

Diamond mine & libraries in partnership for access to knowledge in Botswana

By Jacob Sekgoni

A democracy characterized by peace, consultations, cooperation and collaboration has become synonymous with Botswana culture. The expression “sharing is caring” is a way of life. This article gladly shares what the Botswana citizens proudly can refer to as the BW- shared responsibility culture. The mining industry rightly recognized school libraries as the most needed entity to support government endeavors towards inclusive education for all.

The Botswana government values the formal basic education system as not only an academic learning foundation but as a formation place for an all-rounded citizen that is able to live harmoniously with others. This is a place where networking, social capital and cultural identities are born. Therefore, basic education in Botswana is freely offered through the Ministry of Education Skills & Development. Efforts to provide basic classrooms, qualified teachers and while also ensuring that learners get a balanced diet in all schools has inadvertently relegated building of school libraries to the very bottom of the government priority list. It is a common cultural practice in Botswana for “friend of a friend to be my friend”. Or rather where it “takes a whole village to raise up a child” The diamond mine, the university and national library services did exactly that.

FRIEND 1: The Lucara Botswana Diamond Mine

Botswana's economy thrives primarily on diamond mining. A democratic arrangement has been set where a large portion of the mining proceeds are a public good that is put back into the economy for the nation's well-being.

The Lucara Botswana Diamond Mine has set aside some funds towards the improvement of school library facilities; procurement of ICT material; books and training on the needed skills for the schools in the Boteti region (the mining area) to be part of the global knowledge economy. This was upon recognition of the need to augment the government's efforts towards access to education for all and upholding the principle of the right to knowledge as a democratic right.

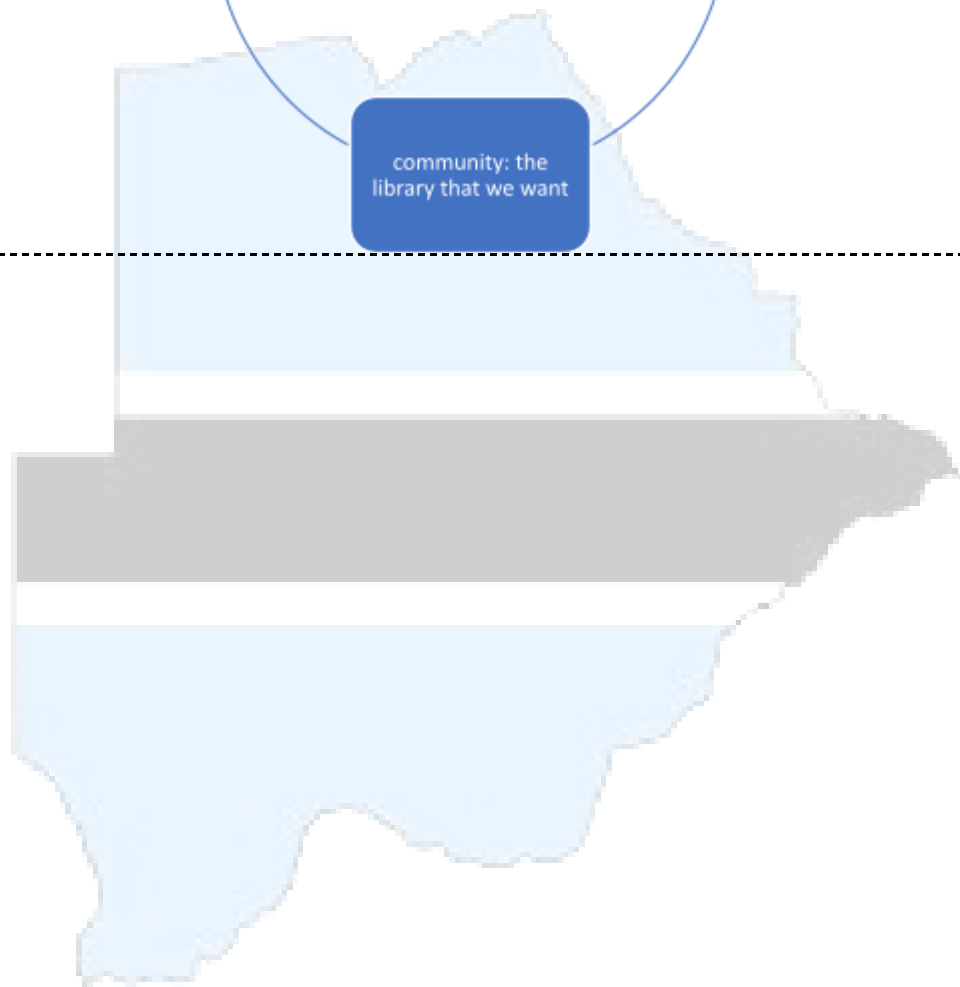
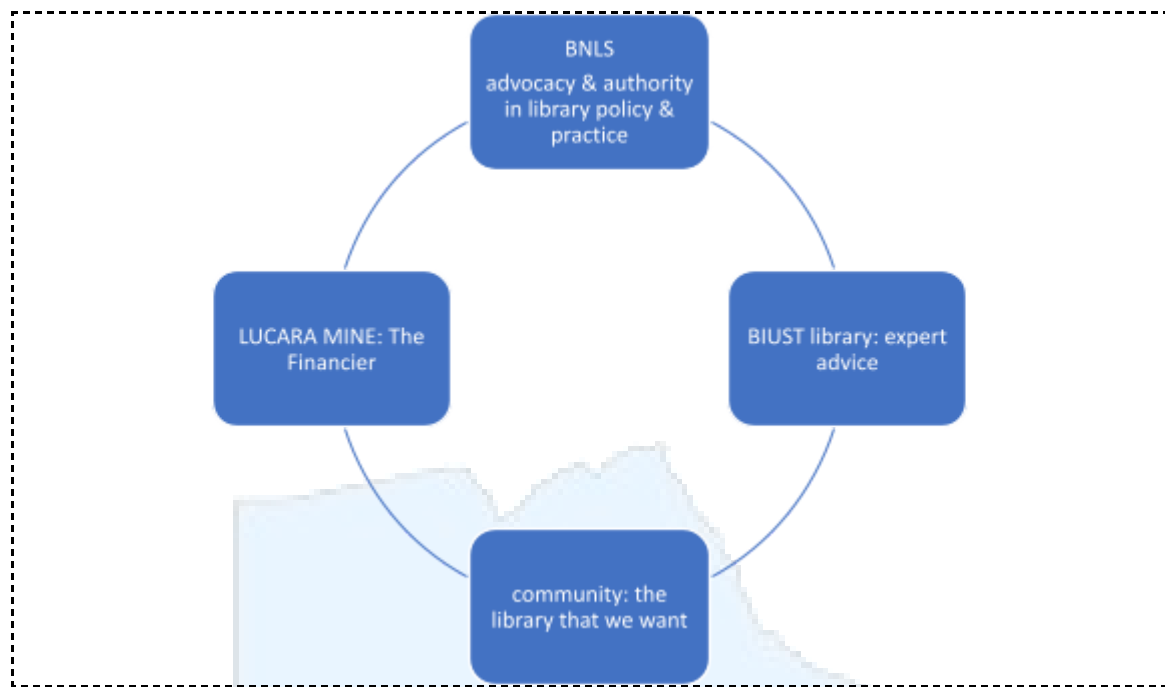
FRIEND 2: The Botswana International University of Science & Technology (BIUST)

The mine has partnered with BIUST for an informed recommendation on school library needs in the broad mining area. A data collection phase is ongoing and the BIUST library team is leading other researchers on this. It has become a beautiful play date for the academic librarians who have put aside the robes to interact with miners; community leaders; schoolteachers and learners. The Revised IFLA School Libraries Guidelines (2015) has become such a go to tool. The key questions revolve around, what type of libraries the schools need, how they want the collections and services; who will use the libraries; who will ensure sustainability of such services and the desired impact as perceived by the targeted schools. It is needful to note that the region has about 25 primary schools: 6 junior secondary schools and a senior secondary school. The primary schools have no purpose built library structure while the secondary schools have very dilapidated structures and old collections that are no longer attractive.

FRIEND: The Botswana National Library Services (BNLS)

While the targeted schools are supported through the Ministry of Education, Skills & Development, the national library system operates through the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Sports & Culture. The BNLS has a national mandate to provide public access to information & knowledge through the needed services for education, research & recreation. The entire collaboration centers around this BNLS mandate, hence the national library services had to be part of the collaboration. In his closing remarks on the day the project was launched to the community, the Director of the National Library Services said : Let's Library-Let's Work Together

The different roles in these three multi-sectoral collaborations towards the provision of impactful school library services can be simplified in this concluding pictogram. Enjoy this little export of Botswana's rich culture of shared roles towards a knowledge economy.



BOTSWANA