

Malawi Library Association



MALAWI COUNTRY REPORT

To
SCECSAL
For
2006-2008

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Introduction

This brief report is being submitted to the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations to fill the filing gap since such a report was not submitted before. It might be of interest to some to note that the last executive committee finished its three year term in 2007 and the next elections were held in 2008. There was a communication breakdown that was created in the transition period between the old and the new executive communication with regard to who was supposed to write the report. I hope this explanation is accepted and I regret any inconvenience that this caused.

The 2006-2008 activities were a progression of the activities that were started in the 2006-2008 era. The activities surrounded the University Libraries, the National Libraries, the Civil Service Libraries who are the major stakeholders of the Malawi Library Association. The biggest breakthrough in the 2006-2008 era in MALA was securing of scholarship for masters' degree in Library and Information Science. This boosted the efforts that MALA has been facilitating in Malawi i.e. the promotion of professional training of Librarians and Information officers.

National Library Activities

The National Library Services continuation to be the main vehicle of library outreach in Malawi. They achieved this in several ways and these are:

- a) Opening new branches, promotion of literacy among women and children through what is known as the Mother to Child Book Reading Project. This project was funded by the NORAD.
- b) By opening more reading centres that were stocked with the HIV and AIDS information. These activities were funded by the Malawi National AIDS Commission.
- c) Opening new libraries in rural areas as part of their planned activities that are not funded through special projects.

It should be noted that the national Library in Malawi on average opens more than 50 branches in rural areas every year. In some cases the challenge that they do have is to sustain these rural libraries.

The University Libraries

The major activity of the University Libraries in these two years was four fold:

- a) Champion the open access software initiatives
- b) Championing 'free' access to reputable scholarly academic electronic resources.

Most of these activities are achieved through the Malawi Library Consortium (MALICO) which was birthed by MALA through workshops that are organized from time to time.

Training

The biggest achievement in this period in term of training was the facilitation of scholarships for Masters degrees in Library and Information Science. What Mala did was to negotiate with the Norwegian Library Association (NLA) so they could grant two scholarships every to Mala. Mala would then advertise these scholarships nationally and select the right candidates. In 2007 the first two Mala members were sent to the University of Botswana. This was a big achievement for Mala. Mala unlike its neighbours in the region has very few people with Masters Degrees in Library and Information Science. There are less than 30 people with Masters Degrees in Library and Information Science against a population of 13 million. Again there are only two people with PhD in Library and Information Science in the country.

MALA continued to conduct the year long certificate course in Library and Information Science. Over 50 students were graduated and the bulk of which were employees in libraries, archives and documentation centres who had been employed without any training. Mala also admitted school leavers who were interested in pursuing librarianship as a career. Most of these school leavers take Mala as their bridging course for the Diploma in Library and Information Science at Mzuzu University's Department of Library and Information Science.

Publications

The association continued to produce Mala Bulletin and Mala Update. Mala Bulletin, which contains professional articles from members, comes out annually whiles the Mala Update is produced every three months.

Subscriptions to Professional bodies

Mala has subscribed to the following professional bodies:

- a) IFLA
- b) COMLA
- c) SCECSAL

Author of the year Award

Mala continued to be the keeper of the author of the year award money which is supposed to be contributed by each association within the region. Each is supposed to contribute \$10 per year. So far the amount of money which the Malawi Library Association has in the 'author of the year bank account is just above \$2500. What should be noted here is that in the 2006-2008 this money was not awarded to any author because no library association within SCECSAL nominated an author. Again it should be noted that no library association within SCECSAL made its annual contribution of \$10 in these two years.

Challenges

- a) Inadequate personnel at professional levels as already indicated
- b) Mala is yet to have its secretariat with full time employees.
- c) Funding levels to libraries in Malawi are yet to get to significant levels
- d) Despite the fact that there are many people in Malawi who claim to be members of Mala, only a handful are committed to paying the membership fees.
- e) Mala is yet to establish other sources of income apart from relying on membership fees and marginal profits realized from the library and information science certificate course.

Future Plans

The following have remained future plans of Mala for a long time:

- a) Review the strategic plans
- b) Widen the partnership with its stakeholders
- c) Financial autonomy. So far Mala has been operating as a parasitic organ on the parent institutions of its member librarians.

Conclusion

All the challenges that have listed in this report have not stopped Mala to continue to operate and steer the development of the library and information profession in Malawi. Among other things, Mala gets its inspiration from such gatherings as the SCECSAL and it is our hope that SCECSAL will continue to have such impact.