

Strengthening Libraries for Development

Summary of the workshop

Introduction

The workshop took place in Brighton with ten overseas participants from eight countries in sub Saharan Africa representing public library services and non governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned with book and information development. All participants contributed actively and each workshop session was jointly facilitated by an overseas participant and a member of Book Aid International staff, who together had worked out the content and structure in advance in order to achieve maximum participation. (See attached list of participants.) The workshop was the third and final one in a series of three funded by the Community Fund (formerly the National Lottery Charities Board). The first (November 1999) formed the basis of Book Aid International's three year plan 2001 - 2003, and the second (March 2001) was about working together to implement that plan. The focus of the Brighton workshop was strategic issues concerning libraries and their role in development, to set the framework for the next plan period 2004 - 2008.

Context

The overall context for the workshop was poverty and how it may be reduced as set out in the Millennium Development Goals - universal primary education and gender equity - and Education for All. How could libraries be strengthened to realise their potential role in supporting the quality of education? And how could they promote gender equity? Libraries had to make a case for themselves in the context of poverty eradication.

Education should be of good quality but this was not possible without literacy skills and access to reading materials. Textbooks alone were not sufficient even if there were enough textbooks available. A wide range of reading materials was necessary to enable people to learn and think for themselves, to develop their own capabilities. In this respect libraries have a unique role to play as agents for development, and they need to do more to promote themselves.

Book Aid International (BAI) and partners needed to work together in more strategic ways. Support for the book chain as a whole was essential for long term sustainability, and before the workshop BAI had useful consultations with the African Publishers Network (APNET) and the Pan African Booksellers Association (PABA) about key book chain issues to be addressed in the next planning period. Working together on advocacy and resource mobilisation was also crucial for long term sustainability.

BAI and partners were working in a rapidly changing environment and had to be able to demonstrate impact to gain support from funders and other stakeholders. What difference did this work make to people's lives, in particular to disadvantaged groups eg women and girls? Does the community appreciate the services offered by libraries? Evidence of impact and the backing of the community was a pre requisite for advocating the role of libraries in development.

Day One

The overall framework for the day was i) fostering sustainability of libraries and discouraging dependency, and ii) poverty - looking at disadvantaged target groups and gender issues.

Advocacy

Why advocacy? To compete for scarce resources libraries had to do much more to advocate their role. There was a low appreciation of libraries in the community as well as in government. Advocacy needs to be undertaken upwards and downwards, at local as well as national levels. It is recognised that textbooks are important but there is little understanding of how access to and use of a wider range of information enables a person to develop their own critical capacity, which is fundamental for success in formal education and beyond. How should advocacy be done? Effective advocacy is about working with others to build credibility and authority, and speaking with one voice about common goals and aspirations. Advocacy work needs a clear target and strategy, as well as conviction and passion about the cause, to enthuse others about what it is and why it matters. Librarians need to be seen in the corridors of power, and to have concrete evidence they are making a difference. Monitoring and evaluation should be built into the advocacy strategy so it can be amended in light of changing circumstances.

Leverage

The concept of leverage was defined as using what you have in order to get what you want. How could partners use BAI book donations to lever additional resources for the library service? BAI believed it might have to introduce some limited form of cost recovery for the donated books and wanted to explore this with partners before it became a necessity. Leverage using BAI book donations could be a way of taking this forward as well as securing additional resources for the library service. BAI strongly emphasised that such cost recovery must not be at the expense of targeting disadvantaged groups. While fully recognising the challenges and raising some questions for BAI, partners had some positive points to make about the principle of cost recovery; as well as being a more sustainable approach it would help to create ownership and address the problem of things that come free not being valued. Partners wanted to know what percentage BAI had in mind. One possibility suggested was that cost recovery should be linked to the cost of freight.

Fundraising

For effective fundraising it is essential to identify with the interests of the prospective funder and understand their requirements. Different sources of funds including income generation were identified, and the experiences of a wide range of successful partner fundraising initiatives were shared, both local and international. To build up confidence it is essential to publicise fundraising successes and to share good practice. Some

fundes who previously supported BAI no longer did so because their criteria had changed. BAI and partners had to work together in new ways to secure funds. For example, the funder requirement to engage with disadvantaged target groups in order to identify their needs was not something BAI could do on its own. It was in any case essential for partners to develop such interaction with end users if impact was to be assessed of their own services, another key funder requirement which was also highly relevant for advocacy. Practical steps were identified, for example BAI sending partners the funder's criteria in advance, agreeing in the light of this whether to go ahead, and then working jointly on the proposal. The proposal should fit in with partner/BAI overall goals, and put across the voice of the people rather than the needs of libraries. Partners should check out other relevant local initiatives to ensure complementarity.

Target groups

There was a need for greater clarity about disadvantaged target groups for both fundraising and effective advocacy. Partners shared experiences of reaching such groups, for example Zambia Library Service (ZLS) has done a needs assessment survey and had developed a questionnaire to collect views and perceptions of ZLS. Librarians need to reflect the voices of children and the community and develop services accordingly. This can only be done through effective interaction with actual and potential users. Librarians need to go to where the potential users are, for example the market place, churches and bus queues. A range of approaches to community outreach work were presented, including interviews and focus groups to assess needs, and mobile services to meet them. Levels of literacy among disadvantaged groups is a real problem and partners should support literacy activities, for example publishing materials in local languages eg Somali. Inputs to library services should be driven by the needs of target groups. Librarians should respond actively and creatively to different interests, for example developing collections to encourage women and girls, and involving youth in developing reading clubs around contemporary issues eg AIDS/HIV, music and drug abuse. To help identify and reach disadvantaged groups librarians should work in partnership with local experts eg NGOs specialising in meeting their needs.

Gender

The discussions about gender took as a starting point the imbalance of library use between male and female revealed by most of the gender statistics on the partner report forms. There were deep cultural reasons behind the imbalance, related to traditional perceptions of the role of women. This was an issue within libraries themselves, and had to be addressed if they were to fulfil their role as agents for development. The Millennium Development Goal on gender equity was just as important for reducing poverty as UPE. What is required for successful services targeting women and girls? Ideas included: official support and backing; gender sensitive book selection based on consultation; allocating separate reading rooms and times; linking with other organisations concerned with women in development (NGOs, the Ministry for Women); working with the book chain to promote gender sensitive books; encouraging men to encourage women to use the library; and working more broadly with teachers and librarians to change attitudes. The latter point was fundamental. There was a lack of understanding of the role of women in development and why it matters. The starting point was for more women to be

involved in top level library policy development so addressing the imbalance had official backing.

Day Two

The second day built on the first by focussing on i) libraries themselves and what they could do to reach out and attract new readers, and ii) partnerships - both with BAI and with other organisations that could help libraries to deliver their mission.

Attractive libraries

How can libraries be more attractive and welcoming? Libraries need to be at the heart of the community but often people do not know they are there or what is in them. Librarians need to reach out and attract new readers in the community with initiatives such as reading tents. The library itself needs to be inviting so people feel comfortable there. Good lighting, ventilation, lay out and signing are essential, with attractive displays both inside and outside. Some classification schemes are complex and put people off, something simpler may be better. Most important of all is the attitude of librarians who need to be friendly and have good communication skills so they respond in different ways to different users. First impressions are crucial. All too often the relevant and up to date books in libraries are swamped by old and worn titles. Reasons behind the hesitation to weed include fear of no books on the shelves and government regulations. A useful distinction was made between the library as current and active and the library as an archive, it cannot be both at the same time. Attitudes need to change so librarians have the courage and confidence to weed. Weeding is an opportunity to make the case for more books, and to create space for other activities to attract people to the library. A policy framework for stock development is needed which is owned and understood throughout the network. The idea of a "weeding enforcer" post was put forward and a positive weeding cycle linked to advocacy was proposed: weeding = less books = get money for more books = get books = weeding and so on.

Reading promotion

Getting the right books on the shelves is not enough, the library can have no impact unless the books are taken out and read. Librarians have a key role in developing a reading culture and reading promotion needs to be an integral part of their day to day job. Reading promotion can be done creatively, it need not be a costly additional activity. There is work to be done to encourage teachers and librarians themselves to appreciate the value of books and reading widely, so they can enthuse others. The Children's Book Project (CBP) gave examples of their work in schools in Tanzania in partnership with READ, the South African NGO. The project strengthens the book chain by commissioning local authors and publication of children's books in Swahili. Children are introduced to the idea that they themselves can write and create their own books, to share in class and at home. It is important to find partners with similar interests to promote reading widely, for example other players in the book chain, journalists and teachers. Within libraries top level organisational backing is required so that reading promotion is recognised to be absolutely central to the success of the library, and is built

in accordingly to work plans and job descriptions.

Information and communications technologies (ICT)

The challenges and opportunities ICT presents were discussed in the context of using ICT to reach target groups, and what support BAI could practically provide to partners whose own ICT capacity was at different stages. The Tanzania Library Service (TLS) aims to use ICT in order to widen access to information; to improve communication and co-ordination; and to automate library processes. The relevance of content to meet the information needs is a major issue. Positive developments included content packages in Hausa in northern Nigeria. Open source software could be a useful option for library partners since it is relatively cheap and easily adaptable for local content, and not tied to commercial suppliers. ICT is very attractive to funders at present and there is a lot of money available for ICT projects. Sometimes it is less clear how such projects fit with the overall aim of the library service to reach the information poorest. There is a massive need for training of both librarians and users eg how can the rural poor be expected to find useful information on the internet even if they did have access to it? It is a difficult area to drive forward since the heads of public library services are themselves rarely computer literate. BAI can provide support in terms of training and capacity building eg by being a neutral source of advice for software choice, and by providing up to date information about ICT. BAI also plans to explore how ICT can streamline book provision (eg by putting lists of titles on the internet).

Partnership

BAI and overseas library service partnerships have been formalised by drafting partnership agreements, which help to clarify the roles of BAI and its partners. The National Library of Uganda (NLU) presented its experience of developing a partnership agreement (PA) with BAI. NLU had found it valuable to develop a common understanding of objectives and record what each partner expects of the other. The agreement had given a framework for re assessing programmes and making them more focussed. Having agreed what you are doing together it is easier to evaluate progress as there is a basis on which to judge. The PA is not just a piece of paper, there has to be real will to implement the agreement on both sides. Other partners said the PA had helped deal with requests from other organisations as it sets out criteria which reflect the need to reach disadvantaged groups. It had given BAI and partners a strategic framework which can easily be understood by other key stakeholders eg the library board. Suggestions were made for improving these documents. In terms of improving the process, it could be helpful if partners submitted proposals as a first step. Points were also made about how PAs could best be monitored and evaluated. This should build on existing systems eg by adding a country specific sheet to the partner report form, and agreeing relevant outcomes and indicators selected from the M&E guidelines. A pre requisite for progress on both sides was trust and honesty. Positive criticism should be welcomed as a learning opportunity to develop more effective programmes. Partnership agreements were confirmed as the most effective way of providing a common framework for partners and BAI to work together to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Other partnerships

The last session of the day looked at other partnerships. Which organisations do we need to form partnerships with and why? First it was necessary to be clear about your own organisation's purpose, only then was it possible to know who it is most important to work with to achieve that purpose. At the outset of a new partnership it is important to examine assumptions each side may have about what matters to the other, and what success looks like from each partner's perspective. The question of partnerships had already been mentioned in other sessions eg gender, ICT, reading promotion. Effective partnerships around those areas could help to achieve the library services purpose. The Ghana Book Trust gave the example of its successful partnership with CODE. Key factors were that programme objectives were well examined and documented and had verifiable indicators which made monitoring and evaluation easy. There was regular consultation and communication, and flexibility about implementation. The partnership with CODE also enabled networking with other CODE partners in different countries eg Senegal, Tanzania. What are some characteristics of successful partnerships? These include: honesty, trust, transparency, commitment, respect for each others perspectives, common values and goals, mutual benefit, good and regular communication, clear roles and an agreed time frame.

Day Three

The final day of the workshop looked at i) monitoring and evaluation (how do we know if our work is making a difference?) and ii) training and capacity building to enable partners to deliver in these new and crucial areas.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

M&E is a vital part of programme work and needs to be built in from the outset. Only through M&E is it possible to keep track, to change as necessary, and to measure success. M&E is needed on the one hand for learning and improving programmes, and on the other for accountability, to give evidence that resources are being used effectively. The latter point is particularly important for BAI given the changing requirements of funders. Facts and figures about numbers of books distributed are no longer enough. Funders now needed to know what difference the books have made, that they have been read and have contributed to specific changes in people's behaviour. These were hard questions for any organisation and partners and BAI needed to grapple with them if they were to be in a position to mobilise resources and advocate effectively. M&E is sometimes seen as a threat by librarians, the challenge is to turn this round so it becomes a positive learning opportunity that can involve all stakeholders and be very motivating. To help develop ideas and understanding, participants worked on identifying indicators for outputs and outcomes for a specific project, the Intra African Book Support Scheme (IABSS).

Training and capacity building

The final session looked at training and capacity building. How can librarians be supported to deliver in these new areas? It was important for library services to identify training needs within their organisations and develop training plans linked to their overall objectives. Training could be sourced locally, and BAI had moved into training so may be able to provide support depending on what was required. NLU presented its own training needs. NLU believes it is their job to influence government to do something about reading (pass rates in a recent literacy test had been as low as 13% in some parts of Uganda). So NLU priorities include lobbying and advocacy, developing partnerships across the book chain, and promoting a reading culture. Training needs were identified by other participants in the following areas: ICT; fundraising and proposal writing; motivating and interpersonal skills; advocacy, leverage and lobbying; m&e; financial management; leadership; women in management; project management; customer relations; reading promotion; professional librarianship training; training of trainers; communication skills; marketing services; reaching out to target groups. It would be helpful to use the partnership agreements to identify training needs related to agreed objectives for BAI and partners to address together.

Wrap up

For the wrap up session library services, NGOs and BAI came up with these action points:

Library services will:

- report on the workshop to employers, colleagues and the library association
- review m&e practice and policy (for example for IABSS)
- emphasise the importance of weeding
- work on reading promotion

NGOs will:

- share information about the workshop with board members, staff and stakeholders
- develop plan of action on critical issues raised, including advocacy, fundraising, m&e
- develop south south and north south networks with organisations doing related work

BAI will:

- use partnership agreements for specific objectives eg training and joint proposals
- look into cost recovery and establish options with partners
- link m&e guidelines and partner report forms to partnership agreements
- integrate gender more broadly across all project and programme activities

Conclusion

Many ideas and issues were raised by partners and BAI at the workshop which will form the basis of BAI's next plan 2004-2008. This plan will work toward the overall aim of poverty reduction as set out in the Millennium Development Goals - universal primary education and gender equity - and Education for All.

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