

ZIMBABWE COUNTRY REPORT 1998 - 2000

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Introduction

My report is presented in the way the Association looked at things. My Association focused attention on the "nine-point" constraints and challenges facing it as listed below:

1. Capacity building for the Zimbabwe Library Association
2. Financial constraints
3. Secretariat for the Association
4. Office accommodation for the Association
5. Demonstrated dedication by all members of the Association
6. Efficient communication system
7. Library effectiveness in rural areas
8. Training and staff development
9. Public Relations: Attainment of an effective rapport with relevant organizations, and of course, government

Capacity Building

The Association has set out to organizing workshops where members can be equipped with the necessary skills to support their Association as well as build their confidence. At these conferences ideas have been shared not only among members of the ZLA but we timed some of them to include members from other associations/countries. During the 1999 Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF'99), a workshop was organized on how to improve the participation of women in association business. All associations present (ALA, Swedish Library Association, Norwegian Library Association, Danish Library Association, Associations from Southern Africa, to mention just a few), all contributed by sharing their experience and providing alternatives. Another move was the workshop on "Capacity Building" held near the Great Zimbabwe over three days which provided an excellent opportunity for the members to learn how to build their association.

Financial Constraints

An age old constraint. The Association has investigated ways of improving its income through the usual means, and explored alternatives. What became clear was that it needed to be able to publish and hold workshops and courses to be able to stand on its own financially with money collected through these.

Secretariat for ZLA

The Association is working on ways to establish a secretariat. Once this succeeds and is manageable for a year or so, then the Association should be able to support itself. The important point we considered here is sustainability and we think we have taken care of it.

Office Accommodation for ZLA

My council has negotiated for office space to rent and it is hoped that once the necessary funds are in place we will finalize and move in. The Association will be sharing with another organization with similar interests so that we can complement each other's efforts.

Dedication by Members

Efforts have been made to instill and raise a sense of commitment to the profession and to the Association by all members. This is contained in our workshop and seminar efforts and is also emphasized at our meetings.

Efficient Communication

Efficient communication is the answer to many failures on the part of an association and the ZLA is well aware of this. Postal communication, no matter how well it may be, is far too slow for today's urgent business. The ZLA has striven to get a computer and is now connected through email address: ZLA99@hotmail.com, and many of our members are on email as well. This seems to have improved communication

Since communication does not end with contacts, ZLA is striving to improve communication through newsletters and the journal (the Zimbabwe Librarian).

Library Effectiveness in Rural Areas

The Association is aware that the library service is not as effective in rural as it is in urban areas. This is of great concern to members. To achieve meaningful penetration into rural areas the Association has strengthened ties with organizations which either have interest in libraries or have their roots in rural areas. This has meant cooperation with bodies such as the Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF), Zimbabwe Book Development Council (ZBDC), Rural Library and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP), National Library and Documentation Service (NLDS). and of course, the government. This is paying good dividends.

Training and Staff Development

The country's two Polytechnics train Librarians up to diploma level. The Polytechnics' graduates have adequately satisfied the country's manpower requirements. But above that there is no training at degree level. The Association has therefore approached the relevant institutions and government to consider this training. Some institutions have responded positively and already two universities are definite to offer degree studies in Library Science soon (one is through

distance studies while the other is conventional tuition). I have already mentioned the workshops which adequately cover staff development as they also stress the need for staff development programmes at the work place.

Public Relations

Public relations (PR) cannot be relegated to the lower end. It is as important as any of the above listed points and we in the ZLA have taken it seriously. The Association has taken strides to maintain good PR at all platforms and we see it paying dividends.

Already we share a librarian with one of the key organizations the ZBDC and participate in their Children's Reading Tent Programme, ZLA participates in the Free Pass Programme of the ZIBF, have invited ZBDC and RLRDP to send participants to our workshops on school libraries during the ZIBF. In addition ZLA is a member of IFLA.

I trust SCECSAL will find this report useful, and I thank you all.