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Library Associations as Prime movers of Professional Development in seven selected countries of southern Africa

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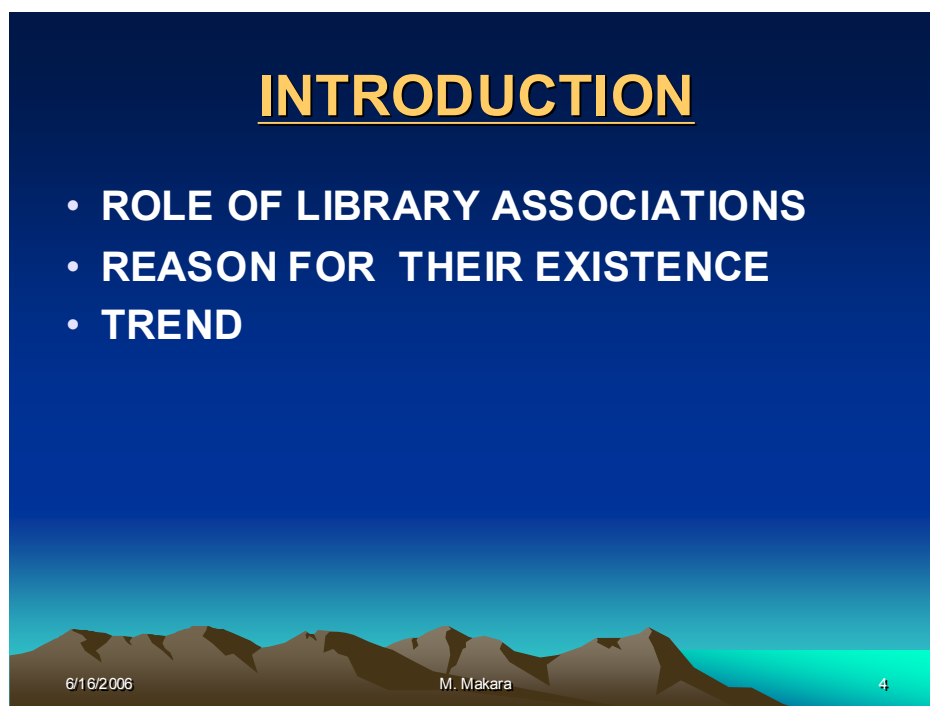
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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

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- CONSTRAINTS
- GLOBAL TRENDS
- ADVOCACY IN LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL CLIMATE

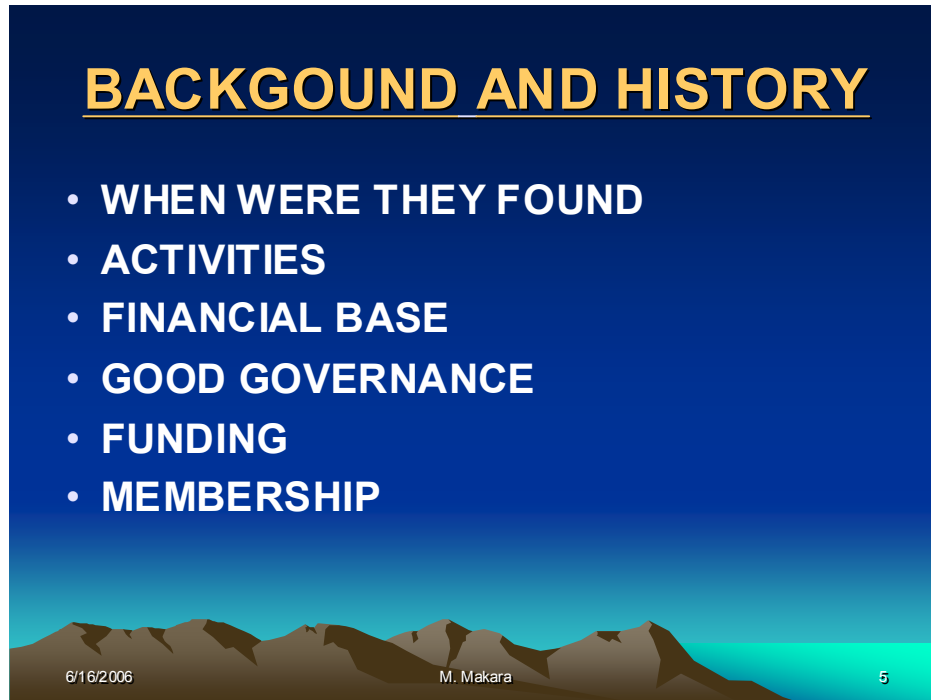
ABSTRACT

Fundamental role of Library associations in this new era is to tell the public what exactly they are and what they can offer. They should be able to dynamically spin the wheel of knowledge and information in their societies. There is an issue of collaboration in associations which is always ignored yet it is the one that opens the way to progress in strategizing the way forward in advocacy. We always build up ideas by discussing issues of interest with our counterparts in other associations, but without a hand to hold and support to the association, such association remains in jeopardy.



Librarians are faced with a big challenge; their existence and their role in the provision of information are not visible in some countries. Let alone the role they play in development of nations. Library Associations Exist to safeguard the interests of their members and to facilitate equal access to information by all citizens. James :(66th IFLA). It is therefore, the role of Library Associations again to make their nations aware of their existence; who they are and what they exist to do. It is obvious that some associations do not know what they are and what their role is in the society, while others seem to be focused. Having originated almost around the same time, Library Associations in the SCECSAL region are not yet at the same stage of development. Some Library Associations are still lacking behind and they have been overtaken by newly born ones in the region. This problem is caused by lack of understanding of the profession which is the role of the associations to raise awareness about the profession to the authorities. If librarians are not able to develop within, how are they going to be able to influence authorities to understand and support their existence? How are they going to advocate for the profession? Based on all

these one would pose a question of whether Library Associations are Prime movers of professional development or not.



Library associations are groups of professionals in library and information field with a common goal of providing and making information accessible to users, and they are intended to exchange ideas for the benefit of development and provision of better information services. However, development is a critical issue as some Library Associations are still struggling to develop while others are showing a great progress. In Africa most countries are underdeveloped and this has created a big development gap between Library Associations (LAs). Since their foundation to present time, Library Associations have been experiencing a weak financial base; they have been depending on subscriptions from members and from Proceeds of fundraising. This has been raised by (Brenda R. James: 2000) but till now there are no significant changes with such LAs. She goes further to point out that this level of funding leads the association nowhere. This has been the truth and it still remains like that. However, some LAs have managed to convince their authorities and they get support from their governments. Of the seven countries in question, Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA) 1967, and Zambia Library Association in 1967 appear to be the eldest and the Library and information Association of South Africa (LIASA) is the youngest but the latter is far more advanced than all these others. Are Library Associations helping each other in the provision of better information services or competing with each other? Ever since their foundations Library Associations meet annually at national levels, biennially at regional levels and annually at international level with understanding of helping each other.

Brief History of the Library Associations

According to literature Library associations dates as far back as 18th century, with the establishment of “the Library Association” in 1877. This is said to be the first one in the world. Since that time other associations developed gradually as the need arise in different regions of the world. However, some developed faster while some are still lacking behind. This paper is based on the information gathered about these selected countries’ associations in the Standing Conference of the Eastern, Central, and Southern African Librarians (SCECSAL) region. They are chosen because of their location in the region and the years they have been founded together with their level of development. They are: Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA) 1967, and Zambia Library Association in 1967. Botswana Library Association (BLA) 1977 for which Botswana National Library Services has been acting for some years; Lesotho Library Association (LLA) 1978, Swaziland Library Association (SWALA) 1984, Namibia Information Workers Association (NIWA) 1990, Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) 1997, which is showing a great deal of achievements.

Library Associations and professional development



In this era of information nations are striving hard to keep pace in development. Who is responsible for this development? This is the responsibility of information professionals through associations to see to it that they move professional development, hence the nations development.

Library Associations are made up of information professionals and their reason for existence, according to Brenda R. James, is to safeguard the interests of their members and to facilitate equal access to information by all citizens (James, B.R.: 2000). This has

not been possible with some associations. Raseroka puts an emphasis to this by stating that if ever possible, without considering the size of the association, Advocacy should be the primary role of LAs, in all LIS issues. And she says these include raising awareness about themselves. (Raseroka 2000)

It is obvious that advocacy, among all the activities of the organizations, is the most prominent one. However, this is not so with most of these African LAs, advocacy is always given a blind eye. Library associations especially in developing countries do not consider it to be a tool they could use to influence the decision-makers. It is always mentioned in meetings but with no action.

LIASA and BLA are among those associations which are keeping up with their objectives. Among these objectives training is in the forefront. They make sure that every year they train their members on a particular issue of interest in their job by holding workshops and training sessions. There are many more activities taking place in this LAs which many others have not been able to achieve.

Constraints

CONSTRAINTS

- **LINK BETWEEN COMMITTEES**
- **FUNDING**
- **LACK OF COMMITMENT**
- **CHANGING MEMBERSHIP**
- **LACK OF INTER-COUNTRY AND INTRA-COUNTRY COOPERATION**
- **LOW MORALE**
- **LOW LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION**

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Handing over of executive committee has been a problem to most of the associations. Most of the time it takes some months before the newly elected executive carries on its duties. This brought about a problem of delay in some activities. Without an office LAs are not able to keep records, as a result each executive starts its own direction for progress. There is no continuation of any kind. Those activities that have been started by the previous committee end up with the committee that is going out. There is no communication for referral purposes between the old and the new executive, let alone continuity to already started projects. This leads to Association which is dormant. Example of this situation is the LLA.

Library Associations are also facing a problem of changing membership. There is no commitment in the profession; this is supported by Badisang on her keynote speech address during BLA workshop on proactive librarianship. She stated that inadequate human resources, lack of trained staff, lack of intra and inter-country cooperation among library services. She goes further to mention issue of low profile accompanied by silence and invisibility, lack of commitment a major barrier to BLA and poor image of LIS and workers (Badisang, B. 2002). LLA is another association that is experiencing same problems. As such these library associations and some others are failing their major duty of becoming prime movers of professional development.

Global trend of libraries



With the use and advancement in Information Technology, Librarians are striving hard to adjust to the rising needs in the provision of information. Therefore, they ought to keep abreast of these advancements. It is visible that the whole world is technology driven; this is evidenced by the rapid changes in the new technologies coming in. hence, those librarians who are not keeping pace with these developments will die a natural death.

Librarians are now in the fight to be recognized by their nations. They are working out strategies that will put them in the map of professionals which have not been there before when this profession was said to be a profession for women, and during that time women were regarded as children, as such children and women in African culture would not stand up and say anything. Today things have changed and a woman is now considered as a full human being with all the equal rights with men. Therefore a librarian should stand up and tell a story about herself / himself without any fear, hence; advocacy.

ADVOCACY IN LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

- **MAJOR ROLE**
- **STRATEGY FOR GROWTH**
- **TELLING A STORY ABOUT ONESELF**
- **GIVING A TESTIMONIAL**
- **RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT LAS**

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Defining advocacy is quite a tricky thing because it uses some of the tools of marketing and public relations. Therefore, deliberations in this paper will be based on advocacy as telling a story about oneself and saying this is what one can offer.

Advocacy in Library Associations has been an ongoing issue which has been discussed in many forums. However, it should be stated that advocacy is neither marketing nor public relations as much as it uses some of the tools used in both. In “Library Advocacy Now” advocacy is described as recommending something publicly; giving a testimonial; or telling a library story, and that it has a great to do with building relationships, partnerships, funding and collaborating with decision makers, potential partners, funders, and stakeholders.

As Raseroka stated, advocacy is one strategy that raises awareness about Library Association and that its major focus should be its transformation into a financially viable entity and its engagement in public activities. Its focus is on community’s concern about LIS issues, and it draws attention to national issues. (Raseroka, 2000) However, there are numerous challenges facing these associations like low level of vibrancy which is always linked to Associations lack of financial viability and which is reflected in reduced levels of participation by members in the associations’ affairs (James, 2000). It is true that this has affected effectiveness of associations negatively.

Most LAs advocate for libraries by campaigns and using media which is now the common way of transmitting information. However, some associations like LLA sees this as difficult as anything. Advocacy has been an issue at meetings but nothing has happened. Other associations take it that advocacy, public relations, and marketing are one and the same thing, so when they have marketed their services they assume that they

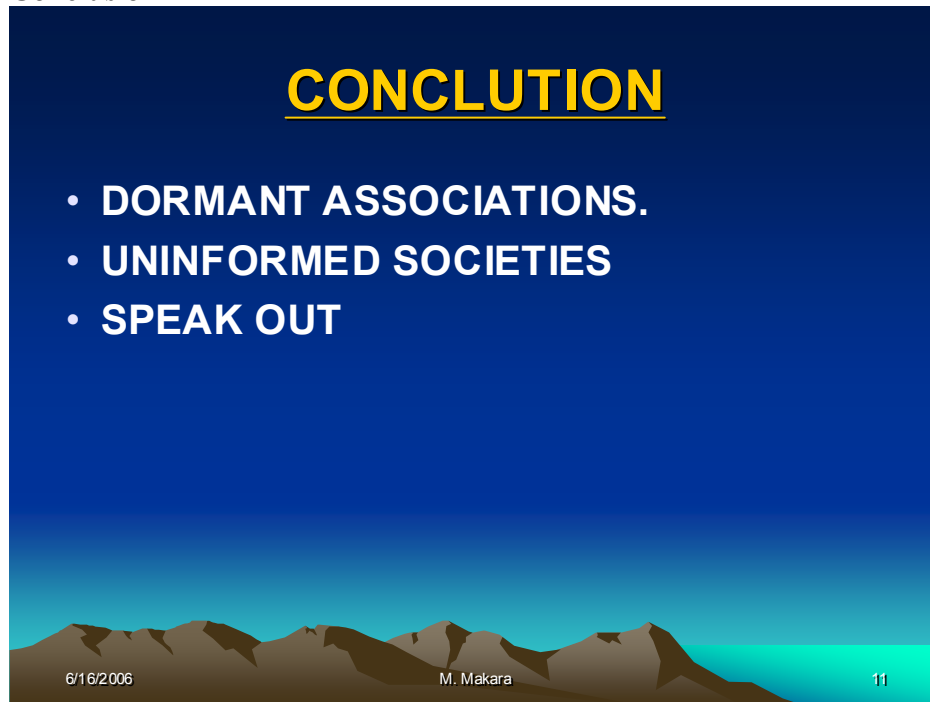
have advocated for the library. This shows that libraries have to go a long way to understanding these three concepts in order to be able to develop professionally. This brings about the issue raised by Raseroka when she says “hence SCECSAL members support each other...” Yes, academically they do by presenting papers but in growth of the association to be able to convince their government about their existence it does not happen. Most of the participants for such conferences go there and bring forth nothing they keep information to themselves. There is no feedback or report to their colleagues at home. With all these some LAs are failing to be prime movers of professional development.

Professional climate



It has been discussed in the previous chapters that in most countries professionals do not show commitment in the activities of the association to extend of refusing to take part when they are given assignments. Their morale is very low, and this low level of vibrancy hinders progress in the role of library associations as effective pressure groups for political action. This also hinders growth of the association.

Conclusion



In conclusion one would say that as much as objectives of the library associations are the same, it is still difficult for others to meet the common goal in the creation of knowledgeable and informed society. They turn a deaf ear to the clarion call which is often heard on many areas including the prominent one which is advocacy. For the library association to be recognized they ought to speak out and tell the public who they actually are and what services can they offer to the nation.

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