**Partnerships and regional collaboration within the
establishment and implementation of the Capital [Bogotá]
Network of Public libraries - BIBLORED**

By **Silvia Prada Forero,**
Gerente Red Capital de Bibliotecas Públicas - BIBLORED

Meeting:	**109 Replicating Innovation, Improving Lives: Best Practices from the Access to Learning Award (ATLA) Recipients - Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**
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Abstract

The Capital Network of Public Libraries, BIBLORED, of Bogotá, Colombia – South America, is a project of the Mayor's Office and the Secretariat of Education of the District. It has earned a place in the city as one of the projects with the greatest social, cultural and educational impact. This acknowledgement has been awarded due to its efforts to provide free and democratic access to information, knowledge and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), as well as its promotion of reading, writing and culture.

As a beneficiary of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's 2001 Access to Learning Award (ATLA), BIBLORED has also accomplished important goals aimed at providing free and democratic access to computers and Internet o close to eight million inhabitants of the city. BIBLORED's sustainable Technological Development Program has created services and programs that address different sectors across the city.

What BIBLORED has learned during its six years of service is related to the need to expand and replicate the library model it has developed, in the different sectors of the city as well as in other parts of the country and the region.

For BIBLORED, cooperation between local and national institutions has developed into a policy that defines a work scheme in which the greatest growth and progress takes place as social profitability is generated, allowing interactions with others at public and private levels in the creation of partnerships that promote the optimization of resources, avoid duplication of activities and concentrate actions to obtain greater and better results.

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Bogotá: BIBLORED Headquarters

The Capital Network of Public Libraries – BIBLORED began in 1998 as one of the special investment projects of the mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Penalosa. Mr. Penalosa included development of a network of libraries within his strategies aimed at achieving better conditions for individuals, families and the community in Bogotá, with an emphasis on those most needy.

In order to understand BIBLORED, it is necessary to first orient oneself in Bogotá. Today this city is considered as the geographical, political, industrial, economic and cultural core of Colombia, with a current population of more than eight million inhabitants; 49.6 percent of them living below the poverty line and 14.7 percent in real destitution[1]. Similar to the situation in most developing countries, a high percentage of income is concentrated in the smallest percentage of the population and the current unemployment rate has reached 17 percent. Additionally, Bogotá has experienced accelerated population growth over the last 30 years, mainly due to the displacement of large masses of peasant population from other municipalities who come to the capital in search of better economic opportunities and social services. They also come to flee violence and social exclusion in their native dwelling places.

Bogotá's rapid growth has not been accompanied by necessary infrastructure work. The coverage and quality of education, health, transportation services and public utilities has suffered; the planning and implementation of development projects has therefore become imperative. Thus, Bogotá is now experiencing a process of transformation that has been framed by a policy of recuperation of public spaces, improvement in the road and transportation infrastructure and the task of building citizenry and a sense of belonging amongst its inhabitants.

How the BIBLORED Project Was Born

The Project of the Capital Network of Public Libraries of Bogotá was born out of the need to elevate the quality of life for the city's population. Libraries are a vital part of the creation of a public environment that allows the community to reduce its material and social deficiencies through the development of educational, environmental, recreational, sport and cultural infrastructures, aimed at serving the most vulnerable or disadvantaged sectors of the population.

Moreover, BIBLORED sought to invite children, teenagers, adults and the elderly to participate and take ownership of the public libraries program, regardless of their situation. This has included participation in its activities, registration in the library, utilizing the facilities to the fullest extent, expression their opinions and complaints about the services, make suggestions about new services and activities to be included in the libraries, and to find opportunities to make good use of their leisure time. The project also expected to offer citizens more security because the libraries would provide spaces for interaction and social coexistence in what has come to be known as "the city at a human scale."

The Capital Network of Public Libraries also originated from a critical diagnostic study into the situation of the libraries and access to reading in Bogotá by consultants, Drs Lina Espitaleta, current director of the Library of the Universidad Externado de Colombia, and Gloria Palomino, director of the Pilot Library of Medellín in 1998.[2] Their research established that of the 105 existing libraries in Bogotá, 39 percent of them gave no service whatsoever to the community and of those that were operating, the great majority had only

[1] "La pobreza en Bogotá y los Resultados de las Políticas Distritales para Combatirla (Poverty in Bogotá and the Results of the Policies of the District to Combat It) Secretaría de Hacienda Distrital, Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, October, 2003.
[2] Espitaleta, Lina. Proyecto para la planeación, construcción y puesta en marcha de las bibliotecas públicas de Santafé de Bogotá, 1998-2001. Santafé de Bogotá, 1998.

one employee to deal with all library services. Not only was there an erratic schedule for the public but the libraries were very deficient in terms of furniture and equipment, and the buildings were quite inadequate with poor light, ventilation and space. It was also found that there were only 184 school libraries, most of them with scant reading and research programs and with a high proportion of school textbooks in their collections. The research also established that of the total of 900,000 volumes in the libraries, 90 percent were located in the Biblioteca Nacional (National Library), la Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango (Luis angel Arango Library) and the libraries that belong to Colsubsidio--the Family Compensation Fund that administers BIBLORED. This meant that the remaining nearly 90 libraries had only 100,000 books between them, that is, an average of approximately 1,000 books per library; their collections were deteriorated and old. Except for the aforementioned libraries, there were no cultural programs or systematic activities aimed at social integration in any libraries, either private or public.

Thirdly, six years ago Bogotá was considered to have a population of about six million. With a bibliographic stock of 900,000 books, this meant that there was only one book for every seven inhabitants, whereas international standards establish that there should be two to three books per inhabitant. Bogotá had a deficiency of 93 percent. With regard to children's literature, the matter was even more critical, because there was one book for every 63 children, as opposed to international norms that state there should be at least one book per child in public libraries.

Also, the situation with regard to Internet access in the city was very critical, as was shown in the surveys on reading habits made in the year 2000, in which the following is found to be the most significant information:

- Only 6.1% of the inhabitants of the city were internet users
- The number of users connected to the Internet was 873, 000 in the entire country (it should be pointed out that at the time the country had an approximate population of 42 million inhabitants.)
- The ownership of personal computers in the country was 32 per one thousand inhabitants.

Finally, the research established that the well-stocked libraries in the city were sparsely located, which made access difficult and implied long and costly transport processes for the users.

The conditions of Bogotá's libraries motivated the administration to propose the creation of four new large libraries that would fulfill the following conditions:
- They would be located in strategic zones in the city, with high population concentration and density, especially in terms of student population;
- They would be open to the public seven days a week, for a minimum of 12 hours per day;
- They would embellish and enrich public areas with harmonious buildings and landscape; and,
- They would become true centres for cultural activities, linked together and with the rest of the world.

The District Government that defined BIBLORED determined that it should be developed by the Secretariat of Education of the District and assigned a budget of approximately $17 million to be executed within four years.

The Project for the creation of a District Network of Public Libraries was conceived in terms of the construction of four mega libraries, located in such a way that they would cover the

different zones of the city (east, north, west and south). The project would also integrate within this same system the existing public libraries which were ascribed to the different communities or public entities.

Currently, three of the large libraries of the project are in operation: the Virgilio Barco, Tintal and Tunal libraries. The fourth large library, called the Julio Mario Santodomingo Cultural Centre, is currently in the planning stage, and is expected to be built in San José de Bavaria.

Tintal and Tunal libraries have construction areas of approximately 6.500 m² each and the Virgilio Barco Library is 16.000 m². Each can accommodate 1,000 visitors simultaneously in their different reading rooms: a general reading room, children's reading room, Internet Room, Multimedia, Newspaper library, Video and Audio Rooms, Play Station and Auditorium.

Furthermore, 16 existing local and neighborhood libraries joined the project; these service between 100 and 600 visitors daily and carry out important community work. Thus BIBLORED was created as a network system with 19 libraries.

The libraries of BIBLORED are linked with the Luis Ángel Arango Library and also the Colsubsidio Library Network.

Implementation and Start Up of the Extended BIBLORED Library Network

The Capital Network of Public Libraries (BIBLORED) is now a knowledge system made up of 19 libraries connected with each other and strategically located in order to offer complete coverage in the city.

Each library is an important cultural and community centre which can be used freely by the inhabitants of the city. The libraries are also research and learning centers with services addressed mainly to children and young people

BIBLORED, as a program of City Hall and of the Secretariat of Education, represents another dimension of public services that provides open facilities for the service of information, education and creativity. The book collections offered by the Network have grown in number to 420,000 volumes and serve over 450,000 users a month. Also, there are approximately 550 points of free access to the Internet throughout the Network available to the inhabitants of the city.

BIBLORED was started with two chief values:

> **Vision**
> BIBLORED strives to become the leader of public library networks in areas such as information services, cultural coverage and programs promoting the improvement of reading and writing skills, nationally and internationally recognized for its efficiency and quality of the management, investigation capacity, innovation, creativity and flexibility.

> **Mission**
> To work for the social and cultural development of Bogotá by promoting reading and writing, and by guaranteeing access to information, knowledge, art and recreation as essential and irreplaceable elements in the betterment of the quality of life of the population.

BIBLORED is regulated by the recommendations of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto[3], and is based on three key operating principles: inter institutional cooperation, social integration and community participation.

> **Inter institutional cooperation:** BIBLORED pursues this principal with the purposes of increasing available resources, reducing costs, offering new programs or services, and improving or enhancing the coverage of existing programs and services for the benefit of the users of the libraries (details of the many alliances are given in a separate section below).

> **Social integration:** It is fully recognized that the public library is an information center that offers data of all types and knowledge to its users. Libraries offer services to individuals of all races, religions, nationalities, languages or social conditions. In this sense, the library must consider the sector of the population which, due to diverse circumstances such as geographical, physical, socio cultural or economic conditions, do not enjoy the services of the library and connect them directly with services and programs whose goal is to promote books and reading; and provide opportunities for socialization which encourage reading, writing and the acquisition of knowledge.

> **Community participation:** Many of the people that go to these libraries feel for the first time in their lives that they have hope: they feel that they are important, that they have rights and a space for themselves. These libraries have started many different programs in which people can be enrolled and participate fully. They have engaged the whole community.

BIBLORED libraries have produced a miracle in Bogotá. They are nice places and people go there not only during the week to study and investigate, but also during weekends to visit with family and   friends, or even to picnic near by outside. These libraries really are the places where people from different backgrounds and social classes go and stay together. They are located in poor neighborhoods, with very few public spaces, and without good public services.   They have become the meeting point of different neighborhoods.

The Organizational Structure of Libraries in the BIBLORED Network

Major Libraries
Located in strategic points in the metropolitan sectors of the city, each major library has an area of 10,000m², 600 reading posts, 149 computers connected to the Internet and a book stock capacity for 100,000 to 150,000 volumes. These libraries currently have about 70,000 volumes each and serve an average of 3,500 users daily.

Local libraries
These represent the second level, after the major Libraries. Although the infrastructure of the local libraries is diverse, they have common services that they offer the community and they function as institutions of the District and also as intermediate coordinating establishment in the localities. They currently have an average of 15,000 volumes each, 100 reading spaces metropolitan parts of the city, each major library has an area of 10,000m², 600 reading spaces, 19 computers and about 730 daily users.

Neighborhood Libraries
These are the basic level libraries of Bogotá. Their origin is communal or district and, with few exceptions, their infrastructure is minimal. They generally serve one to three

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[3] http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/libraman.html

neighborhoods. At present they have an average of 5,000 volumes each, 50 reading spaces, four computers, and about 110 daily users.

The Access to Learning Award (ATLA)

In 2002, BIBLORED applied for and was awarded, the "Access to Learning Award (ATLA)", given by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation including a US $1 million prize. The Award was given to BIBLORED in recognition of its efforts to provide the population of Bogotá with free access to information through computers and the Internet. This award provided invaluable resources to expand and enhance opportunities for free use of technology for the people of Bogotá. The funds of the award were managed by the Friends of BIBLORED Association, BIBLOAMIGOS, and were used for technological investment programs within the project of the Secretariat of Education of the District, BIBLORED.

Use of ATLA Award Funds
To develop a technological Project for **BIBLORED** in accordance with the policies and regulations established by ATLA, by means of the use of new Technologies applicable in libraries. The purpose was to strengthen the portfolio of programs and services to satisfy the needs generated by the environment and the users.

Specific Objectives
- to guide actions towards a sustainable technological development;
- to position BIBLORED in the city as a model in the development of services and products, not accessible in person, with the highest quality standards;
- to broaden the coverage to populations that access services both physically and remotely;
- to create strategies with a high social impact;
- to support democratization of access to new Technologies in the city;
- to provide literacy programs to the population in the use of technological resources;
- to design a technological platform that would allow the permanent growth of BIBLORED in the area;
- to develop a portfolio of products and services based on technology that would be replicable by other library systems.
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Lines of action
An implementation plan was formulated, based on 3 concurrent actions:
- strengthening of library products and services based on technology;
- development of technological literacy;
- strengthening of the technological infrastructure

Projects
A number of specific subprojects were identified:
- development of a BIBLORED Portal (online services);
- development of Digital 'windows' (see page 7);
- provision of access to electronic information resources ;
- strengthening of computer literacy programs;
- technological strengthening and renovation for the free access to ICTs.

Management of the Award
Two committees were created for the orientation and management of the resources awarded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as for interdisciplinary work groups by area across the city.   This now includes a *Follow-up Committee*, a *Technical Committee* and a number of *Work Groups.*

Impacts

BIBLORED represents a radical transformation and revolution of the public library systems for the city of Bogotá, as well as for the entire country, not only due to its dimensions but fundamentally to its role in public administration in the destination and investment of resources and the integration of public libraries into the development plans of the government.

Although the first public library of the city was created in 1777, the public libraries initiated their true development in 1959 with the Luis Ángel Arango Public Library and were strengthened by the Colsubsidio Network of Public Libraries in 1989; however, the growth and impact resulting from the constitution of BIBLORED was unprecedented. The proof is that in only five years of operation the number of visitors to the libraries increased from 6.5 million to 11.5 million per year.

The surveys taken throughout the country show an increasing number of users among the patrons of the public libraries of the city who do not belong to the school system; adult readers, readers from the middle and lower social levels and a broad proportion of the busy population that uses the libraries.

BIBLORED's fundamental importance is shown in its differential impact, as it is the only real option for children of the lower social classes of the school system to have access to complex reading and new Technologies.

In 2006 an impact evaluation of the BIBLORED services was undertaken. In the pilot, it was evident that the impact on groups of unemployed, non-educated children, and in labor and academic marginalized populations was growing significantly.   In the last evaluation of the Information Literacy Program, respondents were asked: "How useful is this course in your daily life?" 98 percent of the people answered that the program was "VERY USEFUL" to his/her daily life.

The BIBLORED Library Network has grown very rapidly. The proof is that from 1,741,055 visitors during the first year, it has now managed to serve 26,559,334 visitors during its five years of service. Moreover, the Network of Public Libraries, in an effort to extend its services to all the households and individuals in the city, has consolidated its affiliation and lending services, increasing the initial figure of 598 affiliates during its first month to the current figure of 138,000 active members, that is, card holding members who can take books home with them.

The network has been able to increase the number of library members thanks to the big campaigns undertaken. One such campaign, "Take the books wherever you go" ("Lleva los libros a dónde quieras"), used posters, stickers, brochures, and banners, to attract more members. The network also has permanent campaigns in order to issue library cards to people. They go to schools, factories, companies, and social and community organizations. They have "Services Fairs" in different localities of the city and they issue library cards there to people who are interested.

The library card is free for children under 12; those older than 13 have to pay US$1.50, for life card. Every year the person has to renew their data with their contact information.

Use of technology Services: projects

Development of a BIBLORED Portal

The BIBLORED Portal (http://www.BIBLORED.org.co/) is a Web site that extends and positions the library, its cultural services and the programs. The Web site presents information to users that traditionally have had no access to the libraries due to their social or geographic conditions. It enhances the services offered for users of the libraries and includes the following:

- information and diffusion services: that is, that the users can learn about the availability of services and programs of each of the libraries, now responding to an average of 1,216 queries per month
- an on line catalogue with an average of 8,750 queries per month
- on line services with an average of 12,546 users per month
- virtual services, such as the request for guided tours in the libraries and their different facilities, amongst others – an average of 12,520 visitors per month
- a schedule of cultural events with an average of 62,935 visits per month

The BIBLORED Portal has a total average of 92,976 visitors per month.

Currently, the Portal is one of the most important tools for publicizing the Network; although important effort have been made to create different communication channels with the community, these have proved to be expensive and limited in scope. The Portal, however, enables the users not only to consult information on the Network but to interact with us permanently.

Although we are aware that access to the Internet is not as extended as we would like, we know that it is becoming increasingly more available and that for the users of the libraries it is vital to have remote access to services, such as the reservation or renovation of book lending, requests for a tour of the library, participation in public events, the possibility of sending comments or complaints regarding our services among many others.

Virtual Windows or Kiosks: Information sites that facilitate the extension of services of the Capital Network in different strategic points in the city, within the reach of any citizen. They provide:
- access from public places in the city
- Permanent diffusion of the Network by means of multimedia presentations.
- access to the BIBLORED Portal
- massive communication of cultural programming
- information on all public libraries in the city

This service receives a monthly average of 9,400 users and 325,866 queries, that is, each user navigates through 35 of our information options on the average.

Access to electronic information resources: This program provides digitalized and updated library resources for the users or affiliates of the Capital Network. At present it holds subscriptions to three data bases including:
- Dialnet: specifically designed as a learning aid, its broad database includes data on all areas of knowledge;
- Ocenet Query: an information source in Spanish that includes articles from magazines, encyclopedias and original documents; literary classics, cartography and language dictionaries. It covers many different academic disciplines; and,
- Legis: a data base containing Colombian legal information.

The databases receive an average of 42,000 user consultations annually.

Computer literacy: Using ATLA funds, BIBLORED has reassessed and redesigned the training programs for technology users in library so they can use and manage the technological resources and products available within the Network. There were 58,600 users of this new training system during 2005 and 2006 throughout the Network.

Strengthening and technological renovation focused on services: ATLA enabled endowment of local and neighborhood libraries with a technological structure that allows them to enhance and strengthen their service portfolio. This was the start up of the BIBLORED Technological Project.

The technological infrastructure for Internet access included:
- Local and neighborhood libraries: 172 Pcs
- Mega Libraries: 428 Pcs

The service infrastructure included:

- Catalogue: 44 catalogue terminals serving an average of 924.000 users per month
- Membership: 4 permanent membership locations and 3 mobile; with a total of 138.000 members to date (may 2007)
- External loans: 11 locations for external loans. Annually an average of 600.000 volumes are loaned
- Internet and Multimedia: 360 inquiry points with a capacity of service for 1,120,000 users per year

Sustainability of BIBLORED's Programs

BIBLORED falls under the administrative infrastructure of the City of Bogotá and the Education Secretary. The City allocates an annual budget for sustaining the project according to the operating requirements of the various libraries.

To the degree that the project has grown, each year the city's administration has allocated a larger budget, with an increase in 2007 of close to 18 percent over the amount provided in 2006.

For the Administration, BIBLORED has been one of the programs with the greatest impact on the city. The proof is that during the last three consecutive years the citizens have positioned BIBLORED in the two first places as the public entity with the best performance.

Libraries are by far special, favoured, privileged spaces for the democratization of culture, knowledge and technology which strengthen in a special way the Sectorial Plans for Education and Development of the city.

Additionally, authorities such as the District City Council, in charge of the approval of the development plans for the city, acknowledge the BIBLORED program as a fundamental element in social integration and inclusion.

The way to guarantee sustainability is to provide good service. By offering good service, the public becomes more demanding and more appreciative of the library as well and uses it more. Thus, future Administrations are pressured into continuing their investments and support of BIBLORED.

As part of the initial conception of the Network, each mega library has areas aimed at the generation of income destined for re-investment in the Project, such as the rental of halls, cafeterias, auditoriums, commercial stores, among others.

In addition to the resources that come from the city, the main purpose of BIBLOAMIGOS is to secure funds and to agree on conventions and alliances that guarantee the project's sustainability and growth.

One of the unique strengths of BIBLORED is the extent of the number and depth of alliances and agreements that have been made with a wide range of different partnerships. From the outset, within the framework for the project, the Capital Network of Public Libraries of Bogotá set out to develop alliances in diverse fields. This has allowed it not only to strengthen the networks services and programs but also to replicate its library model with other systems both on a national and regional basis. BIBLORED's main alliances include:

1. The first instance for cooperation is the **Network of Public Libraries of Bogotá** itself, created as a strategy to distribute resources and services which offer the inhabitants of Bogotá access to information and other cultural goods. The cooperation among libraries within BIBLORED is organized around specific issues such as: services and programs, acquisition of bibliographic material, training of the staff, cultural programming, technological infrastructure and the BIBLORED Portal.

2. At the national level, the instrument for library cooperation is the **Network of Public Libraries of Colombia**, coordinated by the National Library and the Library Network of the Family Compensation Funds.

3. In terms of non-librarian organizations at the local level, strategic alliances with BIBLORED are represented by **BIBLIOAMIGOS**, the Friends of BIBLORED Association. It is through BIBLOAMIGOS, that the Network is able to develop relationships with different public and commercial entities that sponsor projects and the development of activities that stimulate access to information and technology. Among these, it is worthwhile to mention Key Word by Coca-Cola, which sponsors free membership of families who attend the libraries and the contribution from the private sector, such as the Bavaria Business Group of US $17 million dollars for the construction of the fourth mega library

4. BIBLORED holds agreements with various **formal and non-formal education organizations** such as universities, who support the development of literacy and training programs in the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). In the framework of social practices of the higher learning institutions, the students in different fields also carry out their field practice in public libraries, providing skills to users who have previously had no knowledge in the use and management of computers.

5. In alliance with **entities that provide care to vulnerable or incapacitated population**s the Network has not only accomplished computer literacy, it has also offered permanent access to ICTs to populations such as the homeless, illiterate soldiers, soldiers wounded in battle, the visually impaired, young people in rehabilitation processes, and non schooled children among others.

6. BIBLORED works hand in hand with **all local institutions**, public and private, to develop activities in the **field of reading promotion and access to information**. For example, it participates permanently in the District Council on Reading and Writing of Bogotá.

7. **Mass media**: The impact of the Project depends in large measure on its positioning and publicity in the city. Therefore, the development of partnerships and alliances with different communications media (television, radio and printed press) has been

vital; this has enabled the public to acquire ample knowledge of the different options offered by the public libraries.

8. BIBLORED is integrated with the **Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango** and the Library Network of Caja Colombiana de Subsidio Familiar **Colsubsidio**, with the purpose of joining efforts and extending services and programs throughout the different sectors of the city.

9. Sharing experiences and best practices with other library systems is fundamental for the development of the Network. An example is the **Network of Public Libraries in Medellín** at the national level, and **other library networks in Argentina, Chile, Denmark, Bangladesh and Guatemala** in the international field. This exchange of experiences has allowed us to enrich and improve our project permanently.

10. Other partnerships include:

   - **The Bogotá Chamber of Commerce (CCB**)--In each one of the major libraries, the Chamber of Commerce has set up a "Bogotá Room". They have specialized materials about the city on social, economic, cultural, political, historical subjects, amongst other subjects. They also organize conferences and meetings around subjects of local interest.

   - **The National Archive--**BIBLORED and the National archive have signed an agreement for the organization of "local memory archives." The community is invited to participate and the archive give the support and the technical assistance for the conservation and dissemination of the information;

   - **The Public Library Committee for the celebration of Bogotá World Capital of the Book--**The National Library, the universities, the library association and BIBLORED, have formed a committee in order to undertake   permanent action around reading development, access to information and the development of libraries in Bogotá;

The way these alliances develop can be on both formal and informal basis. The underlying philosophy that keeps the partnerships strong and growing is the commitment to public access to information, most especially for disadvantaged groups. They are built on mutual respect and BIBLORED sees the importance of regular communications, discussions and sharing of lessons learnt with all partners. This gives them an ongoing feeling and appreciation of involvement.

These partnerships are developed through agreements (more formal), and alliances (more informal). In the agreements, each one of the parties offers human, technical and/or financial resources. The agreements are signed for the legal representation of each institution. The alliances have a more informal character. In all the agreements and alliances there is one person in charge and a team (depending of the complexity of the project). They have regular meetings, minutes and evaluations.

Other institutions look to BIBLORED as strategic allies, not only because of its infrastructure, but also because they bring together many people.

Conclusion

BIBLORED has demonstrated that a well-planned project led by a hard-working and committed team, gaining support and encouragement from local and national authorities can make a significant impact on diverse and large communities. The role played by

BIBLOAMIGOS Association of Friends of BIBLORED has been particularly important. It is the first experience of this type in the country. They are successful at acquiring resources, managing funds, positioning and linking the Internet to the people, and consolidating strategic alliances. BIBLORED is a point of reference and a model for other cities in the country.

Public libraries should be recognized as special, privileged locations for self learning and education and become fundamental places for the community by providing free and democratic access to information, utilizing new information and communications technologies, as well as more traditional mediums of communication--books, magazines, journals, charts, creative objects, etc.

Populations in disadvantaged positions of vulnerability and incapacity find in public libraries one of the rare opportunities for access to technological resources. Therefore, the developing services for these populations should be the priority of all cities and nations. It is also necessary to establish computer and information literacy in a systematic and permanent manner, addressed to diverse sectors of society.

Connectivity is now one of the challenges that has the greatest impact on technological projects related to Internet access. This is due to the restrictions imposed by communications channels and the costs of connectivity in view of the great demand expressed by the users of the libraries. It is necessary to establish and maintain capacity with the purpose of guaranteeing high quality access for the users.

Additional challenges on which BIBLORED consistently works include:

- Strengthening the management model, in which a private company is appointed and paid to administer BIBLORED. This management model, in the hands of a private company, guaranties agility and continuity, but the government does not relinquish its responsibility with public libraries because it is paying and is monitoring the services according to professional standards of quality.
- The development of its staff, so that they will be trained and committed to the Project.
- Processes that promote good communication with the communities.
- The development of strategies aimed at the participation of communities in the decisions of the libraries and their contribution in different committees.
- Political endeavours aimed at guaranteeing the sustainability of the Project and the support of the Administration.
- The consolidation of school libraries so that the BIBLORED libraries can effectively work with other groups of the population such as: labourers, home makers, and people who have no other possibilities of accessing information.
- The development for the future is the design and structure of a tool box aimed at facing the workplace, and mediated by technology

One of the main challenges of the Network is its growth in the short and medium terms; although the Network consists of 19 libraries, Bogotá has 6.5 million inhabitants and bears one of the most critical phenomena of displaced persons; this results in increasing growth in the outskirts and diminished possibility of coverage in terms of library services.

This situation is compounded by high poverty, which limit the possibilities of the communities of traveling to the sectors where the public libraries are located.

One of the most important processes carried out by the Network has been the enhancement of the 16 local and neighborhood libraries; using resources obtained from the government as well as from partnerships, today the services of these libraries have been replicated

according the models of programs that have the same levels of efficiency and quality as those of the mega libraries.

BIBLORED demonstrates that the development and maintenance of strategic alliances with many different local and national bodies, and with institutions and organizations linked to information and technology are fundamental for the development and growth of the Library Networks in this area. In order to optimize resources and work in cooperation, it is a future priority for BIBLORED to continue to work hard on networking, for example with the School Library Network of the District and the Community Libraries of the poorest neighborhoods of the city of Bogotá. An excellent start has been made to provide library services; BIBLORED can now be replicated not only within Colombia but also in other Latin American countries and throughout the world.   Among the most important efforts in this regard are the alliances for the development of the public library services in the city.   Important work with the local authorities has been initiated in order to strengthen the community libraries. The local authorities are responsible for the budget and BIBLORED offers the technical advice for the selection of collection, furniture and equipment, as well as the design of services and the programs of reading and writing   For example, the new Municipal Library Park plan of the Major of Medellín, was inspired by the experience of BIBLORED.

Key Habits of Effective Replication

From BIBLORED actions to date we have learned that effective replication depends on a number of key factors, these include:

- Gaining the endorsement of the Public Administration. This is still one of the greatest challenges faced by public library systems because only if governments understand their responsibility in terms of these projects and avail the necessary resources for their operation, can public libraries focus their efforts on cooperative undertakings that will result in the development of new projects and the integration of actions for the evolution of their services and the construction of new knowledge   These efforts are focused in   cooperative projects for setting up new libraries; in organizing the extension of programs for groups of the population that have not previously had access to public libraries, and in special projects such as book fairs, reading campaigns, etc.

- Formation of strategic alliances with many partners: for example, college institutions that provide training in the use and management of computer tools.

- Inclusion of a wide range of technology training programs, for example: for children; for incapacitated persons (visual and hearing impairment); for the unemployed who tend to seek jobs with emphasis on technology; for the elderly. These include hypertext workshops and use of multimedia tools.

Contact details:
SILVIA PRADA FORERO
Gerente Red Capital de Bibliotecas Publicas - BibloRed
Av. Cra. 60 No. 57-6
Bogotá
Colombia

Tel. 3158890 Ext. 350
E-mail: siprada@redp.edu.co