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The Success Story of GILLDDNET

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Abstract

This presentation looks at the extent to which the objectives of the Ghana Interlibrary Lending and Document Delivery Network have been achieved. Little or nothing is said about the challenges that the project has faced and is still facing. This is the topic of another paper on the project.

Discussions between Mr. Frode Bakken, a Norwegian, and Mr. Niels Mark, a Danish at an IFLA Section of Document Delivery in 1993 marked the beginning of the Ghana Interlibrary Lending and Document Delivery Network (GILLDDNET). At an IFLA meeting the following year, three important objectives for the project were outlined.

1. To establish electronic network links with a regional and global approach to improve universal availability to publications and information;
2. To improve the competence of library staff in handling interlibrary loans and document delivery systems; and
3. To support negotiations with main document centers/libraries to obtain favorable treaties.

The discussion in this presentation will be the extent to which these laudable objectives have been achieved. This may, hopefully, tell the success story of a project that emanated from the IFLA Section of ILLDD. It must be quickly pointed out that GILLDDNET may not necessarily be a complete success story by certain standards, but it can be said, with a fair degree of accuracy that, as a pilot project, it has achieved most of the objectives it set itself. It has made some impact on the Information and Communication Technology scene in Ghanaian academic libraries. There are important lessons for developing countries that may want to undertake a similar project. Some of the challenges that the project faced were foreseen and adequate measures were taken to tackle them. There were others that caught the coordinators of the project unprepared. These were not, however, allowed to derail the project. They were efficiently and effectively tackled. When, for instance, it came to light that the Ghanaian Internet Service Provider was not living up to expectation, the Danish coordinating team urgently approached the Danish Embassy in Accra, Ghana for a vast and a change of ISP. Tenacity of purpose and an unmatched commitment on the part of the Danish Coordinating Team, the Ghana Steering Committee, INASP and DANIDA to see the project through made the project what it is today.

Connectivity

The project was launched in Accra, Ghana from 15th to 17th April 1996 with an information-gathering seminar. This was a feasibility study that helped the Danish Coordinating team and the Ghana Steering Committee of the project to appreciate and realistically tackle the challenges that the project was likely to face. The theme of the seminar was, "Towards a more efficient and effective interlibrary Lending and Document Delivery in Africa". The following papers were read:

- Getting connected to the Internet; (Kristine Abelsnes);
- The Ghana telecom and electronic information transfer; (T. Akon-Mensah);
- Computer networking and accessing the Internet in Ghana: problems and prospects; (Nii Quaynor); and Interlining and document delivery - The Ghanaian experience; (Christine Kisiedu)

At the time, the project was launched; it was only the Balme Library, University of Ghana that had a stand-alone computer connected to the Internet in the Electronic Support Unit of the library. This was a facility that an Internet Provider in Ghana -Network Computer Systems- provided free of charge. Unfortunately, the library's clientele did not extensively use the facility. It was only a couple of librarians who could do meaningful searches on the Internet for would-be users at the time. These librarians did not appear to have the time to introduce readers to the service, partly because one computer could not adequately serve all the users who would want to make some use of the service. The facility could not be publicized and it remained virtually unused.

As a result of the project, all the participating libraries of GILLDDNET (The Balme Library, University of Ghana; the Main Library, University of Cape Coast, the libraries of the University for Development Studies, Tamale; the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi and the Institute of Science and Technology Information (INSTI) were all by 1998, technically speaking, successfully connected to the Internet. At the initial stages, only a limited number of computers were connected to the Internet in all the libraries, and these were the computers that the project purchased for the participating libraries. Now the story is different in some of the participating libraries. The Library of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, for instance, started the Internet service with two computers. It now has fifty computers connected to the Internet. The Balme Library, University of Ghana, has also increased the number of its computers from an initial five to 35. Provision has actually been made for 106 computers in a new Computer Laboratory that is yet to be formally commissioned by the authorities of the University of Ghana. This can be described as a vast improvement of the situation that used to be. More users than before have access to the Internet with the increase in the number of

computers in these libraries. Cape Coast University Library has 9 computers with Internet connectivity and INSTI still have three, but then INSTI has a Computer Laboratory that can house about 30 PC's and this is what it uses for its training programmes. The computers are hired for the purpose. The University for Development Studies, Tamale has a local area network (LAN) for five computers but for some time now, due particularly to some technical problems, the library has had no access to the Internet. The Chairman of the Danish Coordinating Team has promised to look for funding to help the University in Tamale.

Training

The sponsors of the project recognized training as an important component of the project. Even before the equipment for the project was purchased, funds were made available for the training of six librarians who would operate the ILL/DD service in their respective libraries. The objectives of the training programme organized for the six librarians from Ghana were:

- To introduce trainees to ILL/DD services, statistics, objectives, policies and procedures in selected libraries in the United Kingdom and Denmark;
- To give trainees hands-on experience in ILL/DD operations in the selected libraries in the U.K. and Denmark;
- To equip trainees with skills that will enable them to make effective and efficient use of the vast information resource on the Internet to satisfy the information needs of users; and
- To encourage trainees to establish links between their respective libraries and the libraries where they will have their practical training.

The first phase of the training took place in Manchester and London. The training was essentially theoretical, providing basic training in ILL/DD service. It involved formal classroom instruction/discussion and visits to a number of libraries and information centers engaged in ILL/DD activities. In Denmark trainees were attached to three well-endowed Danish libraries for practical training in Internet search and ILL/DD procedures.

The six who were trained outside Ghana were expected to train other Ghanaian library staff on their return. Training sessions were held at the University of Ghana in November 1997 for selected staff from the participating libraries. In June 1998 there was another training session in Internet use for the different categories of librarians manning the departmental, faculty libraries and also libraries in Halls of Residence at the University of Ghana. The Travelling Workshop on Internet Use, sponsored by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications and funded by DANIDA, trained twenty Ghanaian academic librarians in the use of the Internet in 1999 in the Balme Library, University of Ghana. Sixteen of the librarians were from the University of Ghana and the other four were from the University College of Education of Winneba. The methodology of the INASP training workshop was used, with minor modifications, to organize and run training sessions for the University of Cape Coast and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Ten librarians were trained in KNUST in June 2001 and 14 were trained in the UCC library in October 2001. In all cases, the training lasted five days. Slow learners recommended between three and five days more for the next training programme that must come on very soon. They all felt it was a worthwhile programme and commended the facilitators for a good work done.

It must be pointed out that for all these training sessions trainees were asked to fill evaluation forms and some idea of the immediate importance of the training was obtained. It is felt that what needs to be done

now is to find out whether the training that was provided some time ago has made any impact on service delivery and the way the Internet is used in these libraries. All training activities and services must be evaluated; only on the basis of a continuing evaluation can the quality of these activities be improved.

The South African experience

Three other librarians from the University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology made a study tour of South Africa. The mission to South Africa was undertaken to study the management structures, operations and projects of emerging library consortia in an African environment. It was felt that the GILLDDNET project would benefit immensely from the South African experience.

Technical training

GILLDDNET was quick to find out that technical training would go a long way in ensuring uninterrupted use of the Internet for accessing quality information. Two technicians from the Balme Library were trained in Denmark at different times and they were expected to train library staff that are technically inclined in all the participating libraries. The two have so far trained 10 staff members from the participating libraries with the support of the project. GILLDDNET appointed a coordinator of training who handled all training programmes. A team of technical experts from Denmark visited Ghana about three times a year to offer technical advice and actually help with some vital installations. There are occasions when they brought much needed equipment to Ghana.

Information Resources

A review of the literature on Information and Communication Technology in Africa from 1990 to 2000 shows that Internet connectivity is an issue that receives more attention than Internet content. Also Email which, is only one of the services of the Internet, was and is still popular with those institutions that have Internet connectivity. Academic librarians who wanted to use the Internet to do meaningful, timely and relevant searches for their users had an obvious problem. Quality information on the Internet costs money, as it would be of print. Admittedly there are several sites with quality information on the Internet, but then, the point still remains that subscription to online resources is the best option for the academic library.

The third most important objective of GILLDDNET was, "To support negotiations with main document centers/libraries to obtain favorable treaties." Members of the Ghana Steering Committee are yet to acquire the negotiation skills that will enable them negotiate effectively with database providers. The Danish Coordinating Team of GILLDDNET relied heavily on the services of the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) to negotiate successfully access to information (online journal packages and bibliographical databases) with Academic (Elsevier) Press, Blackwell Publishers, The Cochrane Library, EBSCO Publishing, Mary Ann Liebert and Munksgaard, Silver Platter, the British Library and 'Subito' for a number of developing countries. From September 2001, the participating libraries of GILLDDNET have had access to these journals and databases, which cover subjects like science, technology, medicine, Social sciences and the humanities.

The INASP Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERI) has made available CD-ROM databases of EBSCO Publishing and SilverPlatter products to all the libraries participating in the project. This is one feature of the programme that is highly appreciated in Ghana. The Internet

infrastructure is still at its infancy and there is one library in GILLDDNET that is not getting much out of these online databases. The CD-ROM databases are addressing connectivity and low speed problems.

It must be pointed out that before the online databases were introduced, for about four years, a number of Danish libraries, namely Copenhagen Business School Library, the Veterinary and Agriculture Library, the National Library of Science and Medicine and the State and University library in Aarhus have been supplying GILLDDNET libraries with photocopies of documents when requests are sent to them. The document delivery component of the project is now being seriously tested. Another evaluation of the project is likely to take place at the end of this year, 2002, and it is hoped, judging from the use that is being made now of the facilities that the success story of the project will be written in gold.

Sustainability

Whenever a project is foreign funded, the management issue that immediately crops up is sustainability. Donor funds will not flow forever and steps that will ensure survival and continuity must be considered for later implementation. The networking project under discussion never lost sight of this issue. It was discussed at the April 1996 brainstorming seminar in Accra. In October 1999, the Danish Coordinating Team and some members of the Steering Committee met with the five Vice-Chancellors of the five public universities in Ghana at the University of Ghana. The meeting discussed the project and its sustainability. The Vice-Chancellors promised to do all that they could to ensure the success of the project, and sustain it. The team that met with the Vice-Chancellors also had discussions with the then Deputy Minister of Education in charge of tertiary education. The Deputy Minister urged the universities to implement government policy on university libraries in Ghana. This is the policy that stipulates the allocation of 10% of the universities' annual budget to the libraries. In January 2001 the Danish Coordinating Team and the head librarians of all the participating libraries had another meeting with the Vice-Chancellors. The Registrars and the Finance Officers of the participating universities were present. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) again gave the assurance that the universities were fully committed to the success and sustenance of the project. Again, on a recent visit to Ghana in December 2001 by some members of the Danish Coordinating Team, discussions on the sustenance of the project were held with all the Vice Chancellors and Principal in their own institutions. The team for the third time visited all the GILLDDNET libraries in January 2002. All the heads felt GILLDDNET was important and beneficial and so everything possible will be done to let it function after the end of donor funding.

Evaluation seminars have been organized on two different occasions. The Danish Coordinating Team commissioned two evaluation reports. All the reports maintained that the project was making steady progress and that more needs to be done to improve access to and retrieval of quality information from the Internet.

GILLDDNET may not have made the impact that the management of the project would have liked but then, it can be said that the project has made many Ghanaian librarians information and communication technology (ICT) literate. The impression one gets when one visits other West African libraries is that Ghanaian libraries, however limited their use of the Internet is in real terms, appear to be leaders in accessing and retrieving information, and make more meaningful use of the Internet. GILLDDNET has a future, and a bright one for that matter.