

INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: BENEFITS,
CHALLENGES, AND SUSTAINABILITY

A Dissertation
by
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ABSTRACT

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Shortages of books and libraries exist in many developing countries, making it difficult for people to develop and maintain literacy skills. In response to this need, Westerners have created non-profit international library development (ILD) programs to build libraries, furnish them with books, and train library staff. These ILD programs provide beneficial services but as foreigners developing policies and development priorities, they may also create unforeseen problems. As a reminder to Western influence in developing countries, the negative effects of colonialism are still felt daily in regions such as Africa. Some believe the answer may be in supplying aid in the form of sustainable development, interim aid that helps recipients to eventually manage and finance projects independently.

There is little research on ILD programs. Many descriptive and anecdotal articles have been written describing book aid and ILD programs but only three researchers have collected and analyzed data to explore their effectiveness. To explore the topics of benefits, potential negative impacts, and sustainability in international library development, I incorporated three

traditional ethnographic research methods of interviews, observation, and examination of documents. In order to better understand their lived experience, I interviewed two Western ILD program leaders. I also traveled to two African countries to observe the ILD programs in action.

This research study found that ILD programs are doing more than just supplying books. These leaders and their programs are playing a central role in international education, supporting local schools and educational efforts by providing materials and programs supporting literacy. They supply benefits previously unrecognized in the literature, benefits that meet the needs of the local communities. In many ways these libraries serve more as community centers than as traditional Western libraries. The ILD leaders are also taking measures to avoid some of the biggest mistakes of past book donation and to incorporate local persons into advisory boards and as members of library staff. But regardless, Western influence is evident in the library collections and adherence to policies and procedures created by Western ILD leaders.

The viability of sustainability in international library development is unpredictable. Before ILD libraries can function independent of foreign aid, many serious issues need to be addressed such as the financial stability of partner organizations, a lack of capacity in related managerial skills, and a shortage of materials available to create relevant book collections.

KEY WORDS: Educational Leadership; International Library Development; Foreign Aid; Sustainability; Libraries; Africa; International Education.