

# **MALAWI COUNTRY REPORT 1998 - 2000**

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## **Introduction**

Following SCECSAL 13 which was held in Nairobi, Kenya in July 1998, some developments have taken place in library and information services in Malawi, some in line with the resolution of that conference, others unrelated to the resolutions but intended to develop library services in the country.

Briefly, MALA would like to report on the following resolutions as follows:

## **Information and National Development**

The Library profession undertook a few activities on its own or in support of activities initiated by other organizations.

In 1998, the Executive members of MALA met the Minister of National Heritage under which library and information services fell. He was introduced to the work of the Association, its successes and failures. It was impressed upon him that library and information services are crucial to the economic and social development of Malawi. The Minister responded very favourably and made positive suggestions for improvement. Later in the year, the Ministry was dissolved and library and information services were transferred to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport.

In December 1998, the Malawi Library Association organized a library week whose goal was to increase public awareness and support for libraries as multi-cultural centres that connect communities with global information resources. To achieve this goal, the library week had the following objectives:

- a. To demonstrate how public schools, academic special and research libraries can cause communities to benefit from the information superhighway through information technology.
- b. To educate the citizenry on the types of documentation and information resource centres in Malawi can offer people at different levels of needs.
- c. To demonstrate to policy and decision makers that libraries are a worthwhile investment for a productive and competitive nation like Malawi.

The library week was officially opened on Saturday, 10 December, 1998 whilst the library week started on Monday 12 December. That Saturday was called the library Open Day and it was held in a big hall in Blantyre. All major libraries exhibited samples of their resources and services they offer. The function was presided over by the Minister of Education, Culture and Sport.

Some of the activities undertaken on this day included:

- a. Book exhibitions
- b. Radio talks and round table discussions on services libraries offer
- c. Demonstrations on the linkages between libraries and education, Culture, science and technology and national development.
- d. Information repackaging, dissemination and communication patterns.
- e. Demonstrations on relationships between scientific and indigenous knowledge through gatekeepers and libraries/documentalists.

Although this was the first time for MALA to organize a Library Week, it was quite successful in delivering the message that libraries are a very important tool in the social economic and political development of Malawi.

Another activity in which MALA participated in is the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA).

The National Research Council of Malawi (NRCM) established a chapter for Malawi to which MALA was invited to be a member. The role of NESDA is to help share environmental information for sustainable development throughout the country. MALA is participating in its activities.

In 1991, Malawi and Zambia signed a co-operation agreement. In March 2000, a Zambian delegation from the Science and Technology, Technical and Vocational Training Sector of the agreement visited Malawi for the first time. The visit was hosted by the National Research Council of Malawi which included MALA on the local delegation. The two groups discussed several issues pertaining to science, technology, technical education and vocational training and the need for the two countries to exchange information through publications, annual reports, company directories, journals and other reports, which are often difficult to access and also to exchange staff. Malawi Library Association looks forward to co-operating with the Zambian counterparts. We urge them to contact the permanent Secretary, Ms Mapoma, in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Technical Training for further information.

### **Publishing, Marketing and Bibliographic Control**

Following the World Conference on "Education for All" held in Jontein, Thailand, in 1990 which looked at education as the main ingredient for human resources development in developing countries and which also identified a number of problems which hindered development of education in those countries, it was discovered that learning materials constitute a major hazard in the development of education in developing countries largely due to the poor publishing industry there. Eight countries, including Malawi, which were among the worst affected were identified for special assistance, mainly for UNESCO. With UNESCO's assistance, training needs of stake holders in the book publishing industry in the countries concerned were identified. A fact finding mission came to Malawi in 1996 to look at the problems the stake holders in the book publishing industry experienced. These included the Book Development Council of Malawi which constitutes authors, publishers, printers, booksellers and librarians. Following that mission it was

decided to hold a workshop for all stakeholders to sensitize them on their various roles in the book publishing industry in April, 1999. The Malawi Library Association as one of the stakeholders participated in the Conference and will continue to do so in several other workshops which will be held on the following topics.

1. Manuscript development for authors;
2. Loyalty and contract management;
3. Library and distribution networks i.e bookshops and libraries;
4. Consumer and consumer relationships (marketing);
5. Marketing research and sales promotion;
6. Layout, design and illustrations (publishers);
7. Costing and pricing books (books should be affordable);
8. Stock control and warehouse management.

From all this, one is able to see the role librarians are playing in the improvement of the publishing industry in the country through its membership of MALA in the Book Development Council of Malawi.

### **Information Technology and Communication**

MALA organized three workshops in the Electronic Library in the New Millennium between September and October 1999. In February 2000, MALA also organized a one day workshop on free access to journals on the Internet.

The National Research Council organized a number of workshops and seminars in which MALA members participated. They included those on

- CDS/ISIS
- Biodiversity clearing house mechanism as regards information
- Environmental information system
- NESDA
- Informatics in secondary Schools; a UNESCO project.

Several members of MALA have attended conferences, workshops and seminars pertaining to Information and Technology outside the country. A number of institutions are creating their own Websites. Probably most encouraging is the rise in the number of libraries which have been connected to the Internet and are now able to benefit from the vast resources available on the Internet.

One of the burning problems in Malawi at the moment is training for which a resolution was passed at the Nairobi SCECSAL.

Malawi has no library school. Several attempts made to convince the authorities of the two universities in Malawi have so far yielded no results. All Malawian professional librarians are trained outside the country where it is becoming virtually impossible to send anyone because of several reasons including lack of scholarships. However, the country has continued to offer

continuing education through workshops, seminars and short courses within Malawi. A few have managed to attend similar courses outside the country such as in South Africa, Botswana, Germany the UK and the USA to mention only a few.

### **What are the Plans for the Future?**

Malawi would like to see many more library and information centres get connected to the Internet to be able to access it, and to acquire modern and more powerful computers to handle electronics data bases and similar facilities. Obviously, we would like to have our own library school to give us a pool of new librarians to replace some of the present ones who have ably rendered their services to the country but have now exhausted their energy and vigour and are probably overwhelmed by the intricacies of the Internet.

As far as MALA itself is concerned, we would like to organize more seminars, workshops and conferences as part of the continuing education program and encourage members to participate in similar activities at the international level whenever they can.