

Diversity, Inclusivity, Social Responsibility Aspects, and Outcomes of a Mobile Digital Library and Information Service Model for a Developing Country: The Case for Lesotho

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Abstract

The provision of library services through rigid compartmentalisation of academic, public, school, and special libraries operating in one country can be cost-effective if a country has strong socio-economic, cultural, educational, and political structures. This arrangement is apparently a fallacy for countries that lack such structures, as is the case with Lesotho. This study examined the outcomes and the impact of the UNESCO-funded project titled *Distance and Rural Learner-Teacher Support through a Mobile Digital Library* (DRULETSMODIL) in Lesotho. The National University of Lesotho (NUL) Library proposed DRULETSMODIL whose objective was to reach out to NUL's *de jure* distant teachers and learners. Additionally, the project expanded its scope to include library services to rural and poor communities. This paper outlines how use of the descriptive method, called the corporate social responsibility (CSR) principle, utilised the case study approach to interrogate DRULETSMODIL's performance. The findings reveal that the project embodied various levels of diversity, inclusivity, and (mainly) social responsibility aspects of providing information for free, to the marginalized communities. From DRULETSMODIL's three phases covering all the ten districts of Lesotho, positive outcomes were recorded. Through Information, Communication, and Technology apparatuses, DRULETSMODIL's offerings, and the support of Participatory Initiative for Social Accountability (PISA), diverse information was easily and cost-effectively accessible. The project attracted various partners; beneficiaries included academic library users, secondary schools, and male and female youth and adults in the villages. The study recommends advocacy on CSR for all types of businesses and consideration of this model for developing countries.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility; diversity; inclusivity; Lesotho; mobile digital library

Publication Type: case study

Introduction

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small, mountainous, land-locked country populated by 2.3 million people (Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The country's high-altitude mountainous topography sees the majority of its population located in the rural highlands which are not easy to access by ground or air transportation. The lowlands constitute the urban areas where 31.5% of the overall population live (Worldometer, 2020). As a landlocked enclave, Lesotho is completely surrounded by one neighbour, the Republic of South Africa (RSA), which is a larger, more economically and politically influential nation.

On a full spectrum of economic, cultural, political, and social matters in Lesotho, politics is covered in the media more than any other sector, by both national and private media houses (African Media Barometer, 2018). It is often the negative politics, such as the 1986 coup d'états, where volatile incidents of electoral disputes and political assassinations (Southall, 2010) are reported. Notably, Lesotho is a country of ironies and contradictions. While it is a neighbour to the RSA which is Africa's second largest economy after Nigeria (Oyekunle, 2019), Lesotho has the 36th lowest GDP per capita in the world (Global Finance, 2020).

Despite the nation's poverty, historically, the Lesotho government has successfully promoted basic as well as functional literacy, for both in and out of school youth and adults (Lesotho Ministry of Education, 2000). Therefore, it may be understood that the majority of Lesotho citizens do not have much challenge with reading. In a study that looked at poverty and illiteracy rates as obstacles to book trade in 10 Southern African countries, the Lesotho literacy level was the highest with 70% (Makotsi, 2001). However, the same study revealed that four countries, including Lesotho, lacked evidence of the availability and the role of public libraries as channels for book and reading promotion (Makotsi, 2001). By implication, there is seemingly no correlation between the high literacy rate in Lesotho and library use. Moreover, the high literacy rate that may translate to presumably educated, skilled, and employable citizens, is in contrast to high unemployment rates. Although unemployment rates decreased slightly from 23.6% in 2018 to 23.5% in 2019 (Trading Economics, 2019), that is still a high figure with the majority of citizens residing in the rural areas, where there is abject poverty (Callander, 2017). The emerging trend, however, is that young females migrate from rural to urban areas to seek jobs, mainly from the factories that produce garments for export, and as domestic workers in the RSA (Botea et. al., 2018; Southall, 2010). Historically, males migrated to RSA to secure long-term contracts in mining (Cobbe, 2004). By 2020, it is the women who migrate from the rural areas.

Introducing the National University of Lesotho as the Context

Located at Roma, Lesotho, the National University of Lesotho (NUL) was founded in 1945, under the name, Pius XII College. Pius XII was succeeded by the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland, and later, the University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland that existed from 1966 to 1976 when NUL was born (National University of Lesotho Calendar, 2002/3-2005/6). NUL operated as the only university in Lesotho until 2008 when Limkokwing University, an international and privately-owned university, opened in the capital city of Maseru (Lesotho Universities, n.d.). Nevertheless, today, NUL operates five teaching faculties, and one Institute of Extra Mural Studies (IEMS) as the open and extension arm of the university. In line with the ideals of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), by 2011 the NUL Library endorsed the Budapest Open Access Initiative and the Berlin Declaration on Open Access. As a signatory to such protocols, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) appreciated that the NUL Library was committing "to the "principle of Open Access as well as to pursuing solutions that advance the internet" and also "as an emerging functional medium for distributing knowledge" (UNESCO, 2020:1). It was further noted that the library had established the first institutional repository in Lesotho (UNESCO, 2020).

In 2003, the NUL Library became the founding member of the Lesotho Library Consortium (LELICO), which is outcome of the local libraries' network that was established through the assistance of the international network of Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL). Through this scheme, the NUL Library has been active in securing the often cheaply negotiated or freely available e-resources that are, most of the time, shared nationally. Thus, the NUL Library seized

the opportunity to seek UNESCO funding that would promote both the Information, Communication and Technologies (ICTs) and electronic resources for use by disadvantaged communities that are supposed to be the clients of the public section of the Lesotho National Library Services (LNLS), but are mainly excluded.

Lastly, the NUL library is to be regarded as an academic service of a university. An academic library, similar to a faculty, has a tripartite role to play: it participates in college-level teaching, scholarly research, and community service.

Introducing the DRULETSMODIL Project

In the years 2015, 2016, and 2017, the Lesotho National Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued annual calls inviting proposals for funding projects which national institutions could prepare within that year's focus on the use of ICTs by disadvantaged communities (UNESCO, 2016). The NUL Library proposed DRULETSMODIL. From 2017, when the project commenced, until January 2020, DRULETSMODIL went through three distinct phases of study of providing ICT-driven library services to the 10 districts of Lesotho as follows: northern districts (phase 1), southern districts (phase 2), and rural Lesotho (phase 3) that were examined here in terms of ICT mobile access and performance, specifically to determine the project's levels of diversity, inclusivity, social responsibility aspects, and learning outcomes.

By November 2019, the DRULETSMODIL vehicle had operated three phases in all the ten administrative districts of Lesotho, namely Butha-Buthe, Leribe, Berea, Maseru, Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek, Quthing, Qacha's Nek, Mokhotlong, and Thaba-Tseka. In each district town, there is a district branch library of the Lesotho National Library Services (LNLS). Since 1977, when the LNLS was established with the British Council financial support, 43 years have gone by but LNLS has not yet reached out to the rural areas at village, council, community, or individual school levels. As it is deduced from the British Council's reports (Coombs, 1988), the first ever attempt for LNLS to operate a mobile library in the country between 1978 and 1979 was through the Danish Development Programme, the externally-funded scheme operating under the British Council's support for the establishment of the LNLS. The British Council reports that after four years the LNLS had been backed with "funds for building, furniture and equipment, books, *mobile libraries* [author's emphasis] and staff training" (Coombs, 1988, p. 245). However, the project came to a halt soon after the British Council had served only a limited number of school libraries in the five lowland districts. The British Council's report further indicated that, "[w]ith hindsight it seems that a central, though perhaps unavoidable, weakness of the scheme was that for most of its existence it was dedicated to setting up free-standing public libraries on the British model, rather than to giving *direct* assistance to the library needs of rapidly developing educational systems" (Coombs, 1988, p. 275). The report concluded that such assistance would have been more likely to ensure effective and continued support from the host governments. By implication, there has been ineffective outcomes and discontinuity. As a result, LNLS has not resuscitated the mobile library service which the British Council introduced. In this regard, LNLS is different from many other public libraries in the English-speaking countries of Southern Africa such as Botswana, Eswatini, Namibia, and RSA (personal communication, March 2020). LNLS is devoid of a mobile library service that touches the communities and the sparsely populated rural areas that cannot be easily accessed by LNLS branches located in district towns. Compared to the outreach of LNLS, DRULETSMODIL covered a more intensive and extensive field, within a shorter period of four

years, DRULETSMODIL comparatively covered more ground and achieved more impacts with communities.

Literature Review and Conceptualising Relevant Terms

The concepts that define the inherent features and value of DRULETSMODIL are here semantically unpacked in relation to the library and information services (LIS) field.

Mobile Library and Mobile Digital Library

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) provides guidelines for mobile libraries at two levels. In the first general sense, IFLA discusses mobile libraries under the mission of public libraries, and in the section of “libraries without walls” (Koontz & Gubbins, 2010, p. 14). In the latter topic, the examples of mobile libraries that are connected with extended pods and internet are in developed countries. In Africa, only Ethiopia, a developing country, is mentioned in the guidelines by depicting its simple donkey-drawn carts that have no internet. IFLA further describes the “Bibliobus” as the name of the modern mobile library centre providing the internet and having operated successfully in the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (U.S.), Germany, Finland, and Russia.

Of note is that the approach of a mobile library “allows residents of remote rural areas to access information and education services, helping overcome the digital divide” (Koontz & Gubbins, 2010, p. 15). In the same way, “digital divide” is referred to as inequitable access to computer-based ICTs such as the internet (Chisa & Hoskins, 2013, p. 229). It is stressed that in sub-Saharan Africa, the digitally disadvantaged mostly include the indigenous communities and other vulnerable groups such as those living in the rural areas. In the case of Lesotho, these are the rural dwellers who form the majority while the urban demographic constitutes about 31.5% of the population (Worldometer, 2020).

On the other hand, IFLA’s *Mobile Library Guidelines* (2016) are published as standards which address the issues of authorities that normally establish mobile libraries by government agencies to the types of mobile libraries, governing factors, amenities, and equipment that incorporate technological devices such as computers, staffing, and collections. Even in these guidelines, IFLA still defines mobile libraries as being “essential to the Public Library Service and should be seen as an integral part of it” (Stringer & IFLA, 2016, p. 5).

What is mobile is on the move, operating from one place to another. It perhaps makes sense that this move occurs when the services are extended from the organisation’s headquarters, beyond its inner circle to the outer periphery. Since the topic of this study refers to a mobile ‘digital’ library, definitions further consider the understanding that is provided by Ojedokun and Moahi (2007), who elaborate on not only a digital library but also its relationship to an electronic library as well as hybrid and virtual libraries that fit DRULETSMODIL by stating, “A digital library is an umbrella concept for diverse activities and diverse offerings. Other terms used with a similar connotation include, for instance, the electronic library, the virtual library, the universal library, the future library and the library without walls” (2007, p. 212). This means that the library defies the tradition of library buildings as modern types, which have adjusted to modern and advanced offerings of ICTs.

From its heritage of operating in Lesotho as the only university since 1945 until 2008, the National

University of Lesotho has tended to carry out several nationwide academic and related responsibilities (Moshoeshe-Chadzingwa, 2009). Although the NUL Library seemingly had its *de jure* clientele in mind, within the culture of also shouldering the national interests, off-campus general library users still dominated NUL's consideration when DRULETSMODIL was conceived. That notwithstanding, there is a paucity of literature providing proof that, in English-speaking southern Africa, mobile libraries of any sort operate beyond the public libraries. The Eswatini National Library Service, as well as the Namibia National Library Services are examples that attest to this pattern (personal communication with deputy librarians from Eswatini and Namibia, June, 2020). In a sense therefore, the NUL Library as an academic instead of a public library has performed above the expected level to operate a mobile library that is open to the public.

Diversity

Diversity is the condition or quality of being diverse ("Diversity", 1991). It is a range of different things, including the condition of having several unique elements. The NUL Library boasts a diverse collection, that is accessible in print and electronic formats, has a diverse workforce comprising academic, non-academic, and non-governmental clientele in terms of age, gender, race, sexual orientation or cultural background, geographical location such as rural versus urban, and advantaged against disadvantaged. Diversity is therefore about these differences that, on the one hand, may breed asynchrony, friction, disharmony, and inequalities between the haves and have-nots. On the other hand, diversity may enhance the materials the library offers and the services it provides. These are two polarities that may be linked by a mobile digital library that has remained a constant variable in the three phases of the DRULETSMODIL project.

Inclusivity / Inclusion

Inclusivity or inclusiveness denote a practice or policy of including people, members or participants who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized due to their gender, race, class, sexuality, physical disability, or such challenges ("Inclusivity", 2012). People could also be excluded on the grounds of being distant, unknown, or not being influential. Prospective library users may be excluded from normal services on account of comparatively inaccessible rural, distant places or due to poor, inadequate internet connectivity or ICT-related facilities. Potential library users may be excluded from library and information services if such users are already library and information illiterate. A policy that deliberately brings marginalised groups to the fold of services translates into advocating for inclusiveness, inclusivity, and inclusion.

A relevant lesson may be drawn from the perspective of South Australian research conducted by Kaeding et al. (2017) on public libraries and access for children with disabilities whose special needs are not catered for in the mainstream public library services. These researchers propose an inclusive library model which is broad and encompasses the "collections, physical barriers (space and equipment), partnership, programmes, training and marketing" (p. 15). The model suggests that all these issues require supportive management. Adjusting the buildings, providing collections that suit groups with physical disabilities, for example, widens the scope of information services so that groups that are different from others can be included into an expanded arrangement that includes diverse clients. This is an ethical outcome that can also bring about synergy between engaged stakeholders. Institutions, services, and corporate bodies that deliberately address inclusivity policies demonstrate a social responsibility to their communities.

Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Responsibility

The literature on social responsibility (SR) is extensive and intensive. Chen (2020) defines the term as “a theory that asserts that businesses, in addition to maximizing shareholder value, have an obligation to act in a manner that benefits society”. Relating SR to value is further brought to the fore by Smit (2020) who diagrammatically illustrates that, on the one hand, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) value chain entails shareholder as well as stakeholder considerations. Smit (2020) posits that the CSR value chain is, in principle, similar to other value chains.

That the CSR value chain is like any other value chain becomes clearer by comparing it to the marketing infrastructures for the horticultural value chain in Lesotho. The horticultural value chain in Lesotho also depicts similar categories of consumers, government, organisations, and their policies as well as retailers and partners (Lesotho Ministry of Trade, Industry, Cooperatives and Marketing, 2012).

CSR means “a self-regulating business model that helps a company to be socially accountable to itself, its stakeholders and the public” (Chen, 2020) for its activities and the results. Although the principle of CSR has been around from as far back as the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and gaining a common use with the emerging term ‘stakeholder’, the American Society of Quality (ASQ) explains that CSR “is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and to contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of ... as well as local community and society at large” (Holme & Watts, 2000). Whereas the idea of a ‘business model’ may give the notion that CSR suits profit-making enterprises and industries only, that is not the case. In 2010, the International Organization for Standardization released a set of voluntary standards, namely ISO 26000 which “is aimed at all types of organizations, regardless of their activity, size, or location” (ISO, 2010, p. 1). CSR means the character emanating from a sociable conduct, fitting a friendly environment and a social obligation. It is the behaviour expected of the individuals, institutions, services, corporate bodies, and businesses to go beyond a call of duty, rule, profit, or norm. It is the ethical manner of giving and offering for the sake of it and as the good thing to do. In the library sector, Khoir (2011) reports on CSR and Gadajah Mada University library collaborative partnership whereby the disadvantaged poor in Indonesia were generally supported. The case applies the Carroll’s Pyramid of CSR (Khoir, 2011) constituting key social, philanthropic, ethical, legal, and economic considerations that correspond to the dimensions listed above (Chen, 2020; Smit, 2020).

Methodology

There are possibly various libraries that operate mobile digital libraries that are diverse, inclusive, and embracing CSR, but this study looks at the single case of Lesotho. This study employed the descriptive research design, using the case study method. Mixed research methods employed included synthesizing quantitative and qualitative data in order to examine and assess levels of diversity, inclusivity, social responsibility aspects, and outcomes of DRULETSMODIL.

The study therefore relied mainly on secondary sources for data, such as the researcher’s own experiences as an information professional. Additionally, secondary sources constituted both published and semi-published literature as well as official records from the partners of the projects. This methodology was favoured because of its affordability in terms of costs, time and similar logistical arrangements. Field work and in-depth data collection would be expensive and time-consuming. Notably, a case study, according to Payne and Payne (2004) looks at an example

from a broad process, and examines that unit closely. In kind, testimonies of the participants and experiences of relevant informers also contributed data significantly.

Mchombu (1995) as well as Moser and Korstjens (2018) contend that measurement studies may yield more reliable information if carried out and observed while the services are happening in the moment, rather than relying on memory later. This is understood to mean that the study of a unit is time and space bound. In this regard, Moser and Korstjens (2018) outline the effective methods of observations in research, and state that an observer who is there as part of the setting, who is located where the process and action is taking place, make a suitable method especially for qualitative data collection.

For this case study on diversity, inclusivity, social responsibility aspects, and outcomes, data was coupled with observations, the researcher's own experience, interviews with relevant individuals, and communication with personal contacts for a qualitative analysis that defined the author's viewpoint. Corporate Social Responsibility made the framework upon which to examine performance of DRULETSMODIL during its three phases of operation. As mentioned, the CSR framework is similar to methodology that an academic library of Gadja Mada University in Indonesia also used when it partnered with institutions that were not necessarily academic (Khoir, 2011). That academic library further embraced non-academic users within its premises where special corners were created.

In like manner, the assessment focused on the following issues:

- vision, business integration of the main service provider which is the NUL Library on the one hand, and the disadvantaged group and groups that were socially and ethically being included in the CSR model, on the other hand
- stakeholder consideration, the partnerships involved and empowerment
- and, shareholder considerations, return of investment, public reputation.

The Planned Functions of DRULETSMODIL

DRULETSMODIL aimed to:

- Provide electronic and printed materials, mainly to the Open and Distance arm of NUL, the Institute of Extra Mural Studies (IEMS), part-time learners and lecturers, and (secondarily) where possible, to the communities residing in the remote areas of Lesotho where library services are either limited or unavailable;
- provide, for free, internet connectivity to the disadvantaged IEMS branch libraries (one in the North and two in the Southern region);
- remain open to any interested rural communities, particularly to the rural youth in secondary schools, who are prospective NUL students as well as primary school pupils, because the e-resources do not necessarily deplete with the increasing number of users;
- enhance the capacity of the UNESCO supported information depot in the Botha-Bothe and Mohale's Hoek districts; and

- facilitate the dissemination of instructional materials from the IEMS instructors to the registered learners.

Phase 1: The Functions of DRULETSMODIL in the Northern Part of Lesotho from 2015 to 2016

Beginning in March 2015, DRULETSMODIL's mobile vehicle belonging to NUL left Maseru, IEMS headquarters, to provide distance and part-time learners and instructors with library services. Through one year's funding from UNESCO, the vehicle followed the schedule that was agreed upon with the hosting schools and users in the vicinity. Impressed by the innovation of DRULETSMODIL, and the prospects of influencing the clients, the commercial vendor who initially charged for the Wi-Fi, began to offer reduced rates. The vehicle stopped at the designated secondary school for a week. During that period, DRULETSMODIL services were accessed by the IEMS distant part-time students, who are primary target users, and secondary school pupils and teachers. Local community members were also free to visit the mobile library vehicle where the following items and services were offered:

- a fitted Wi-Fi facility (accessible within the radius of about 4KM) and laptops;
- printed material such as the newspapers and books for reference or for borrowing;
- some of Lesotho Library Consortium's free electronic databases on general areas such as dictionaries; and
- guidance by staff from both the NUL Library and UNESCO National Commission.

On its return journey, the vehicle stopped at the same stops and, in some cases, at additional ones. The northern region covered the Berea, Leribe, and Botha-Bothe districts. In Leribe personal testimonies were provided by high school teachers and learners comprising a female pupil (user number 1) from St Boniface High School, a male pupil (user number 2), as well as another male pupil (user number 3). User number 3 rejoiced, "I have managed to find great books and resources that are relevant to my schoolwork. For instance, I always struggled to understand our set-book, *Julius Caesar*, but the notes that I found in this library have been very useful to me." While User number 3 showed off a copy of *Hamlet*, User number 1 said that the text was one of her "favourite works by the English writer, William Shakespeare." In Teyateyaneng (town in the Berea district of Lesotho), where the DRULETSMODIL vehicle was part of the celebrations of International School Day, teachers confessed that they initially dissuaded the pupils from taking cellular phones into the classrooms. However, after seeing how a cellular phone could be used to access some educational material through the internet provided by DRULETSMODIL, they found the use of cellular phones appropriate (Serabele, 2015).

This change of attitude implies the project's positive impact. In Butha-Buthe, DRULETSMODIL cooperated with the UNESCO-supported Community Radio station. The two services enhanced each other's visibility in the area. As an academically-oriented arm of a university, the NUL Library met its obligation to serve the NUL clients. But to extend a mobile digital library at this stage, the library assumed a corporate ethical responsibility to embrace the needy. The library did this voluntarily as the ISO 2000 standard recommends. Clearly, the secondary school pupils who benefited from the mobile library are an indirect investment return to NUL whose students come from the secondary schools which benefitted from DRULETSMODIL. During Phase 1, UNESCO

was the main stakeholder. The commercial internet provider also sustained the service. The range of participants, such as the school authorities and the district administrator who contributed something to the library, had something valuable to reap from the operation. The Librarian's report to the NUL Library Board (NUL Library Board, 2018) reported that by the end of the first phase, 45,000 people had been offered diverse library and information services.

Phase 2: The Functions of DRULETSMODIL in the Southern part of Lesotho from 2017 to 2018

Subsequent to UNESCO's approval to fund the second phase of the mobile library, the project team further set off on a second leg from Maseru to the southern districts, with the functions similar to those of Phase 1. It began at Masianokeng High School, where a number of the users converged around it. At Mazenod High School, the principal welcomed the service, noting that it instilled a sense of fun and excitement for the students. Neither the male nor the female pupils had felt that way before. At Holy Cross High School, in Mohale's Hoek, the teachers advised that the library hours should be extended, mainly to the evenings. During its first two phases of operation, the project had become the subject of research by a university postgraduate student in the library sector. A mobile library service became a topic for a university dissertation. Kubutu (2018), a local student studying outside Lesotho, conducted a study on the impact of a mobile digital library. The study revealed that the project had reached and met the information needs of the rural learners, which included not only the target IEMS academic learners but also the school pupils. This proves that the project is significant and worth assessing. Subjecting the operations of DRULETSMODIL to scholarly scrutiny allows for some improvements where necessary.

DRULETSMODIL boasts an ingredient of ICTs. In line with the Budapest and Open Access protocols that the NUL Library commits to, the project introduced a digital mobile library, embedding openness during the first two phases. This condition is derived from the arrangement where free electronic resources are openly accessible and available to all. The project thus embraced diversity, inclusion, and social responsibility aspects whose outcomes benefit a wide spectrum of communities at once. DRULETSMODIL also provided specialized children's library services. During this phase, the NUL vehicle connected with the internet and the UNESCO funding continued to be the company's brand that attracted library users. Records indicate that when the internet was off, the youth did not stay at the mobile centre (personal communication with the attendant of the Centre, 2017). Similar sentiments were heard at the event where the DRULETSMODIL vehicle was officially toured and was an attraction to participants of the UNESCO celebrations of the World Book and Copyright Days at the Royal Archives and Museum Centre, at the Royal village in Matsieng, Lesotho (personal communication with guests at the Copyright Day celebrations, 2017; UNESCO, 2016; "Prince Seeiso calls for reading culture", 2017; Royal Archives, 2017).

Phase 3: The Functions of the Project in the Districts of Lesotho from 2018 to 2019

Prior to the end of the UNESCO funding, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit - German Corporation for International Development (GIZ) had approached the NUL Library to offer its contribution as a partner in the project. The agreement between the NUL Library and GIZ marked the beginning of Phase 3 of DRULETSMODIL. This initiative broadened public library services to adult community members, which was a slight shift from phases 1 and 2 that mainly covered academic and school library clientele. Towards the end of 2018, the

DRULETSMODIL van was re-branded NUL with GIZ slogan of “Participatory Initiative for Social Accountability” (PISA) and it started to make stops in the rural and urban areas, the lowlands and highlands, and the Community Councils of Lesotho.

GIZ works mainly on behalf of the European Union (EU) and supports the Lesotho Government to implement its Strategic Plan. The priority areas of cooperation between the GIZ and Lesotho include ‘Decentralisation and local development’, ‘Citizen’s participation and political education’ as well as the ‘Social welfare systems’. It is within this broad framework that PISA applied some information aspect on the DRULETSMODIL approach of an outreach to the distant communities, with the slogan, “It is the responsibility of all of us” translatable into Sesotho, the local official language as: “*Boikarabello ke ba rona bohle*”. The emphasis is inclusion, social participation, and responsibility.

By 2019, almost one year after joining DRULETSMODIL, PISA reached out to 45,000 users, comprising the previously information-poor and information-illiterate communities. Through that effort, DRULETSMODIL and PISA positively stimulated ICT literacy among rural learners and adults. In that way, the project has contributed to ushering Lesotho into the ideals of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), which recommends that each country should seize the ICTs opportunity to facilitate access to information by all.

Some of DRULETSMODIL’s positive outcomes include:

- enhanced citizen engagement in democratic matters in Lesotho;
- created Dialogue Platforms with effective engagement for local and national structures;
- facilitated community awareness and participation in public policy processes;
- in some districts, and together with UNICEF, provided library space for children’s “Kiddies Corner” which introduced relevant literature for children while the parents engaged in the debates of the day;
- partnered with a local non-governmental organisation called Development for Peace Education (DPE) through the “Community Parliament” to debate on topical and developmental issues for the marginalised communities in the rural highlands; and,
- found a suitable audience for its own newsletter titled “*Boikarabello ke ba hao*” (meaning “it is your responsibility”) and other local newspapers, leaflets, and materials that are available from the Transformation Resource Centre (TRC), the Land Administration Authority, and other sources whose publications could previously not be easily distributed to the remote areas.

Phase 3 of the mobile library has, through PISA, further penetrated 45 out of 76 local councils within the three districts (Mobile Centre Main Report 2018-2019). This 59.2% of the coverage has not been covered by LNLS, despite its national mandate, and scope to be ahead. LNLS has not yet attained this milestone because it operates a traditional physical library whose branches firmly occupy fixed space in the ten urban centres of their respective districts. Seemingly, this traditional pattern of library service is predominantly practised in most of the developing regions, especially in Africa. The DRULETSMODIL and PISA project, on the contrary, operate an

electronic library, virtual library and, perhaps a universal library, thus breaking the norm in this regard. This integrative approach seems to be synergistic. It serves the clients of the academic library, the public library, the special information centres, and the children's library sections. An epitome of CSR related lessons to be learnt from the PISA operations in which the end-beneficiaries participated is a record of the subjects that were debated and discussed (Mobile Centre Main Report 2018-2019). Table 1 lists eleven places where participants (in three categories of gender-aggregated users) visited the centre. The topics range from politics, gender equality, income-generating schemes, and finance, to youth for employment and human rights. Females participated more than males.

*Table 1. Mobile Library Statistics from Phase 3:
Participation by sex, in interdisciplinary presentations made at PISA Mobile Center 2018-2019*

Place	Topic/Theme	Participation	Figures by Sex		Total
			Male	Female	
1. Makhoarane Community Council	Arms of Government	Open session	11	19	30
		Visitors	44	77	121
		contacts	9	15	24
2. Kubake Community Council	Transparency during recruitment process/ Human Rights Advocacy	Open session	4	5	9
- Moitsupeli	Volunteerism	Open session	3	10	13
- Tlali Primary School	Citizenship	Open session	30	25	55
- Tholoan'a Lerato	Food Security	Open session	54	49	103
		Contact	5	24	29
3. Likolobeng Community Centre	PISA Mobile Centre Education & ICTS	Open session	87	61	18
- Marakabei			1	9	10
- Likolobeng			19	55	74
	Financial management	Visitors	177	129	245
		Contact	16	16	32
4. Qiloane Community Centre	Training/ Youth literacy Youth Management	Open session	20	18	38
		Open session	1	13	14
		Visitors	35	67	102
		contacts	9	24	33
5. Manonyane Community centre	World HIV / AIDS Day	Open session	15	18	33
- Mafeoane	Financial Management		35	4	39
- Liphakoeng	Financial Management	Open session	25	19	44
- Mafikeng	Financial Management	Open session	13	11	24
6. Semonkong Urban Council	Financial Management	Open session	12	16	28
- Ha Moahloli			8	11	19
- Ha Khonyeli	Financial Management	Open session			

7. Semonkong Urban					
Council	Financial Management	Open session	12	58	65
- Likorolo Khubetsoana	Environment/Soil				
- Good Sherpard School	The role of herd boys	Open session	18	2	20
	Financial Accounts	Open session	18	7	25
- Ha Konyana- Tsoana	Financial Management	Open Session	30	6	36
- Polateng		Visitors	142	149	291
		Contacts	1	0	1
- Ha Pomela	Good qualities of a leader	Open session	19	38	57
8. Mazenod					
Community centre	Female's role in combating corruption	Open session	49	61	110
- Mazenod	Youth, democracy/ICT's	Open session	3	9	12
	Gender inequality	Open session	10	0	10
		Visitors	230	214	444
		Contacts	30	4	34
- Thota-moli	Principles of democracy	Open session	18	2	20
- Ha Josiase	Human Rights	Open session	24	9	33
-Fika	Public Service delivery	Open session	13	7	20
Lemohala/'Mantsebo	Citizens' participation in governance	Open session	-	-	-
- Ha Thaabe		Open session	9	11	20
- Ha 'Masana	Civic engagement				
9. Lilala					
Community Council	Decentralisation/Local Government	Open session	15	45	60
- Tsoeneng	Enhance Citizens' health	Open session	0	10	10
	Participating in election		-	-	-
10. Rothe Community Council					
	Role of democratic institutions	Open session	12	48	60
		Visitors	57	190	247
		contacts	11	69	80
11. Maseru Industrial Area					
	Financial Management	Open session	25	78	103

Note: The participation of females is further illustrated graphically in Figure 1.

Table 1 does not only show the level of participation by males and females. The proportion of females to males as 54% to 46% (open sessions), 57% to 43% (visitors) as well as 65% to 35% (contacts) and still tallies with the already mentioned national ratios of 59% female to 41% males of the national statistics. Table 1 also illustrates a wide range of topics that the users of the Mobile Centre were engaged in. The analysis is that the exposure of the communities to the library-related information has enabled the participants to apply their minds to issues that affect their everyday lives. PISA is about this level of involvement in a traditional or a digital library. What is important is that there is an actual and meaningful use of information. Use in this case may be determined when a user actually takes the initiative and participates in the library services through visiting the mobile vehicle, reading, surfing the internet, and then understanding and acquiring knowledge (Moshoeshe-Chadzingwa, 2002). The mere exposure of DRULETSMODIL to the rural and marginalised communities is not automatically benefitting those

people if they are passive. It is the positive actions of getting to the mobile library as the school pupils in Phase 1 did. The students accessed the internet, read school prescribed books, and then affirmed that they benefitted from the activities. The 3,030 participants listed in Table 1 are understood to include those who made telephone calls to the national radio station to affirm that they were empowered by engaging in those PISA and DPE supported discussions of relevance to development projects within the communities.

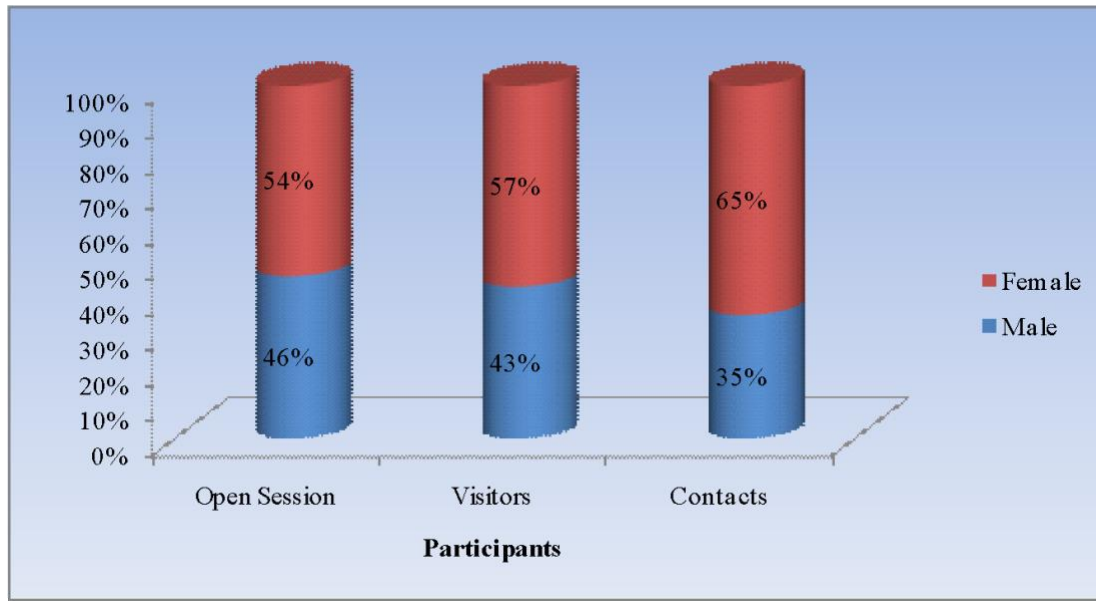


Figure 1. Proportion of participants by sex.

Attributes of DRULETSMODIL and Outcomes of the Model

Although the attributes of the project may stand out, weak points too should be mentioned as they exist. To a certain extent, sustainability of the service depends on the external funding from UNESCO, GIZ, and UNICEF, consequently making continuity difficult. Yet for a mobile library, it seems common that a vehicle is generally donated, or is an item prone to rapid breakage and poor maintenance (Personal communication with the deputy librarians from Eswatini and Namibia, 2020). This is also the case with Zimbabwe (Doust, 1999) and the Malawi's CURE mobile library (Brock, 2018). By January 2020, there has already been no continuity with library services in the northern parts of Lesotho which was covered by the first phase despite the high schools loudly asking for repeat services. In Phase 3, the vehicle made a stop for a significant and continuous presence at each administrative council while it stayed for only two weeks at a time in the previous two phases. Several advantages accrued from this seamless approach of the project. Library and information services were introduced to large sections of the population that had never used any form of information services before. DRULETSMODIL, as a hybrid type of a library, encompassed digital, electronic, and print materials for academic, school, children's, and public groups. At its inception, the project was not necessarily designed along the CSR theory. However, along the way, the service fits the model, which is appropriate for developing as well as developed countries. It is the model that works for any business, company, and

institution that looks at the value chain with all its stakeholders and partners. The voices are audible from the users of the two completed phases and the third, on-going one. Testimonies are positive from most of the beneficiaries, constituting the members of the public, the academics, the learners from the secondary and high schools, and the children who use the “Kiddies Corner”. The service is attractive in all respects and has the potential to grow. On October 17, 2019, on *Seboping* Radio Lesotho programme, and commenting on the usefulness of being engaged in public debates conducted by PISA and DPE, a female caller affirmed that they were empowered to inform their member of parliament from their constituency, about the transport-related challenges, comprising the need for a bridge. The project enabled that particular council not only to receive relevant information but also to respond by constructing a bridge. Through DRULETSMODIL and PISA, the project is diverse and inclusive. It embraces comprehensible and socially responsive services. The innovation of the NUL Library was that of tapping on the advantages of ICTs, and of serving beyond the academic boundary. By so doing, NUL, the international bodies, and the local non-governmental organisations embraced intra-institutional inputs. Their visions converged, enabling the NUL library to invest in the community, as CSR urges.

The project’s diversity is expressed by the varied formats of information materials and the wide number of subjects, geographical areas, staff members, and community partners. The model is inclusive and ethical, especially towards remote, rural, and underserved communities. The principle of inclusion and a non-discriminatory library practice resonates with the call by WSIS, the *UNESCO Public Library Manifesto*, as well as with the *Internet Manifesto* of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). It is about time member states adhered to these protocols. When PISA contemplated suspending its services for a while, due to the unavailability of accommodation in Teyateyaneng, the community opted to find a venue on their own. The community argued that the youth were enthusiastic to use the PISA internet and the library and that if the centre were to discontinue its services, the youth would revert to delinquency (personal communication with Centre facilitator, February 13, 2020). This move is evidence of “being responsible” and of the community ownership of the library.

Significance of the Study

To a certain extent, the case study of Lesotho tested the applicability and suitability of a theory of CSR to library services. The test has provided a lesson that the CSR business model may be considered to work in library services. The study has created awareness of how ICTs may be tapped by economically poor and developing countries, incorporating partners’ support to extend library services for otherwise excluded groups. The relevance, appropriateness, and value of this study as pertaining to diverse information offerings to the marginalised rural communities in Lesotho cannot be overemphasised. In this respect, the study has highlighted the role of external technical and financial ambivalence in library development, especially in initiatives coming from academic libraries that normally may not be serving the general members of the public.

The report has contributed knowledge on the subject of the efficacy of the mobile digital library, for practical library managers, and for LIS learners and researchers. However, the scope has been too broad to be satisfactorily covered within the limits of the study. At this stage, the report has therefore laid the foundation for further evaluations of library services that extend to user studies that enquire in detail from the beneficiaries. By discovering more information on mobile digital libraries and CSR from southern Africa and in Indonesia for instance, the study postulates that future comparative studies may follow, and from where this paper has left off. More

importantly, the study is a lesson for the value of this type of a library project to a broad spectrum of beneficiaries that are not compartmentalised in seemingly the same local people. In particular, it is time for the library organisations to aim at operating for quality and professionalism by evaluating their performance against the existing frameworks such as the Corporate Social Responsibility.

Summary and Conclusion

The NUL Library requested UNESCO to fund the first phase of the project. When this phase succeeded, UNESCO easily supported the second phase, at the end of which GIZ offered to continue with the widened scope of the functions. Within this period, a number of stakeholders participated, cooperated, and collaborated with the project. Presumably, this support gives a good reputation to NUL where it enjoys an active use of its library by the community at-large, including support from community-based stakeholders. For example, a commercial Wi-Fi service provider injected its assistance. The Teyateyaneng Council of Berea district committed a physical space. The Development Peace Education (DPE) voluntarily played its role; in conjunction with PISA, it enhanced debates as depicted in the topics and levels of participation in Table 1. DPE's inherent focus on education and peace building development, enriched the scope of the third phase of the project.

These values accrue for diversified groups and visible signs of social responsibilities that occur when an innovative service is visible and successful. Above all, the features of the library and information services of the project do not lend themselves to the normal operations of any single type of an academic, public, school, special, or children's services. However, all these categories have been touched and have benefitted. Could this be an option for the kind of the library of the future for Lesotho? Could it be a model to be tried, incorporating diversity, inclusivity, and social responsibility features?

The author is convinced, and would like to conclude that the diversity, inclusivity, and CSR features of DRULETSMODIL project make it a suitable model not only for Lesotho but for similar countries whose meagre resources make it difficult for library authorities to reach the marginalised through one stereotype library. The corporate social responsibility nature of the NUL academic library service attracted local and international partnerships that extended their hands to offer hybrid library services that benefitted rural and urban schools, marginalised public library communities, and a previously information-poor section of ordinary people. The outcomes are voiced by the beneficiaries themselves. Some school learners give testimonies that they would not have passed their classes without the project's help; women in the communities confirm that the service empowered them. It is a successful mobile library service model.

Acknowledgements

It is with gratitude that I thank institutions and individuals that helped me to carry out and complete this study. Facilities and records of the NUL Faculty of Humanities and the Library were accessible to me. I should recognize the invaluable assistance of UNESCO National Commission to Lesotho as well as the office of PISA Lesotho. The encouragement from colleagues and family members was immense; and so was the patience of the editors and reviewers. I have learnt a lot from them. I am indeed indebted to all these people and offices.

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