

Thesis Introduction Sample

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

With diminishing finances, it is rarely possible for a library or information center to have enough resources to fulfill the needs of its clients. What is being delivered is only a portion of what their clients actually need (Ramos & Mohd Ali, 2005). Collaboration is widely recognized as the best way for libraries to cope with the ever increasing challenges: volume of information resources; nature and quality of information; user needs and expectations; information and communication technology competencies and infrastructure; inflated cost of information resources; and staffing needs. However, although these challenges have continued to prevail, libraries working under collaborative initiatives like the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) have registered tremendous success.

This thesis reports the findings of a thorough study to establish the factors that have led to the success of CARLI and how such success factors can be applied in libraries of developing countries like Uganda. Emphasis is placed on the establishment of CARLI leadership, the sharing of responsibility and decision making processes as well as sources of funding for the consortium. Also central to the research study is exploration of the role and responsibility of participating member libraries and their contributions to and expectations from the consortium.

I contend that lack of funding to facilitate consortium activities is not the central factor in the failed progress of the planned consortium activities in Uganda, rather it is the lack of committed leadership and cooperation among participating libraries that is responsible for the lack of progress. In any kind of organization or cooperation like a library consortium, funding has never been enough due to ever changing technologies and continuous demands from library patrons. However, good leadership and cooperation among membership plays a bigger role in achieving a common goal. Having and working towards a common goal, under dedicated, dynamic and faithful leadership with an active and energetic membership plays a great role in the success of a consortium.

To assist in the possible improvement of consortium operations in Uganda, I need to understand the leadership, responsibility, staffing, collection, policies and procedures, funding and structure of academic libraries in the participating membership of CARLI in comparison with those of Uganda. My research has incorporated interviews with CARLI staff and a questionnaire survey to all the participating CARLI membership.

1.2 Problem statement

There is now ample research on the benefits of library collaboration mainly in developed countries (Kaul 2001, Riley 2006, Wright 2006, Bennett 2007, Foulonneau et al. 2007, Williams 2008, Feather, Bracken & Diaz 2008, Butler 1998, Domatob, 1998). In Africa, a lot of research has been devoted toward the need for collaboration (Musoke 2008, Paulos 2008, Kinengyere 2007, Ibeun & Obasuyi 2007, Amaeshi (Ed.) 2003, Kaul 2001, Rosenberg 2001, Ade Ajayi, Goma & Johnson 1996) and a few registered successes (Musoke 2008, Paulos 2008, Rosenberg 2001, Kinengyere 2007, Ibeun & Obasuyi 2007, Amaeshi (Ed.) 2003, Kaul 2001). However, no research has been reported on how to apply identified success factors from developed countries in order to bring a change in developing countries. Developed countries have registered tremendous success stories compared to less developed countries; failure in developing countries has been attributed to poor funding without looking at other factors like committed leadership and cooperative membership.

The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) (2007) indicates that there are six public and twenty-four private universities giving a total of thirty registered universities in Uganda. Of these, only twenty-one universities and two research institutions are actively and currently participating in the Consortium of Uganda University Libraries, (CUUL) (2008). It is clear, however, that most of these universities do not have adequate resources to support certain, if not all, areas of their academic and research programmes. Since 2005, access to computer facilities, books and other learning materials has improved; still many are far from reaching ratios comparable to world standards; and, unfortunately, the student to book ratio dropped from twenty-three books per student to nineteen in 2006 (NCHE, 2007). The NCHE 2006 (2007) study further shows that there has been a 9.4% increase in the total number of students that enroll in the universities from 124,313 in 2005 to 137,190 in 2006 without an increase in

the number of information materials in most of these universities. Although there is evidence of no increase in the number of information resources to be used by students in these universities, NCHE instead attributes the low level of research across the higher education spectrum to inadequate funding; more so, the student to book ratio stated above is far below the set standards and NCHE does not suggest for these universities to participate in resource sharing as a way of bridging the student to book ratio.

The NCHE (2007) acknowledges the usefulness of the library, stating that “the library... is the heartbeat of an academic institution”. However, its 2006 study indicates that universities have continued to reduce the amount of money spent on books (0.1% in private and in 2.5% in public universities) and that library space is being converted to student instruction classrooms. This is an indication of low spending on library books; much as these universities are still working harder to acquire information materials, space to store them is also becoming another challenge.

One of the important things I have learned all through the time I have worked at Makerere University Library’s outreach programme in partnership with CUUL as Deputy Country Coordinator for E-resources, on top of other significant institutional challenges among African universities, a committed leadership and membership was noticed as still lacking among CUUL membership. While there are already tangible successes registered by CUUL, still much has not been achieved, like spearheading resource sharing as one of its objectives since inception.

This study begins to address issues that are surrounding the inefficiency involved in partnership, networking and collaboration among university libraries in Uganda. This includes how universities with far better information resources like Makerere University can share with newly established universities lacking sufficient library resources. More particularly, the study directly addresses consortium issues like leadership, communication and membership contribution as key factors in this kind of collaboration.

1.3 Objectives of the study

- Study the consortium history among academic and research libraries in the state of Illinois

- Identify the factors that influence libraries to join and continue to participate in a consortium
- Determine how consortium values affect participating libraries
- Determine the effectiveness and extent of resource sharing among CARLI member libraries
- Identify factors that lead to the success of a consortium other than money
- Suggest practical ways for resource sharing in developing countries like Uganda

1.4 Limitations of the study

Any comparison of differing societies, or search for causal relationships must be conducted within dimensional identities (Amaeshi (Ed), 2003); meaning, a perceived need to understand the economic, political, educational and sociological factors that affect information sharing among universities in both developed and developing countries. While the majority of the developments are standard practice in academic libraries in the developed world, many of these issues are relatively new to us in developing countries, and we have had to contextualize them by finding practical but local ways of addressing some of them (Musoke, 2008).

In this study therefore, I do fully understand the dimensional identities that exist among CARLI and CUUL; I try to contextualize identified success factors by finding practical but local ways of applying these factors that have led to CARLI advancement putting into context the economic, political, educational and sociological environments of operation between the two consortia.