

A long tail of the co-operation between Namibian and Finnish libraries

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Finland and Namibia share a long history of partnership and development co-operation originating from the early missionary work of the Finnish Lutheran church in Namibia in the 1870s. Mr Martti Ahtisaari played a significant role during the struggle for independence for Namibia, first as a UN Commissioner for Namibia and later a UN Special Representative. Later on, Namibia was a development cooperation partner with the Finnish Government, and even when the direct government support ceased in the 2000s, many non-governmental organizations have continued to collaborate with Namibian partners.

The cooperation within the library sector has roots back to decades as well. The Finnish Library Association sponsored the studies of two Namibian students at the University of Tampere in the late 1980s, which laid a foundation for a long-term and keen cooperation. One of the students, Ms Ellen Namhila has played a prominent role in the Namibian library community, and she has paved way for various cooperation projects and contacts with her Finnish counterparts.

Ms Päivikki Karhula and Ms Tuula Haavis-to compiled a study of Namibian libraries in 2002, and Ms Ritva Niskala, has worked at

the Namibian Ministry of Education for several years developing and implementing library strategies. HelMet libraries have participated in establishing and developing Greenwell Matongo Community Library at the suburb of Windhoek in the framework of a project administered by the Association of Finnish Regional and Local Authorities.

The Libraries for Development Project, funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and administered by the Finnish Library Association, was started in 2012. It will take the experiences of Greenwell Matongo elsewhere to the country and even up to Tanzania. The University of Oulu and Åbo Akademi University, as well as Turku University of Applied Sciences have been cooperating with the University of Namibia in staff and student exchange in the framework of The North South South LIS Network Project as from 2005.

Now, the long history continues in a form of a project aiming at staff development in a close cooperation between Namibian, Helsinki and Tampere university libraries. A long tail of development cooperation in different sectors is reflected in an increasing trust and smoother co-operation. 