

*Malawi Library Association*



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MALAWI COUNTRY REPORT

To  
SCECSAL  
For  
2008-2010

Diston Chiweza  
President Malawi Library Association

## **Introduction**

Honorable ladies and gentlemen, the activities of the Malawi Library Association (MALA) in the period 2008-2010 were not very different from the activities which were reported in the 2006-2008 period. This brief report is being submitted to the Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Associations as an update on the previous report. Once again the activities surrounded the University Libraries, the National Libraries and the Civil Service Libraries who are the major stakeholders of the Malawi Library Association. The biggest breakthrough in the 2008-2010 era in MALA were securing of INASP funds for the MALA certificate in Library and Information Science (LIS) curriculum review and the payment of the formal registration at IFLA. This boosted the efforts that MALA has been facilitating in Malawi i.e. the promotion of professional training of Librarians and Information officers.

### **National Library Activities**

The National Library Services continued to be the main vehicle of library outreach in Malawi. They achieved this in several ways and these are:

- a) Opening new branches, promotion of literacy among women and children through what is known as the Mother and Child Book Reading Project. This project was funded by the NORAD. Mothers are registered at Under-Five Clinics and attend book reading sessions with their children.
- b) By opening more reading centres that were stocked with the HIV and AIDS information. These activities were funded by the Malawi National AIDS Commission.
- c) Opening new libraries in rural areas as part of their planned activities that are not funded through special projects.

It should be noted that the national Library in Malawi on average opens more than 50 branches in rural areas every year. In some cases the challenge that they do have is to sustain these rural libraries.

## **The University Libraries**

The major activity of the University Libraries in these two years was four fold:

- a) Champion the open access software initiatives
- b) Championing 'free' access to reputable scholarly academic electronic resources.

Most of these activities are achieved through the Malawi Library Consortium (MALICO) which was birthed by MALA through workshops that are organized from time to time.

## **Training**

Although the period 2008 – 2010 was hit by the Global Financial crisis which actually affected the scholarship for Masters in LIS offered by Mala, four people during this period, upgraded themselves to the Masters level using other sources of funds. This is a breakthrough for Malawi considering that for a long time there have been less than 20 people with masters degree. Currently there are only two people with Doctoral degrees in Library and Information Science in Malawi.

MALA continued to conduct the year long certificate course in Library and Information Science. 80 students were graduated and the bulk of which were employees in libraries, archives and documentation centres who had been employed without any training. Mala also admitted school leavers who were interested in pursuing librarianship as a career. Most of these school leavers take Mala as their bridging course for the Diploma in Library and Information Science at Mzuzu University's Department of Library and Information Science.

## **Publications**

The association continued to produce Mala Bulletin and Mala Update. Mala Bulletin, which contains professional articles from members, comes out annually while the Mala Update is produced every three months.

The Mala Bulletin received a facelift in this year period. For the first time the bulletin was printed with high quality paper.

## **Subscriptions to Professional bodies**

Mala has subscribed to the following professional bodies:

- a) IFLA

- b) COMLA
- c) SCECSAL

### **Author of the year Award**

Mala continued to be the keeper of the author of the year award money which is supposed to be contributed by each association within the region. Each is supposed to contribute \$10 per year. So far the amount of money which the Malawi Library Association has in the 'author of the year bank account is just above \$2500. Again it should be noted that no library association within SCECSAL made its annual contribution of \$10 in these two years. Unlike in the previous years, MALA managed to take this money to SCECSAL in readiness for a prompt award to anyone who would be chosen as the author of the year.

### **Challenges**

- a) Inadequate personnel at professional levels as already indicated
- b) Mala is yet to have its secretariat with full time employees.
- c) Funding levels to libraries in Malawi are yet to get to significant levels
- d) Despite the fact that there are many people in Malawi who claim to be members of Mala, only a handful are committed to paying the membership fees.
- e) Mala is yet to establish other sources of income apart from relying on membership fees and marginal profits realized from the library and information science certificate course.

### **Future Plans**

The following have remained future plans of Mala for a long time:

- a) Review the strategic plans
- b) Widen the partnership with its stakeholders
- c) Financial autonomy. So far Mala has been operating as a parasitic organ on the parent institutions of its member librarians.

### **Special Awards**

- a) Mala was privileged in this period to witness one of its members, Mr Fiskani Ngwira, who also happens to be the General Secretary of the Association, win the OCLC/ALISE grant for 2011. Only five people from Africa were chosen and

- Mala considers the choice of its member as a great honour to the Association.
- b) Mzuzu University's Department of Library and Information Science won an IFLA/FAIFE research Grant within this period to a research on 'the impact of mobile phone on development: with special reference to rural Malawi.' Only three countries in Africa received these grants and they are Senegal, Malawi, and Namibia.
  - c) Mr Gray Nyali, Director of Malawi National Library Service received an international award from International Library and Information Group (ILIG) in 2008. This award was in recognition of his contribution to the library services in Malawi.
  - d) Prof. Joseph Jabulani Uta, University Librarian for Mzuzu University, has been appointed the university's acting Deputy Vice Chancellor by Mzuzu University Council. We wish him well in his new appointment.

### **Retirement**

The following members retired from service during the period 2008-2010; Mr Ralph Masanjika, Mr Paul Kanthambi, Mr Foster Howse, Mrs Margaret Ngwira. These are among the pioneers of librarianship in Malawi. MALA wishes them a wonderful retirement.

### **Obituary**

The Malawi Library Association is sad to report to SCECSAL the demise of three of its celebrated members who passed on during the 2008 – 2010 era and they are:

- 1) Mr Stephen Phalula who was until the time of his death a Senior Librarian at the National Library Service headquarters in Lilongwe. Mr Phalula will be remembered as an ardent writer. Those of you who may recall, he was the only Malawi who presented a paper to SCECSAL in Lusaka in 2008.
- 2) Mr Mac Katsonga who until the time of his death was the Librarian for the Department of Agriculture Research Library in Lilongwe. He was also the President of the Civil Service Librarians' Forum.
- 3) Mr Ernest Phiri who until the time of his death was the Librarian for the Malawi Institute of Education. He will be remembered as an ardent writer too.
- 4) Mr Sydney Ngwira who until the time of his death was a lecturer in the Department of Library and Information Science at Mzuzu University. Mr

Ngwira once served as the Vice President for MALA. He will be remembered for his dedicated service to MALA and the library profession as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

All the challenges that have listed in this report have not stopped Mala to continue to operate and steer the development of the library and information profession in Malawi. Among other things, Mala gets its inspiration from such gatherings as the SCECSAL and it is our hope that SCECSAL will continue to have such impact.