

## **FUTURE PUBLIC LIBRARIES TODAY**

Botswana public libraries aim to improve lives of others by providing free Internet and computer access for all

*Sesigo project avails a platform where all can access ICT services at public libraries, at no-cost.*

African Comprehensive HIV/AIDS Partnerships (ACHAP), together with the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Culture (MYSC) through the Botswana National Library Service (BNLS), is launching an ambitious program to transform Botswana's public libraries and bring their services in line with the information age. This program, called Sesigo, aims to bring about fundamental changes in the service offering and technology endowment of libraries and is supported by funding from the Government of Botswana and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Botswana Government has committed US \$6.5 million (P45.5 m) to Sesigo for library building maintenance and upgrades, recurrent Internet charges as well as in-kind contribution. The foundation has awarded Sesigo a US \$4.75 million (P33.25 m) grant to provide free access to computers and the Internet in Botswana's public libraries, and to train library staff and communities on how to use the new technology. Microsoft Corp. is donating software valued at more than US \$1 million (P10.37 million) to the project to equip all library computers and servers.

The project is truly national in coverage, and it is projected to cover 78 of the 98 public libraries, from the traditional branch libraries in towns and major villages, through the median community libraries and the smallest village reading rooms. The four-year project focuses on deploying technology and integrating it into the normal service offering of Botswana National Library Service. The final two years will be focused on transitioning the new service from a project to a permanent public library service, with a minimum of 70,000 members of the public trained in the use of computers and the Internet at libraries.

The training offered to library staff will enable them to generate new library services; make libraries the number one information access point for the Botswana public and transform libraries into community resources centres that increasingly reflect the cultural life of the people. By constantly monitoring and evaluating the services offered, public libraries will offer services informed by the needs of the users.



In addition to the financial support by the key partners mentioned above, the project will:

1. Build partnerships to ensure effective implementation and long-term sustainability.
  2. Will co-share services and facilities, with other Botswana Government Ministries and Departments including the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, which will be involved with e-learning initiatives.
  3. Integrate the project into the global e-government process through the Ministry of Communications Science and Technology.
  4. Will provide content and specialist knowledge to improve distance education services and librarianship training in collaboration with a number of tertiary training institutions such as Botswana College of Distance Learning and the University Of Botswana.
  5. Through the professional association of librarians in Botswana--the Botswana Library Association the project will help improve the library profession.
  6. Sesigo will also explore the role that private industry could contribute to the project.
- The Gates foundation's Global Libraries initiative is working to open the world of knowledge, information, and opportunity to many more people. Part of the Global Development Program, Global Libraries works with select countries that demonstrate a need and a readiness to help public libraries provide free access to computers and the Internet, and training on how to make full use of these tools. Microsoft is a partner of Global Libraries and donates software to partners who request it. The initiative is working to transform public libraries into vital resources that can help improve the lives of millions of people.

**In summary the project will achieve the following:**

Four year implementation: 2009 2013.

Equip 78 public libraries signifying infrastructural readiness.

Implement Program activities: comprehensive ICT training program, technological support (hardware, software, help-desk), capacity building of librarians, advocacy and outreach activities, impact assessment and evaluation activities.

Train a minimum of 70,000 on use of computers and the Internet.

Deliver 530 computers to the 78 public libraries.

Train all public library staff.

Build capacity of the library system in cooperation with the key players in the library field: Botswana National Library Services, Botswana Library Association and Department of Library and Information Studies.

**For more information please contact:**

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