

SKILLS ACQUIRED AND PASSED ON: THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN AND MAKERERE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AND THEIR NEW PARTNERS IN THE NORTH AND SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Bergen in Norway celebrate ten years of collaboration in 2009. The collaboration includes the libraries in the two Universities, focusing on continuing professional development. This paper reports the activities of the collaboration between the two University libraries, and highlights the multiplier effect of the collaboration, which has led to new partners at the University of Juba in Southern Sudan, the East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS) at Makerere and the Norwegian School of Librarianship at Oslo University College. The new partners have joined to implement the Juba University Library Automation Project (JULAP) that is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. JULAP aims to rebuild the Juba University Library that was closed because of the war in 1985. The project has two main components: automation of the library and training of library staff who are already working in the library, as well as sponsoring young people for a Bachelor's degree in Librarianship at EASLIS. The training of library staff has a theoretical component conducted by EASLIS, while the practical component is handled by Makerere University Library staff using the skills they acquired over time from collaborations with skilled librarians from the North. Part of the project includes the acquisition of a library system, and the training of staff to use the system. The paper then outlines the activities of the project, the challenges faced and how they have been addressed, the achievements and future plans. Although most collaboration usually involves two institutions, this paper highlights the growth of the collaboration from two institutions to where it is now, and the audience is encouraged to learn from this experience and replicate it to be able to 'build bridges' of LIS education in Developing countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Bergen in Norway have been collaborating for a long time. In 2009, the two universities celebrate ten years of the current agreement. The collaboration involved the libraries in the two Universities, which

is the focus of this paper. The collaboration between the two libraries included support from the University of Bergen Library (UoBL) to various professional activities of Makerere University Library (MakLib), for example: Capacity building of library staff, interlibrary loans, professional support for the retrospective catalogue conversion, and the Uganda Scholarly Digital Library.

Capacity building of MakLib staff included visits to the UoBL for attachments ranging from two weeks to three months to get hands-on training and observe best practices. Between 2001, when the Maklib-UoBL partnership was formalised, and April 2009, fourteen Maklib librarians had visited UoBL, while five UoBL staff had visited Maklib to conduct training in various aspects of the state-of-the-art academic librarianship.

InterLibrary loan from the UoB Science Library to Maklib was one of the first activities started after Maklib and the UoBL signed a memorandum of understanding in which both libraries identified areas of collaboration as already indicated. One of the objectives of the collaboration was to facilitate Inter Library Lending (ILL) between UoBL Science library and Maklib following a framework of International guidelines of ILL. This facilitated access to the UoBL through the online database "BIBSYS". Maklib then got registered as an official user of UoBL and was given an account to freely access the library holdings through BIBSYS. Since January 2002, there have been information literacy sessions focusing on e-resources, and Maklib users get introduced to the BIBYS database. This has been specifically for academic staff in the science-based departments. On average, forty requests for DDS are received from one science department in a year. The documents are delivered from the UoBL by fax. On the other hand, Maklib receives, on average, five requests for Maklib local collection materials, which are scanned and sent as e-mail attachments to UoBL (Musoke, 2008). The collaboration with UoBL expanded in 2005 to include a digitisation project for Maklib local materials to increase their access.

In 2005, Maklib received the very needed professional support on the retrospective catalogue conversion from the UoBL. This included a well spelt out workplan mutually agreed upon by Maklib and UoBL. For example, using the shelf-list (had over 100,000 cards) in the Main library, control the cards against the shelf, define a catalogue status "conv" in Virtua Integrated Library system, entering the records in "MARC-light", revise the proof-reading routines, upgrade the card production process, data import from Virtua to CardMaster, pilot project on the Serials Control module, etc. A strategy was also put in place, namely: establish a Retrospective conversion project steering committee, set up a project team - build the team – find the right people – train them, set a reference group, identify suitable facilities in the library for the project, develop a conversion manual, provide information, e.g. by developing a web page for the project (intranet).

The Uganda Scholarly Digital Library (USDL) included a project plan, software (DSpace) and training of Maklib staff. Makerere University's Institutional repository is another example of the fruits of the collaboration between Maklib and UoBL. After the first group of librarians from UoB had been to Makerere in 2002, the UoBL was

requested to collaborate on a digitisation project. The project initially focussed on sciences, but after the pilot phase, it was extended to other disciplines. A pilot phase of one year was proposed to enable Maklib staff to gain experience on digitising, storing and making available research results in a digital archive. This was the same year the UoBL was implementing the DSpace software for its Institutional Repository, The Bergen Open Research Archive (BORA). Librarians from UoBL went to Makerere in February 2005 to assist with the planning of USDL (and the Retrospective records conversion project as already reported). Training in DSpace and hands-on scanning was done during the visit as well as the first attempt to upload the digital documents to a DSpace-server that was set up in Bergen. There were, however, initial problems probably due to the low bandwidth at Makerere. To address this problem, a DSpace server was set up at Makerere University. The electronic publishing group at UoBL sent technical information and installation manuals to the USDL project at Makerere and with not much more support from UoB, the USDL-project has now succeeded in setting up a USDL server at Makerere. Over two hundred full text records have been archived in DSpace for access on the USDL site. However, some of this content (especially theses) is still restricted to the public because there are pending policies to be passed by Makerere University before access can be opened.

In all the above activities, Makerere University librarians have gained the knowledge and skills needed to implement automated projects. The knowledge and skills have been acquired over a period of time from various collaborations with librarians in the North (Dewey, 2006; Ford & Schnuer, 2006; Musoke, 2008) and support from Norad, Sida/SAREC, Carnegie Corporation of New York and other Development partners. The acquired knowledge and skills, through continuous professional development, have been enhanced by the hands-on practice that has resulted into 'champions' at MakLib. The skilled librarians have exported their expertise to other libraries in Uganda, Nigeria and Sudan.

2: GROWTH OF THE COLLABORATION BEYOND THE INITIAL TWO INSTITUTIONS

This section highlights the new collaboration involving the two institutions in the North and three in the South, the activities, the challenges faced and how they have been addressed, and finally the achievements.

2.1 The growing collaboration.

The Norwegian University Cooperation Programme for Capacity Development in Sudan (NUCOOP) aims to fund collaboration between institutions of higher education in Norway and Sudan. This is a follow-up to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the warring parties in Sudan, where the Norwegian Government has set aside funding for rebuilding Sudan, especially geared towards rebuilding the South.

When the NUCOOP announced the funding of collaborative projects, the Juba University contacted the UoBL for a joint project. As the UoBL already had collaboration with Makerere University Library, it was necessary to build on the existing network in order

for the project to be successful. The new project, named Juba University Library Automation Project (Julap), focus on the automation of the library and the training of the library staff. As the project had an academic training component, it was necessary to include the Oslo University College Faculty of Librarianship (OUC) and the East African School of Library and Information Science (EASLIS) at Makerere University.

2.2 Aims and objectives of Julap.

This project aims at establishing a computerised library to facilitate access to references, periodicals and academic information sources.

The objectives are to:

- Set up a modern university library, with scholarly literature in the form of relevant books, journals and reference works, both printed and electronic.
- Enhance ICT infrastructure: computers etc, for staff and for patrons; software for cataloguing, circulation and repository.
- Sustain the project by building the capacity of Juba library staff through training.

2.3 Project design and activities.

One of the first tasks was to meet all the partners to make an assessment of existing library collections and services in Juba, and this was done in February 2008. All partners were represented. The meeting took note of the facilities and the existing systems, as well as the printed collections. The existing catalogue was card-based, hence the main activity in this project was related to the development of an electronic library system. After the initial meeting, periodic meetings are held to plan, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the project.

The project consists of the following activities that are planned to be completed in a period of four years:

- a. Meetings: Periodic meetings in Sudan, Norway and Uganda
- b. Short training visits to Norway and Kampala
- c. Training of library staff on computer applications and modern reference cataloguing and classification systems by Maklib.
- d. Application of an advanced classification that is compatible with the available stock of references.
- e. Establishment of a computer network.
- f. Installation of a library system software, and training of library staff on its applications.
- g. Cataloguing in the electronic library for new books and retrospective record conversion of the existing 30.000 books in manual catalogue.
- h. Monitoring and evaluation.

Details of the project activities are available at the website (julap.uib.no).

2.4 Challenges faced in the Julap project first year, and how they were addressed.

a) The level of competence of the Juba University Library staff was much lower than anticipated. Consequently, the practical training of the Juba library staff was expanded and extended to last longer than initially planned. Furthermore, the need for training of library staff also led to the EdLib-project which includes all the university libraries in Southern Sudan.

b) The aftermath of the war and its effects on the administration of the Juba University has slowed down the pace of the project implementation. This is difficult to overcome, but the project team will continue discussing the way forward with the University administration.

c) The high costs and scarcity of commodities in Southern Sudan means that the original budget will have to be adjusted accordingly.

d) Identifying people who qualify for university education, especially women has been a problem. This has to be addressed in the recruitment process of Juba University. Furthermore, the new EdLib-project has a specific focus on training of women.

2.5 Achievements in the collaboration so far.

Sustaining the collaboration beyond the first agreement is one of the major achievements. The sustained collaboration has led to the expansion into more partners both in the North and the South. After the initial agreement between Maklib and UoBL, there are two new projects focusing on Southern Sudan, namely, Julap and EdLib, which have received funding and are being implemented.

Some of the specific achievements of the initial collaboration include building the skills and imparting knowledge of librarians which have enabled Maklib to implement its automation activities and to pass on the skills to other libraries in Uganda, Nigeria and Sudan.

Achievements in the Julap project so far include the setting up of the first computer laboratory in the Juba University Library which will be used by staff and students. The renovations of the library building, the acquisitions of books, and free subscription from Proquest for one year are also noteworthy.

Furthermore, the University of Juba Library staff received training after a period of 21 years. This means that there was a dire need for updating knowledge and imparting new skills for the librarians to be able to implement Julap. The project meant that the library recruits more staff and this has been done. In addition to the training of the existing library staff at Juba, the project sponsors two students for a Bachelors Degree in Library and Information Science at Makerere University.

In addition, the Oslo University College has introduced an open source library system called Koha to Ugandan and Sudanese libraries through the Julap project. Training of

trainers has been conducted and the trainers are already running various training sessions in Uganda. This has generated interest beyond Uganda and Sudan.

This project also initiated the cooperation between EASLIS and the OUC, and this has lead, among other things, to improvements in the curriculum and teaching. For example, EASLIS now teaches cataloguing for its BLIS students by using an electronic library system, Koha.

The implementation of EdLib has just started and its achievements will be reported on the website (julap.uib.no).

3. WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THIS COLLABORATION FOR LIS EDUCATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES?

This section outlines some of the unique features of the collaboration.

3.1 More than two institutions

As already indicated, the original collaboration consisted of two institutions, namely Maklib and UoBL. The extended collaboration consists of five equal partners, each with their special responsibility in the project. The UoBL and Juba University are the two coordinating units, in North and South, and have overall responsibility for planning, administrating and reporting. The OUC deals mainly with Koha, the new library system, its implementation and training of trainers, while EASLIS does the training of theoretical and traditional library science, in close cooperation with Maklib. Maklib further provides the actual practical training and support for the everyday running of the library in Juba.

3.2 Practitioners and educators

The initial collaboration focused on continued professional development of practicing librarians at Maklib, while the new collaboration focuses on both the professional development of practicing librarians as well as the academic training of librarians at Diploma, Bachelors and Masters degree levels. This is unique as most collaborations usually focus on either. A combination of the two has been beneficial as it keeps feeding into the other. The practicing librarians at the University of Bergen trained the MakLib librarians, who have also trained the Juba Library staff. It is expected that when the new graduates (from Juba) acquire knowledge and skills, they will share with the practitioners.

The LIS educators (EASLIS and OUC) rely heavily on the practitioners (UoBL and Maklib) in this project because for the library in Juba to be sustainable after the project is over, the Juba library staff needs to learn the practical running of the library.

3.3 Multiplier effect

- South-South collaboration:

The skills and knowledge gained by Maklib staff in the initial collaboration have been passed on the South-South collaboration. The benefits of the South-South collaboration need not be overemphasized. It is far more practical for the Julap library staff to travel to Kampala, Uganda, one hour away on the plane, than to Norway which is 9 hrs away. It is also less expensive, which means that the project will get more training out of each Krone. Furthermore, the culture and environment is much more similar, opening for a better learning experience and sustainable support.

- EdLib: From Juba to all of Southern Sudan

One of the first experiences of the Julap project team was that the need for capacity building was far greater than was originally anticipated. This was true for all the three university libraries in Southern Sudan; therefore, the Julap project partners agreed to submit an application to NUCCOOP for a new, capacity building project called EdLib. Consequently, the two other South Sudanese university libraries were invited to participate, including their existing Norwegian NUCCOOP partners as a support- and contact group. The application was successful, and is to be implemented in the next four years.

4. CONCLUSION

One of the lessons learned is that capacity building of library staff is key to the sustainability of automated library projects in Sub-Saharan African University libraries. This is important as the knowledge and skills gained are passed on to others in the South to South collaboration which has a multiplier effect.

There will be more collaboration/networking/dissemination in line with NUFU February 2009 meeting recommendations to “increase cooperation South-South-North institutional partnerships”, particularly the section on increasing access and use of information in Higher education and research where libraries play a key role. The future of the collaboration will, therefore, continue with the implementation of the Edlib project, and a new project of the Nile Basin which is being prepared to advance the collaboration even further.

Although most collaboration usually involves two institutions, this paper has highlighted the growth of the collaboration from two institutions to where it is now and its planned growth. The collaboration focuses on continued professional development of practicing librarians as well as academic training. The audience/readers of this paper are, therefore, encouraged to learn from this experience and replicate it to be able to ‘build bridges’ of LIS education in Developing countries.

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