



Libraries in Networks: Creating, Participating, Co-operating

Partnerships to power innovative public libraries

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Abstract

Public libraries are fast becoming active partners in community development, working across vital issues: agriculture, health, business, employment, youth development and more. In the developing world especially, public libraries have slender resources. To offer effective development services, they must harness additional skills and resources. Growing numbers of libraries are therefore entering into less traditional, project-based partnerships with civil society organizations, government and business. This paper reflects on the experience of the EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP) programme, which resources libraries in developing and transition countries to implement community development projects.

Introduction

The importance of partnerships as a strategy for development and poverty alleviation is emphasized in the eighth Millennium Development Goal.¹ The power of information as a development tool is similarly widely accepted, and so it is no surprise that public libraries, as recognized information service providers, staffed by information professionals, should be referred to as 'natural partners' in community development.²

There is evidence that the general public and other stakeholders expect local libraries to provide services that contribute to community development. Research into perceptions of public libraries in Africa³ found that significant numbers of people visit libraries to seek information about issues like health and small business development. The study also found that the majority of government officials and librarians believe that public libraries have a role to play in improving lives in areas like health, education, economic development, communication, social inclusion, citizen empowerment, democracy and e-government.

However, public libraries do not have all the skills or financial resources needed to deliver effective community development services. Therefore, more libraries are entering into partnerships with other organizations. A 2011 survey of library directors in Lithuania found that in 2010, 58% of directors experienced cuts in their general budgets. Between 2010 and 2011, significantly more public library directors entered into partnerships with government institutions (80% in 2010; 89% in 2011) and business entities (42% in 2010; 63% in 2011).⁴

¹ Millennium Development Goals 8: Develop a global partnership for development. See <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>

² For example, in Hamilton-Pennell, C. (2008), *Public Libraries and Community Economic Development: Partnering for Success*. Rural Research Report. Vol 8, Issue 10. Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs.

³ TNS RMS East Africa (July 2011): *Perceptions of Public Libraries in Africa*, research commissioned by EIFL-PLIP. Available at <http://www.eifl.net/perception-study>

⁴ Jurgita Verikiene, Viktorija Jonikova, Nike Kiskyte (2011): *Libraries for Innovation - Library Directors' Opinion Survey 2011*. Unpublished research, Social Information Centre, Vilnius.

Background

The EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP) aims to promote libraries as dynamic community development partners.⁵ In 2010 EIFL-PLIP launched a grants and capacity building programme for libraries in developing and transition countries. Two calls for proposals led to funding of 26 services in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Grant invitations stipulated four key application criteria: libraries should (1) serve community needs (2) be innovative (3) integrate information and communication technology (ICT) into services (4) build partnerships. EIFL-PLIP conceived partnerships as local-level project-focused partnerships, whose main aim was to extend public libraries' resources and reach. [See Appendix A for EIFL-PLIP's guideline on partnerships.]

At the end of year-long contracts, libraries assess the impact of their services. Results, including reflection on partnerships, are presented in case studies and reports. Information in this paper is drawn from case studies and reports of six libraries, and interviews with staff of two libraries. The experience of all six libraries is summarized in Appendix B. The experiences of two libraries, Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library, (Lithuania) which successfully managed over 20 partners, and Public Library Radislav Nikčević (Serbia), which took a more informal approach with fewer partners are examined in detail.⁶

The two libraries and their partners

Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library is a centralized system of 23 libraries (three town and 20 village libraries). The town of Utena (population under 34,000) and Utena District (population about 50,000) are relatively small. The library's project was titled Play to Study, and targeted a complex group of children who were coming to the library to play computer games during school hours. Social services identified various reasons for the truancy, including problems at home and at school and learning difficulties. Concerned about the children's future, librarians came up with the idea of an educational computer game to reconnect the children with their schools. Titled *Iššūkis* (Challenger) the game is designed for children in 5th to 7th grades. Teachers assess pupils' performance, and points that the pupils win are added to their school marks. To move forward at key stages, pupils must ask teachers for help. The game is played in the libraries.

The six main partners were:

- *Utena Education Centre (UEC)*, an educational NGO that builds teachers' professional skills. Some teachers were sceptical about both the idea and the library's capacity to deliver. UEC's key contribution was authority: their expertise convinced teachers the project had merit. Another valuable contribution was motivation: the library could not pay teachers for overtime work needed to administer the game, but UEC could offer incentives like training and excursions.
- *The computer software company, Prewise*, was contracted to develop software and train teachers. The company was paid for their services.
- *Utena Pedagogical Psychological Service* provided expertise on working with at risk children.

⁵ For further information about EIFL-PLIP, see <http://www.eifl.net/plip>.

⁶ The case studies can be accessed on the EIFL-PLIP website: see <http://www.eifl.net/service-areas-replication-case-studies>

- *The municipal Department of Education, Sport and Tourism*, which supervises schools, helped establish partnerships with schools.
- *The municipal Department of Children's Rights Protection and the Juvenile Affairs Officers Group at Utena County Police Commissariat* provided information about at-risk children, informed families and encouraged participation.

Other important partners were 13 village schools, the village libraries and The National Ministry of Science and Education, which is now considering extending the game to new districts.

Public Library Radislav Nikčević supervises 16 village libraries in the municipality of Jagodina, which comprises Jagodina (population 36,000) and 52 villages (population 35,000). The AgroLib-Ja service enables farmers to use ICT to improve their livelihoods. With the EIFL-PLIP grant, the library bought computers, installed them in four village libraries, connected them to the internet and invited farmers to undergo ICT training. Working with farmers, they created an agricultural web portal and an online farm produce market.⁷ They also hosted a series of lectures on agricultural methods and grants and opportunities.

AgroLib-Ja partners and partner contributions:⁸

- *The Jagodina Town Assembly* financed renovation of the village libraries and employed librarians to ensure they were properly staffed. They also allocated funding for books and journals.
- *The Ministry of Agriculture*, through the Rural Development Support Network, provided technical and administrative support, and lecturers on agricultural topics. The Network also marketed the service to villages not reached by the four libraries.
- *The Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises and Registered Households* provided lists of farms and farmers. They also attended lectures; informed farmers about government support programmes, and advocated for local government funding for activities initiated through AgroLib-Ja.

The nuts and bolts of partnership: Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library⁹ and Public Library Radislav Nikčević¹⁰

Past experience of partnership projects

Projects – most of which involve partnerships – are a feature of service delivery throughout the system managed by Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library, and so the library has extensive experience. Past and present partners include international agencies like the European Union and local agencies (government, civil society and business). The most common partnerships are between village libraries and local schools.

⁷ <http://www.agrolib.rs/?lang=en>

⁸ The library made three short videos about these three partnerships. (1) Partnership with Jagodina Town Assembly: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=za_KAayRVKQ&feature=related (2) Partnership with the Rural Development Support Agency <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4vHzLjDLLA> (3) Partnership with the Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises and Registered Households http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2UkbimYT0zc&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL

⁹ Information from an interview with Ms Laima Lapiniene, coordinator of Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library's Play to Study project, 24 May, 2012, and from case studies and reports written in 2011 and 2012.

¹⁰ Information from an interview with Ms Jelena Rajić, one of the coordinators of the AgroLib-Ja service, 7 June 2012, and from studies and reports written in 2011 and 2012.

In contrast, Public Library Radislav Nikčević has limited experience. Before the EIFL-PLIP grant, partnerships (mostly with schools, media and local government) were informal and focused on information services. The library successfully used its status as an EIFL-PLIP grantee to attract other partners and leverage additional funding.

Selection of partners

Neither of the two libraries has written policy to guide partner selection. Selection processes are informal:

*'Utena is a small town – we know all the local institutions. We are able to think of likely and relevant partners. It is not necessary to have a list.'*¹¹

*'We have a kind of list, but Jagodina is small. We choose our partners depending on how influential they are in society; how they reach people in our community.'*¹²

At both libraries, senior staff members (directors, heads of department) are responsible for selecting partners. Advice from existing partners is generally taken into account.

Partnership management

Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library set up a formal structure – a Team of Experts – comprising representatives of the six main partners to manage the project the development phase. Once the game had been completed, this team gave way to a Working Group of implementers, comprising a library representative, 13 teachers (one from each school) and the UEC. The library coordinated implementation in the branch libraries; teachers administered the game and assessed pupils' performance; the UEC provided expertise, incentives and encouragement.

Public Library Radislav Nikčević did not establish formal partnership management structures. The library director managed partner involvement and relationships.

Contracting partners

Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library's approach to contracting partners varies. For longstanding partners, like UEC, there is a general contract, covering the overall relationship and incorporating various projects. Some partnerships are governed by specific contracts, focused on delivery of goods or services. With some partners there is no written agreement. Public Library Radislav Nikčević does not generally enter into written agreements with partners.¹³

Communication, decision-making

The Play to Study team of experts met about twice a week while the game was being developed; the working group mostly communicated by email, because it was too expensive for teachers from village schools to travel to Utena for meetings. AgroLib-Ja leadership communicated with partner organizations as needed, mostly by telephone and email, and during events. Decisions were made through discussion and consensus, and neither library experienced serious disagreements with partners.

¹¹ Interview with Laima Lapiniene, 24 May 2012.

¹² Interview with Jelena Rajić, 7 June 2012.

¹³ According to Ms Rajić (7 June 2012) EIFL-PLIP was the library's first formally contracted partner.

Cost of partnerships¹⁴

Most costs of the Play to Study partnership were met by the library, however, the detailed cost (or cost savings) of working with partners were not calculated. Similarly, Public Library Radislav Nikčević did not try to establish the cost of working with partners.

Barriers to partnership

The main barriers experienced were financial. Challenges arose at the end of the Play to Study project that are now affecting project sustainability:

*'It is difficult to continue now because of (teachers') motivation. This (EIFL-PLIP-funded) project was only for one school year. Now we have a new school year. The question is: how do we motivate teachers again? Some thought the project was finished. Some now expect to be paid.'*¹⁵

The library also sometimes experiences finance as a barrier to building partnerships:

*'The main difficulty is that not all institutions want to be partners because they do not want to have additional obligations, especially financial obligations. Institutions lack funding – Lithuania is not a rich country.'*¹⁶

Public Library Radislav Nikčević also experiences problems managing financial expectations:

*'Some organizations just want to partner to make money, but we do not have funds, and we have to watch out when that happens.'*¹⁷

Challenges encountered

While the partnership experience of the two libraries examined above was smooth, some of the other EIFL-PLIP grantee libraries encountered difficulties. In one instance, the library's inexperience almost led to the collapse of the service. The lead partner, an NGO, had drafted the project proposal, but the partnership disintegrated after the contract was signed because the NGO was unhappy that the grant would be deposited into the library's account.¹⁸

Other problems arose out of failure to consult sufficiently with partner organizations during the project planning phase, and to manage expectations: partner organisations were not aware of public libraries' limitations, especially with respect to human resources and technology skills. Some partnerships with national government led to bureaucratic obstacles that slowed down project implementation. Sustainability of relationships was a challenge: some partners took part enthusiastically during the 12-month contract period, but pulled back when the project ended.

¹⁴ For example, staff time spent in meetings; communication and knowledge sharing costs; transport; any other material costs of managing partnerships and implementing in partnership with other organizations.

¹⁵ Interview with Laima Lapiniene, 24 May 2012.

¹⁶ Interview with Laima Lapiniene, 24 May 2012.

¹⁷ Interview with Jelena Rajić, 7 June 2012.

¹⁸ EIFL-PLIP's policy is to deposit funding into applicants' accounts, and the grant call stipulated that applicants should be public libraries. The issue could not be resolved, and eventually, an independent consultant employed by EIFL-PLIP recommended that the library extricate itself from the partnership.

The benefits of partnership

Working in partnership had benefits for the projects, the libraries and the libraries' partners. The main benefit noted by libraries, and some partners, was how partnership implementation extended their reach. Another highly valued benefit noted by the libraries was the ways in which working with partners reinforced legitimacy and credibility of their services, during and beyond the project period. Some partner organizations valued the opportunity to market their services through library networks, and to reach new and different groups.

Librarians valued learning from partners' experience and content knowledge, and some said that through partners, they gained a deeper understanding of target communities. Libraries and their partners agreed that working together led to cost-savings in their operations:

*'... some (financial) problems in our work are solved. It is easier to come to the village library and talk to current and future farmers.'*¹⁹

Conclusion

Many public libraries have strong partnership experience, with more traditional partners like schools, museums, publishers and archives. However, the changing role of public libraries is placing new demands on library skills and resources and generating a need to engage with less traditional partners. EIFL-PLIP's experience demonstrates that public libraries are able and valued partners, but that there are risks. There is a lot to learn about what drives successful partnership, including shared planning, relationship building, partnership structures, communication, decision-making, managing expectations, contracting and costing. As the number and variety of public library partnerships changes, partnership management is becoming an increasingly indispensable part of library management.

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EIFL Public Library Innovation Programme project case studies:

Available online at <http://www.eifl.net/service-areas-replication-case-studies>

- AgroLib-Ja – Improving the lives of farmers. Public Library Radislav Nikčević , Jagodina, Serbia, Case Study, March 2011

¹⁹ Representative of the rural Development Support Network of the Ministry of Agriculture, quoted in Public Library Radislav Nikčević Case Study, March 2011.

- Creative minds create job opportunities, Public Library Braka Miladinovci, Radovis, Macedonia, Case Study, March 2011
- E-health corners, Kenya National Library Service, Kenya, March 2011
- internet Access and Training Programme, Northern Regional Library, Tamale, Ghana, Case Study, March 2011
- 'Play to Study', Utena A and M. Miskiniai Public Library, Lithuania, March 2011
- Youth Corner and Media Training Centre, Zavidovici Public Library, Bosnia and Herzegovina, March 2011

Interviews

Interview with Ms Laima Lapiniene, coordinator of Utena A. and M. Public Library's Play to Study service, 24 May 2012.

Interview with Ms Jelena Rajić, one of the coordinators of Public Library Radislav Nikčević 's AgroLib-Ja service, 7 June 2012.

Appendix A:

EIFL-PLIP guideline on partnerships for grantees

Potential partners could be other organizations that provide knowledge resources that you currently do not have or local delivery partners who reach different groups that you currently do not reach and would like to.

Some suggestions: Nonprofit organizations, Schools and colleges, Libraries of all types, Businesses, Government agencies etc. Consider the following in selecting your partners:

- * What is the partner's mission and does it complement the library's mission?
- * Does the partner honestly recognize your limitations, capacity, strength and weaknesses?
- * What is the partner's position in the community?
- * Who are the groups or segments of the community served by the partner?
- * What sort of resources – assets and strengths – might this partnership bring to the relationship and project goals?
- * What are the partner's strategic directions?
- * What is the partner's corporate culture and can you work together?
- * Is the partner's planning and budget cycle one you can work with?
- * Will the partnership bring two way benefit?
- * Is the financial relationship between the beneficiary and the partner (or partners) clear and transparent?

Appendix B: EIFL-PLIP grantee libraries: partnerships for community development

Library & project	Partnerships	Library contribution	Partner contribution
<p><i>Utena A. and M. Miskiniai Public Library, Lithuania.</i> Project: Play to Study. Aim: To encourage resistant pupils to reconnect with their teachers and schools. Beneficiary community: Vulnerable children, youth at risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 13 schools ✓ 23 branch libraries ✓ Utena Education Centre (NGO) ✓ IT company (business - Prewise) ✓ Utena Pedagogical Psychological Service ✓ Department of Education, Sport and Tourism of Utena District Municipality ✓ Department of Childrens' Rights ✓ Protection of Utena District Municipality ✓ Juvenile Affairs Officers Group at Utena County Police Commissariat ✓ Zarasai and Ignalina libraries ✓ National Ministry of Science and Education 	<p>Innovative idea & project proposal Donor funding Overall coordination of partnership & implementation. Physical space for meetings Human resources (administrative, plus librarians to work with children)</p>	<p>Physical space (in libraries and schools) Human resources (teachers) Marketing project in the community. Motivating and encouraging teachers to participate IT expertise Understanding of beneficiary community. Guidance and consultancy for development of computer game; plus methodology for evaluating pupils. Coordination of implementation in schools Participation, with a view to replication of the service (the libraries) Future sustainability (National ministry, libraries and schools)</p>
<p><i>Zavidovici Public Library, Bosnia and Herzegovina.</i> Project: Youth Corner and Multi-media Centre. Aim: To provide children who would otherwise be waiting for buses with useful skills and interesting activities. Beneficiaries: Vulnerable children, youth at risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Municipality ✓ Employment agency ✓ Local democracy agency ✓ Schools ✓ Individuals and volunteer trainers 	<p>Innovative idea & project proposal Donor funding Overall coordination Physical space for Youth Corners ICT Human resources – administration plus overseeing activities</p>	<p>Financial support Marketing support Content of courses Technology expertise (film and video cameras; ICT, website development etc.) Knowledge of beneficiary community.</p>
<p><i>Northern Regional Library, Ghana.</i> Project: internet Access and Training Programme. Aim: To improve unemployed young people's chances in life through ICT and leadership training. Beneficiaries: Vulnerable children, youth at risk</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NGO [Local ICT for development agency, Savana Signatures]. ✓ Government departments and agencies including Ministry of Education; National Youth Employment Programme; National Service scheme ✓ Traditional leaders 	<p>Innovative idea & project proposal Donor funding Physical space Overall coordination Human resources – skilled librarians who managed and conducted training. ICT</p>	<p>Training Content for courses Status of links with high-level government departments Local credibility and legitimacy Contacts with beneficiaries Understanding of beneficiary needs and interests Opportunities for youth</p>
<p><i>Public Library Radislav Nikčević, Serbia.</i> Project: AgroLib-Ja Aim: To provide an information service and online market to improve farmers livelihoods. Beneficiaries: Farmers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Town Assembly of Jagodina ✓ Ministry of Agriculture ✓ Rural Development Support Network ✓ Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises and Registered Households ✓ Local farmers associations, for example, the Beekeeper's Association 	<p>Innovative idea & project proposal Donor funding Physical space Overall coordination Human resources – skilled librarians who managed and conducted training. ICT Library contacts and networks Connection to local government</p>	<p>Finance Contacts with farmers; understanding farmers' context and needs; Lecturers and content for lectures;</p>

<p><i>Kenya National Library Service.</i> Project: E-health corners in two branch libraries. Aim: To improve access to health information. Beneficiaries: Healthworkers; general public medical/health students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ministry of Health ✓ Staff and students of local medical colleges ✓ World Bank ✓ Book Aid International 	<p>Donor funding Physical space ICT Management of e-health corners Human resources - skilled librarians</p>	<p>Reinforced credibility, legitimacy Health knowledge Knowledge of beneficiary communities Finance (World Bank) Books on health (Book Aid International)</p>
<p><i>Public Library Braka Miladinovci, Macedonia.</i> Project: Creative minds create job opportunities. Aim: To help jobseekers into work through providing ICT, online job-seeking training, motivation & confidence building. Beneficiaries: Unemployed in municipalities of Radovis and Konce, especially women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ NGOs: Civil Creative Centre (CREA); Women's Action ✓ Local government – Office for Economic Development ✓ Employment Agency ✓ Business sector – especially Buchim copper mine. 	<p>Innovative idea & project proposal Donor funding Overall coordination Physical space ICT Course development and trainers</p>	<p>Reinforced credibility and legitimacy Knowledge of target/beneficiary community's needs and interests Lists of unemployed; contact details Financial and material support</p>