

**STANDING CONFERENCE FOR EASTERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN
AFRICAN LIBRARIANS (SCECSAL VVII 2006)**

**LIBRARIES AS A BRIDGE TO AN INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE
SOCIETY IN EASTERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA: DAR ES
SALAAM, TANZANIA 10 – 15 JULY 2006**



BOTSWANA COUNTRY REPORT 2004 - 2006

By

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is that time again when library and information associations in the Eastern, Central and Southern Africa meet to deliberate on issues of common interest, exchange ideas and experiences, strategise on way forward as well as review progress made in implementing resolutions made at the previous gathering. This report reviews the period from 2004 – 2006. I will share with you what BLA managed to accomplish especially regarding items 7.3 and 14.1 of the minutes of the SCECSAL XVI held in Kampala, Uganda in 2004. I will further report on other activities undertaken during the period. I will, also in this report, share with you, the real shortcomings and challenges hat the association had to face and contend with. I will also try to discuss some solutions where possible and hope that your additions will assist us as we forge ahead in the forthcoming period.

2. SCECSAL RESOLUTIONS

2.1 SCECSAL Website Updating

The request to send up to date BLA contact information to SECSAL webmaster was done.

2.2 Submission of National Library Associations' Expenditures to IFLA

Expenditure for BLA for the years 2002 – 2004 was submitted to the Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) as required.

3. ACTIVITIES OF THE BOTSWANA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (BLA)

Most activities planned by the Executive Committee as well as those by Sub-Committees were not achieved. The following are some of the few recorded achievements:

3.1 BLA Subscriptions to other Associations.

Payments were made for the SCECSAL membership renewal, SCECSAL Author Award and IFLA membership. Subscriptions for the current year are being processed.

3.1 Publication of BLA Newsletter

A total of two issues out of the expected four issues were published.

3.2 Amendment of Constitution

The proposed Constitutional amendment that was tabled in 2003 and turned down for technical reasons by the Registrar of Societies is being revisited. The new constitution proposes the association name change from Botswana Library Association (BLA) to Botswana Library and Information Association (BOLIA) The incoming executive committee will take up the issue and re-submitted the document.

3.3 Fund-raising

Not much fundraising activity was recorded during the period. The Publicity Committee organized an unsuccessful multi – cultural dinner for purposes of raising funds.

3.4 Participation in issues of national concern.

3.4.1 Copyright and Neighboring Act of 2000

A member of the BLA National Executive Committee presented a BLA position paper on the Copyright and Neighbouring Rights at the Africa Copyright and Access to Information Alliance (ACAIA) conference held in Kampala, Uganda in April 2005. Among other resolutions made at this conference was a call for national library associations to establish local chapters of the ACAIA in each country represented.

BLA, as the mouthpiece for library and information services, was concerned by the emergence of the new copyright Act. It is, indeed, needless to say that libraries are the major purchasers of copyrighted information sources and that they carry the responsibility of making it accessible to society. As such the library profession has an obligation, on the one hand, to ensure that information is accessible while on the other taking reasonable steps to ensure that copyright holders' rights are not abused.

BLA believes that there is a need to have a properly balanced copyright law that can uphold both the rights of users and the copyright holders. BLA view all unduly restrictive rights as barriers to the free flow of information and therefore, undesirable. The position paper submitted to the Ministry of Trade and Industry found out that:

- While the old Act had provision for course packs for teaching purposes, the current one did not have this provision. BLA

believes that this is still an important issue since teaching resources remain inadequate.

- With the current increase in electronic information handling it is expected for the Act to cover electronic information issues adequately. This was found to be lacking in the new Act.
- Distance learning as a fast growing area in the country has not been catered for.
- Provision for disabled user information has also been omitted and yet this category of users should also be catered for.
- Indigenous knowledge has also not been covered.

BLA as the major stakeholder and concerned about these issues in the copyright act, convened a meeting with other stakeholders. The main objectives of the meeting were to address how the new Act handled matters regarding libraries and other educational institutions. It was also to initiate the formation of the Botswana ACAIA chapter and table shortcomings of the Act before the stakeholders for further discussion with the view to eventually negotiating amendments with the relevant authorities. A committee was formed to spearhead the establishment of local ACAIA chapter in Botswana. It is hoped that the local chapter will be formalized soon and that its voice will amplify the impact this far made by BLA.

3.4.2 Other meetings

- BLA participated in the stakeholders' consultative meeting convened by the Botswana National Library Service in January 2005 to kick start the review process for the Botswana National Library Service Act which was deemed obsolete. It was agreed that a national policy needs to be put in place first. The review process is expected to continue in due course and the responsibility remains with the National Library Services.
- BLA also participated in discussion of the existing Botswana National Library Services and Namibia National Archives Joint Permanent Commission of Cooperation. It was agreed that BLA be taken on board in this venture. Consequently, the association was tasked to tackle the issue of the Florence Agreement (Abolishment of excise duty tariffs on educational materials). This is one of the outstanding tasks that the association has to undertake. BLA was asked to draw up a position paper to be considered and adopted by the stakeholders for presentation to both Botswana and Namibian governments under the agreement. As part of the

research for the paper, BLA is to draw experiences from other foreign national associations such as LIASA, Zambia Library Association and others on how they have tackled the tax issues within their countries. It is expected that the paper will form the basis for Botswana National Library Service, the Namibian counterparts and the library associations of Botswana and Namibia in approaching their respective governments as one consolidated teams. It is hoped that their voices will be heard and that this cooperation will have an impact.

- As a member of the Vision 2016 Forum on Educated and Informed Nation, BLA continues to participate in the Vision 2016 meetings.
- BLA also participated at the Children's Information Trust (CIT) strategic Planning Workshop in Gaborone and also the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) meetings to discuss policy matters.

3.5 Translation of the UNESCO School Manifesto into Setswana¹

BLA, in collaboration with a team from the Ministry of Education translated the UNESCO school Manifesto into Setswana, making the document more accessible to a wider audience. The manifesto is now readily available in schools as well as on the UNESCO website.

4. SHORTCOMINGS

4.1 Fatigue and apathy

It has become apparent that BLA operating completely on volunteers and without a secretariat, even enthusiasts get exhausted during their term of office. Apathy was a major challenge, for the executive. Members repeatedly failed to attend meetings. Sub-committees were similarly affected, resulting in pending activities.

4.2 Heavy workloads

It seems, at least in Botswana, today that librarians' work loads have ballooned (maybe it is the information revolution, or maybe work ethics or just change in work attitudes) and they continue to show an upward trend where people, now, more than ever, find themselves having to put in extra time over and above the normal work hours. It is also apparent, that as members get more loads at their work places,

¹ A National Language in Botswana

and BLA as a voluntary activity continue to drop as a priorities change. The Executive Committee has suggested that to avoid problems such as these, people should declare commitment to treat BLA business as a priority too before being accepted to office.

4.3 Lack of vibrancy

The association lacks vibrancy, I fear for its death if a remedy is not found urgently. My only hope now is in the young energetic professionals who are still keen to grow professionally. I hope that LIMSA (Library & Information Management Student Association) that was formed in 2003 will inject young blood into the association to keep it afloat.

4.4 Lack of continued training and updating of dominant traditional LIS skills

BLA realizes and acknowledges that some professionals still operate only on old skills that need to be updated. There is generally no communication between stakeholders to come up with a strategy to bridge this gap. BLA should find ways of determining training needs and working with stakeholders to design training courses for in service practitioners.

4.5 Lack of financial resources

The Association is bedeviled with lack of funding. The small publishing sector in the country has, over the years, supported activities of the association. This has (understandably so) resulted in donor fatigue.

4.6 Lack of formally established District chapters

The association is still focused in the city of Gaborone while a large number of librarians remain in other areas of the country. Plans to establish interest groups at district level are underway.

4.7 Lack of Office Space

Lack of a secretariat and office space remains a problem. There is an urgent need for the basic equipments such as a personal computer and internet connectivity. Botswana National Library Service (BNLS)

has promised office space. This should go a long way in giving BLA records a home. I can only hope that the incoming executive will pursue this further and secure the office.

4.8 Declining BLA general membership

It has become apparent that membership is steadily declining. Practitioners have no interest in the association's development and growth, even though attempts such as letters written to individuals and approaching some companies to offer reduced rates have been made to get them interested.

5. CONCLUSION

This was a difficult period for Botswana Library Association. The incoming executive committee is faced with a mammoth task to revive the association. It is my hope that the incoming committee will not try to carry the entire work load on its own. I would advise that the committee try as much as possible to involve as many members of the profession as possible in its activities and this should include those who may be far from the city centre. The outgoing committee did not communicate much with the general membership. The incoming committee will need to use all forms of communication to keep everybody interested and on board. The BLA Internet based discussion group should be used. E-mail is yet another way to keep everybody posted. Even more importantly, there is need for the current committee to keep in touch with the outgoing committee to avoid the already identified pitfalls. Perhaps a good start will be to review what is pending and rework a strategic plan as well as a work plan which should deliberately include more than just the executive. My advice to the incoming committee is to avoid fatigue by soliciting extra hands from the general membership.