



World Library and Information Congress: 69th IFLA General Conference and Council

1-9 August 2003, Berlin

Code Number: 191-E
Meeting: 109. Management of Library Associations
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

Strategies by LIASA to develop library services and the profession in South Africa

Ellen R. Tise

University of the Western Cape,
South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Library associations worldwide are all actively involved in developing strategies to build and enhance the profession and library and information services in their respective countries and regions. National library associations in particular provide a range of services and programs to its members to achieve these goals. They are very committed to advocate for libraries, nationally and internationally. BUT, how effective are these efforts, and does it really make a difference. I think it DOES. There are many examples to this effect, such as the successes of IFLA and many of its affiliated associations and institutions. The library and information profession in South Africa is no different from its counterparts in other countries and also strives to make a difference in the provision of library services in the country. This paper will provide an overview of the historical background of library associations in South Africa, the current position, issues facing LIS in South Africa, strategies adopted by LIASA to develop the profession and LIS services in South Africa, and the way forward. The big question is, can library associations assist in bringing about social change?

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, (Act No. 108 of 1996), provides the constitutional framework for the provision of library and information services in South Africa. Part A of Schedule 5 to the Constitution list “libraries other than national libraries” as one of the functional areas of exclusive provincial legislative competencies. It is therefore a provincial

responsibility to develop the legislative framework wherein library and information services can be provided for in the province. The Constitution has implications for all levels of Government, including local government (Cillie, 1999). The National Library of South Africa is located in the Department of Arts and Culture. There are 9 provincial library and information services. Provincial Library Services have historically assisted local government in the rendering of community library services. Local government has traditionally been responsible for the delivery of community library services and still performs this function. Non-governmental organisations, companies and other organisations are usually responsible for the delivery of services to their individual communities not within government spheres (Tise, 2000).

Recent statistics indicated that in addition to the libraries above, there are presently 77 higher education libraries, 9416 school libraries, 79 government departmental libraries, approximately 100 corporate libraries, 1800 public and community library service points, 6 metro library services, 5 legal deposit libraries, and 14 Library Schools attached to Universities and Technikons.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The following are key developments of library associations in South Africa.

In 1928 the Carnegie Corporation of New York sent Messrs. M.J. Ferguson and S.A. Pitt to South Africa to study the library position. They convened a conference attended by 78 librarians in Bloemfontein, and stressed the need for a library association and a national library system. A Committee was appointed to draft a constitution. In 1930 the inaugural meeting of the South African Library Association (SALA) was held in July in Bloemfontein. Between 1960 and 1980 various name changes took place, membership of SALA was limited to whites and separate library associations established for other racial groups. The Cape Library Association for Coloureds was formed in 1960, South African Indian Library Association in 1967 and the Non-European Library Service, Transvaal in 1962.

The Non-European Library Service, Transvaal changed name to Central Bantu Library Association in 1964, then to Bantu Library Association in 1966 and finally to African Library Association of South Africa in 1972. SALA changed its name to the South African Institute for Librarianship and Information Science (SAILIS). In 1982 SAILIS adopted a new constitution, with membership opened to all races but limited to those holding approved formal librarianship qualifications or librarianship students. In 1991, a new organisation, Library and Information Workers Organization (LIWO) was established in Natal as an alternative group of library workers.

Robert Wedgeworth, President of IFLA at the time, visited South Africa in 1991 as a keynote speaker at the SAILIS conference. He held extensive meetings with the three library associations, and stressed the importance of co-ordinating their educational and social service efforts, and recommended that a Fact Finding Mission be sent. (IFLA Newsletter:VIII). In 1993 the IFLA Mission visited South Africa to gather information on the library and information services situation. This development was followed by a Conference on Libraries and Information Services

in Developing South Africa (LISDESA) which was held in Durban in January 1995 at the instigation of SAILIS and ALASA. One of the outcomes of this conference was the election of a Steering Committee for Unification of Library and Information Stakeholders (ULIS) who was given the mandate to carry forward the process for the formation of a new organization.

ULIS-1 conference was held in July 1996 in Johannesburg. An Interim Executive Committee was elected to draft a constitution, followed by a ULIS-2 conference (Constituent Conference) held in July 1997 in Pretoria, attended by 450 delegates and senior executive members of IFLA and the Library Association (UK). After much debate, the constitution was unanimously adopted and the name *Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA)* decided upon. A Transitional Executive Committee was appointed to organize the first annual conference, recruit members and establish branches. Finally admitted as an association member to IFLA August 1997 (since 1964 when South Africa was excluded). The main existing organisations, ALASA and SAILIS ALASA disbanded in April 1998.

CURRENT POSITION OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

The formation of LIASA was no easy task, as the three existing library associations (SAILIS, ALASA and LIWO) and Special Interest Groups were anxious about matters such as turf, financial assets, membership, professionalism, representivity, etc. Such historical baggage had to be eradicated before the process of unification could begin, and it took three years of protracted and arduous negotiation before LIASA was established. Today, a number of independent smaller specialist interest groups still exists such Organisation of South African Law Librarians and Interdepartmental Vocational Association for Information Specialists and Library Personnel (government library services).

Following the success of the Constituent Conference, LIASA as the single national library association established 10 branches in the 9 provinces as well as nine specialist Interest Groups (IG) that meet both professional and working needs of the members. It has a National Office based in Pretoria and is staffed by a full-time Executive Director, Professional Officer, Project Coordinator, and a part-time Administrative Assistant and Secretarial Assistant. Governance rests with the Executive Committee and the Representative Council. The Annual General Meeting serves as the legislative authority of the general membership.

The following text is an extract from the LIASA Business Plan 2003 –2005.

“LIASA has succeeded in attracting membership from among librarians and all types of libraries across the LIS sector. It uses its extensive infrastructure to ensure effective communication with its members. It presently has 1600 paid-up members nationally and has the potential to grow to more than 5000 over the next three years. Membership includes 204 institutional members, 1372 individual members and 24 international members. The delivery of a relevant service to its membership is of utmost importance and therefore, income generated from individual, institutional and international members are utilized for the development of the branches and interest groups. LIASA, in its determination to increase and serve its membership base has recently conducted a national survey of its members. The results of the survey indicate that the membership has expressed strong support for a professional association, training and skills

development programmes, high expectations for LIASA to promote the image of the LIS workers, work towards improving library services in South Africa, represent the South African LIS profession internationally and initiate advocacy programmes at local, regional and national level.”

“Since its inception five years ago, LIASA is able to offer the following services and products to its members: -

- Professional networking amongst members through specific Interest Groups
- Co-ordination of the Continuing Professional Training and Development programme for LIS workers in SA to ensure a skilled LIS workforce
- Ensures that the best quality formal training and education facilities for LIS workers are available and maintained
- Serves as an LIS information resource and is often consulted by external agencies
- Engages in advocacy and lobbying programmes at national and regional level
- Markets and promotes the value of membership of a national professional association to members, LIS community and wider public
- Represents the South African LIS sector and safeguards its interests in the region and internationally
- Strategic and business planning for self-sustainability
- Building and extending collaborative relationships and partnerships on a national and international level
- The Annual LIASA Conference, which is hosted by a different branch every year thereby developing a national pool of resources and skills.
- Hosting of allied conferences (15th SCECSAL 2002 and 2007 IFLA General Council and Conference), seminars and workshops for the LIS community
- Professional print and electronic communication
 - Two official in-house publications, LIASA News and LIASA-in-Touch
 - Formal scholarly journal *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science*
 - LIASA Website – www.liasa.org.za
 - LIASAonline Listserv
- Effective and efficient management of the organization through its structures at national and regional level.” (LIASA Business Plan 2003-2005).

ISSUES FACING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The evolving government structures since the first democratic elections in 1994 have been unclear about the position of libraries, particularly public libraries. They have not receiving proper consideration at national, provincial and local government levels. For this reason, LIASA and the United States Information Service jointly organized a series of Library Advocacy Workshops in June and July, 1998 so that LIASA members could learn to lobby the government more effectively. Mary Somerville, past-President of the ALA, was invited to facilitate the Workshops using material developed by the ALA. Thereafter LIASA identified the key activities that needed urgent attention. However, it was important for LIASA to consolidate not only its position within the library and information profession, but also within government and educational structures. The Association realized that the consequences of failure would be far-reaching, as LIASA and its members have a key role to play in the socio-economic development of South Africa, and in the development of libraries, as stated in the preamble of its Constitution.

“WHEREAS, we the Library and Information Service (LIS) workers of South Africa,

- Determined to build a united and democratic association to take its rightful place in the broader family of international LIS organizations;
- Noting with sensitivity the divisions of the past;
- Affirming that equitable and unrestricted access to basic information, including government produced information, is a fundamental right in a democratic society;
- Recognising the power of information and information technology in establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- Committing ourselves to the redress of past imbalances and the provision of quality library and information services to promote and support information literacy;
- Supporting the constitutional right to the Freedom of Association;

AND WHEREAS WE BELIEVE that the free flow of information is essential for reconciliation, reconstruction and nation building, and are therefore committed to a united association which is democratic, inclusive, effective and assertive;

NOW THEREFORE, the following provisions are adopted as the constitution of Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA).”

Recently, an article in a South African Sunday Paper, (Sunday Times, June 22, 2003) headlined “Multimillion-rand libraries stand empty: doors have never opened to public due to shortage of staff”. This is one example of the key issues facing the profession in South Africa. Just like other countries, staff shortages, pay equity, finance, professional status of librarians, education and training, and information societal issues are constant issues that we are also battling with.

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES – ROLE OF LIASA

In response to the article mentioned above, a LIASA member ask the following question: “What strategies does LIASA, as the professional body representing Librarianship as a whole in South Africa, have in place to lobby government – both national and provincial – to address this situation regarding libraries in our country? Are there any meetings with relevant ministers scheduled, proposals drawn up to present to the relevant parliamentary committees, etc? What are we all doing as Librarians, about this situation, and what is our professional association, LIASA doing about it? And how can we help?”

LIASA initially identified key strategies in 1999, and goals in 2000 when the Association approached the Carnegie Corporation of New York to support an office infrastructure and appointment of staff.

The strategies were:

- Ensure that, by the year 2004, every community and school in South Africa has access to a well-stocked library or information resource centre.

- Ensure that, by the year 2004, all community and school libraries have access to information through appropriate utilisation of technology, including links to the Internet.
- Zero-rating on books, magazines and other information media of educational value, for purposes of VAT.
- Ensure that the library community and, specifically LIASA as its representative body, is fully consulted by the government in all discussions and initiatives relating to the provision of information, including the national virtual library, multipurpose community centres, etc.
- Put in place without further delay the proposed National Advisory Council on Libraries and Information Services.

Progress were made with 4 and 5 of these strategies, 3 is still in progress and 1 and 2 still require a lot of work. Smaller strategies with achievable objectives should now be developed.

The goals were:

- The need to make LIASA visible and attractive to existing and potential members within the LIS community.
- The need to promote a highly visible group identity through conferences, meetings, publications, news bulletins, publicity campaigns, electronic communication strategies, etc.
- The need to build LIS capacity within South Africa and within LIASA.
- The need to support continuing education programmes.
- The need to support and develop leadership among the many young upcoming LIS graduates and diplomats. Without this they will have little or no future in libraries due to the decline of LIS, especially school and public libraries.
- The need to lobby politicians, who do not view libraries as a priority. This is understandable among new politicians who did not have access to libraries during the apartheid years.
- The need for an advocacy campaign to highlight the role of libraries and access to information in reconstruction and development.
- The need to be proactive about legislation that is affecting library and information services.
- The need to support the public library sector in particular because of its unclear position in national, provincial and local government structures.
- The need to provide leadership and outreach to other African countries.

The previous section clearly highlighted the progress and achievements of LIASA with regard to some of these goals. To mention two major achievements of LIASA in 2002 - a very successful SCECSAL conference was hosted for the first time in April in South Africa and the bid to host the 2007 World Library and Information Congress was awarded to the LIASA in August. This will only be the second IFLA conference in Africa and the first one in Southern Africa.

The grant received from the Carnegie Corporation of New York had a major impact on the development of the Association and the leadership provided to the LIS community in South

Africa. The last five years showed unprecedented growth of library associations in South Africa and the African continent. The profile of the profession received a major boost. However, this did not provide long-term sustainability for the Association's current infrastructure. Also, because of the growth and achievements of the Association, high expectations were raised and continued demands for services and new products were received from a wide spectrum of members. In addition to this, the provision of public and school library services continue to decrease as demands for services in these areas increased.

During 2002 the LIASA Executive Committee held a strategic planning session to discuss these new challenges and to map out a direction for the Association for the next few years. It was agreed to work within the existing framework of LIASA's Vision, Mission and Aims as these were still relevant for guiding the Association. The Executive Committee identified three strategic objectives on which to focus for the next three years (2003-2005). These are as follows:

- To increase our paid-up membership to 3 500 in two years through various recruitment strategies
- To establish an effective Continuing Professional Development infrastructure
- To establish effective communications within the LIS sector and in the wider community in order to develop a positive image and sense of professionalism among library and information workers and to achieve improved service delivery in libraries and information centres.

Each strategic objective is set out identifying the key projects and activities that will support the successful achievement of the strategic objective together with the projected income and expenditure.

Strategic objective 1:

To increase our paid-up membership to 3 500 in two years through various recruitment strategies

This will be achieved by:

- Target-focused recruitment and marketing strategies implemented during 2003 and 2004
- Achieving an annual membership retention rate of 85%
- Clearly defining and assigning renewal and recruitment responsibilities for the National Office, Branches and Interest Groups
- Implementation and coordination of a membership management and evaluation system by the National Office.

Membership growth is a critical success factor in the long-term sustainability of LIASA and its ability to maintain an effective national office and infrastructure with staff to initiate, drive and implement recruitment strategies, both in South Africa and the international arena.

Strategic objective 2:

To establish an effective Continuing Professional Development infrastructure and to gather information in respect of:

- training needs of LIASA members
- training needs of LIASA office bearers
- availability of training facilities and trainers
- training partners and partnerships
- and to establish a Committee: Continuing Education and In-service Training.

The second strategic objective is a response to a high level of expectation from the LIASA membership for the national library association to facilitate and implement a comprehensive Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme for the LIS sector in South Africa. The CPD programme will have the potential to attract new members who want to benefit from discounted rates for LIASA members. A number of the CPD programmes would be offered as pre- and post- conference programmes.

Strategic objective 3:

To establish effective communications within the LIS sector and in the wider community in order to develop a positive image and sense of professionalism among library and

information workers and to achieve improved service delivery in libraries and information centres through the establishment of a Committee: Communications, Marketing and Advocacy.

Strategic objective 3 focuses on the critical success factor of communications, marketing and advocacy which represents one of the most important group of activities supported, developed and coordinated by the National Office and the staff, in close cooperation with the relevant LIASA office bearers and structures. Specific projects to improve communication and image-building include the publication of an association handbook, initiation of an annual lecture series and a directory of LIS. (LIASA Business Plan 2003 -2005)

Should the required funding be acquired, the objectives outlined above are certainly achievable and will provide sustainability to the Association over the coming years. LIASA made tremendous progress in the its relatively short history and should now consolidate its efforts towards the bigger societal, economical and political role it is expected to play

CONCLUSION

Statement by the Interim Chair of the IFLA Management of Library Association Section (2002 Annual Report): “Library associations provide many valuable services to librarians. They work to develop effective library programmes and services that meet the needs of library users and advance societal objectives and interest, ensuring public access to information, and preserving and protecting cultural resources”

There is therefore no doubt that library associations can and should play an important role in influencing and contributing to social change. That’s why it is important for LIASA and other

library associations in developing countries world to get involved and address issues of concern which impact on development in general. In Africa, library associations in particular should develop strategies that can influence civil society initiatives such as the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) and the New Partnership Development for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

AISI “is an action framework that has been the basis for information and communication activities in Africa for the last six to seven years. AISI was launched in 1996 as Africa needed a common vision for its quest not only to bridge the digital divide between Africa and the rest of the world but more importantly to create effective digital opportunities to be developed by Africans and their partners, and to speed the continent's entry into the information and knowledge global economy.” (<http://www.uneca.org/aisi/abtaisi.htm>)

NEPAD “ is a pledge by African leaders, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, that they have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth and development and, at the same time, to participate actively in the world economy and body politic”. (<http://www.nepad.org.ng>)

Library associations and the LIS profession can make a significant contribution to social change globally by ensuring access to libraries and information, thus empowering citizens to play a meaningful role in the development of their countries and the global information society.

REFERENCES

1. IFLA Management of Library Associations Section, Annual Report, January 1, 2002 through December 31, 2002
2. LIASA Business Plan 2003-2005, October 2002
3. Proposal submitted to the Carnegie Corporation of New York by LIASA, 2000
4. Tise, E.R. 2000. The impact of changing government structures on the provision of library and information services in South Africa. SCECSAL 2000 Conference Proceedings.