

BOTSWANA COUNTRY REPORT 2000 - 2002

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In the spirit and the letter of the SCECSAL 2000 resolutions, this report reflects on the activities of Botswana Library Association since 2000. It is also guided by resolutions of a professional development meeting: 'Taking the BLA into the next millennium' and builds on them for future direction. These include, among others, creation of a website; publishing; marketing and publicity; professional development / training; and funding and membership drive. The report encapsulates issues from BLA's four sub-committees: Professional Development; Publicity; Editorial; and Fundraising. It is supported by published documentation and the website. Publications on display include: the latest BLA Newsletter issues and newly published information leaflets - BLA general information for members; and BLA Vision mission and values. Identifies some problems that have stifled growth of the association and suggests measures that have been taken to rectify the situation.

Review of action on Resolutions and Recommendation from SCECSAL 2001

BLA goes cyber at website <http://www.bla.0catch.com>

In accordance with Resolution No. 1 of SCECSAL 2000, during the period under review, BLA set up its website providing hyperlinks to other national and international professional networks. A BLA discussion group to which the executive members subscribe has been initiated. It is an outstanding achievement and a pride to the association. It was created and is being maintained by the treasurer of the association who has volunteered her expertise to carry out this worthy undertaking. Such commitment and professional responsibility has seen the association getting recognition from potential members and has driven the membership cause, another SCECSAL 2000 resolution.

Professional Development / Training

As part of the Public Library revitalisation in Africa initiative, BLA submitted a funding proposal in October 2001. The BLA will receive USD 6000 towards a continuing education workshop under the Carnegie/INASP scheme. The workshop is being organised by the Professional Development Sub-committee for June 2002. LIS institutions in Botswana took Resolution No.4 on board by continuing to accord staff members the opportunity to acquire skills on ICT. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat held a seminar for librarians in SADC institutions on Information organization and use within the restructured SADC in September 19-21 2001ii. The University of Botswana (UB) Department of Library and Information Studies (DLIS) from 11-22 June 2001, held a DLIS/DSE supported training workshop on the Effective use of Automated systems in Libraries which was held at the University of Botswana. Individual institutions have also been sponsoring in-service training for their members.

One significant achievement worth mentioning is that the country has advanced in the Public Libraries' Revitalization Project that has, with Carnegie's support, brought even the BLA on the spotlight to benefit from INASP/ Carnegie support. The University of Botswana Library also benefited from a series of INASP supported Internet and electronic resources workshops run for library and information workers.

The Botswana institutions have also been running country preparatory workshops with a view to implementing Performance Management Systems (PMS). Botswana Government has taken the initiative to implement PMS to improve performance and both organizational and individual employees' performance. One believes through the new PMS based services, the library profession and information provision will be more visible with a more pronounced impact. This will surely emancipate libraries from misconceptions about their insignificance among parent bodies, as long as the LIS employees drive PMS effectively.

A member of the BLA has been awarded the the first Wedgeworth Fellowship, competed for internationally by library professionals from South Africa's neighbouring countries including Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The Wedgeworth Fellowship sponsors Mrs Chedza Molefe to the World's renowned Mortenson Centre for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois where she will enroll for a six weeks long Library Leadership Program. The Botswana candidate will join nine South African professionals who are also taking the summer Library Leadership Program though under a different arrangement. We are hopeful that she will forge new professional links and bring home expertise that will help further growth of our association and the profession in our country.

Thanks to ALP, one of the BLA executive members, the Treasurer, managed to attend IFLA in Boston. Through her attendance, we were able to get valuable information, new ideas and professional networks from the conference. We are now convinced more than ever that professional associations should not live in isolation but network more. BLA will work towards forging partnerships from the various parts of the globe.

Marketing and publicity

BLA is delighted to report that publicity work has run proficiently and smoothly during the period under review. In accordance with resolution No.5 of SCECSAL 2000, BLA for the first time in the history of the association in April 2001 organized a strategic planning workshop which foreground advocacy as one of its mandates. The First Publicity Sub-Committee was formed and responsibility was given to the office of the Assistant Secretary. Publicity activities have been running significantly consistently and efficiently during the period under review. The Publicity Secretary (Assistant Secretary) has been very effective in capitalizing on the activities of the association to enhance the visibility of the association. The Fundraising Committee organized a court of injustice as one of its fundraising functions. The function was well covered in the media and through it BLA has been able to hook up with such organizations as the Barclays Bank, South African Air Express, Botswana Telecommunications Corporation, to name but a few. Publicity from this event and others, placed in the local media has given the association clout as evidenced by regular invitations to participate in national activities. BLA has

also published (on the web) its “Code of ethics”, researched and compiled by the Executive Committee, led in the exercise by the treasurer.

Networking

In its recognition as a stakeholder in the development of literacy in Botswana, BLA is represented in the Adult Basic Education Advisory Board of the Ministry of Education. BLA is also represented in the National Library’s (BNLS) Revitalization of Public Libraries Programme. Two members presented papers to a revitalization conference in December 2000 on the professional development and indigenous publishing. An executive member is part of the reference group tasked to evaluate the “BNLS computerization project” and the committee that sets “Library Standards for Colleges of Education in Botswana”. BLA has also been invited to participate in assessing the “State of Governance in Botswana”. A representative has attended consultative launch and submitted a response to a questionnaire that sought views on effectiveness of political economic and social institutions.

BLA was able to participate in LIASA annual conference through part sponsorship of a member, who delivered a country report to the LIASA sub-committee on School and Youth Services.

During the period under review, some BLA members met up with the COMLA Chair who was visiting Botswana in order to strengthen professional links with COMLA. The BLA is affiliated to IFLA and a few members attended the conference in Boston. The association has been taken to glorious heights by having one of its founder members Kay Raseroka, ascending to the IFLA highest seat and such an honour has illuminated the upcoming associationⁱⁱⁱ.

Social responsibility

The Francistown Orphanage Project appealed to BLA for help. BLA recognizing the importance of reading and information as a right to every child, took the challenge seriously. Through the National library BLA has been able to select some very good used books which the National Library would transport to the orphanage.

BLA advocates access to reading material as a right for children. A proposal to start a reading campaign has been submitted to UNESCO for consideration. The proposed project, now known as “*A BOOK FOR EVERY CHILD*” aims to avail reading materials to the various primary school levels. The role of information cannot be overemphasized in the economic and social development of a country. BLA recognizes its role in the facilitation of access to information. Along these lines, a team of BLA members have submitted a proposal to COMLA for consideration for funding. The project proposed called *Information Repackaging for Grassroots Botswana Nationals*, aims to present information on government programs and other citizen economic empowerment projects to the general public in meaningful formats that they can access and comprehend .

BLA Vision and Mission

The association hopes to live up its vision of being a vibrant association with a say in public matters affecting information and knowledge acquisition, storage, retrieval and dissemination; and to be the leader in advocating access to information without barriers. BLA and other stakeholders are facing a major challenge as Botswana has introduced VAT on information resources among others. The association has also made input in a draft media bill that is still at consultation stage. The association has published its vision and mission on the web and in print.

BLA and the national Vision 2016

BLA has effective representation in the stakeholders' committee and has been actively involved in strategic planning activities towards realization of the vision. A member, Professor Amos Thapisa, facilitated a retreat for one of the vision pillars, the Forum on an "Educated and Informed nation" of the Vision on March 31st 2001 and other vision fora. Vision 2016 represents the aspirations of the people of Botswana; the kind of society they would like to be when they celebrate Botswana's 50th anniversary of independence in the year 2016. The vision will guide strategic thinking and policy making in the succeeding years...The vision will usher in change which will be fundamental transformation across the broad spectrum of the social, economic, entrepreneurial, political and cultural lives^{iv}. The goals of the vision are that by the year 2016 Botswana will be an educated and an informed nation; a prosperous, productive and innovative nation; a safe and secure nation; a safe and secure nation; an open, democratic and accountable nation; a moral and tolerant nation; and a united and proud nation. Through participation in the national vision 2016 activities, BLA has manifested itself and the library/information profession as one of the key stakeholders in the creation of an "Educated and Informed nation by the year 2016". Detailed background information on BLA's role is in the newsletter^v.

Editorial Board

The BLA constitution has been revised and presented to the strategic planning meeting in May 2001 by the Editorial Board. It is going to the general membership for approval at the next AGM in June 2002.

The Association has been awarded a sponsorship for the publication of the newsletter for three (3) years by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) and Carnegie. Circulars and Information notes are released throughout the year to keep members informed of current activities. One of the scholarly publications of the association, which is relevant to this meeting, has been the publication of the proceedings of SCECSAL VII on Libraries and Literacy held in Gaborone in 1986. The conference focussed on indigenous information. The association has had a good journal-publishing track record till resources thinned out. The fundraising committee is working hard to fundraise for the next journal issue which has been awaiting publishing for some time.

Fundraising

The evening of 5th December 2001 showcased Botswana's own Information and Communications Industry, bringing together originators of written works and sound recordings, organizers, indexers and disseminators of information, music producers, scientists, legal minds, academics, information researchers and students, among others. This major event raised some money for the association and raised its profile as it was well publicized. Details will be carried in the newsletter issue, which will be distributed to other Library associations.

Challenges

Some of the sub-committees were faced with the non-attendance of meetings by some members and the generally poor attendance at some of the meetings. The timing of meetings has also been a problem as meetings always had to be held after working hours. Conveners of those committees have been very effective as they continued to work tirelessly to ensure survival of their committees.

Donor dependency and fatigue

The association had been largely donor dependant, on members of the Executive Board and External donors, till Fundraising Committee felt it was just not on. As a result wishes were just horses. The membership drive has been quite weak because of lack of funds. The Executive has had to contribute money to finance a number of activities. Carnegie / INASP pledged support at a time of need. The vibrant Fundraising Committee under the leadership of the Treasurer, is boldly meeting the challenge through commitment and sharp fundraising skills

Outreach

BLA remains predominantly Gaborone based. Failure to establish branches throughout the country is one of the major challenges. The Executive is now aware the capacity available in some of the other centres such as Francistown and Maun. The Executive will target these competent individuals to start up some activities in these parts of the country.

Improper office and filing

For the good part of the year (75% precisely) BLA Certificate could not be found. Business could not be conducted because there was no evidence of the association's legal existence. Such problems are propounded by the current nature of the association where it is run by a team which is 100% voluntary without a physical address. The certificate has now been reissued and we have drawn lessons from the hiccup.

Way forward

BLA has had a vibrant and committed committee during the period under review. The aim is to complete unfinished business before the AGM. BLA relies heavily on stakeholders, particularly the BNLS network, through which BLA has commendably covered the whole of the country in dissemination of the association literature.

Notes:

- i. Rathapo, Shadrack B. (ed) – Professional development: taking the BLA into the next millennium: proceedings of the Botswana Library Association Workshop held on 16th September 1999, Boipuso Hall, Gaborone, 2000, ISBN 99912-0-347-8, 21p.
- ii. Proceedings of the seminar for librarians in SADC institutions on Information organization and use within the restructured SADC held in Gaborone, 19th –21st September 2001, 88p.
- iii. BLA makes history: Kay Raseroka's IFLA Election, a win for many, Botswana Library Association Newsletter 6 (1) Sep 2001 (ISSN 1019-1577) p.6
- iv. Rathapo, S.B. – BLA actively participates in vision 2016 activities; building an educated and informed nation, Botswana Library Association Newsletter 6 (1) Sep 2001 (ISSN 1019-1577) p.4
- v. Ibid. p.4-6