



**African Library and Information Associations and Institutions
(AfLIA)**

**Association Africaine des Bibliothèques et des Institutions
d'Information**

Associação de Bibliotecas e Instituições de Informação

3rd AfLIA Conference & 5th African Library Summit

Title of the paper:

**“Professional development for young librarians matters! An Initiative for
Young African Library Innovators”**

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Abstract

This paper summarizes learning and experience from two years' implementation of the Initiative for Young African Library Innovators (IYALI) – from collaborative implementation and selection of participants, to participative creation and implementation of an agenda that supports interaction and knowledge sharing, which results in new ideas to improve library services for communities. IYALI aims to expose emerging public library innovators aged under 35 from countries in Africa to experiences and ideas from other developing and transitioning countries.

A 2014 study by Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) found that innovation in libraries was most likely to happen when librarians sought to make their libraries responsive to

community needs. The study also found that peer-to-peer learning through library visits, participation in conferences, workshops and trainings were effective strategies for inspiring innovation in libraries¹.

With the results of the 2014 study, and also lessons learned from other projects of the EIFL Public Library innovation Programme, EIFL implemented a leadership programme for young public library innovators to develop their skills and expand their professional horizons and networks. In 2016, EIFL received funding and partnered with two major players in the field – the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) – to design the IYALI programme for young African public librarians.

The IYALI partners developed a three-year plan (2017-2019) for two groups of public librarians to connect with their peers outside of and within Africa, and to explore new ideas and see their own work and achievements from a different perspective.

The IYALI programme includes three elements: a short, face-to-face, and very-intensive international workshop on public library service innovations; library visits in the host country of the workshop; and participation in World Library and Information Congress organized annually by IFLA that brings together around three thousand library and information professionals from different countries. After this two-week programme IYALI participants were invited to compete for scholarships (six each year) to attend the African librarians' conference, organized by AfLIA, and share their experience.

There were two IYALI programmes offered, and a total of 28 young public librarians from 13 African countries participated. From the feedback, we have concluded that IYALI has been an extremely positive experience that surpassed learning expectations of participants and led to transformation of attitudes towards public libraries, the library profession, and themselves as professionals. The programme built confidence of participants to share and implement new ideas and solutions in their libraries.

Introduction

IYALI – the Initiative for Young African Library Innovators – connects early career public library innovators from Africa with their peers in Africa and from other developing and transition economy countries to offer a unique opportunity to expand professional horizons, explore new ideas and reflect on their own work and achievements in a global context. The

¹ Ana María García Femenía, Renata Sadunisvili, Ugne Lipeikaite. EIFL Public Library Innovation Programme: Evaluation of the take-up of PLIP innovation by other libraries. What sparks innovation in the public library sector? URL: http://www.eifl.net/system/files/resources/201506/eifl_take-up_study_may_2015.pdf

initiative was launched in 2017 by a partnership of three international library organizations – Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL, <http://www.eifl.net>), the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). IYALI is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

From 2017 to 2018 two IYALI programmes were organized. In 2017, 13 young African librarians traveled to Lithuania and Poland; in 2018, 15 participated in a programme in Indonesia and Malaysia.

IYALI was designed to focus on experiences and emotional connectedness, not only on content: the IYALI programme invited experimentation, questioning, and reflective learning. Instead of a set curriculum or structure, it offered an environment that was carefully calibrated to meet the unique needs of each group. The goal was to provide a transformative experience in a short intensive period of time. The experience was not about how much knowledge could be acquired; instead the aim was to change mindsets about the role of innovative libraries.

"I would like to thank the EIFL-PLIP team and their partners for thinking about equipping young library professionals. In most cases, it is rare for young librarians, early in their careers, to acquire such an extensive exposure. This has opened my eyes to appreciate the profession far much more than I ever dreamed." - IYALI 2017 participant Bonny Olobo, Adult Library Officer at Kampala Public Library in Uganda.

Selection of the candidates

Key criteria for selection of participants was age (under 35), working experience in public or community library (at least three years), experience in developing innovative library services or outreach, and having a vision for the future development of his/her library, based on community needs.

Overall, 28 young public librarians from 13 African countries (Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe) participated in IYALI. All participants were in the early stages of their careers in public librarianship. Their experience of working in libraries ranged from three to ten years. The majority of participants were employed in specialist positions, such as children librarian, reference librarian, ICT officer; a few were serving as middle or top managers in their public libraries, and a few held more junior positions, such as library assistant. About one third of the young innovators had some previous networking experience beyond African continent; half only had experience within the African continent or had no international networking experience at all. Interestingly, none had any speaking/presenting experience at professional events outside of their own countries.

Components of the IYALI Programme

IYALI programme is built of four main elements:

- 1) a face-to-face, super-intensive multicultural learning workshop on public library service innovation, where, among other interactive things, each library innovator had to share their library's achievements in service innovation and community outreach, and its aspirations and issues;
- 2) library visits and unconference² discussions on topics, jointly selected by African librarians and host librarians;
- 3) participation in the World Library and Information Congress organized by IFLA that annually brings together around three thousand professionals from different countries. In the Congress IYALI participants presented a group poster on New Services and Community Outreach in African Public Libraries³;
- 4) Training workshops on Social Media Communications; Innovation Leadership and Impact.

After each IYALI programme, the participants were invited to compete for six scholarships to attend the library professional conference organized by AfLIA and share their learning and new ideas with the library community in Africa.

What has been achieved by IYALI programme?

Feedback from IYALI participants revealed that international learning experience equipped them with new knowledge, skills and changed mind-sets and motivation. The following paragraphs summarize the main results of the programme, captured through a questionnaire survey and reflection sessions during the workshop, and contributions after the participants returned home. All in all, we witnessed changes in participants' knowledge and attitudes, professional networks, and services in the libraries where they work.

² Unconference is a participant-driven meeting that allows participants to define and structure the agenda and informally exchange ideas and experience.

³ IYALI 2017: New Services and Community Outreach in African Public Libraries. Poster presented at: IFLA WLIC 2017 – Wrocław, Poland – Libraries. Solidarity. Society. in Session 112 - Poster Sessions. Available at: <http://library.ifla.org/2037/1/p-015-petuchovaite-poster-en.jpg>

IYALI 2018: New Services and Community Outreach in African Public Libraries. Poster presented at: IFLA WLIC 2018 – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – Transform Libraries, Transform Societies in Session 153 - Poster Session. Available at: http://library.ifla.org/2408/1/p-120-osuigwe-en_poster.jpg

Specific lessons learnt shared immediately after the two IYALI programmes were published in two blogs published on the EIFL website⁴.

1. Knowledge gained by the participants

The key learning from the IYALI programme, as mentioned by the participants, included gaining ideas on how to encourage library usage through new services, such as makerspaces, storytelling through comics, games for learning, ICT literacy training, and social activities in and outside the library. The participants also highlighted the need to customize services to specific target groups, such as schoolchildren, farmers, unemployed populations, women, local businesses, disabled, etc.

Felicia Kuubepuo of Ghana, and two participants from South Africa, Kettie Tshisikule and Thuletu Mlumbi-Javu, members of the 2017 IYALI group, were keen to start makerspaces: *“I saw the makerspace as an opportunity for kids who would love to be scientists. This is a place where kids can kind of hide themselves and do what they love in the library other than going around in the streets,”* said Thuletu.

Participation in IYALI equipped young professionals with practical methods and tools to attract new target groups to the library, by using creative strategies, new services, and redesigning library spaces.

Many participants pointed out the importance of community engagement, applying different methods to get to know community needs and library being a “third place”, an inviting space that attracts various community groups, and providing services that address their needs.

IYALI 2018 participant Koi Kazungu, Senior Library Assistant at Kenya National Library Service Kwale Community Library in Kenya’s south coast said: *“One thing I will change in my library is reaching out to communities that are excluded.”*

Many young librarians reported learning about leadership in library, team-work and solving different management issues. Participants most frequently mentioned such take-aways as understanding leadership styles and the leader’s role, new approaches to staffing and professional learning, fundraising, advocacy and partnerships with government, businesses and non-profit sector.

“My Library should become a vibrant, innovative, creative institution which is inclusive, accessible and universally designed to engage and meet all the needs of the community...It should basically be the champion of development in my community.” - Letshani Ndlovu, Bulawayo Public Library, Zimbabwe, IYALI 2017.

⁴ African Libraries, get ready for change/ IYALI 2017. Accessible at: www.eifl.net/blogs/african-libraries-get-ready-change ; Riding the wave of change / IYALI 2018. Accessible at: www.eifl.net/blogs/riding-wave-change

2. Professional networking

IYALI also provided an extraordinary opportunity for African public librarians to extend their professional networks through making new or deepening previous connections with each other, and colleagues, who are actively engaged in the key professional library associations – AfLIA and IFLA. Through networking young innovations extend access to the professional knowledge and experience, new ideas and different perspectives on the field’s development that are ‘food’ for innovation.

“IYALI has given me the opportunity to form good networks with librarians from over the world that will help in taking my library and country agendas forward” said Djillali Chatane from Algeria, IYALI 2017.

Networking with each other – most young librarians have never met each other before taking part in the IYALI programme, so they have also built personal relationships and friendship that continues after the meeting and foreshadowing a life-long network of trusted friends and professionals. Participants highly valued an opportunity meet other young professionals from Africa, who share similar visions and dreams, and struggle with similar issues. They appreciated each other’s presentations about library achievements, aspirations and challenges. All together it gave them a broader perspective on the context of public libraries around Africa.

Networking with librarians from the IYALI and IFLA host countries – young professionals met librarians from the host countries during the workshop on the innovative public library services, library visits and unconference discussions, and IFLA conference. From colleagues they learnt new things, such as creative ways of using technology to serve communities, focus on community development, close relationships with local communities, partnerships with local authorities and organizations. Connections established between librarians of different countries during the IYALI programme continue by email and social media. This exchange provided young African librarians with access to ideas, good practices, and approaches to public library development in other developing and transitioning country outside of Africa continent.

Networking with leaders of the profession across the globe – young public librarians described participation at IFLA World Library and Information Congress (WLIC) as life changing professional experience, a “gateway” or “door opener” to a new stage in their careers and work. They felt that by networking with the congress participants, taking part in round table discussions, and hearing and mingling with presenters of conference papers and posters they got ideas, encouragement and confidence to do things differently. All the IYALI participants were impressed and honoured to meet leaders of IFLA and AfLIA, and to take part in discussions on Global Library Vision, a united library field, transformation of libraries, and the need to advocate on all levels. Although not all of these connections may be explored on the same level as with peer librarians, a perspective of a global library field served as a source of inspiration, pride of

belonging to the library profession, and motivation to act and make difference in their local libraries and communities.

“Meeting passionate librarians from other countries has reignited my love for the profession. IYALI has been a career-changing event!” said Shariff Mdanku, from Tanzania, IYALI 2017.

3. Service innovation as a result of IYALI learning experience

Approximately three months after the end of IYALI programmes, EIFL on behalf of the IYALI partners, invited participants to take part in competition for six scholarships to attend the AfLIA annual conference and share their experience with African librarians. The main criteria for qualifying for a scholarship were the introduction of new or improved services in public libraries, and the efforts undertaken by participants to share with colleagues in their library and country, what they have learned. Service innovation and improvement introduced by IYALI participants in a very short time are impressive (see the table below). We grouped them by three broad service areas: technology skills training tailored to needs of different community groups; encouraging creativity and community engagement; and supporting education and learning.

<i>Technology skills for all</i>		
<i>Specialized ICT training program for visually impaired people (Bulawayo Public Library, Zimbabwe)</i>	<i>Training, which blends computer technology, business and entrepreneurship, leadership and good governance and holistic individual growth (Kenya National Library Service, Nakuru branch, Kenya)</i>	<i>Office use, Typing, Internet searching and online communication training for women at social risk (Kuyasa Public Library, South Africa)</i>
<i>Free computer training, introduction to e-paper, tablets and Mobile banking using smartphones for seniors (Kenya National Library Service, Meru branch, Kenya)</i>	<i>Free computer training, introduction to e-paper, tablets and Mobile banking using smartphones for seniors (Kenya National Library Service, Meru branch, Kenya)</i>	<i>Child-Coder program, which provides kids with basic coding, programming and web design skills, using “Scratch” methodology (ICC Public Library, Algeria)</i>
<i>Volunteer teenagers training younger kids on coding basics, enabling them to get certificates from code.org (Misr Public Library, Egypt)</i>	<i>Providing access to students and training to use online West African Examination Council biometric registration system (Greater Accra and four other regional library, Ghana)</i>	<i>Providing access and training to the public on registering for Tax Payer Identification Numbers (TPIN) online and opening emails for civil servants to access pay slips (Choma Provincial Library, Zambia)</i>

<i>Creativity and Engagement</i>		
<i>Space for developing youth talents and preventing them from early child pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, through acting & performing educative music, dance and drama (Nambi Sseppuuya Community Resource Centre, Uganda)</i>	<i>Maker space for children and youth to spark their interest, encourage creativity through x-box machines, bead making, workshops with clay, craft making, building Legos (Bellville Public Library, South Africa)</i>	<i>“Discussion bay”, a special space for community forums to discuss local issues (Choma Provincial Library, Zambia)</i>
<i>Library Outreach program, aimed at sensitising school pupils and the community at large on violence and other related issues that affect peace and conflict resolution (Sierra Leone Library Board, Sierra Leone).</i>	<i>Introducing social media dynamic messages (text with image, short animated videos, text alone) to promote library services and engage new users (Greater Accra regional library, Ghana)</i>	<i>Through media energise community to donate books to the library (Ndola city council library, Zambia)</i>
<i>Education and learning</i>		
<i>Interactive reading promotion program, which uses word search, quizzes, spelling games and other techniques to improve children reading skills and proficiency in basic and senior high schools (Ghana Library Authority, Sunyani branch, Ghana).</i>	<i>A location based game for developing English language skills, pronunciation and grammar (Misr Public Library, Egypt)</i>	<i>Organizing comics story telling session for schoolchildren at the annual events for International Literacy day (Greater Accra regional library, Ghana)</i>

Twelve best cases of service innovations by IYALI participants were presented to the broader African library community – six at 3rd African Public Libraries Summit in 2018 (Durban, South Africa) and another six at the 3rd AfLIA Conference & 5th African Library Summit, 2019 (Nairobi, Kenya).

The secret of IYALI success

As we assessed results of three-year IYALI experience, we want to outline three principles that, we think, are key to the programme's results and impact, and that could be replicated in other professional venues to turn leadership programmes into a transformative learning experience for participants.

1. Interactive, engaging and fun

All IYALI young library professionals had a vast experience of community outreach and service innovation. On one hand, they were eager to share, participate and contribute, on the other hand, lacked confidence due to no or very little experience of speaking in the international professional meetings. The IYALI programme created an informal, collaborative and non-threatening environment that encouraged open conversations, free discussions, and reflections.

Here is how we did it:

- The agenda included time for fun get to know each other session, participants-led energizers, creative and interactive exercises, reflections, round table discussions that facilitate sharing and engage everyone on equal basis, including young innovators, guest speakers, host librarians, partner representatives.
- Prior to the face-to-face meeting we communicated an expectation that everyone would take responsibility for their own learning, we clearly expressed that everyone had to contribute by sharing their experiences, and react to contributions by others, ask questions, complement, discuss, debate and share their reflections on key learning and insights.
- We connected participants in the Facebook group and encouraged discussions on their experience and learning expectations a few months before the face-to face-meeting.

Warm and informal atmosphere, interaction on social media, enabled participants connect emotionally and build collaborative relationships from the first moment of the face-to-face meeting. This approach helped everyone to deal with stress of unknown environment, confidence issues regarding presenting, and fear of being criticized. Participants felt pretty safe to consider new ideas, concepts, and approaches, and question their established perceptions and traditional library practices. Moreover, dynamic sessions and contributions, followed by discussions, or practical and fun activities helped participants' to keep attention and focus on learning each day, throughout intensive two-week programme period.

2. Practical and hands-on learning

One of IYALI objectives was to equip participants with innovative ideas, new approaches, and inspiring good practices, potentially replicable in their libraries. The list of innovative services started by IYALI participants above is evidence that we have achieved this

In the programme we discarded theoretical, academic type papers, formal speeches and other traditional conference formats. Here what we used instead:

- **Short presentations on achievement, aspiration or challenge** – a super short, up to five minutes, four slides presentations, illustrated with photos to share one selected achievement in serving community, one aspiration or challenge of the public library. To encourage discussion and reflection, after five presentations we planned five-minute session for question and answers. Participants had printed hand-outs with a space for comments and notes that they were able to follow up with their peers during breaks or free times.
- **Interactive presentations on innovative service or good practice** – total 30 minutes session that includes up to 15 minute presentation about public library's successful service, programme or good practice, using visuals, such as photos, videos, evidence of results, and 15 minutes for Q&A and discussion in a small group. The latter allowed participants clarify things, discuss, share thoughts on links to their experience and conditions. Basically, the presentation consisted introduction to public library and its context/community and description of the successful service (what, why, how and to what end)⁵.
- **Hands-on workshops on technology based service or programme** – total 60 minute session, consisting of a short introduction of the service (where, what, why, how and to what ends); hands on demonstration of technology, tools, methodology (for example, practical exercises) used in the programme; and fifteen minutes for Q&A and discussion in a small group.
- **Library visits and unconference discussions** – two to four hour meetings that include an informal greet-and-meet session, guided walking tour (or unguided wandering) around the library, and unconference discussions. During one library visit, depending on the time available and number of participants, librarians shared their experience on 4 to 8 practical and real-life issues relevant to public libraries across the borders. As for the process, in short, in each library unconference started with building an agenda on the spot, where everyone (host library staff and visitors) could suggest professional topics, ideas, issues they are interested to discuss. Then, topics are explained, if possible aggregated, participants select the ones that are most relevant put into time grid, and split into small

⁵ Interactive sessions and hands-on workshops are organized in two or three parallel sessions with a space for 6-9 participants to sign in. This allow to provide a bigger choice of innovative services and programmes during a short time meeting. Also, presentations in smaller groups are less formal, allow in-depth conversation and engage everyone personally in learning experience.

groups to talk about it, following the simple rules of an unconference. Each group selects moderator, time-keeper, note taker.

3. Collaborative development of agenda

Transformative learning in IYALI has happened because we managed to build agendas that addressed participants' interests and learning expectations, provided relatable examples, but also offered new experiences and knowledge that challenged established assumptions and traditional practices.

Introducing new professional communication formats into IYALI programme, we spent a lot of time on curating the content to achieve goals of the meetings – developed guidelines to contributors on each format, held conversations during preparations, reviewed outlines and draft presentations.

We applied a collaborative approach to planning IYALI agenda, engaging young library innovators, and other participants in developing agenda through:

- Doing skype interviews with shortlisted candidates on their learning expectations, professional experience and interest.
- Encouraging discussions on IYALI Facebook group on successful library services, achievements and issues.
- Meeting with library experts and visiting libraries in the country to understand the scene of public library innovations and good practices, and to identify forward thinking and open to new experiences libraries to visits.
- Surveying young library innovators on which thematic areas of public library innovations and good practices they are most interested in (for example, engaging communities, using technologies, addressing needs of different user groups, developing partnerships, management and leadership in libraries, etc.)
- Having conversations with leaders and professionals of innovative and creative public libraries from the host country and other developing countries to select most relevant cases that meet stated learning expectations, but also challenge them, encouraging 'out of the box' thinking about library development and profession.
- Consulting with colleagues from IFLA, AfLIA and other partners on relevant sessions and special learning activities for IYALI group during IFLA conference and World Library and Information Congress.

Participatory process of agenda development and thorough curation of content and formats of contributions paid off, IYALI has not just met, but surpassed learning expectations of the participants and ours, and yielded highly positive feedback of librarians in host countries.

Conceptually, IYALI as professional development programme is best described by a series of key words (or rather action verbs): apply, share, learn, network, discuss, reflect, put into practice, assess, and communicate.

Conclusions and Recommendations

IYALI served as a mobile incubation lab that organically built on the strengths of different library communities and facilitates peer learning. This is an immersion approach to learning, IYALI participants are plunged into library communities with different languages and cultures, and encouraged to analyze and reflect on their observations. For participants, it was an intense experience, challenging, exhausting, outside of one's comfort zone.

“Now we must change ourselves so that we can change our library services for the community we serve.” said Allan Hagwelele Mudenda, IYALI 2017.

Assessment of results, indicates that overall, it was an extremely positive and fun learning experience. We believe that a warm atmosphere emotional charge of the experience contributed to extraordinary learning outcomes and motivation leading to changes. Participatory process of agenda development, curation of the content and formats of contributions, engagement of international and local partners helped to select relevant cases of innovative services, design an effective mix of learning activities, and experience the most innovative libraries that met and surpassed learning expectations of the IYALI participants.

Evidence shows that in a short time, IYALI participants gained practical knowledge to address needs of particular user groups in communities and ideas to solve issues relevant to their libraries, identified during initial interviews; got insights on library management and leadership; broadened understanding of changing public library concept and the practices of advocacy and building new partnerships for innovative services; significantly extended their professional networks by making new connections with professionals from Africa and other continents; gained an extensive experience to develop and practice public and intercultural communication skills.

While the lessons learned in each country and by each participant might be different, the impact of innovative and responsive libraries addressing the needs of community members led to quite quick adoption of innovative services and development of new programmes by IYALI group. It is our belief that this successful programme could be replicated at a national or regional level.

Zambian librarian from IYALI 2017 Allan Hagwelele Mudenda summed up the mood after the IYALI experience: *“African libraries, get ready for change!”* he said.

Presenter's profile:

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