, without additional resources NLAS could not honour its legal obligation, making the Library and Information Act and various policies toothless. Based on professional vision of the library sector contribution to the national development and the findings of the analytical surveys carried out by the library staff, NLAS prepared its detailed five year strategic plan for the first phase of ETSIP identifying key strategic issues, even though it was not yet officially accepted as part of ETSIP. This strategic plan included a programme description with background, achievements, challenges and priorities and the logical framework detailing the implementation plan consisting of strategic objectives, activities organised under several ETSIP components describing major goals, inputs, outcomes and indicators. Because of the urgency of this planning process, assistance from the colleagues at the University of Namibia and other major libraries in the country was sought. Within half a year, by the end of 2005 NLAS had the documentation outlining its strategic intervention ready and started lobbying within the Ministry and the education sector.

3.3. NLAS lobbying strategy

NLAS was very well prepared with documentation that met all the requirements of the ETSIP process, and this gave the Directorate the confidence to present the plan in any situation where ETSIP was discussed.

The first step in lobbying was to form partnerships with the Directorates within the same Ministry that were already recognised by the World Bank and included in the ETSIP programme. Their solidarity was critical because this interaction created a snowball effect as they in their turn started lobbying for the library sector inclusion. They also informed NLAS about scheduled meetings with the World Bank team, to which NLAS was not invited as it was not officially part of ETSIP. NLAS management ensured that it would not miss a single meeting that came to their attention, and established a dedicated team so that anyone of the team could speak on behalf of NLAS.

The second phase of lobbying was to present the library sector plan to the top management of the Ministry of Education, explaining the rationale and the gap that will be created if libraries are not part of ETSIP. It was critical to remain collected and present the plan in a very composed manner, even when it hurt to be treated as an unwanted intruder. The team ensured not to complain and never to become emotional, even in heated debates, which in fact did happen during this process, taking care to maintain professionalism.

The Ministry was eventually convinced that the library sector has a an important role as part of the education sector development and should become part and parcel of the ETSIP programme. It took a firm decision and undertook to convince the World Bank team. By the time the World Bank team returned in late 2005 to assist in finalising the programming and soliciting funds to implement ETSIP, they found the Library and Archives sector included in the ETSIP documentation issued by the Ministry of Education. They did

not agree. Their position was that libraries, with the exception of school libraries, are not part of the education sector, and that the public/community libraries should in fact be completely removed from the Ministry of Education⁸. During the final programming phase in 2005, the ETSIP Programme document and five year plan was changed by the World Bank delegation, and the library sector which had been included by the Ministry was cut out to be included again by the Ministry. The World Bank team maintained this position throughout the negotiation process and still tabled a formal request to the Ministry to exclude the library sector from the ETSIP plan as late as April 2006 when the full programme was presented to the development partner community. Their recommendation was that libraries and knowledge management and creation should be excluded from ETSIP (World Bank 2006).

Nevertheless, NLAS attended all World Bank team meetings and development partner roundtables, met all the deadlines and spoke for the libraries using available evidence on usage, services and gaps, especially pictures of library innovations and activities. It was the images of children studying in small cramped reading rooms of community libraries in remote villages that captured the heart of development partners and made them listen to the plea of library services. Eventually, because the education sector was fully behind NLAS, the World Bank had no choice but to accept libraries and archives programme as part of ETSIP. The inclusion was officially recognised in the ETSIP appraisal meeting in October 2006, where the World Bank team and development partners provided positive feedback on the library sector programme. The library sector has since then been included in the Ministry of Education ETSIP documentation and planning, but remained outside all ETSIP documents issued by the World Bank and published at the World Bank website (World Bank 2012).

It remains to be established why the World Bank team was so fiercely against recognizing the contribution of libraries to the education sector.

4. THE OUTCOME OF THE NLAS LOBBYING PROCESS

Based on the long lobbying and programming process in 2006, the library sector was finally accepted officially as part of Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme within the Lifelong Learning sub-programme called Culture, Adult and Lifelong Learning (CALL), later streamlined and renamed Information, Adult and Lifelong Learning sub-programme (IALL).

Within the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme, the Namibia Library and Archives Service received funding which almost doubled the operational budget for the library network, although the IALL sub-programme allocation of the overall ETSIP budget was only 5% - which during 2006-2012 has meant a total allocation of about €6 million, of which over 50% has been used for the library and information service sector development (Tencalla, Y. 2011; ETSIP annual review documents).

In addition to the overall inclusion of the library sector, ETSIP further included the community libraries in its Information and Communication Technology deployment, providing funding for computers and connectivity not only to schools but also to the community libraries. Later, after a two year process in 2006-2008, some of the ETSIP-activated library programmes achieved additional funding to extend the scope of plan by being included in the countrywide Millennium Challenge Account Namibia programme

⁸ Notes on discussions in 2005-2006 with the World Bank Delegation, headed by Dr Marope, and Ms. Ellen Namhila, the Director of Namibia Library and Archives Service from 1999-2007

(Millennium Challenge Account Namibia 2006). This is a large scale development programme support by the United States Government with the aim of supporting economic improvements that will redress poverty and accelerate economic growth. Although initially left out again, the library sector proposal on building and equipping three regional libraries to disadvantaged regions to improve access to scientific, professional and technological information as well as study and learning materials was accepted. This required another active lobbying process based on the fact that access to information is unequally distributed in the country and could be a genuine economic resource in improving peoples' livelihoods.

5. RESULTS OF THE LIBRARY SECTOR ETSIP PHASE I (2006-2012): HOW HAS THE LIBRARY NETWORK CHANGED

After six years of ETSIP implementation, it can be said that, although the public/community library network has shifted from a recreational reading and lending institution towards a genuinely inclusive education and information institution, the NLAS ETSIP plan was obviously too ambitious in view of available financial resources and even more so the human resources critical to implement the library sector reform throughout the country. However inclusion in the ETSIP programme has brought about a real change in the countrywide library network.

The main objective of the library sector ETSIP programme (Ministry of Education 2007: 57-64) was to redress geographical and social inequalities in access to information. That was further defined to address ETSIP pro-poor principle by focusing the aim to redress constraints faced by the disadvantaged part of the population.

With regard to ICT, the aim was provide free public ICT access through all community/public libraries to improve access to relevant information and learning resources and support learning of computer skills as well as use of computers for redressing poverty by employment creation and support to local economy (Ministry of Education 2007). While in 2005 there were only five community libraries with a few public use computers and internet access for which the user had to pay, today 41 of the 64 public/community libraries provide free public ICT access. The pro-poor approach brought about changing the original idea of charging for computer use and internet to sustain the services. Initial statistics comparing libraries that charged for ICT use and those that provided free internet access clearly validated the assumption that in Namibia the income levels do not allow the vast majority of population to pay for ICT access. While the free computer labs in libraries were full, the usage numbers in the libraries that charged fees were only 5% of the numbers in libraries with free ICT access⁹. Statistics provided clear evidence for the decision to provide free ICT access in libraries. Today libraries as public ICT access point have been clearly accepted. Although the target was not totally achieved, the sustainability of the initiative is supported by inclusion of free public ICT access in libraries in the Ministry of Education Midterm Expenditure Framework and the forthcoming Ministry of Education 2012-2016 strategic plan, thus making it part of mainstream education sector development. Budget provision for the community/public library network internet connectivity was secured in 2009, thus moving the cost from the donor-supported improvement programme to a sustainable mode. Through the ETSIP funding NLAS also subscribed to the first selection of international online information portals and databases to be available through public/community libraries starting from 2012. The first months of

⁹Library ICT usage statistics / NLAS

usage proved its usefulness for Ministry's staff and other library users especially those doing postgraduate studies.

The ICT access component of ETSIP included more efficient use of ICT in providing local content through digitization and digital libraries, as well the introduction of joint catalogues and integrated library managements system in all community and special libraries. This part did not advance except for projects in the National Archives to digitize historically important national documents. The community and special libraries still use manual lending systems, the joint catalogue is not available in the internet – mainly due to very limited professional staff in the NLAS structure this part of the improvements of the library and information services was not achieved, but is part of future plans.

Three regional study and resource centres, well equipped and resourced regional information centres, are under construction, with MCA Namibia funding under auspices of the ETSIP programme. The fourth, under advanced planning, will be built with government budget. Such centres should be established in all of Namibia's thirteen regions, but it needs practical pilot projects to convince stakeholders of the benefits of such centres to education and economic development. (Millennium Challenge Account Namibia 2006; 2008, 2009: 12-14; Duddy 2009).

The library sector human resource factor remains a key problem. Namibia Library and Archives Service was well aware of the problems in human resources in the library sector when the ETSIP programme started, due to the existing staffing structure that is mainly based on non-professional clerical staff in both community and special libraries as well as newly graduated still inexperienced librarians in most of the few professional positions. (Haavisto 2003). This led to including a strong component of capacity building in the ETSIP programme, providing support to qualifying studies for library assistants to occupy the vacant professional positions and scholarships for further studies for the newly graduated staff members to create expertise in the specialised fields of librarianship. Both the ETSIP evaluation report and the strategic assessment of the library sector carried out as part of ETSIP however state that NLAS has been trying to do too many things without adequate human resources – and that “the Component 3 (Access to information) of the IALL plan assumes that management of decentralised programme/service delivery is in the hands of a network of competent staff at regional, district and community levels. Yet survey reports and studies suggest that (a) the regional / district network is short-staffed; (b) individual capacities of available staff continue to be weak.” (Connal 2011; MDR Partners 2011).

Although professional capacity building part of the ETSIP programme helped to improve the professional skills of ca. 25 staff members from community/public and ministerial libraries, it did not have as much impact as hoped for, because of another residue of past policies that has not yet been resolved. Newly trained staff was often drawn towards greener pastures by parastatal and private institutions. The LIS sector strategic assessment carried out in 2009-2010 (MDR Partners 2011:33) put it very bluntly: “Low staff salaries make it near impossible to attract and retain staff; competencies required by the LIS sub-sector are difficult to find in new recruits; professional development often results in resignations; and a shortage of senior-level positions suggests that the staffing structure in general is in dire need of upgrading.” Human resource capacity proved to be the weak link in the reform process. Although the ETSIP library sector programme contributed to the development of library sector expertise at the national level, it did not translate into improving the public/community library human capacity base. This issue needs clearly more attention, because any service is as good as those who render it. It

however led to the conclusion confirmed by the overall ETSIP midterm review that in the library sector, improvement requires restructuring and re-grading of the staffing structure to secure the required expertise. NLAS has since prepared proposals for an upgraded LIS sector staff structure which, although not yet finally approved, got an overall favourable reception. This can be seen as a direct outcome of the ETSIP process.

6. CONCLUSION

The Namibia Library and Archives Service (and, one could say, the entire library sector in Namibia, as it has been involved in the process) learnt some very important lessons which are likely to be applicable not only in Namibia.

One lesson is that it is worthwhile not to give up easily, even when being poised against an adversary as formidable as the World Bank. We are not in a position to analyse whether the neglect of libraries as educational resource is a World Bank policy, or an unfortunate accidental result of preconceived opinions of the specific consultants involved – this would require comparison with the experience of other countries.

Another lesson is the importance of reliable and comprehensive statistics, not only on the use of libraries but also on external factors that influence, or may be influenced by, the use of libraries. Statistical data on the population of the area in reach of libraries, the school-going population, on distance learners, on small and micro-enterprises in need of information are vital pieces of the puzzle to convince stakeholders that investment in libraries is necessary. But just as important are qualitative accounts of persons who have experienced how library use has helped them.

Finally, it is extremely useful to have successful examples at hand how a functional library can become a lively and much-used community resource. We were fortunate to have such an example close at hand, in a small community library in one of our capital's poorest suburbs¹⁰. We have seen people who knew only the concept of a library as a place where bored old ladies go to borrow the next novel of their favourite author, coming out completely converted to the idea of libraries as a development instrument after a visit to this library. That library has been developed in a small-scale cooperation project between the City of Windhoek and the City of Vantaa (Finland), and in serving as such an example it has had a much wider impact than just on the local community.

NLAS has not yet carried out a study to analyse in detail how libraries with these improvements are and will be contributing to national development goals and educational performance. That is an aspect that needs attention to secure the required funding for further developments. International impact studies of public libraries (e.g. Holt 2003) seem to support the benefits gained from libraries, however as they have all carried out in the US and other developed countries, a locally adjusted study would be needed to evaluate the assumptions made in ETSIP strategy and further library sector planning.

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