Sarawak Libraries Collaboration Initiatives:
In The Aspirations Towards Bridging Knowledge Divide And Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to discuss and highlight collaboration efforts done by libraries generally in Borneo and specifically in Sarawak. There are many initiatives by libraries and other information professional planned and executed in Sarawak with purpose to ensure the information managers community could maintain and enhance their knowledge and skills and at the same time could increase awareness and access towards information among library users.In discussing issues in smart partnership, this paper is prepared to answer two basic questions. The first question is what are the smart partnership initiatives joined by libraries in Sarawak and the second question would be what are the challenges and opportunities faced by libraries in Sarawak with regards to smart partnership. The method used in this paper is case study. The Centre for Academic Information Services, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak has been actively involved in many smart partnership initiatives. Therefore this paper will look at all the initiatives joined and initiated by the library to identify answers to the above research questions.Smart partnership allows libraries to be involved in an intellectual collaboration as well as giving them opportunities to share resources thus giving the opportunities to save resources.

Keywords: Smart partnership; Collaboration, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak; Library, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak; Knowledge sharing, Malaysia; Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

SMART PARTNERSHIP is about governments, organizations and people collaborating, sharing experiences and wisdom for long-term mutual gains. Libraries and Information Providers all over the world have been involved in smart or strategic partnership in one way or another for a very long time.

Library cooperation may just be for interlibrary loan or it could be extended to full resource sharing or smart partnership that goes beyond resource sharing, where members are working and collaborating together to achieve common goals and objectives either between two or more libraries locally, regionally or worldwide.

The collaboration between libraries could be done through members working together in some form of ad-hoc projects or it could occur through a formal and official bond by signing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC).

Previous Studies

As smart partnership is an initiative that would benefit many parties, libraries and other information agencies are keen to work with each other in a lot of different aspects from management, to promotion and towards provision of information.

McMenemy (2010) suggested that library practitioners should work closely with academia to encourage or to enhance the research culture among them that would later leads to better development of libraries and information field.

Many studies that have been done highlighted collaborations between libraries in different nations. These international collaborations have become a trend and therefore a good example to follow as Sarawak is located in the land of Borneo where it consists of three different nations.

Gross and Riyaz (2004) Explored the partnership between academic libraries in Western Australia and the Republic of Maldives where as a developing countries the libraries in Maldives has benefited a lot in terms of collection development and distribution of good quality information to the users.

Hall (2011) in her research found that collaboration between libraries within a country or if possible worldwide could result in better collection development for small library collections and could support accessibilities towards information resources.

Sakaguchi, Shimada and Wasserstrom (2010) explained how collaborations allow two libraries from two different regions could work together in preservation and digitization that would later add up to both libraries' collections.

Libraries in Sarawak

The island of Borneo consists of three countries namely Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia. Under Malaysia are the states of Sabah and Sarawak while under Indonesia is the Kalimantan. Kalimantan consists of Kalimantan Timur (KALTIM), Kalimantan Barat (KALBAR), Kalimantan Tengah (KALTEN) and Kalimantan Selatan.

Libraries consist of academic, public and special libraries whereas information providers are among others, the museums, government departments, foundations, literary bodies as well as the cultural and community development councils. Borneo island 'with its strategic location houses a unique and diverse flora and fauna as well as many ethnic groups with their own dialects, culture and traditions.

In Sarawak, there are over 400 libraries available. From the main Pustaka Negeri Sarawak, to a small village library in Lawas and Kapit, all these libraries are built and maintained to ensure that everyone in the community will have a taste of information.

A lot of initiatives have been taken by the government to make sure all people in the state are able to gain access to information and knowledge. Not only libraries built on solid ground, mobile libraries on land and water vehicles are also made available for people in the areas unreachable to development.

Besides the public libraries, there are also libraries catering for academic communities in three public universities and over 30 private colleges and universities in the state. Therefore it is obvious that the community in Sarawak is supposed to be well covered in terms of information availability.

CENTRE FOR ACADEMIC INFORMATION SERVICES (CAIS)

The Centre for Academic Information Services (CAIS) is an academic library servicing students and staff in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak as well as the community outside the organization. Established in 1993, "CAIS functions as the Knowledge Centre for the University, supports directly and contributes to the success of the University's academic programs." Margaret (2010).

As one of the largest libraries in Sarawak, CAIS has the advantage in terms of the number of professionals as well as the best facilities and resources. That is why besides initiating some smart partnership projects, CAIS also becomes the pioneer members of collaborations among libraries within and outside the state.

CAIS AND SMART PARTNERSHIP

With the realization of the importance and benefits of Smart Partnerships, CAIS has been very active in joining many collaborations among libraries no matter whether the initiatives are within Sarawak, within Malaysia or even in Borneo. This section will discuss every smart partnership initiatives attached to CAIS.

Library Association

Librarians Association of Malaysia, Sarawak Chapter (PPMKSAR) is an active group that gathers librarians and other information professionals in the state. Most librarians in Malaysia are members of Librarians Association of Malaysia (PPM). In Sarawak, the association is represented by the Sarawak Chapter. This society allows members to create linkages and networks among members of the association.

Every year PPMKSAR arranges a lot of activities for the members. The committee which is divided into a few bureaus organize many activities that would lead to social networking as

well and knowledge sharing experience. Among activities held by PPMKSAR are knowledge sharing programs like talks by experts. PPMKSAR also organizes workshops and conferences for the members. Besides that social events like bowling tournaments, family days as well as annual dinner are organized. PPMKSAR is also active in outreach programs to assist small libraries and communities in the state.

Besides PPMKSAR, CAIS is also a member of the Medical Librarians' Group (MLG) under the PPM. The MLG, as the second medical library association in Asia started in 1990 with the purpose of gathering all librarians working in a medical or hospital libraries in a special group. This group is created specially to provide support in the form of training and resources among the libraries and librarians as there are not many specialists in the field of medical librarianship and limitations in terms of resource collection in medical especially for small libraries.

Resource Sharing

CAIS has been very much involved in a resource sharing community. Though it is located in Sarawak it has been an active member of library collaborations and co-operations in Malaysia. Good examples are PERPUN, a forum involving the Chief Librarians of the university libraries together with the Director General of the National Library and the Council of the Chief Librarians of the public universities. These groups work together in projects of resource acquisition, resource sharing and allowing access to information on researches and theses available in each member's library. Having succeeded in developing a few databases and a union list, the groups are really active in Malaysia to promote resource sharing among academic community.

In Borneo, CAIS has been the co-founder as well as an active member to an initiative call the Key to Knowledge on Borneo or better known as k@Borneo. Initiated in 2001 and established in 2002, k@Borneo managed to gather members from 12 libraries to date who contribute actively in sharing resources about Borneo as well and in the publication of the k@Borneo bibliography.

As Borneo has always become the interest of researchers within the region as well as from all over the world, the publication of the bibliography and the website of k@Borneo could be of a great help to any researcher to identify resources available about Borneo Island. Though they are now still gathering information from members of the group, they are also working hard in encouraging more and more libraries in Borneo to become members and hence contributing to the publication of more comprehensive bibliographies and other publications.

Knowledge Sharing

Besides the resource sharing projects, CAIS is always willing to be involved in knowledge sharing activities. Among the activities that they have in order to exchange knowledge with people within and outside the organization are accepting students from other academic institutions to do practical training as well as fieldwork in the library, the librarianship forum and in research projects.

Every year CAIS has been accepting students from other universities and academic institutions from all over Malaysia who wants to do their practical training in the library. The students came from all the different background of studies and will be appointed to designated departments according to their field of study. To make sure the students will benefit from the training, a practical plan and schedule is designed to cater the duration of training for each student. This initiative is also one of the ways they could create mentoring environment among their staff and building up the soft skills among the students.

Librarianship Forum on the other hand is an annual event initiated and organized by CAIS with the intention to provide a platform for librarians and information professionals in Malaysia as well as those in Sarawak especially to sit together and discuss issues and development in the field of information management. This forum allows the participants to learn new issues or new insights about information and library from different point of views. Besides that it is a good training for information professionals and librarians to be involved in discussions and paper presentations.

As the forum involved presentations and discussions, it has been a great success with the participation of many librarians as well as head of the libraries. With the success of the

previous two forums CAIS intends to upgrade this forum into a seminar from 2011 so that the event could involve more people especially those from other countries to share their insights about what is happening in their respective nations.

Though the librarians are knowledge managers and normally catering for users who do research in the library, they are now moving forward to become researchers in their field. CAIS members or librarians in the organization are now being actively involved with researchers and lecturers from the faculties in UNIMAS as well as with lecturers from Universiti Teknologi MARA.

The collaborations between librarians and other parties allow them to learn on how to do research as well as for them to understand the current condition of the library and how to better manage the library in the future. From researches being done, the librarians have been presenting in conferences and seminars locally and internationally.

This research and collaboration culture does not only benefit individual librarian, it also indirectly benefit the library as the librarians who do research and presented them in conferences will be able to promote the organization as well as coming back to the library with all the different insights from other presentations or discussions.

Community Services

Besides collaborating in activities and initiatives that would benefit the organization, CAIS is also involved in other initiatives that would benefit the society as a whole. These community based services are intended to assist community especially those who experience digital and information divide.
Sarawak Committee in Information Literacy Skills (SCILS) is one of the initiatives joined by CAIS where they work with other libraries and the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM in Sarawak to form guidelines for information literacy.

Though access to information is not a big issue in the state, the skills to enable users to use information wisely is still yet to be determined and might not be of the best standard. Therefore SCILS are formed with the vision to create a standard guideline and later promote and train the librarians and library managers in Sarawak on how to implement and use the information literacy guidelines (Ramli, Ibrahim and Abd Rani, 2008). In 2011 it is expected that the SCILS Guidelines could be used and a few libraries have been identified as the pilot libraries to implement the guidelines. It is a great hope that SCILS Guidelines could be the beginning towards the creation of a national standard on information literacy as our nation does not have one proper standard used by all libraries in Malaysia.

Besides collaborations in serious matter such as SCILS, CAIS is also very much involved in other types of community services. Their "drop a book" initiative is done to encourage users to donate books and reading materials which later will be donated to village libraries reading rooms in small villages in the state. They also work closely with students from the Faculty of Information Management, UiTM Sarawak in building reading areas for community in the rural areas in Kuching and Kota Samarahan. The latest project that they are involved in is in Kampung Bajo, Lundu Sarawak where CAIS donated books for the reading spot in the village's community hall.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

Borneo is a vast and diverse island and some parts of the island are accessible only by air and river. Sarawak itself with the size almost as large as the Peninsular Malaysia has to understand the fact that libraries available in the state is scattered all over the place. Thus we can imagine the challenges facing librarians and organizations to collaborate efficiently and effectively.

Being geographically diverse as well as challenges associated with basic facilities like electricity and ICT leads to the issue of digital divide. Although the government has made a lot of effort to solve this issue, there are still a small number of libraries that have not been provided with ICT facilities. This issue needs to be addressed by libraries as it will definitely affect the process of collaboration.

Bureaucracy is an issue faced by many organizations. Different libraries would have different level of bureaucracies as well as different administrative systems. Thus sometimes it is a bit difficult for libraries with different systems to create partnership initiative that would benefit all parties equally. Besides that different laws and policies that govern the different libraries and organizations of the different countries also play a major role in determining the success of the collaboration.

Opportunities

Facing with and trying to address all the challenges mentioned above we in Borneo island are blessed with diverse fauna and flora, diverse communities with unique cultures and languages/dialects, as well as long history of colonial rules. All these serve as valuable opportunities for researchers to tap thus producing insurmountable research materials and publications

Within the walls of the small, special and departmental libraries –there exist a vast, original and unpublished researches and publications that are kept all over the island which are still not tapped, captured and documented. These would enable the libraries to cooperate in searching, documenting and storing information about all these researches.

The rich fauna and flora, oral cultures and traditions are there to be captured and documented. Researchers from the institutions, especially the higher institutions, government bodies and NGO's have at their own doorsteps golden opportunities to carry out researches and studies. Libraries should take this opportunity to work with research group as well as researchers in universities to do research on the vast topics as such available in the state.

Availability of elders in the villages should be quickly identified and with the assistance of the various Councils for Customs and Traditions of various natives can assist researchers by identifying elders who are well versed in their traditions and cultures.

PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

As smart partnership is not a onetime project, there are a lot that could be done in the future. This future development plan could ensure ongoing collaborations among libraries.

As there are a lot of opportunities to strengthen smart partnership, current collaboration should encompass other areas of knowledge as well as knowledge enhancement such as training and workshops. The initiatives that are already in place should be continued as the benefit is clear to all participating organizations.

Digitization of materials is to proceed and enhanced to increase accessibility so as to ensure efficient and effective knowledge sharing, therefore investment towards advanced ICT equipment and training is a must. As digitization could reduce cost and redundancy, libraries could save millions of dollars if cooperation between agencies in sharing their digital resources are much expected. On top of that, digitization could assist small libraries who could not afford to buy many resources. Therefore if they were given the chance to get a digital copy for their library free of charge, that could be a great help.

Oral culture and traditions are to be quickly captured and documented. Interviews with elders in the village should be done quickly before they are lost forever

To enhance smart collaboration among libraries in Borneo and to develop training program for human capital development in this region they should take the opportunities to inculcate lifelong learning among librarians in pursuit of professionalism as well as the communities in the region.

Issues on Copyright and IP should be addressed in order to protect intellectual ownership and at the same time to enable knowledge sharing.

CONCLUSION

Smart partnership among libraries and information providers in Borneo has been in existence amidst the challenges faced by them. However with the many opportunities out there to be discovered and exploited by all, strategic partnership is the only way to develop and enhance fruitful and effective resource and knowledge sharing.

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