

Report to the IRRT Board: Axumite Heritage Foundation Chromebook Lab, Mission Enhancement Grant

By Janet Lee, Dean of the Library, Regis University, Denver, CO; Fulbright Scholar 2017-2018, University of Aksum

Program Overview:

The Chromebook Lab project at the Axumite Heritage Foundation Library in Axum, Ethiopia was the first recipient of the American Library Association's International Relations Roundtable (IRRT) Mission Enhancement Grant, an award of \$1,000. Janet Lee, Dean of the Library at Regis University in Denver, and a Fulbright Scholar assigned to Axum, Ethiopia, coordinated the efforts of the lab and the grant. The grant helped support the establishment of a lab that was comprised of 30 Chromebooks and a portable plug-and-play RACHEL (Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning) server loaded with the entire Ethiopian secondary school curriculum, plasma videos that accompany the curriculum, and content from other providers such as the Kahn Academy, Hesperian Health Guides, African Storybook, and a range of open-access textbooks.

The Axumite Heritage Foundation Library and the Chromebook Lab have opened doors for the students in the small town of Axum, known for its thriving tourist industry and the recently built Aksum University. The Foundation Library serves in many ways as an extension of the University, providing a welcoming facility that has stable internet, modern technology, and a large collection of print resources. The addition of the Chromebook lab expands services to include the Ministry of Education core curriculum and its related plasma videos, thousands of open access textbooks, health resources, and teaching tools such as the Kahn Academy.

The Foundation Library is located across from the main tourist bureau on the direct route to the historic sites for which Axum is famous. It has the full blessing of the mayor's office, city elders, the university, and the regional development association, all of whom have been supportive of its development since its original opening in 2002. It serves as a model of community development for all regions of Ethiopia.

In an effort to ensure the sustainability of the Foundation Library, the Foundation has built a large café, a commercial building that will house the Ethiopian Airlines office; and a full range of craft shops that will serve the tourist trade, thus reducing the future need for outside funding.

Evaluation of the Project:

Janet reported that immediately upon the opening of the lab, the lab was filled to capacity all hours of the day. Not unexpectedly, the Ethiopian curriculum was used heavily by students from the local schools, grades nine through twelve.

Month	Visits	Pages
May 2018	1,228	36,829
June 2018	1,201	29,715

July 2018	1,042	23,470
August 2018	1,035	23,779
September 2018	581	10,288
October 2018	787	18,346
November 2018	1472	42,602

Please note: National Exams are given in May and June and classes resume in late September and October.

In addition to the Ethiopian curriculum, the Interactive World Map, Boundless Books (open-access textbooks), and Fantastic Phonics were popular. Students found the Chromebooks easy to navigate and the information helpful to their studies.

The Chromebook Lab, itself, has received an average of 1,000 visits per month, and an average of 24,000 pages have been viewed per month since its instillation. Since few schools have libraries in the region, it has served as both an educational resource and a community gathering place. Students must pass a national exam at the end of the 8th, 10th, and 12th grades to proceed to the next level of education.

Comments from current and former students indicate that the resources at the library have been life changing. Kflay Assefa “This library lead me to be engineer today”. Tikabo Mekonne “Heritage foundation was my little avenue year back”. Hafton Kebede “It is priceless and very valuable contribution to the world of library”. “I appreciate this brave man (Dr. Tsehaye Teferra) for his relentless work to make this happen. He love his country and his born place. What a courageous man. We salute you for the big gift you made to Axum community.”

The opening of the Chromebook Lab occurred at the same time as the move from the existing library to the new building, thus there were many successes and many challenges. The building was beautiful and an inspiration. It was spacious and very open. The made every attempt to keep the open feeling by placing book stacks around the perimeter in the great reading room, using carrels and shelving as natural dividers. This was specifically the case of the Chromebook lab. This allowed the Chromebook Lab to occupy a large corner of the great reading room. The expansive windows allowed much natural light. It also was not unusual to have a troop of monkeys peer into the windows as the students were studying. From the day of the opening, the great reading room was filled to capacity and students lined up outdoors for an empty seat. Insufficient staffing did not allow the library to open up other areas (Ethiopia Room, Children’s Library) until later in the year. The students thrived in this new open environment.

Challenges with the project included the general lack of training and education of staff, inadequate power, unstable internet, lack of availability of resources, and inferior supplies and electronics. Although laptop locks were available and purchased in Addis Ababa, the capital, the locks did not work well. Other electronic supplies needed to be purchased in Shire, a town an hour away from Axum. Only one business center in town could make color prints, which meant a 30-minute walk to get color print copies. Another business center that could print black and white was closer. Despite these challenges, the library and the Chromebook Lab opened to an enthusiastic group of students, who used the library

extensively. The new building also allowed a great expansion of services, including serving children under the age of 13, who perhaps could benefit most from the services in the long run.

Accounting of how funds were spent:

The funds supplemented the lab through the purchase of a UPS, power strips, headphones and laptop locks. In addition the grant also partially subsidized the travel of a trainer, Ashenafi Kebede, from ETLearns, a non-profit organization that has established 11 such labs in government schools in southern Ethiopia. Ashenafi spent several days training the librarians on the operation of the Chromebooks and the Rachel server. The Foundation Library was the first community library that has set up and run a Chromebook lab, and all indications conclude that it has been a great success in its first six months of operation.

DATE (EC=Ethiopian Calendar	ET (Ethiopian Birr) 27 ETB to 1 USD	US Dollar	Detail
26/6/2010 (EC)	100	\$3.70	Printing
NA	471	\$17.44	Supplies
24/03/2018	10,899	\$403.66	Electronics
27/09/2010 (EC)	1,040	\$38.51	Supplies
NA	10,000	\$370.00	Electronics
25/09/2010 (EC)	3,600	\$133.00	Headphones
24/01/2018	13,499	\$499.96	Laptop locks
SubTotal*	39,609	\$1466.27	Total
Less grant		\$1,000	
Out of pocket		\$ 466.27	

Does not include trainer's lodging & food. The Chromebooks and the server were purchased and donated by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Janet Lee and Bill Graff. Graff is the founder of a nonprofit called ETLearns.

Background

The Axumite Heritage Foundation is a subsidiary of the Ethiopian Community Development Council (<http://www.ecdcus.org/>). The Council established the Foundation in 1993 in order to restore the 'Inda Nebri'id, the former Governor's Palace in Axum, and turn it into a cultural center and library to promote the unique heritage of Axum. The 'Inda Nebri'id opened its doors as a public library in 2002. Use of the library exceeded the limits of the existing building, and a new library building was needed. After several years of construction, the new building was opened in May 2018 in the same compound as the former library. In addition to the Chromebook Lab, it includes a children's library, auditorium, large reading room, a computer lab, an Ethiopian collection, several classrooms, an exhibit hall and several meeting rooms.

The Foundation is planning on installing a lab in a school in nearby Dimbaza, where the Foundation is building a school. The site is without electricity, which will present some challenges, but a solar solution is being investigated.

IRRT Mission Enhancement Grant

In 2016, the International Relations Round Table members and supporters established the IRRT Endowment. Interest from the Endowment is used to fund member-initiated proposals for international activities and initiatives which contribute to ALA's role in international librarianship. Goals for the funding are to provide support for international projects or partnerships; promote a global dialogue about librarianship; increase visibility of international opportunities for U.S. and international librarians, and encourage international collaboration in librarianship. The IRRT Executive Board approved the establishment of the IRRT Mission Enhancement Grant as a mechanism for distribution of endowment funding in 2017. Information about the grant may be found at <http://www.ala.org/rt/irrt-mission-enhancement-grant>.