

PILLARS ANCHORING AN EMPOWERED LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION IN THE SCECSAL REGION

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Abstract

The effective equation of providing optimum library and information Services in any country depends on comprehensive LIS education and training system; a legally instituted Professional Association; and a code of ethics. Provision of the three should ensure production of the expertise, the governance framework and ethical/professional behavior. The provision and practice of the above three pillars has led to commendable LIS provision in USA spearheaded by the American Library Association (ALA), since 1876; United Kingdom (UK), spearheaded by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) since 1877; in Nigeria spearheaded by the -Nigerian Library Association (NLA) - Nigeria Registration Council; and to some extent in South Africa, by the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA). The Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA) and the other LIS professional associations in the SCECSAL region are playing the 'catch up' game. They have established the Library and Information Associations but still lack effective accreditation system of programmes, the professional register, and a code of ethics. The aim of this paper is to review the pillars forming the foundation of a successful Library and Information Association. The objectives include: review of what these pillars are, the challenges faced, and the recommendations towards effective strategies to achieve adherence to the pillars of effective and dynamic delivery of LIS services in the SCECSAL region. The methodology involved literature review and an online survey of selected LIS Associations' leaders in the SCECSAL region.

Key Terms: *The Professional Association, Information professional, Professional register, Code of ethics, Accreditation.*

Beneficiaries: *Professional Association Leaders, LIS Educators, Ministries, Users, LIS students, and LIS professionals*

Background

The effective equation for providing Optimum Library and Information Services in any country seems to depend on Good LIS Education and Training system; Legally Instituted Professional Association; and a code of ethics. Provision of the three should ensure production of the expertise, the Library Association governance framework and ethical/professional behavior.

The provision and practice of the above three pillars has led to commendable LIS provision in USA spearheaded by the American Library Association (ALA), since 1876; United Kingdom (UK), spearheaded by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professions (CILIP) since 1877; in Nigeria spearheaded by the -Nigerian Library Association (NLA) - Nigeria Registration Council; and to some extent the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA).

The Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA) and many Library and Information associations in the SCECSAL region are steadily and persistently playing the 'catch up' game. They have established the Library and Information Associations but still lack effective accreditation of programmes, the professional register, and a code of ethics.

The aim of the paper is to review the Pillar provisions of a successful Library and Information Association/s. The objectives include: review of what these pillars are, the challenges faced, and the recommendations towards effective strategies to achieve adherence to the pillars of effective and dynamic delivery of LIS services in the SCECSAL region. The methodology included literature review, and online survey of selected LIS Associations' leaders in the SCECSAL region.

Methodology

An online survey was administered to five library associations within the region. These included: Uganda Library and Information Association (ULIA), Kenya Library Association (KLA), Tanzania Library Association (TLA), Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), and Professional en Organisation et gestation des Bibliothèques des Archives et des Centres de Documentation, Burundi A total of ten responses was received. These responses were analysed and details presented. One to one interview was held with the President, Uganda Library and Information Association. Document reviews supplemented the findings.

Findings

The findings were presented majorly guided by the objectives of this paper. They are detailed below:

Elements of the Pillar foundations of a successful Library and Information profession.

Parameters of an Information professional

Parameters are attributes that should be achieved for a professional to be recognized and gazetted as a practicing expert. According to Kigongo-Bukenya (2000), the parameters are:

Approved specialized professional programme

A professional should have successfully completed a prescribed programme of study to acquire special knowledge and skills. An aspiring information professional in Uganda should undertake a BLIS/similar programme or a Masters or higher programme at the East African School of Library and Information Science or elsewhere at the LIS accredited programmes at other universities in Uganda for example Uganda Christian University (UCU) or Kyambogo University (KY) and others. Other professionals are qualified abroad e.g. School of Library and Information Science, University of Pittsburgh, Department of Information and Library Science, University of Wales, UK etc.

a) Monopoly of Expertise

The professionals should have monopoly of expertise and entitled to practice it exclusively on their clients. Nobody outside the profession should practice the profession. This is the “closed shop policy”. It is enforceable by a Professional Register.

b) Full time engagement

A professional practices a vocation – a specific calling to a service. The implications of “full time engagement” are that: first, a professional practices as long as qualified. Secondly, the profession is the main source of income.

c) Affiliation to professional solidarity

A professional should associate and act in solidarity with fellow professionals. Professionals should therefore prescribe to the philosophy of the Professional Association and be active in its activities.

d) Bound by code of conduct

Each professional should be bound by standards, rules and regulations and controls specified by authority. This ensures that the client is not given below standard service or exploited. The professional is also safeguarded against the

backlash of professional action, for example when the professional is castigated despite having acted in good faith and professionally.

Accreditation

The American Library Association website (ALA, USA) (2017) and the Chartered Institute of Information Professionals (CILIP) website (2017) -the Library Association (LA, UK) have effectively played the role of regulation through accreditation. Jacobs (1992) states the role of accreditation to regulate and thereby strengthening the Library Association as follows:

Credentialing focused on an institution is accreditation; and that focused on an individual is certification. Both accreditation and certification are essential and complementary, providing a quality control assurance for those entering the profession and continued competence through programmes of professional development and certification.

The process of accreditation entails two aspects, self-assessment and peer assessment. Self assessment is an ongoing process (3 to 5 years) and involves planning, goal setting and measurement against two dimensions: the goals and objectives set by the programme, and evaluation by peers against the set standards agreed upon and ratified by the profession. Peer evaluation is effected through visits by a panel of education and practitioners who analyse the programme against the standards of accreditation, specifying the quality of the curriculum, the facilities, the faculty, the students and the administrative structure.

Accreditation is therefore beneficial to the students, profession, faculty, administrators, practicing professionals and consumers of services because it ensures the quality of the LIS products. It also advances the status of the profession.

Professional Associations in developing countries such as the Uganda Library Association are not effectively involved in accreditation (researchers, 2017). These associations face crises of leadership, government recognition, apathy from the LIS professionals themselves, funding problems, and many other difficulties.

The Professional Register (PR)

A PR is a list of eligible professionals to practice the profession. An independent statutory body administers the PR. The authority is set up by law to exercise general supervision and control over professional education. The authority should:

- i. Advise and make recommendations to government on matters relating to the profession, and
- ii. Exercise through the Disciplinary Committee Control over professionals' matters.

Criteria for inclusion on the PR

The procedure for enrolment a practicing professional might differ from profession to profession. However, the requirements are similar:

- i. Having successfully completed a programme of study.
- ii. Having undergone successful supervision by a qualified professional in the field in order to get professional experience (e.g. internship for Medical profession).
- iii. Being a citizen of the country (non-citizens may have other pre-requisites to meet for registration).
- iv. In some cases areas of specialization must be fulfilled.
- v. Legal and Medical Professions demand inspection of facilities and equipment of the chambers, clinics or hospitals to ensure minimum standards and security to clients.

Concept and Philosophy of PR

Professionals provide very important services, which would mean life or death to the clients. Consequently, stringent measures must be taken to ensure that enrolment is only after proper education and training, subscribing to the code of ethics, constant inspection, and in case of malpractices, facing disciplinary measures. This is a safety measure against impostors who is allowed to practice in the profession, would be dangerous to the clients and would tarnish the name of the profession.

The Code of Ethics

While the PR specifies the professionals gazetted to practice in the profession, the code of ethics gives guidelines to professional ethics, and performance in the field.

Ethics comes from the Greek work ethos (Custom) and has to do with conduct, the theory of what is ultimately good or worthwhile, of good conduct and character, of moral rights and obligations (Boaz, 1972:pp242-244).

Socrates is believed to be the father of 'moral philosophy'. He echoed the words of the Delphic Oracle "know thyself" and declared that the life worthy of living was the intelligent life, the life of a person who understood what type of person he was and what values, aim and satisfactions were appropriate to him. On the other hand Plato's moral philosophy was based on "aristocratic rationalism" by which he means "the rule of the best". Plato talked of the need

of avoiding the counter vices of too much or too little but strike the virtue of just enough – “the rational” or the “Golden Mean”.

Concept of the Code of Ethics

Both Socrates’ “moral rights and obligations” and Plato’s “rule of the best” respectively have implications for the philosophy of the Code of Ethics. The American Medical Association talking of the Medical Code of Ethics specifies that a professional has for its prime object the service it renders to the public – reward of financial gain should be subordinate consideration. Whitaker also subscribes to the same view that the selfish interest must not be a dominant motive in professional work. He argued that the knowledge and skills professionals acquire or achieve are inheritances accumulated over time from our ancestors’ toil, labour, and sacrifice. Professionals should therefore not exploit the public but should be trustees of such knowledge and skill.

Examination of the different codes show that while financial reward as a method of livelihood is essential, it should be secondary to the ideal service. The Uganda ‘professional Codes’ are no exception. The Advocates’ (Professional Conduct Regulation, 1877) and the Hippocratic Oath both emphasize loyalty and devotion to the public.

Basis of Codes of Ethics

1. Golden Rule

The basic consideration of any code of conduct should be the golden rule which must either be stated or implied: loyalty, honesty, generosity, courtesy, frankness, goodwill, cooperation, friendliness, charity and sincerity – which are general standards or ideals of conduct.

2. Voluntary Spirit

Most codes are voluntary because they are products of the professionals’ volition and therefore the extent of its efficiency depends upon mutual understanding and common interest.

3. Machinery

Each code should establish controlling machinery, and an arm in the form of Disciplinary Committee to correct deviations.

Characteristics of Code of Conduct

According to Kigongo-Bukenya (2000), any code of ethics (conduct) should incorporate the following:

(i) Duty to client and employer

This is the guiding principle that priority should be paid to the interests of the clients within prescribed or legitimate requirements. The other dimension of this characteristic is that the professional must be loyal and obedient to the employers within legitimate requirements.

- (ii) **Updating Professional Expertise**
Professional scenario is ever changing. Members must be competent in their activities including the requirement to keep abreast of development and those branches of professional practice in which qualifications and experience entitle them to engage.
- (iii) **Supervision of Staff and Trainees**
Experienced professionals must provide supervision and training to the juniors to ensure steady professional development leading to independent responsibility.
- (iv) **Discrimination on race, colour, creed, gender and sexual orientation**
Professionals should not exercise discrimination based on race, colour, creed, gender or sexual orientation in the execution of their services to clients except as limited by legal prescription.
- (v) **Confidentiality**
Professionals should not divulge information gathered during the course of execution of duties to their clients. Clients are entitled to secrecy of what transpires between them and the professionals. However, professionals are absolved from the 'confidentiality – tenet' in so far as required by law or in answering questions under the Disciplinary Committee.
- (vi) **Personal Financial Interest**
Members' actions and decisions should be determined solely by their professional judgment and they should not profit from their positions other than by normal remuneration or fee for professional services.
- (vii) **Criminal Offence**
Members should report the facts to the Secretary of the Professional Association if convicted of any offence involving indiscipline or one, which brings the profession in disrepute.
- (viii) **Co-operation with disciplinary proceedings**
Professionals must respond to any requirements from the disciplinary committee for comments or information on a complaint. For instance:
 - Attend to committee proceedings when required to do so, and,
 - Attend upon a nominated person for the purposes of receiving guidance as to future conduct if required to do so.

In summary, one to be an ideal professional, one should have achieved academic and professional qualifications; one should be loyal to the profession and should dedicate full time to it or related activities; one should be bonded by the Code of Ethics and should affiliate to the professional association and be active in its activities. The Code of Ethics is vital to the regulations and therefore success of any professional and should be adhered to. However, pitfalls should be avoided in formulating and adopting the codes. For instance principles of vague idealism should be avoided. Expectations of codes should be as realistic as possible. As one source has it:

“Codes should (not) dress too much like puritans and (should not) talk too much like saints”.

Challenges of achieving the pillars

Through literature review and the online face to face interviews discussion, challenges rampant in the SCECSAL region in the context of implementing the Pillars of the profession were identified as follows:

- a) Lack of the Professional Register. This has led to the open door profession...one where one whether qualified or not could partake the activities of the LIS professional activities with obvious consequences of inefficiency, etc. from the face to face interviews, the informant joked
“Without a Professional Register, anyone who works in a library is a librarian!”
- b) Lack of a legal basis setting up the LIS profession thereby specifying the dos and don'ts in the professional arena.
- c) Lack of a legally binding Code of ethics leading to misbehavior, under performance, corruption, etc. During the Face to face interviews it was noted that:
“The Code of Ethics should be in force to safeguard the professional actions of staff as well as safeguarding the users' confidentiality.
- d) Lack of mandatory continuing education necessary for the professionals' up-dating of knowledge and competencies. For instance, all the respondents of the online survey, noted that:
“the scenery of LIS provision is ever changing. It is therefore absolutely necessary that continuing education cater for change”
- e) Other challenges mentioned included: lack of initiative, leaders and funding to implements the plans

Conclusions

Judging from the interaction with the practitioners and other interested stakeholders, and literature review, it is clear that while LIS Professional Associations at large in the SCECSAL region, know the destination of the Pillars Provisions to Empower Library and Information Association, they have not reached the destination, due to factors discussed above. The consensus view from the online survey administered to library association leaders, it was agreed that what remained to be done are the following:

Establish Legal based LIS Professional Association and empower them to manage the LIS profession by empowering them to take charge of professional activities including among others to:

- i. Establish a Professional Register and its management
- ii. Establish and implement the Code of ethics – specifying what is legally binding to the information professionals Pillars
- iii. Take possible action against the offenders.
- iv. Provide Continuing Education to allow up-dating professional knowledge, skills/competencies.

In Africa, the Nigerian Library Association has made tremendous progress; the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) is on the right track. We should learn a lot from the American Library Association (ALA) and the Chartered Institute of Information Professionals (CILIP) from UK.

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APPENDIX 1: ONLINE SURVEY.

Introduction

Dear Colleague,

We are administering an Online Survey on the Status of LIS Professional Associations in the SCECSAL Region. The findings will be shared at SCECSAL XXIII, Entebbe, Uganda.

Kindly provide accurate answers to the questions. The processes will be confidential.

We thank you for your cooperation.

1. Name
2. Country.....
3. Responsibility in the Association.....
4. What is a Code of Conduct?.....
5. Does your association have a code of conduct/ Ethics?..... if yes, what is it about? If No, any plans to have one soon?
6. Do you have an idea about the characteristics of Code of Conduct/ethics
7. What are the pillars of a professional association?
8. What are the challenges of achieving the pillars of professional association?
9. What is a professional Register?
10. What are some of the criteria to consider for Inclusion on the Professional Register?
11. Any other comments?

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix 2: Literature review guide

The sub themes below guided the review of literature

1. Code of Conduct
2. Characteristics of Code of Conduct/ethics
3. Pillars of a professional association
4. Challenges of achieving the pillars of professional association
5. Professional Register
6. Criteria to consider for Inclusion on the Professional Register