

# SCECSAL: WHICH WAY FROM NOW?\*

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the efforts to strengthen SCECSAL. The environment in which SCECSAL operates has changed over the years. A large number of SCECSAL stalwarts are no longer very active in the library and information services (LIS) profession to continually support the forum on 24/7 basis; costs associated with hosting the forum are increasing while majority of member Associations no longer attract adequate funding from national, regional and international organizations to organize the forum; SCECSAL does not have a permanent secretariat to implement and monitor the decisions of its General Assembly and recommendations of the biennial conferences; on average the number of participants at SCECSAL conferences has reduced; and SCECSAL is no longer the only active forum for library and information professionals in the region. There is need to address the impact of these factors on SCECSAL to make it more effective and sustainable. SCECSAL member Library and Information Associations have an important role to play and they need to be receptive to ideas to reform SCECSAL.*

**Keywords:** SCECSAL, Africa, Library Associations

## 1. Introduction

SCECSAL (Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations) is a *biennial forum* based on a loose alliance between national Library and Information Associations (hereafter referred to as member Associations) in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. The first SCECSAL forum was held in 1974, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Since then, the forum has been held without a break, from the first conference in 1974 to the twenty-second in 2016, making it the most successful sub-regional forum for library and information professionals in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). This is a major and commendable achievement by the member Associations.

Several factors have contributed to the success of SCECSAL. These include the SCECSAL stalwarts (the founding fathers and a few other individuals) who took it upon themselves to ensure its continued existence; member Associations that have been keen to host the biennial conferences; national, regional and international organizations that have supported the SCECSAL conferences; and individual library and information professionals, from the sub-region and beyond, that have supported SCECSAL by regularly attending its biennial conferences. The environment in which all these factors operate has changed and it is wise to re-assess the situation

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\* *The views expressed in this document are solely those of the authors.*

and develop strategies for a sustainable SCECSAL. There is also the absence of a permanent secretariat or an organ to coordinate and monitor the forum's activities, decisions of its General Assembly, and the recommendations from the biennial conferences. In addition, SCECSAL is no longer the only active regional forum for library and information professionals in SSA. In 2013, the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) arrived on the scene and held its first international forum in 2015. All these factors have implications, whether positive or negative, for SCECSAL.

## 2. SCECSAL Stalwarts

As a noun, the Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English (2009) defines a *stalwart* as “a loyal, reliable, and hard-working supporter of or participant in an organization or team”. Since 1974, SCECSAL has partly relied on the good will of several stalwarts some of whom have passed on, to monitor its activities and keep its institutional memory. Who can forget the role played by Jaffrey Musisi, the founding father of SCECSAL? As Lungu (2000) indicates, “Musisi is part of the SCECSAL package and history”. Since its establishment in 1974, Musisi was the main keeper of SCECSAL's institutional memory, a role currently partly played by Justin Chisenga.

The late Maurice Lundu, and his fellow LIS professionals in Zambia, took SCECSAL out of its original home, East Africa, when they hosted the second forum in Lusaka in October 1976. ‘Mampaila Lebotsa, and her LIS colleagues from Lesotho, ensured that SCECSAL stood true to its name when they bid, in 1978, to host the 1980 SCECSAL forum in Maseru at the time, according to Musisi (1998), when Lesotho Library Association was unheard of by majority of SCECSAL conference participants, many considered Lesotho to be too far, and doubted as to whether a library association really existed in that country. Still the SCECSAL founding fathers went ahead and gave Lesotho a chance to host the forum. Since 1974, the following current 11 “active” member Associations have each hosted the forum at least once, as shown in Annexes 1 and 2:

- Botswana Library Association (BLA)
- Kenya Library Association (KLA)
- Lesotho Library Association (LLA)
- Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA)
- Library and Information Association of Zambia (LIAZ)
- Malawi Library Association (MALA)
- Namibian Information Workers Association (NIWA)
- Swaziland Library Association (SWALA)
- Tanzania Library Association (TLA)
- Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA)
- Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA)

The likes of Musisi (Kenya), Lundu (Zambia), Lebotsa (Lesotho), Kay Raseroka (Botswana), Jacinta Were (Kenya), Isaac Kigongo-Bukenya (Uganda), Peter Weche (Kenya), Joseph Uta (Malawi), Justin Chisenga (Zambia), Charles Lungu (Zambia), John Tsebe (South Africa), Kingo Mchombu (Tanzania), Alli Mcharazo (Tanzania), the late Ezekiel E. Kaungamno (Tanzania),

the late Stan Made (Zimbabwe), the late Steve Mwiyeriwa (Malawi), Ralph Masanjika (Malawi), Matseliso Moshoeshe-Chazingwa (Lesotho), Ellen Namhila (Namibia), Dikeledi Kunene (Swaziland), Nomsa Mkhwanazi (Swaziland), and many others, worked or have worked tirelessly to see SCECSAL succeed. To them, SCECSAL is not just any forum that takes place every two years. SCECSAL is the forum for professional networking in the sub-region and contributes to continued capacity development for LIS professionals.

Sadly, Musisi, Lundu, Kaungamno, Made and Mwiyeriwa have passed on. Even though not very active in the LIS professional activities, most of the remaining stalwarts still keep an eye on SCECSAL, attend the biennial forums, and provide support to SCECSAL as best as they could. But SCECSAL also needs strong support from the young LIS professionals to ensure that a situation does not arise whereby there will be no one to support or lead the forum when the longtime SCECSAL stalwarts are no longer able to do so. SCECSAL should start paying attention to developing up-coming LIS professionals and equip them with skills to enable them to lead SCECSAL in the near future.

### 3. Member Library Associations

The biennial conference is at the heart of SCECSAL. Without it, SCECSAL would not exist. Bringing library and information professionals in the region in one place, every two years to discuss professional issues that might be of common interest, is what SCECSAL is all about. Member Associations volunteer to host the forum. Increasingly it is becoming difficult for them to host the forum. Hosting SCECSAL requires both financial and human resources. Today there are very few SCECSAL member Associations with adequate capacity to *easily mobilize funds* needed to host the forums. In addition, some member Associations are not able to adequately mobilize LIS professionals in their country, and as a result the number of members on their books is small which contributes to shunning away from considering hosting the forum.

SCECSAL member Associations need to be very active and visible in the countries and in the region. Some member Associations go into hibernation after each SCECSAL conference and nothing is heard from them. They rarely share information about their activities and never invite send official invitations to other SCECSAL member Associations to participate in their national LIS conferences or related events. In addition, most member Associations do not have official permanent contact email addresses. Therefore, when they change their Executive Committee members, it is generally difficult to know whom to contact on urgent SCECSAL matters, including where to send announcements and official invitations to LIS events.

The future of SCECSAL partly depends on the strength and vibrancy in its member Associations. The strength of the member Associations is also vital in getting government support and in influencing other external support such as funds for hosting, sponsorship of pre- or post-SCECSAL workshops and exhibitions (C. Lungu, personal communication, March 5, 2016). In addition to the need for member Associations to scale up their activities and visibility at national level, Lungu recommends that SCECSAL should be spending “some quality time either through the general conferences or workshops to discuss techniques of developing and nurturing national Library Associations”. Raseroka (K. Raseroka, personal communication, March 2, 2016) proposes that SCECSAL should consider having a standing training session for member Associations during the biennial forums.

#### 4. SCECSAL Partners

Over the years, several national and international organizations, both profit and not-for-profit, including national governments, have supported SCECSAL forums through the host national Library Associations. Traditional partners, among others, have included IFLA, UNESCO, COMLA, SABINET, INAS and the then German Foundation for International Development (DSE). These organizations provided various forms of support including funding speakers and participants to SCECSAL conferences, funding publishing of the conference proceedings, paying for conference venues, and organizing pre- and post-conference workshops and seminars. The nature and extent of the support has depended mainly on the relationship between the host Library Associations and the partner organizations.

Support to SCECSAL by partner organizations has drastically reduced and this is demonstrated by the following:

- Host Library Associations no longer fund or subsidize conference speakers to participate in the forum;
- The number of participants supported by partner organizations to the conference has reduced;
- Registration fees are relatively high as the host Library Associations, rightly so, pass the cost of the conference to the participants;
- Production and distribution of conference proceedings is a challenge for some member Associations and in some cases the quality of the documents produced has been poor as the Associations look for cheaper options and sometimes do the work “in-house” to further reduce the costs;
- The number of pre- and post-SCECSAL workshops and other capacity development events, which were a major attraction to the forums and also brought in participants to the conferences, has reduced;
- The number and variety of regional and international exhibitors at the forums and the size of the exhibitions have reduced.

SCECSAL will not survive for long without the active support of its partner organizations. However, as indicated by Lungu and Raseroka, only strong and vibrant member Library Associations are more likely to attract adequate funding and other forms of support for the forum.

#### 5. Library and Information Professionals

SCECSAL's success is also due to the contributions made by library and information professionals, both from within and outside the SCECSAL region. These have supported SCECSAL by attending regularly the biannual forums. SCECSAL also attracted participants and paper presenters from Europe, the United States and the Caribbean Islands, and organizations such as the Commonwealth Library Associations (COMLA) and IFLA used to send official representatives to some SCECSAL conferences.

On average, the number of participants at SCECSAL conferences has gone down, and it is also rare to see many participants and paper presenters from outside the SCECSAL region. Gone are the days when the majority of member Associations would send more than 20 of their members to participate in the forum, regardless of the country where the forum was held. In fact, unofficially,

member Associations competed to see which one would have the most number of participants at the conference. This was healthy competition and it benefited the forum. Why is this no longer the case? What has gone wrong? Is SCECSAL no longer attractive to the LIS professionals, both from within and outside the region?

## 6. SCECSAL Secretariat

The question of establishing a permanent SCECSAL Secretariat, to coordinate and monitor the affairs of the forum, has been on the lips of most participants at the forums has also been raised at some General Assembly meetings, SCECSAL related meetings, and by some member Associations. In 1998, during SCANUL-ECS meeting in Eldoret, Kenya, the idea of a permanent SCECSAL secretariat was mooted and it received very strong opposition from those present. At the General Assemblies in 2002 and 2004, LIASA raised the issue again and on both occasions it was referred to the next General Assembly. The 2006 General Assembly referred it to its 2008 meeting, where TLA presented a proposal to reform SCECSAL. TLA's proposal was referred to the member Library Associations, to be discussed at the 2010 General Assembly, and the rest is now history. Nothing has happened so far regarding this significant SCECSAL organizational matter and there are several reasons, including speculations, for this.

SCECSAL "is merely a forum and not an organization" (Lungu, 2000). It is an ad hoc forum (a standing conference). SCECSAL is not registered as a formal organization in any of the member countries, and therefore does not have a permanent address. Its structure is very simple. Member Associations are formally registered in their countries and only use SCECSAL, on an equal level, as a networking forum. Apart from the token membership fees, which are rarely paid on time; and the contributions to the SCECSAL Author Award that has only been awarded a few times, member Associations have no other major obligations to SCECSAL. The decisions of the SCECSAL General Assembly are also not binding on the members. The current arrangements also give the members the freedom to decide on whether or not to participate actively in SCECSAL or to host the biennial conference without worrying about sanctions if they did not do so. This *laissez-faire* arrangement seems to suit most member Associations and could be one of the reasons why most of them have resisted establishing a strong SCECSAL coordinating and oversight mechanism or organ like a permanent secretariat.

There are other strong factors that have also contributed to the reluctance by the member Associations to establish a permanent secretariat. For example, in 1998, the strong opposition was mainly because the proposal to establish the secretariat was also linked to it being hosted by the institution that had put the proposal on the table, something that did not go down well with most participants at the meeting. In 2002 and 2004, it is believed that the majority of the member Associations *feared* that LIASA, the new kid on the block then, wanted to take over SCECSAL and they were not going to allow it to happen. Then, there is the general view that none of the three SCECSAL founding members (KLA, TLA and ULIA) would want to see a permanent secretariat hosted by any of the other two member Associations.

Whatever the reasons are for not establishing a permanent secretariat, SCECSAL needs strong mechanisms to coordinate, implement, and monitor its activities and decisions. One major negative impact for not having a permanent secretariat is that official SCECSAL records and documents are scattered all over the region and some may have already been lost forever. In 2002, in Johannesburg, the General Assembly discussed and agreed to establish the SCECSAL Archives to be hosted by the University of South Africa (UNISA) Library in Pretoria. The

decision was confirmed in 2004, in Kampala, and henceforth all member Associations were to comply with the decision and submit, to the Archives, all SCECSAL records and related documents including agendas, minutes, financial statements, other agenda documents such as country reports, proceedings, other relevant documents of an historical nature, and informal documents of historical value such as photographs. How many member Associations have complied with this decision? In the absence of a permanent secretariat, SCECSAL has failed to enforce and monitor the implementation of this landmark decision.

## 7. AfLIA

SCECSAL is now no longer the only *active* forum for library and information professionals in Sub-Saharan Africa. AfLIA (African Library & Information Associations & Institutions) arrived on the scene in 2013. AfLIA is structured on the classic model of professional associations/organizations with an organ (its Governing Council) to implement its mandate and carry out the necessary functions. AfLIA is also organizing international conferences to serve as a *forum* for library and information professionals across Africa. It has already reached places, such as Francophone and Lusophone countries, where SCECSAL has never been before. AfLIA's Governing Council has a constitutional provision for representatives from all the five African regions, namely, Central, Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Africa. There are also representatives from French speaking and Portuguese speaking countries on the Governing Council. AfLIA is slowly becoming a trusted voice for the LIS profession in Africa.

AfLIA is good news to the LIS profession in Africa. To some extent, this is what Lungu (2000) recommend when he called for the formation of a federation of library associations in the SCECSAL region, which would have committees to carry out functions including those that SCECSAL had been accused of failing. Establishing an organization like AfLIA was also in TLA's proposal to reform SCECSAL that was presented to the General Assembly in 2008. The only difference in the Lungu and TLA proposals is that that AfLIA is an Africa-wide Association as opposed to being sub-regional based, as is the case with SCECSAL. That aside, it should go on record that the 2012 SCECSAL General Assembly, in Nairobi, Kenya, passed a resolution that strongly supported the initiative to establish AfLIA and called upon its member Associations to actively participate in the initiative. Support for AfLIA is further evidenced by the fact that KLA, LIASA, NIWA and ZimLA, all SCECSAL members, are also members of the continental Association. There is need for SCECSAL and AfLIA to work together in the SCECSAL region.

## 8. What next for SCECSAL?

SCECSAL urgently needs to reform but without changing the character of the forum, the arrangement to which, despite the challenges and problems highlighted in this paper, it owes its continued existence (Lungu, 2000). Specifically, SCECSAL needs to:

- Establish adequate mechanism to coordinate and monitor implementation of its activities and decisions;
- Implement the 2002 decision on the SCECSAL Archives;
- Develop a SCECSAL marketing strategy;
- Implement capacity development initiatives targeting member Associations and LIS professionals;
- Establish formal collaboration with AfLIA.

### 8.1. Coordinate and Monitor SCECSAL Activities and Decisions

Due to various reasons, SCECSAL member Associations have since 1998 resisted the idea to establish a permanent Secretariat to coordinate and monitor activities and decisions of the forum. Therefore, instead of establishing a Secretariat, we recommend reforming the General Assembly to empower it to be able to coordinate the forum's activities. Under the current arrangement, the General Assembly, consisting of member Library Associations represented by heads of delegations at the conference, is the highest decision making authority of the forum. However, due to its nature and structure, it cannot implement or monitor its decisions and the recommendations of the SCECSAL General Conference. Partly, this is due to the following factors:

The General Assembly only meets once every two years and there is no mechanism in place for it to work on SCECSAL matters in between the biennial conferences.

The General Assembly consists of member Library Associations represented by heads of delegations, who in principle are supposed to be Presidents/Chairpersons of the member Associations. Due to various reasons, including changes in the composition of the members of the Executive Committees of the Library Associations, almost at each General Assembly some new faces turn up to represent their Associations. As a result there is no continuity in terms of representatives and follow-up on decisions of the previous General Assemblies.

Recording and distribution of the minutes of the General Assembly is generally poor and not consistent. Minutes are produced late, sometimes key decisions or points raised during the meetings are not recorded, and they are not formally distributed to the member Associations. There are also cases in which formal minutes of the General Assembly have not been produced.

As part of the proposal to reform the General Assembly and to also address the above issues, we recommend that SCECSAL member Associations establish a *Council of Permanent Representatives to the SCECSAL General Assembly* (Perm Reps), with the following basic features:

- **Key functions:** to coordinate and monitor implementation of the decisions of the General Assembly; to liaise with the member Association hosting the forum on issues related to the theme of the conference, the programme, and LIS capacity development initiatives to be organized during the conference; to prepare the agenda and the minutes of the General Assembly; to ensure that records pertaining to SCECSAL General Assembly meetings and the forums are deposited with the SCECSAL archives within the stipulated time; and to liaise with and advise their Library Associations on matters related to SCECSAL.
- **Number of Perm Reps:** the number will correspond to the number of active SCECSAL member Library Associations. Each member Association will appoint **ONE** Perm Rep to the Council. Preferably, these should come from among the Executive Committees, although professionally active and loyal members of the Associations should also be eligible.
- **Term of Office:** Perm Reps will serve for one term of four years each and they could be re-appointed by their Library Associations to a maximum of two terms.
- **Management:** Perm Reps will elect, amongst themselves, a President, a Secretary/Finance Officer, a Finance Officer, and a Conference Affairs Officer to manage the affairs of the Council on a day to day basis. The Presidency will rotate among the member Associations.

Implementing the above recommendation would largely involve introducing new clauses (related to the Council) and amending appropriate clauses, especially *Article 5 - The General Assembly* of the SCECSAL Constitution. Such additions and amendments could include:

- Clarifying the role of the Council during the General Assembly meetings;
- Defining the key functions of each office bearer of the Council; and
- Clearly defining who can represent the member Library Association on the General Assembly meeting in the absence of the President/Chairperson of the Association or the Perm Sec to the General Assembly.

## **8.2 SCECSAL Archives**

The 2002 decision by the General Assembly to establish and to host the SCECSAL Archives at UNISA is irreversible and should be implemented in full. It is very difficult to understand why library and information professionals in the SCECSAL region, whose responsibilities, among others, include ensuring that documents/records are preserved and made available for use, have failed to do so regarding documents/records related to SCECSAL. This is a scandal! It is unethical!

The SCECSAL General Assembly should ask all member Library Associations to account for the records and documents pertaining to the forums they have hosted, and submit them to the SCECSAL Archives by the end of December 2016. In cases where the records are lost, this should be officially reported by the member Associations to the Archives. By the end of the first quarter of 2017, UNISA should report to the member Associations indicating the members that would have complied with the decision.

## **8.3. SCECSAL Marketing Strategy**

To be sustainable, among others, SCECSAL needs to attract participants from various regions to its conferences, and support from different organizations. Therefore, there is need for SCECSAL to extensively market itself among the LIS professionals; organizations, both public and private; and in the LIS schools. A strategic approach to promoting SCECSAL is highly recommended. This is very key!

The SCECSAL General Assembly should develop and implement a strategy to market/promote the forum both inside and outside the SCECSAL region. The strategy should, among others, include:

- Developing promotional materials such as brochures, flyers, etc.;
- Consistent use of the SCECSAL brand, i.e. SCECSAL logo and SCECSAL colours;
- Using social media platforms (a SCECSAL social media strategy already exists and should be implemented without delay);
- Involving all member Library Associations and request them to report on its implementation.



#### **8.4 Capacity Development Initiatives**

SCECSAL needs strong and vibrant member Associations. Therefore, member Associations should develop adequate capacities to be able to mobilize resources, strengthen their membership base, and to actively facilitate professional networking and capacity development initiatives targeting their members.

The SCECSAL General Assembly should make it mandatory for member Associations hosting the forum to also organize at least two pre-SCECSAL capacity development (CD) initiatives focusing on areas identified in consultation with the member Associations. These CD initiatives should target member Associations and individual LIS professionals. To make them sustainable, they should be implemented on a full-cost recovery basis, unless where they are fully or partly funded by partner organizations.

#### **8.5 Formal Collaboration with AfLIA**

AfLIA is an organization while SCECSAL is a forum and therefore the two are quite different. Their coverage, in terms of regions and target members, also differs significantly. However, they both focus on the LIS sector and are in a way complementing each other's work. They should therefore, consider:

- Establishing formal collaboration arrangements on how best to develop the LIS profession in the SCECSAL region;
- Organizing combined SCECSAL and AfLIA conferences;

The two "organizations" should also discuss and establish whether AfLIA's international conferences would have negative implications for the SCECSAL forum in the long term, and if so, how this could be addressed.

#### **9. Conclusions**

SCECSAL member Associations should address the issues raised in this paper and consider the recommendations that have been put forward. Above all, implementing the 2002 General Assembly's decision on the SCECSAL Archives and putting in place a strong mechanism to coordinate and monitor SCECSAL activities are of outmost importance and should be implemented without delays. Reforming SCECSAL without changing the nature of the forum is possible, but can only happen if member Associations are willing to do so. There will never be enough other time to implement the arguments and recommendations highlighted in this paper. This is the time! Unless, more obvious than not, the status quo remains!

The recommendations made in this paper are all made in good faith and are aimed at strengthening the SCECSAL to make it sustainable.

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## Annex 1: SCECSAL Conference Hosts and Themes

S/R	Year	Host/Country	Conference Theme
1.	1974	TLA, Tanzania	Libraries and their impact on education, economics and culture in developing countries
2.	1976	ZLA <sup>1</sup> , Zambia	Libraries and information services as instruments of transition to the 21 <sup>st</sup> century in Africa
3.	1978	KLA, Kenya	The development of information systems: an African approach
4.	1980	LLA, Lesotho	Book production and the sharing of resources in Africa
5.	1982	MALA, Malawi	Libraries for national development
6.	1984	ZimLA, Zimbabwe	Information for national development
7.	1986	BLA, Botswana	Libraries and literacy
8.	1988	SWALA, Swaziland	Library and information services for the disadvantaged groups
9.	1990	ULA <sup>2</sup> , Uganda	Bibliographic control in the 1990s and beyond: strategies for development of library and information services in East Africa
10.	1992	TLA, Tanzania	Improving access to information and knowledge for socio-economic and technological development in Africa
11.	1994	MALA, Malawi	Libraries and freedom of information
12.	1996	LLA, Lesotho	Libraries and information services in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century and beyond
13.	1998	KLA, Kenya	Information for sustainable development in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century
14.	2000	NIWA, Namibia	Information 2000: A vision for the SCECSAL region
15.	2002	LIASA, South Africa	From Africa to the world: the globalization of indigenous knowledge systems
16.	2004	ULA, Uganda	Towards a knowledge society for African development
17.	2006	TLA, Tanzania	Libraries as a bridge to an information and knowledge society in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa
18.	2008	ZLA, Zambia	Libraries and information services towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

19.	2010	BLA, Botswana	Enhancing democracy and good governance through effective information and knowledge services
20.	2012	KLA, Kenya	Information for sustainable development in a digital environment
21.	2014	MALA, Malawi	Information and knowledge management as a driving force for socio-economic development in Africa
22.	2016	SWALA, Swaziland	Digital transformation and the changing roles of libraries and information centres in the sustainable development of Africa

#### Annex 2: Frequency of SCECSAL Conferences: 1974 to 2016

	Member Associations	Frequency of Hosting (Years)			No. of Times Hosted	Cumulative
		1 <sup>st</sup> Hosting	2 <sup>nd</sup> Hosting	3 <sup>rd</sup> Hosting		
1.	BLA	1986	2010		2	2
2.	KLA	1978	1998	2012	3	5
3.	LLA	1980	1996		2	7
4.	MALA	1982	1994	2014	3	10
5.	NIWA	2000			1	11
6.	LIASA	2002			1	12
7.	SWALA	1988	2016		2	14
8.	TLA	1974	1992	2006	3	17
9.	ULIA	1990	2004		2	19
10.	ZLA/LIAZ	1976	2008		2	21
11.	ZimLA	1984			1	<b>22</b>
		<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>		

Now LIAZ - Library and Information Association of Zambia, then Zambia Library Association (ZLA)

Now ULIA - Uganda Library and Information Association, the Uganda Library Association (ULA)