

PROPOSED FUTURE OF SCECSAL

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Africa, the political, social and economic climate has been rapidly evolving towards support of pluralism and social change. A number of developments are taking place in the cooperative programmes of Standing Conference for Eastern Central and Southern African Librarians (SCECSAL) countries. These developments require corresponding professional development to be able to cope with the changing dynamic world. The Library and Information Science (LIS) profession as a key sector to development needs to comply with these requirements of change. The question is how can LIS profession utilise the available cooperation opportunities in an effort to cope with the changing information age and its legal, institutional and policy implications.

2.0 THE CURRENT STATE OF SCECSAL

The structure and formation of SCECSAL can be traced from 1972 when the librarians from countries that originally formed the East African Library Association (EALA) dissolved the association and decided to form National Associations. However, it was deemed necessary for members of the former East African Library Association (EALA) to come together once every two years to exchange ideas on possible areas of co-operation and development of the profession and services. For continuity, the Associations thought of forming together into the Standing Conference that would alternate in the three countries every two years. This Conference has expanded to other countries in Africa, the now the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations (SCECSAL).

As of now, SCECSAL is possibly the largest and fastest growing professional federation of association in Africa. Today, the conference is characterized by great diversity of ideas and experiences, which make it an outstanding Library and Information event on the African professional calendar. The first SCECSAL was held in the city of Dar Es Salaam (1974) and subsequently Lusaka (1976), Nairobi (1978), Maseru (1980), Blantyre (1982), Harare (1984), Gaborone (1986), Mbabane (1988), Kampala (1990), Dar Es Salaam (1992), Blantyre (1994), Maseru (1996), Nairobi (1998), Windhoek (2000), Johannesburg (2002) and Kampala (2004). The current objectives of SCECSAL are:

- provide a forum through which members of the library and information profession in the region meet to discuss issues of mutual interest;
- establish, strengthen and spread information professionalism in all the countries of the region;
- promote regional and international understanding and co-operation in the area of library and information profession;
- collect, collate, publish, preserve, conserve and disseminate research information through publications to potential and prospective clientele in the region and beyond;
- encourage capacity building by promoting education and training of library and information professionals;
- encourage exchange of staff and students amongst institutions in the region, and solicit funds for the programme for capacity development;
- promote cooperation with other library and information profession organizations outside the SCECSAL Region in the areas of library and information work;

- promote the adoption and use of information and communication technologies in library and information work; and
- undertake such other activities as will promote the development of the information profession in the SCECSAL Region.

3.0 CHALLENGES OF SCECSAL

The Association so far has a membership of 12. However, no effort has been made to recruit associate members. Currently, apart from the Standing Conference and General Assembly, there appears to be no project or activity that is being undertaken in the SCECSAL region to promote the LIS services in the region. As a region, it requires a strategy to develop the profession in the day to day developments in the country.

SCECSAL is a fully-fledged body established by constitution, however, there are no registered constitutions in countries that host it. There is no legal stand for the operations of SCECSAL in member countries. An appropriate structure to enable the governance of SCECSAL region is crucial. Although Secretariats are responsible to host the Conference, the documentation remains with the immediate past country and information is handed in at the end of SCECSAL general Assembly. There is a need of redefining SCECSAL governance that to reflect the continuity and follow up of its programmes.

4.0 WAY FORWARD

Option 1: Regional body with registered chapters in the countries

The SCECSAL should have a Council with a representation of the member countries. Although the Secretariat may change depending on the Association hosting the conference (as it is now), governance of the conference should be established as a regional body. The governance should ensure implementing the resolutions of the Conference and running projects that may be necessary in the region. For purposes of running the SCECSAL affairs effectively, SCECSAL Constitution should be registered and recognised in the laws of the participating country. Diversification of activities performed by SCECSAL will be a way forward for member associations and institutions to value the contributions of the SCECSAL. It is now time to incorporate all the professional categories by involving them in activities of SCECSAL as Chapters, Sections or Special Interest Groups, not only in the Conference but also in projects that may be started by SCECSAL.

The SCECSAL Governing Council may comprise of the President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Board Members [directly elected] for a term that may be determined by the general assembly (proposed 5 years). The Council shall be charged with the duty of formulating the general policy of the organization, evaluate the performance of the organization, and coordinate with sister organizations engaged in similar activities and oversee the implementation; execute decisions and policies as laid down by the General Assembly. The Executive Secretary who shall be an ex-officio to the Council should be responsible for the SCECSAL Secretariat, which runs the day-to-day activities of SCECSAL.

Option 2: Regional Federation of Library, Information Associations and Institutions (RFLIAI)

Under this option SCECSAL would be reconfigured to resemble IFLA. Each member Associations and Institutions would form a Federation with equal power and voting rights. A Secretariat would be formed constituting of a Secretary General and Programme Managers and Office Assistants. The secretariat would reside in one member country for a given number of years or permanently.

This is the most radical transformation, with heavy financial implications. However the advantage is that the Secretariat would offer logistical support, fund raising, and expertise with key functions of the RFLIAI. Generally speaking it would be a mirror organization in a reduced scale to IFLA. So the details can be worked out based on structures and goals and objectives of IFLA.

Option 2: Congress of Library and Information Associations and Institutions in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa.

This type of organization will be responsible to hold conferences once every two or three years in rotation in the different member countries.

It will be headed by an Executive Board made up of board members from each member library Association and Institutions. They will meet periodically to draw up a strategic plan for the organization, monitor implementation, and maintain links with partners such as SADC, EAC, NEPAD, IFLA, UNESCO etc.

In each country there would be one Liaison Officer to represent and promote the organization within the country.

A Secretariat would also be put in place to be hosted by one of the member countries, for periods of 3 years or more. The Office of the Secretariat would have a Secretary General, project officer, and coordinating officer to link up with the liaison officers.

5.0 CONCLUSION

As a follow up of the last general assembly resolution held in Kampala (2004) and Dar es Salaam (2006), I call upon all member associations to consider this proposal of redefining the governance structure for appropriate consideration at the next General assembly in Lusaka, Zambia.

Thank you.

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3 August 2007