

The Quest for Sustainability in International Library Development: The Experience of the Riecken Foundation

John Boyd (boydjd@appstate.edu)
Appalachian State University

Elizabeth Cramer (crameree@appstate.edu)
Appalachian State University

Abstract

The Riecken Foundation provides support to communities in developing countries to create sustainable partnership library programs focusing on collection development, technology applications, and assembling professional staff and volunteers. This article studies the experience of the Foundation through research gathered in interviews with Bill Cartwright, President and CEO of the Foundation, along with on-site observations at six participating libraries, and offers analysis of documentation related to these sustainability initiatives. The study also examines the transition of the Foundation from a private foundation to a public charity and the effect this has had in its programming.

Introduction

The Riecken Foundation works in Honduras and Guatemala to support community-run lending libraries equipped with open stacks and access to computers. Riecken has always functioned as a non-profit agency but has undergone a series of changes in its funding model—changes that make for interesting discussion about the concept of sustainability. Founded in 2000, Riecken began as a private foundation with funding provided by its founder, the philanthropist Allen Andersson. From the very beginning, the foundation built libraries with the understanding that municipalities or local governments would contribute financially to cover the cost of librarian salaries and help the libraries achieve self-sustainability. But in reality, Andersson was very generous in covering many of the costs for the libraries. In 2006, the Riecken Foundation began to enforce the self-sustainability model for all of the libraries. Existing libraries were informed that they would be required to start paying librarian salaries and utility bills and this became the standard model for all new Riecken libraries.

In 2008—after Andersson's investment firm, Paperboy Ventures, suffered a serious setback with the loss of more than 300 million dollars—all

training, book purchases, building repairs, computer upgrades, and network repairs came to an abrupt halt.¹ After this period, known as "the crisis" by Riecken staff and libraries, the Foundation was forced to seek out new sources of funding such as multilateral development funding, social media, support from Board members, and grants from U.S. philanthropy. In 2012, as a result of this new funding structure, Riecken changed its status from a private foundation to a public charity.

Riecken's goal is to create sustainable libraries—libraries created with development aid but eventually managed and supported by the recipient partner. The standard definition of sustainability is development aid that leads to self-sufficiency for the partner organization and can be defined by two factors: (1) the ability of the partner organization to continue producing beneficial outcomes for the intended community, and (2) the ability of the partner organization to rely on local resources to produce these benefits.² Though sustainable development leads to self-sufficiency for the partner organization in theory, in reality developing countries often experience economic, social, and political factors that negatively affect their ability to fulfill the perceived needs independently. Many development projects decline or cease after funding resources

have withdrawn aid.³ In order to thrive, it is often necessary for the donor and recipient partners to continue working together and to identify additional sources for funding.

The authors studied the transition of Riecken from fully funded private foundation to public charity and examined the corresponding need for alternative funding sources and increased sustainability. We looked at the above definition of sustainability to answer the following research questions:

1. What are some of the funding options for an international library development program as a public charity?
2. What is the acceptable level of service for a development program to be deemed sustainable? Should the development project be expected simply to survive or to thrive in its ability to produce beneficial outcomes?
3. How can municipal and national government support of libraries be cultivated and developed?
4. What is the ongoing role of the donor partner? If a donor partner remains active in the ongoing operations of a development project, can the project be deemed sustainable?

Methodology

In this qualitative study, over the months of November, 2012 through February, 2013, we interviewed the President and CEO of the Riecken Foundation, Bill Cartwright, on matters relating to sustainability. We chose to interview Cartwright due to his seven years of employment with the Riecken Foundation and his knowledge of the changes in Riecken's funding structure and support of libraries. In addition to the interviews, we employed two other qualitative research methods: observation and analysis of documentation. Prior to our interview with Cartwright, we visited six Riecken libraries during the months of November and December of 2011. In our observations of the libraries and discussions with library staff and community volunteers, we focused our study on three areas related to the creation of sustainable libraries: library collections and technology; community

and municipal support; and the roles of the Riecken Foundation staff, library staff, and community volunteers. One group with whom we did not speak were government officials, an omission only realized in hindsight.

We also examined documents obtained from the Riecken website, from the Riecken staff, and from partnering municipalities. In the documentation we looked for information to give further insight into the interview data and observations. Reading relevant documents also offered opportunities to triangulate our interview data and observations.

Background for Guatemala and Honduras

In 1996, Guatemala ended a 36-year civil war. Since then, Guatemala has seen economic growth and successful democratic elections. Economic inequality remains a major problem, particularly among the indigenous peoples, who make up half the population. Guatemala is the largest economy in Central America and experienced an annual economic growth rate of over four percent between 2004 and 2007, but by 2009 the growth rate had fallen below one percent.⁴ A series of natural disasters in 2010 and 2011 further hurt the Guatemalan economy. Guatemala has also seen a dramatic increase in the level of drug-related crime. The Human Development Index ranks Guatemala 131st out of 181 countries with only Haiti ranked lower in Latin America.⁵ Despite the problems of inequality and poverty, particularly in rural areas, the World Bank believes that Guatemala "has huge potential for accelerating economic growth through trade, regional integration and tourism. The main challenges for the government include fostering inclusive growth, addressing social inequalities and ensuring revenues to finance public spending on education, health and infrastructure, among others."⁶

Honduras saw the return of civilian government in the 1980s after years of military rule. But high levels of inequality, poverty, and corruption, as well as a dramatic increase in drug-related violence in the last ten years, have hampered its progress. Since being devastated by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, Honduras has embarked on the

Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) to reduce the existence of extreme poverty (36 percent remain in extreme poverty, defined as living on less than \$1.25 per day).⁷ Public spending in the past decade has improved the health of Hondurans: vaccination programs have reached nearly 100 percent of the population; chronic malnutrition has dropped from 33 percent of 1-5 year olds to 24 percent; and there has been a 38 percent reduction in maternal deaths from live births.⁸ Despite having what the World Bank calls “the most open economy of Central America,” Honduras needs to see improvements in the “quality of education” and a more diversified economy in rural areas.⁹ A major security issue for the country has become the crime associated with drug trafficking. Honduras now has the highest homicide rate in the world.¹⁰

Literacy levels are often used as a benchmark to measure a country's progress. By literacy standards, Honduras and Guatemala are successful. Nearly 97 percent of Hondurans aged 15-24 are literate.¹¹ In Guatemala this age group has a literacy rate of 87 percent, compared to a literacy rate of 75 percent for all adults 15 and older.¹² Over 95 percent of boys and girls in Honduras¹³ and Guatemala¹⁴ are enrolled in primary school. At the secondary level, an average of 46 percent of Guatemalan boys and girls attend school.¹⁵ An estimated 30 percent of Hondurans over the age of 15 have completed secondary school.¹⁶ Figures from 2010 indicate that as a percentage of total government expenditures, Guatemala spends 18.5 percent on education.¹⁷ Looking at only poverty levels for both countries, we see enormous challenges. The national poverty level in Honduras is 60 percent¹⁸ and just over 50 percent in Guatemala.¹⁹

It is difficult for the governments in Guatemala²⁰ and Honduras²¹ to provide sufficient ongoing support for libraries. Although libraries are fairly common throughout Honduras and Guatemala--with small libraries in some local communities and public schools and larger libraries in most universities--the perception of the library is often as simply a study hall or a reading room.²² The materials are not generally available for check out and are often of little interest to the user. There is also little access to

information and communication technologies within libraries. For Internet access, cybercafés are common throughout both countries; however, access is limited to those who can afford to pay.²³

Riecken Foundation: From Private Foundation to Crisis

Allen Andersson, business and social entrepreneur, founded the Riecken Foundation in 2000. Andersson, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras in the 1960s, earned millions by designing software and investing in various pharmaceutical enterprises. He invested a large portion of his family income into programs in Central America, including the Riecken Foundation.²⁴ Between 2000 and 2008, the foundation invested millions of dollars into building libraries in Honduras and Guatemala.²⁵ In 2008, after Andersson lost his fortune, the Riecken Foundation was forced to look elsewhere for funding.²⁶

In our interview, Cartwright discussed the Riecken Foundation's transformation from a well-funded private foundation to a public charity investigating and pursuing alternative funding sources. Thirteen years ago, when Riecken was founded, libraries were built in the hopes of becoming sustainable, but Andersson covered many of the expenses. Beginning in 2006, there was an increase in sustainability with most of the communities paying salaries, utilities, and basic costs while the Riecken Foundation provided support for programming, training, and maintenance costs. After the crisis in 2008, Riecken was unable to provide financial support. The Foundation could not pay for new books or building repairs. All training for library staff and computer support ceased. Cartwright says that while it was expected that libraries would begin to close, “the libraries didn't close. They had had enough training and self-empowerment that they would continue on their own. So, in theory, you have self-sustainable libraries – they didn't close.”

Crisis Leading to Change: Transition to Public Charity and Alternative Funding

As a result of the crisis in 2008, Riecken was forced to learn more about fundraising. By shar-



ing these funding models with readers, this article will inform other library development initiatives of alternative income sources. Currently Riecken is implementing a fundraising strategy drawing from four areas: key benefactors, multilateral development, grassroots fundraising, and U.S. philanthropy.

In 2008, after the crisis, a group of Andersson's colleagues pledged to donate a fixed amount of income to Riecken on an annual basis. This money, along with multilateral agreements, allowed the Riecken Foundation to continue operating as an agency but with greatly reduced aid to the libraries. Cartwright emphasizes the importance of finding funding from diversified interests through multilateral aid (countries providing developmental assistance to other countries through international aid agencies). Often other countries or development groups are interested in partnering with Riecken libraries once they realize the large range of opportunities that exist. For example, a group that is interested in early childhood development and health and diet for babies will be interested in supporting a library that is willing to teach community health classes and supply appropriate reading materials.

This creative approach to partnerships has allowed the foundation to work with a range of organizations to increase funding for libraries and library services. The Embassy of Finland has partnered with Riecken libraries to build the Copán Ruinas (Honduras) library, publish eight children's books in Mayan languages, create eco-clubs for youth, expand the Mayan language literature collections, and offer additional activities focused on promoting awareness and expansion of local languages and cultures. Two years ago, Riecken entered into a multilateral agreement with a coalition of European governments including Finland and Spain that provided funding for reduction in poverty. Other notable partnerships included building and equipping a community library with the Inter-American Development Bank and supporting projects promoting environmental awareness with the Proyecto Finlandia. Riecken's multilateral agreements as of April 2012 are listed in a document entitled *Riecken Community Libraries Partners and Project Summary*.²⁷

Riecken has also begun a social media fundraising effort including a website, videos, blogs, Twitter, and Facebook. This effort has increased awareness of Riecken among the general public but generates only a modest amount of income. Cartwright believes that this area of fundraising could prove more effective if it was designated more staff and effort. The money raised has been used to revitalize existing libraries.

For the first time, Riecken has hired a contractor to help write foundation proposals to seek grants from U.S. philanthropists. It is a costly process, but Cartwright feels it is necessary because Riecken does not have sufficient support from public sources. Like the libraries themselves, Riecken is very transparent in budgetary matters. Cartwright tells us that Riecken has a current proposed 2013 budget of \$600,000. He believes they should be operating at a minimum of \$650,000, and to be running at optimal capacity, a one million dollar annual budget is needed.

One good piece of news for the Riecken Foundation was the recent funding received from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—a one million dollar grant to be distributed over the next four years, for general operating support. Traditionally, the Gates Foundation has given funding directly to governments to support library development. Riecken is one of the few non-governmental organizations to receive such a grant, which will help Riecken to strengthen its existing network and to enhance its sustainability model. The grant is for core costs such as overhead, salaries for Riecken Foundation staff, vehicles, and transportation. Cartwright feels that the flexibility of the grant from the Gates Foundation allows Riecken to leverage the grant money to attract other funding for direct support of community programmatic activities, such as donations from Rotary Foundations.

The Definition of Sustainability: Survive or Thrive?

The current sustainability model for Riecken libraries, as described on their website, divides responsibilities between the Riecken Foundation, the local community, and municipal governments. Responsibilities for the Riecken



Foundation include supporting library programming, helping the libraries receive funding (grants) and partnering opportunities, and providing training, construction oversight, site visits, and international volunteers. The local community is responsible for the creation of a Local Oversight Board called La Junta – an all-volunteer group of community members that serve as a governing body for the libraries. The community also provides volunteers to work at the libraries in various capacities and to organize programs and fundraising for the library. Expectations for the municipal governments include funding for the librarian's salary, access to utilities, providing the land for the construction of a library, and providing legal status allowing for local fundraising.²⁸

As defined at the beginning of this article, sustainability is development aid that enables communities to produce self-beneficial outcomes relying on local resources. In the case of the Riecken libraries, the libraries proved sustainable since they were able to continue to provide basic library services after the crisis, drawing on funding from the local communities and municipalities. But one could argue that there are differing levels of sustainability based on the quality of outcomes. If the libraries are functioning in survival mode, they will not be able to remain vital and relevant in the future. Some of the libraries are in buildings with leaky roofs and unstable electricity. Books need to be bought on a continuing basis according to the needs of the community. Some of the computers are ten years old and no longer have Internet capability.

Is it enough for Riecken libraries to keep the doors open with minimal services (survive) or is it preferable that they continue to provide high-quality programming and computer/Internet access as originally envisioned by Andersson? Even if municipalities agree to pay salaries and utilities and the communities continue to raise funds to purchase new books, this is not enough to allow the libraries to thrive. It is clear that without additional aid from Riecken or other agencies/governments, core components of the Riecken libraries such as programming and technology will fail to flourish or will be discontinued altogether. During the authors' visits to

six Riecken libraries, we saw first-hand their sustainability successes and challenges. The following section describes our observations of the libraries.

Riecken Community Libraries

Due to the funding available prior to the crisis, the existing book collections at the Riecken libraries are strong. The libraries that we visited contained from 3,000 to 7,000 books. One collection of note was the Roberto Sosa Library collection in Copán Ruinas. Riecken supplied the majority of the 4,000 books including over 700 books for children and youth, an up-to-date and quality reference collection, and many works of literature by Spanish language authors. All of the Riecken libraries we visited contained a good selection of children's picture books. The quality of the general book collections varied, as some librarians chose to retain older and less relevant books received as donations, perhaps in the interest of keeping volume numbers high. But as time passes, there will be increased need to purchase new books for the collection or to replace books that are lost or damaged.

Just as governments should be held accountable by their citizens, non-governmental organizations need to prove their effectiveness and be committed to principles of transparency. It is recommended that best practices and accountability standards be established that will help contribute to the viability, long-term success, and sustainability of the organization.²⁹ A key component of the Riecken model is transparency of information, including budget, program, and usage statistics. Library attendance statistics show that libraries are well-used resources in their communities. For example, during the month of March 2011, the community library in Xolsacmalja, Guatemala (population 900), saw a total of 280 attendees, with a large majority (226) under the age of twelve. The computers were used 54 times, and many activities took place, including three story hours and three early childhood development sessions. Statistics for the library in San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala (population 12,000), for the month of March 2011 reflect continued community support and interest, with 830 children (0-12), 870 youth (13-



21) and 267 adults using the library in some capacity.

The Riecken libraries strive to provide relevant activities, programs, and clubs to the communities they serve. Activities at the Sosa Library in Copán Ruinas include a reading group; Zona X (a group of Maya Choti youth that act as leaders in regional literacy efforts); Proyecto Maya (a group that meets once a week to learn about Maya Choti culture and language); Maestro en Casa, Educados (adult students taking high school classes from home and meeting with instructors once a week); and a book exchange (mainly for the many tourists who visit Copán). In San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala, the community uses the library for many purposes. Adults come for community meetings, young mothers attend parenting classes offered by the Health Center, teachers come for training sessions, and political candidates participate in public debates.

Yet in discussions with library staff in some of the libraries, it became clear that early childhood development, technology, and reading programs have been put on hold due to diminished numbers of library staff and lack of support funds. Prior to the crisis, Riecken staff would visit the libraries on a regular basis to provide training and motivation for volunteers to run these programs. After 2008, the funds for such support no longer existed. Bill Cartwright notes that the Riecken Foundation wants to reinvigorate these programs, but lacks sufficient funds to make it happen.

During our visit in 2011, the fiscal challenges of the Riecken libraries were reflected by the condition of library computers and the state of Internet access. At the library in Tatumbla, a rural community outside of the Honduran capitol city of Tegucigalpa, the computers were six years old and ran slowly. The Chiché library, in Guatemala, had computers but had no Internet access during the previous year, due to the prohibitive cost of an Internet connection. In Copán Ruinas, the library's Internet access was donated by a local cable provider. In San Juan La Laguna, the technology center was of the highest quality of the libraries we visited, due to community support. It included five computers with Inter-

net access, a television, a DVD player, and a projector. The library was equipped with Wi-Fi, funded by the library's director.

As reflected in the attendance statistics, the Riecken libraries are being used by their communities. But the librarians and community volunteers are also struggling to retain or reclaim the quality programming and computer/Internet access that was once a trademark of Riecken libraries. The libraries are surviving and could justifiably claim to have proven sustainable. But as demonstrated by the examples of community, librarian, and municipal support described in the following sections, the libraries are clearly fighting to *thrive*.

Community and Librarian Support

Perhaps the first line of support for Riecken libraries comes from the local communities and the librarians themselves. As stated on the Riecken website, "the success of the library network hinges on the active involvement of local committees and volunteers."³⁰ In many of the libraries that we visited, the local monitoring group, La Junta, had raised funds to either purchase materials for the libraries or to supplement the paying of librarian salaries. At the Riecken library in Tatumbla, Honduras, members of La Junta had contributed their own money to pay four months of a librarian's salary during the previous year, after the municipal funds proved insufficient.

The creation of a Riecken library in San Juan La Laguna was a direct result of community involvement. Built in 2005, the building replaced a previous library begun as a community initiative in 1990. The community and municipality paid for 70 percent of the cost of construction, with Riecken contributing 30 percent.

Fundraising within the local community provides resources to purchase new materials for the library collections. During 2010-2011, the community in Xolsacmalja, Guatemala raised over 3,000 quetzales (\$300) for the librarians to purchase 70 new books for the library during their annual trip to the National Book Fair in Guatemala City. At the library in San Juan La Laguna, Guatemala, the sale of popcorn during



films and other activities helps raise money to purchase books. In 2011, the library was able to purchase 83 books, an important step in assuring that the library collection meets the needs of the community.

The Riecken Foundation has the goal of teaching librarians how to create the proposals for funding on their own, something that Riecken is currently doing for the libraries. In order for these libraries to prove sustainable, they would need to create a cadre of trained personnel to take over much of the work still performed by the Riecken Foundation staff. Trained library personnel can contribute expertise on the economic and social trends within the host country, including expert knowledge of its development needs. They have the potential to demonstrate how previous funding has been successful and the ability to track and assess projects from the earliest stages of development to their implementation and completion.³¹ Raising funds is an on-going process; no organization is going to agree to provide very long-term funding. The librarian at the Chiché library in Guatemala, as one example, has done a fabulous job of creating relationships with other organizations such as Derechos Humanos, the municipality, El Ministerio de Salud (Health Ministry), El Centro Educativo, and the Policía Nacional Civil (PNC).

For sustainable aid to be successful, it is important that there is strong leadership, a long-term organizational direction, a clear vision and mission, and dedicated staff.³² In contrast, development programs at the community level will fail if the leaders prove to be weak or corrupt.³³ In order to cultivate and develop support at the community level, it is imperative to identify and enlist dedicated individuals who believe in the Riecken Foundation's vision for libraries. Throughout our visits, we met librarians and community volunteers who worked above and beyond expectations, demonstrating their commitment. Examples include the librarian who paid for the Wi-Fi out of his own salary, the librarian who has established relationships with multiple funding organizations, and the members of La Junta who paid a percentage of the librarian's salary.

Local Municipality Support

Commitment of political and community leaders is very important in the success of these partnerships. UNESCO's *Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for Life: Summary*³⁴ states that the literacy challenge can be met only if political leaders commit themselves to action. Sadly, some politicians do not see libraries as an issue that will help in re-election, particularly in comparison to such issues as health, education, and employment.³⁵ The Riecken Foundation has worked with politicians who show various levels of support for libraries.

In our visits to Riecken libraries, library staff at two of the six libraries told us that the mayors have failed to uphold agreements to pay librarian salaries. At times, politicians may find it useful to display support for the Riecken libraries but later fail to keep their promises. At the Copán Ruinas Library, debates were held at the library prior to the election. All candidates agreed to continued support for the libraries, but salaries are now one year in arrears with the municipality claiming other priorities such as streets and bridges. This is true not only in Honduras and Guatemala but also for governments around the world that have cut back on what they agreed to or are willing to pay. For instance, a survey of public health workers in the state of Kogi, Nigeria showed that nearly half of them had not been paid for six months or more by local government authorities. Despite adequate financial support from the national government to the local government for the payment of salaries, Khemani determined that a lack of accountability resulted in funds being dispersed elsewhere.³⁶

The authors have witnessed the inability of partners to meet obligations of salaries at two additional international library development programs that we visited during the past three years. These programs, located in separate African countries, have both experienced the inability of partner organizations to pay the agreed-upon salaries of librarians. In one situation, the Metropolitan Assembly froze positions after an employee retired or resigned, forcing the library development program to provide wages for essential library staff. In another case, a library

was transferred to a different municipality due to government restructuring. In a third situation, the host organization just stopped paying the librarian's salary, claiming it had no money.³⁷

Cartwright says only 10 to 20 percent of the mayors have problems honoring the agreements to pay librarian salaries and utilities. There are many reasons why these mayors stop paying. Sometimes they want the library jobs for members of their own political party; sometimes it is nepotism, or political patronage. Occasionally they literally have no money--the national government has not given them their municipal expenses. Sometimes it is personal -- the mayor does not like the librarian, the situation becomes egregious, and the mayor threatens to close down the library. Cartwright says that working with the local governments requires a delicate balance, a lot of coaxing and negotiating, and a lot of meetings. He knows that Riecken could file a lawsuit against the Association of Mayors to try and force it to pay delinquent salaries. But he also knows that if Riecken filed a lawsuit on the behalf of libraries and actually won, it would ensure that no mayors would cooperate with it again.

A new tactic to try and gain cooperation from the mayors is to invite them to a Riecken Foundation meeting. In November 2012, twelve mayors and deputy mayors attended the Riecken Annual Meeting in Honduras. All of these mayors reported that their municipalities had paid the librarian salaries and utilities but they all knew of other mayors that have not paid. They indicated that one additional reason mayors may be reluctant to pay is that they are not sure what the money is for -- the Riecken libraries are almost too autonomous. Cartwright feels that this is a valid point and that the libraries need to better inform and to include the mayors in their work. The mayors reinforced the financial difficulties that municipalities were having in receiving national funding and balancing available funds with providing health care, water, and road maintenance. Such financial realities make it difficult to ensure that library funding will be a priority.

National Government Support

Currently there is no support structure for technology (both computers and Internet access) within the Riecken community library sustainability model. In our interview, Cartwright noted that Riecken is working to find a formula and a balance where the governments can pay for Internet access. Communication with government officials is central to this process. Cartwright stated that while the Ministry of Culture in Honduras is a big supporter of the Riecken Foundation, it has no money to contribute at this time. Recently, Cartwright did manage to get the Vice-Minister of Social Development in Honduras invited to the 2012 Beyond Access conference in Washington D.C. -- a conference that supports the role of public libraries in creating economic and social change. The Vice-Minister's attendance at Beyond Access was followed by documented commitment to the Riecken Foundation. In 2013, the Social Development Ministry drafted a *convenio*, an agreement of cooperation with the Riecken Foundation. In this document, the Ministry voices support for Riecken and its libraries.

In early 2013, the Riecken Foundation signed a formal agreement of cooperation with the Honduras Ministry of Education to provide Internet access to the Riecken libraries in Honduras. The agreement recognizes Riecken libraries as education centers and states that the Ministry will supply Riecken libraries with alternative education materials and find a way to connect libraries to the Internet using telecommunication legislation. Two months have passed since the document was signed and no tangible results have been seen as of yet. Cartwright realizes that it is common for agreements to be signed in Central America without follow-through. Riecken has signed two previous government agreements with little result, but it is a means of communicating and lobbying for additional library support.

Other international library development programs have successfully partnered with national ministries to support libraries in developing countries. In a recent interview with a spokesperson of the Osu Children's Library Fund (OCLF, an agency based in Canada and Ghana),

Deborah Cowley described how OCLF recently diversified its support beyond local municipalities by entering a partner agreement with the Ghana Education Service (GES) in the creation of their newest library, the Accra College of Education Community Library. OCLF paid for the construction of the library, supplied the book collection, and is paying the salary of someone to oversee the running of the library. In turn, the GES is paying the salaries of seven teachers working within the library and the water bill.

Sustainability and the Balance of Continuing Partnerships

As previously stated, the Riecken libraries proved sustainable in survival mode since they were able to remain open and functioning following the period of crisis. But in reality, as we witnessed during our visits to the Riecken libraries, the technology, Internet access, and programming at the Riecken Libraries began to deteriorate in quality and number. To assure that the Riecken libraries remain vibrant community centers, it is important that the libraries provide programming and technology that goes beyond just being open and providing traditional library services.

Some critics may question the Riecken Foundation's sustainability model, given the fact that it continues to offer support to established libraries. Others may question whether the Riecken libraries can ever prove to be self-sustainable without increased financial support from the national or municipal governments. In answer to the above concerns, one must remember that development projects can suffer without continued outside funding and expertise if local governments are unable or unwilling to commit domestic resources.³⁸ Withdrawal of financial aid has been proven to lead to decline of services in health development projects and it is likely that the same would occur with libraries.³⁹

If Riecken continues to provide support to established libraries, does that go against the idea of self-sustainability? Not necessarily. Servaes et al. suggest an alternative definition of sustainable development in contrast to total reliance on local resources. They allow for a more inclusive definition of support, reaching beyond local munic-

ipalities and governments, noting that "sustainable development implies a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach to policy-making and implementation, mobilizing public and private resources for development and making use of the knowledge, skills, and energy of all social groups concerned with the future of the planet and its people."⁴⁰ This definition includes the possibility that the sustainable model includes many interested parties, drawing from a multitude of resources from both charity and government. Other researchers suggest donors continue to monitor sustainable development projects in order to detect and ameliorate such decline in services.⁴¹ If it is determined that the project needs additional help, the donor should be willing to step in as needed. Donors need to provide aid according to a predictable schedule and must continue until the partner is capable of providing benefits independently.⁴²

What is the answer in finding the balance in funding and support for sustainable libraries? One-hundred percent reliance on government funding has its own problems in that government ministry funding can vary from good times to bad times. In a national budget or ministry budget, libraries may be the lowest-hanging fruit, the first to be cut. But depending on money and resources from associations like Riecken, where 100 percent of funding depends on the availability of public and foundation donations, can also prove problematic. During difficult times, like the recession, it can become extremely difficult to find even small donations. A combination of government and development funding may be the best solution.

Conclusion

The changes in the Riecken Foundation's financial structure have not only tested the sustainability of the Riecken libraries but have also tested the sustainability of the Riecken Foundation itself. Through new methods of fundraising, such as multilateral development funding, social media, support from Board members, and grants from U.S. philanthropy, the Riecken Foundation has received sufficient funds to continue its mission to support community-run lending libraries in Honduras and Guatemala.

The Riecken libraries themselves proved sustainable in that they survived the difficult years following the Riecken Foundation financial crisis. This continued existence is due to dedicated library staff, active community volunteers, and municipal support. But in order for the libraries to surpass survival mode and to thrive, it is necessary that the Riecken Foundation continues to support established libraries.

The Riecken Foundation sustainability model can be adopted in countries where governments alone cannot provide sufficient resources for libraries to thrive. This model heightens the independence of established libraries by training library staff to locate and acquire additional support and funds from international partner agencies and grant opportunities. At the same time, Riecken offers ongoing support through training, advocacy, and networking skills. Under this model, the Riecken Foundation continues to work to stabilize municipal support for librarian salaries and utilities and to lobby for national government support of libraries.

Does this mean that the Riecken libraries cannot claim to be sustainable? If the definition of sustainability requires that all funding comes from the internal resources of the recipient country, one must remember that it would be extremely difficult for libraries in many developing countries to thrive – the governments simply do not have the financial resources to make library funding a priority. In many situations, to restrict library development to such a narrow definition of sustainability would result in no libraries at all or libraries in survival mode with out-of-date collections, little or no technology, and run-down buildings. But if sustainability is defined more broadly – encouraging the sharing of knowledge and information, plus continued participation of all involved (libraries, municipalities, national government, library development partners, and outside funding agencies), then the Riecken model can be recognized as creating sustainable libraries that thrive in their ability to provide information, technology, and services to their communities.

Endnotes

¹ Manuel Roig-Franzia, "Allen Andersson Struck It Rich, and Then Struck Out in Honduran Politics," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 2009, accessed December 8, 2012, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/13/AR2009071303275.html>

² N. Ravichandran and S. Rajashree, "Financing Sustainability and Globalization: Theory and Research," *Journal of Health Management* 9 no. 2 (2007): 201-222.

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