Quotations answering the question "Have we become stronger together?"

Inga Lundén, former chair, Swedish Library Association and signer of the Letter of Intent:

Agenda 2030 defines the most important issues for a whole world. Topics for the libraries about the access to information and knowledge can be found there. To realize the goals in that agenda it is not enough to rely on the great global organizations, bilateral cooperation is crucial. That organizations with possibilities invent financing and reach out a hand to sister organizations in other countries in order to facilitate for them to generate a sustainable knowledge development for the multitude.

Here the initiative from The Swedish Library Association to a cooperation with Kenya Library Association (KLA) is important and inspiring. I has been pointed out by IFLA in the ongoing work with Building Strong Library Associations (BSLA) as well as by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in their engagement in Global Libraries and networking in different parts of the world within INELI.

"Stronger Together" means just that; to side by side with another library association in a country with different conditions and prerequisites discern exactly what is common, learn from each other and put in support where the needs are greatest.

That KLA today is proposed for an official acknowledgement in conformity with the Kenyan Bar Association is a considerable step up from an association 2010 with few members, weak member anchorage without a proper office and without possibilities for a membership in the global organization IFLA. The first requirement was a manned office, of which The Swedish Library Association has provided capital for construction and operation together with Kenya National Library Services (KNLS). Equally important has been the creation of confidence and structure.

The mutual agreement between The Swedish Library Association and Kenya Library Association was signed 2012. Since then many meetings between the Kenyan and the Swedish boards have taken place as well as between many members. Openess, transparency, responsibility and member democracy have been and are issues in focus for both our associations. Other such topics are regional development and school library matters.

To sum up:
Stronger Together means that The Swedish Library Association and Kenya Library Association together have worked with the global development goals of FN in view in order to strengthen the libraries and broaden the access of information and knowledge through stronger member driven organisations in respective country.
The issues are often the same globally but the answers differ originating from varying conditions and circumstances. This sharpens questions and issues and widens the perspectives.

Stefan Engström, Head of Communications, Swedish Library Association during the main part of the project time:
The cooperation with Kenya is a unique exchange of experiences of building independent organisations carried by the members – both associations mobilise to strengthen the profession as well as the institutions. My own experience of all international library cooperation is that irrespective of were in the world we act the task is the same – to
strengthen the freedom of expression as a corner-stone for democracy. Both Kenya and Sweden share the mission to defend these freedoms even if the economical and political challenges are much bigger in Kenya. During the cooperation I have myself been reminded of that we never can take the democratic task given to the libraries for granted, especially in the challenging times we live through in Sweden as well.

Katarina Möller, Librarian, Örebro, holder of a scholarship and lecturer in Kakamega 2013:

Yes I feel that we get stronger together. I like the cooperation between the associations and that we in Sweden can learn something from the library system in Kenya too. And Swedish Library Association becomes stronger also by having this close contact with KLA. I think it must strengthen SLA to invite representatives from KLA to courses and library days in Sweden and get an international perspective of the library field. Presumably it becomes more concrete than other kinds of the IFLA work ever can be.

Annsofie Olsson, Librarian, Malmö University, holder of a scholarship and lecturer in Meru 2015, future project manager:

I find it extremely rewarding to see how libraries function in different countries and how colleagues are working. Also to get an insight in which challenges and possibilities our profession gives. Through the visitors from Kenya it is interesting to hear that we have similar experiences and challenges despite the fact that we come from totally different continents with varying conditions. We were able to have really exiting and interesting discussions about the library role in the university. The foundation is laid for a wider cooperation which I feel we have only started to sniff at so the answer to the question if we get stronger together is evidently a big YES!

Craig McDonald, Librarian, Homsund Library, Umeå, holder of a scholarship and lecturer in Eldoret 2014:

Our exchange with Kenya’s Library Association has been a very enjoyable and exciting, learning experience. Seeing the differences as well as the similarities in library institutions between our two countries and cultures was very intriguing.

Traveling around Kenya and being given the opportunity to visit a number of different libraries, from small school libraries in both public and private schools, to a large national branch library was especially interesting. The warm reception and hospitality we received at all our stops was wonderful. The variation among these libraries was quite considerable and clearly illustrated the gap between rich and poor in Kenyan society. This gave me cause to reflect upon how much we take for granted in our own wealthy country where everyone has access to both public and academic libraries and all the information, knowledge and culture therein. It also made me reflect upon the vital role public libraries play in a democratic society. Meeting so many dedicated and committed individuals who are working so diligently
to raise and strengthen their countries libraries and library association was therefore truly inspiring.

During our short stay in Kenya and particularly while attending the annual KLA conference it became increasingly clear that the importance of academic libraries and higher education are prioritized in the country. That this should be the primary focus is a matter of course for a developing country like Kenya. We felt however somewhat distinct when we presented before the conference on some of the methods we practice for promoting reading for enjoyment among children and young people at our own public library in Umeå. Working with developing a reading culture for young people through school and public libraries and the intellectual, emotional and cultural importance of reading fiction is something that I hope Kenya’s library professionals can focus more on in the future given the opportunity and resources.

Meeting associates from different countries and cultures, exchanging experiences, inspiring each other, learning from one another and building contact networks is always a rewarding experience. Projects like this are in my opinion exceedingly important in building bridges between different parts of the world and should not be underrated. We are always stronger together!

Overall, our contact with Kenya’s Library Association has been a rewarding and memorable experience and I am thankful that I was given the opportunity to participate and represent Holmsund public library.