

	<p style="text-align: right;">Date : 19/06/2007</p> <p><b>Co-operation Across Continents: Case of Library and Information Association of South Africa and Finnish Library Associations</b></p> <p><b>Tommy Mathee</b> Library and Information Association of South Africa</p> <p>And</p> <p><b>Marjatta Lahti</b> Finnish Library Association</p>
<p><b>Meeting:</b></p>	<p><b>129-1 Management of Library Associations with Continuing Professional Development and Workplace Learning (1)</b></p>
<p><b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b></p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p><b>WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 73RD IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL</b> 19-23 August 2007, Durban, South Africa <a href="http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm">http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla73/index.htm</a></p>	

## IS IT POSSIBLE?

South Africa is a country of 1 219 912 km<sup>2</sup> and 45 million inhabitants. The new, democratic government took over in 1994, after a long apartheid era. South Africa has recently taken long strides in the economic development, although the wealth is still rather unevenly distributed. The literacy rate is estimated at 86 %, but a number of people are unaccustomed to the use of libraries since the access to them was long unavailable to the majority of them.

Finland is a Northern industrialized country, part of Scandinavia, with only just over 5 million inhabitants and an area of 338 000 km<sup>2</sup>. The literacy rate is almost 100 %, and the public libraries are heavily used.

How can these countries co-operate? Do they have anything in common? What can they share?

## BACKGROUND

### *FLA*

The Finnish Library Association, <http://kirjastoseura.kaapeli.fi>, was founded in 1910. Since libraries, almost by a definition, are international by nature, also FLA maintained international contacts from the very start. The first links were, naturally, with the neighbouring Nordic and other European

countries as well as with USA. From the 1970's – following the general transformation of the society – FLA got interested in other parts of the world as well, particularly Africa.

In 1985, the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) invited FLA to participate in running the library services at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (Somafo), the educational centre of the ANC in exile, in Tanzania. The work continued for seven years, i.e. until the South African exiles returned home in 1992. The project was funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which honoured the recommendations of the UN Security Council by funding this type of humanitarian projects for the South African refugees. At that time, it was impossible for the Finnish government to get politically involved by e.g. supporting the armed struggle.

The ANC Library Project was supervised by the ANC and administered by FLA. In the framework of the project, library services were offered to the residents of the two ANC centres in Tanzania, Somafo and Dakawa Development Centre. FLA provided professional manpower, and e.g. Ms. Sinikka Sipilä, the present secretary general of FLA and Ms. Marjatta Lahti, co-author of this paper were among the seven Finnish librarians who worked there as librarians and project coordinators. FLA participated also in the training programme of South African LIS professionals, and managed the acquisition of library material and equipment.

The positive attitude that the ANC showed towards developing library services laid a basis for the work, and for FLA this project was a major undertaking in the field of an international co-operation. The project laid a firm basis for the future co-operation between the South African and Finnish library professionals.

Later, FLA also supported the archive of the liberation movements which was situated at the University of Fort Hare. The bulk of the archival material, situated at Somafo and Dakawa, was collected and transported to Fort Hare in 1992. One of the students trained under the scholarship programme was later employed by the archive.

### *SLAF*

The Swedish Library Association of Finland (SLAF), <http://www.biblioteken.fi/biblioteksbranchen/FSBF>, was founded in 1982 by a merger of two older associations. Representing a minority group in Finland, many members of the Swedish-speaking association have always been internationally oriented and have understood problems of other minority groups. It was, therefore, easy for them to take over from FLA in 1992 to continue supporting the scholarship programme for South African students at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. The project was funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs as a non-governmental project, which meant that the Ministry paid 80 % of the expenses, and SLAF had to raise 20 % of the funds on its own. Extensive voluntary work from the association members was therefore required, but they managed to successfully complete the project in 2001.

Through the above mentioned programmes, supported by SLAF and FLA, altogether 23 South African students attained either a certificate, diploma or a degree in library science at universities or other institutes of learning in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, The United Kingdom, Finland and South Africa.

Due to the above projects, a considerable interest was raised among many Finnish librarians towards the transformation of the South African society from an apartheid era to a democratic society. The role of the libraries in the transformation was naturally of a special interest to them.

## *LIASA*

The Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), <http://www.liasa.org.za> was founded in 1997. The formation of the new association was a result of extensive talks between the three associations existing then: The South African Institute for Librarianship and Information Science (SAILIS), the African Library Association of South Africa (ALA) and the Library and Information Workers Organization (LIWO).

IFLA also paved the way for the merger of the associations, by sending a Fact Finding Mission to South Africa in 1993. To further illustrate the Finnish interest in the South African library scene, it is to be noted that there was also one Finnish delegate in this group. The mission was followed by a number of meetings, and a lot of dedicated work from the members of all the South African associations concerned was required before the formation of the new association was completed.

The newly created LIASA received assistance from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to support an office infrastructure and appointment of staff.

Because of the links FLA had earlier had with the South Africans in exile, it was now natural to continue co-operating with LIASA. South Africans, on their part, welcomed new international contacts, and a co-operation programme with FLA seemed to bring a new dimension to it.

## **AIMS OF NEW CO-OPERATION**

The above mentioned type of a project-oriented co-operation was now over. New ways of working together, based on an equal participation and decision making, were explored.

It was noted that the libraries of both countries aim at promoting democracy, equality, sustainable development and participation in their respective societies. The universal access for information is promoted and meeting points for the civil society are arranged. Libraries also participate in bridging the digital divide. All these principles laid a basis for the co-operation.

It was envisaged that especially the work of the South African libraries with multicultural societies would through FLA and SLAF be made known to Finnish librarians. The South Africans, in their turn, would make use of the Finnish experiences of meeting the challenges of the information society. Both parties would gain from the international co-operation which would increase mutual understanding and eradicate ignorance and racism in both countries.

## **CO-OPERATION AGREEMENT**

The first draft for the co-operation and plan of action between LIASA and FLA was accepted in 2003. In January 2004 the agreement was endorsed by the boards of both associations. The following measures were then planned:

- participation in and lectures given at seminars, organized in both countries,
- exchange of journals and articles,
- exchange of personnel, including LIS students, and study tours

- co-operation at international meetings.

## **WHAT HAS BEEN DONE**

### *Seminars, conferences and study tours:*

**2001:** SLAF arranged a study tour for eight Finnish librarians to South Africa. The Western Cape branch of LIASA organized a seminar, under the chairmanship of Ms. Naomi Haasbroek, and with speakers from both South Africa and Finland. In the lectures, an overview of the state of libraries in both countries was given. First discussions about the further co-operation between the associations were also held.

**2002:** FLA and SLAF organized a seminar, called Foundations of Democratic Society: Finnish and South African Libraries, and it was held in Helsinki, Finland. Mr Tommy Matthee, then a member of the LIASA board, and now the chairperson of LIASA, gave a paper on Development of South African Libraries: Heritage of the Past and Visions for the Future. He told the audience about the challenge that the South African libraries were facing to draw the unaccustomed readers to make use of the services offered to them. Finnish librarians found it also interesting to hear about the ways the libraries were trying to meet the challenges that the eleven official languages of the country were posing to them. Mr. Mandla Ngubeni, member of the LIASA – FLA co-operation working group spoke about Transforming South African Libraries to Serve the Majority of the Population. As a result of the apartheid history, most libraries were situated far from the areas where the majority of people lived. Challenges of the transformation were huge, both physically and mentally, but steps into the right direction were already being taken. Ms. Sindiwe Magona, an award-winning South African writer also attended the seminar and spoke about her work both to the seminar delegates and to a wider Finnish audience, attending a large book fair, which the seminar was a part of. Her presence raised a lot of attention among the general public, making them aware of the present, versatile South African literary scene. Two Finnish lecturers, Mr. Matti Wuori and Ms. Heli Saarinen, gave their views about the libraries and democracy, from a Finnish point of view.

The South African participants visited several libraries, and they had a chance of discussing with a number of colleagues. They also held discussions with the representatives of the Finnish Ministry of Education and the Association of Finnish Regional and Local Authorities. The role of libraries, their administration and financing in both countries was then discussed.

Mr. Matthee and Mr. Ngubeni also had an important meeting with the officials of FLA where the future co-operation between the two associations was planned.

**2003:** Two Finnish librarians prepared papers for the LIASA Annual Conference in Rustenburg, South Africa. Ms. Tuula Haavisto wrote on Strategies for Hybrid Libraries (as she was unable to attend, the paper was delivered by Ms. Marjatta Lahti) and Ms. Satu Hallikainen spoke about Using Linux at Libraries. Especially the experiences about the use of open source software at libraries woke considerable interest and discussion among the conference delegates.

Ms Marjatta Lahti held discussions with the LIASA executive committee about the future co-operation between the associations. As a result of the talks, an agreement of the co-operation was prepared, and it was later accepted by the boards of both associations.

The representatives also discussed the library related issues to be dealt with at the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) conference which was due to be held in Geneva. As Ms. Sipilä, General Secretary of FLA was a member of the Finnish government delegation, LIASA board members could be briefed on the latest developments.

The Finnish delegates were impressed by the smooth organization of the big LIASA annual conference. Fruitful lectures and seminars were combined by the joy of togetherness and cheerful atmosphere, which the Finns would have a lot to learn from.

**2004:** FLA organized an international seminar Libraries for Active Citizenship, in Helsinki. Ms. Valdi Phillips, a library science student from the University of the Western Cape (UWC), participated. She paid also visits to several libraries, and had fruitful talks with LIS teachers and students at Turku University of Applied Sciences and Åbo Akademi University. She even gave a talk about studies at UWC to a gathering of students. This was the first step towards the co-operation between the universities which later started in a formal way, and which also got full support from the associations.

**2005:** Plans were made for a LIASA member to attend and give a paper in Finland at an IFLA pre-conference on library buildings, but unfortunately, funds could not be secured for this purpose.

**2006:** Mr John Tsebe, national librarian and Ms Lucille Webster, board member of LIASA visited Helsinki in April, and Mr. Tsebe gave a paper at an international seminar Whose Internet, organized by FLA and the Library of Parliament. The paper was called The Cultural Impact of Internet in South Africa, and it gave an overview of the internet and related services offered at South African libraries.

Mr Tsebe and Ms Webster got also acquainted with the work of FLA. A special interest for them was to note that FLA had a politician as a chairperson which gave food for discussion about the benefits of the arrangement. They were also interested in the courses and seminars that FLA is arranging for its members. Plans were made to expand the co-operation in these fields.

Besides visiting several libraries, both public and academic, Mr. Tsebe and Ms. Webster paid a visit to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs where possible sponsoring of future ICT projects at South African libraries was discussed. The discussions were later continued with the representatives of the Finnish Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa.

Dr. Tarja Cronberg, chairperson of FLA could, unfortunately, not honour the invitation extended to her to attend the LIASA annual conference held in Pretoria in September. The chairmanship of EU required the presence of all the parliamentarians in Finland at that time, but Ms Marjatta Lahti represented FLA instead. She was informed about the preparations that LIASA was making for the forthcoming IFLA conference to be held in 2007 in Durban. She was urged to encourage Finnish librarians to attend the conference, and discussions about sponsoring African delegates to the conference were also held. As LIASA normally invites several foreign speakers to its conference, it was a welcome chance for Ms Lahti to meet colleagues also from other African countries and learn about their views and experiences.

FLA sponsored Mr Mandla Ngubeni to the XVII Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Professionals (SCECSAL) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. This was a way of promoting South to South cooperation since experiences from another African country would benefit the work done locally.

**2007:** The major event is the IFLA conference where also South African and Finnish librarians can meet and plan for the future.

The LIASA liaison officer will visit Helsinki towards the end of 2007 or beginning of 2008. Besides a tour to several libraries, he will be introduced to the organization and work of FLA, especially arranging training and courses for librarians. He will be introduced to the functions of SLAF and other Finnish library associations as well.

***Other ways of co-operation:***

- Articles about the co-operation have been published in both LIASA-in-Touch and the Finnish Library Journal (Kirjastolehti).

- A list on African fiction, available at Finnish libraries, was prepared by Ms. Kristina Vattulainen at the request of FLA for the use of the Finnish libraries. A number of South African authors were naturally included in the list. <http://www.kaapeli.fi/~fla/tiedote.htm>

- At the request of LIASA, FLA has promoted the participation of Finnish librarians to attend the IFLA conference in Durban in 2007, and is sponsoring one LIASA member to participate. As LIASA has expressed a wish about a big attendance from several African countries at the IFLA conference, FLA is participating by sponsoring one delegate from the Namibian Information Workers Association as well.

- Preparing this paper at an IFLA conference was also a new experience to both parties.

- FLA has supported, together with other Scandinavian countries, the African initiatives at IFLA, particularly nominations of African members to the board and chairpersons, including the chairmanship of Ms. Kay Raseroka and the nomination of Ms. Ellen Tise.

**PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

***- Funding:***

Applying special funds for the co-operation requires time and effort from the participants. As outside funding is in most cases required, preparations for applications have to be started well in advance, and extra work is needed for administering the practicalities. Funding has not, however, posed a major problem, but it has occasionally set some restrictions since e.g. one visit in 2005 had to be cancelled due to lack of sponsorship.

***- Personnel resources:***

The employees of both of the associations have their hands full of duties in running the associations. International co-operation requires extra work, and there must be a special dedication and understanding about the importance of this type of a work for it to be successful.

***- Language:***

Although South Africa has eleven official languages, it is an advantage for LIASA, as far as the international co-operation is concerned, that English can be used at most of its meetings and in

publications. This makes it easy for foreigners to participate in the functions and read the publications. Finnish, on the other hand, is used at most of the seminars organized by FLA and Swedish at the seminars organized by SLAF. Although the number of seminars with English as the main language has recently increased, the foreign participation in the Finnish meetings is somewhat limited. The FLA journal is in Finnish and the SLAF journal in Swedish, and consequently they are directed mainly to the Finnish audience. Articles can be translated from other languages into Finnish and Swedish and published in the papers, but it is, naturally, difficult for foreigners to read them.

However, since English is widely spoken among the Finnish librarians, the language has not set serious problems to the LIASA / FLA /SLAF co-operation.

## **FUTURE**

The challenges of the globalisation have set new demands on the international co-operation between library associations, making it increasingly important. LIASA / FLA co-operation will be continued even in the future, but, while still continuing the above type of a co-operation, new avenues are also sought for. SLAF, on its part, will participate in a more informal way, through a personal involvement of its individual members or working together with FLA.

Including an international approach to training programmes of the future generation is of a special importance. The associations will encourage the co-operation between universities and other institutions offering LIS studies. A start has been made between two South African and three Finnish universities, but more contacts and improving the quality of the co-operation will be encouraged.

A common goal for both South Africa and Finland is to make the library branch visible and the decision makers aware of the importance of the libraries. Sharing ideas and experiences about these topics will certainly be one of the priorities of the co-operation in the future.

In the above, just a few names have been mentioned of those who have participated in the co-operation. Many more have benefited from it. However, there is still space to include new members and expand the activities to new libraries and areas. It is anticipated that with the inclusion of new actors, fresh ideas will also be developed.

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