Best practices: advocacy and leadership skills in the management of Library Associations: Experiences from West African Library Association

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Abstract

This is a report of the IFLA/ALP supported workshop designed to examine the causes of poor or non-performance of national library associations in West Africa. IFLA/ALP/SIDA support was solicited to facilitate the meeting of all Anglophone West African countries with similar colonial backgrounds to examine the cause effect and solutions to our common problems under the auspices of West African Library Association (WALA) The meeting took place some time in 2007, guidelines were drawn and circulated for member countries implementation. Results and effects of these guidelines are part of the issues considered in this report as one of the successful ways IFLA/ALP/SIDA support has contributed to the development and growth of library associations and librarianship in this part of the world.

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Introduction

West African Library association was founded in 1954. It was one large Library Association for all the English speaking British colonies of the time. By the early sixties when the countries became independent, each country pooled out to form its own Library association. During this period and until 1999, WALA was dead. After some efforts to revive it in 1999, it went comatose again until 2001 when it was re-created a new to include the Francophone West Africa and Cameroon. Since then, WALA has had to contend with the demands and challenges of the 21st century information needs of the sub region.

All along, one thing was clear to all Library and Information professionals in the region, the need to come together to provide leadership for the development, promotion and improvement of libraries and information services in West Africa to ensure access to information for all, and ultimately to reduce poverty. WALA was therefore designed to facilitate among others:

- Feel part of the profession
- Improve welfare of members
- Learn new developments
- Exchange of professional knowledge
- Research, standards, statistics
- Solve mutual problems
- Foster cooperation
- Improve image and status of the profession
- Extend professional contacts
- Build international partnerships
- Exchange of best practices

Aims and Objectives

The above mentioned concepts were built and embedded into the Constitution of the West African library Association (WALA) as follows:

- provide a forum through which members of the Library and Information profession in the region meet to discuss issues of mutual interest;
- establish, strengthen and spread information professionalism in all the countries of the region;
- promote regional and international understanding and co-operation in the area of library and information profession;
- collect, collate, publish, preserve, conserve and disseminate research information through publications to potential and prospective clientele in the region and beyond;
- encourage capacity building by promoting education and training of library and information professionals;
- encourage exchange of staff and students amongst institutions in the region, and solicit funds for the programme for capacity building and development;
- promote cooperation with other library and information profession organizations outside the WALA Region in the areas of library and information work;
- promote the adoption and use of information and communication technologies in library and information work; and
- undertake such other activities as will promote the development of the information profession in the WALA Region.

THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA
WHERE ARE WE AND WHO ARE WE?

For several centuries Africa has mesmerized the world with its stunning scenery, its ancient civilizations and its hypnotizing music It has remained the world's most fascinating continent to date.

Africa is the world's second-largest and second most-populous continent, after Asia. At about 30.2 million km² (11.7 million sq mi) including adjacent islands, it covers 6% of the Earth's total surface area and 20.4% of the total land area. With about 922 million people in 61 territories, it accounts for about 14.2% of the world's human population. The continent is surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Suez Canal and the

Red Sea to the northeast, the Indian Ocean to the southeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. There are 46 countries including Madagascar, and 53 including all the island groups. Africa, particularly central eastern Africa, is widely regarded within the scientific community to be the origin of humans and the Hominidae tree (great apes), with the earliest *Homo sapiens* (human) found in Ethiopia being dated to ca. 200,000 years ago.

Geographically, Africa straddles the equator and encompasses numerous climate areas; it is the only continent that stretches the northern temperate to the southern temperate zones. Because of the lack of natural regular precipitation and irrigation as well as glaciers or mountain aquifer systems, there is no natural moderating effect on the climate except near the coasts.

WALA COUNTRIES: GEO-POLITICO SOCIO ECONOMIC & CULTURAL SETTINGS
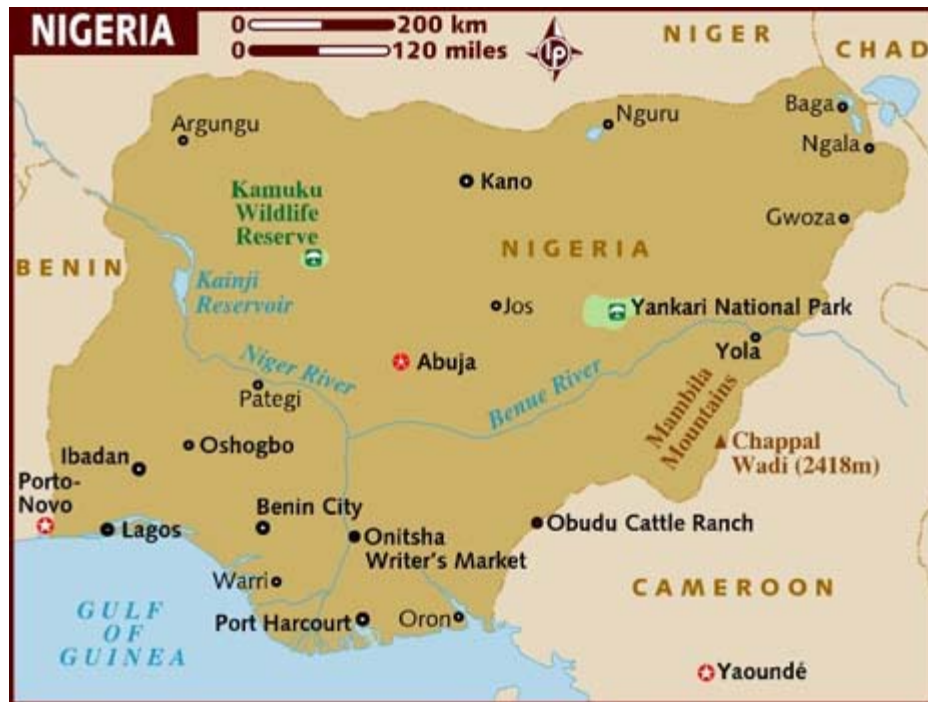

West Africa

West Africa is the westernmost region of the African continent. Geopolitically, West Africa includes the following 16 countries distributed over an area of approximately 5 million square kilometres:

- Benin
- Burkina Faso
- Côte d'Ivoire
- Cape Verde

- Liberia
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Niger

- The Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau

- Nigeria
- Senegal
- Sierra Leone
- Togo

With the exception of Mauritania, all of these countries are members of the ECOWAS or Economic Community of West African States. The UN region also includes the island of Saint Helena, a British overseas territory in the South Atlantic Ocean.

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

Map of Nigeria

Nigeria, officially named the **Federal Republic of Nigeria**, is a federal constitutional republic comprising thirty-six states and one Federal Capital Territory. The country is located in West Africa and shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the west,

Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north. Its coast lies on the Gulf of Guinea, part of the Atlantic Ocean, in the south. The capital city is Abuja.

The people of Nigeria have an extensive history, and archaeological evidence shows that human habitation of the area dates back to at least 9000 BC. The Benue-Cross River area is thought to be the original homeland of the Bantu migrants who spread across most of central and southern Africa in waves between the 1st millennium BC and the 2nd millennium AD.

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the eighth most populous country in the world with a population of over 140 million. The country is listed among the "Next Eleven" economies, and is one of the fastest growing in the world with the IMF projecting growth of 9% in 2008 and 8.3% in 2009.

The ICT Globalization

Efforts to revamp WALA through its biannual meetings since 1999 have been positively rewarding. However, given the place of ICT today, and the rapid global change that is sweeping through the Library and information profession the world over, the need to further strengthen the national associations of libraries in the West African sub-region cannot be over-emphasized. But funding had always been a major constraint. The significance and centrality of professional associations to their respective professions is well known. The inability of individual national association of West African countries to function properly can be said to be positively related to the poor states of library development and poverty of information in the sub-region. The paucity of information cuts across the sub-region as the United Nations information sources more often than not form the basis of a lot of data in the region. Unfortunately, most of these are dated and one finds himself using projected and estimated figures for national planning and other related development plans. This unacceptable situation form part of the impetus for the Library leaders in the WALA countries to determine to forge a positive change of the state of LIS in the region.

Functional Leadership Model Principles
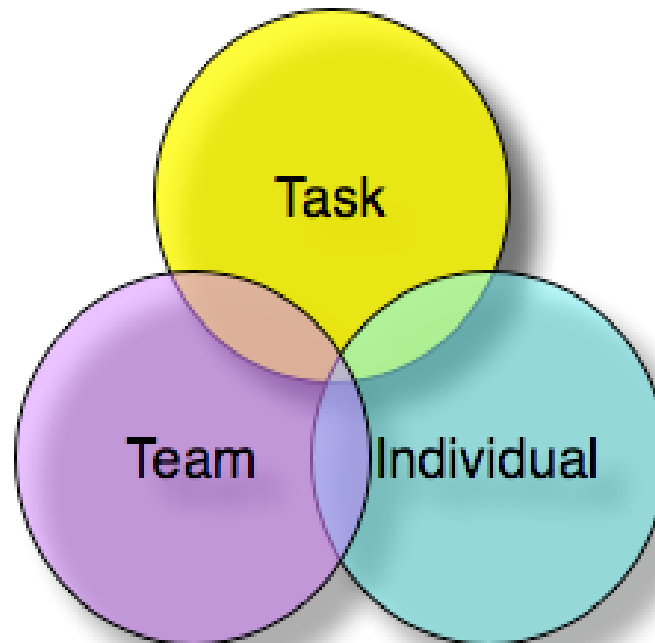
- Going by **John Adair's "three circles"** functional leadership Model, the Library Associations fits into these three areas of "Task, Team and Individual" and helps explains the need to focus on the leadership of Library Associations to stimulate the National Associations growth and functionality. By focusing on the function of leadership it is easier to see the stimuli that are actually influencing the behaviour of the organization. Here, leadership behaviours can be divided roughly into three types that meet needs in the above three areas:

- Substantive, or behaviours directly relevant to performing the group's task, such as proposing possible solutions or providing important information;

- Procedural, or behaviors that help direct the group's discussion, such as developing group procedure or testing the degree of agreement among members; and

- Maintenance or behaviors that improve the relationships among the members, such as encouraging silent members or facilitating open discussion.

Ideally, any member can perform these behaviors, and so any member can participate in leadership. It was once thought that members always specialized in one type or another, but while that can happen it is not necessarily the case. It is therefore ideal to groom everybody for leadership position thereby widening the net for participation.

The Necessity for Partnerships

The leadership of WALA saw the need to bring together and unite all national library associations, institutions and individuals interested in the development of librarianship in the sub-region of West Africa; to discuss modalities for reviving and sustaining the non-functional and weak national associations in the WALA states through the exchange of information and best practices. It was to this end that we decided to take positive steps to revive the national associations and institute an evaluation mechanism and sustainability strategies for the sub regional national associations.

These laudable ideas tally with the goals of the International Federation of Library and Information Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the Management of Library Associations (MLAS) which relies and depends so much on the ational Associations world wide for survival. The success of IFLA, by inference, depends largely on the success of individual country's library association. No wonder that the IFLA section on the Management of Library Associations (MLAS) is designed to oversee and advise library associations on various professional aspects with the aim of making library associations strong and functional. In spite of these good intention and efforts by IFLA/MLAS and its relevant organs, many library associations are not functional and weak. There are those associations that are almost non-operating at all; others are operating but not vibrant. The sad situation is the fact that to date, in some West African countries, there are no functional library associations at all.

Some Identified Causes of Poor library Associations

Some of the reasons advanced for failing to have solid and strong library associations in the developing countries including West Africa comprise poverty, lack of interest on library matters amongst government officials and library association leaders; failure on the part of the library associations to provide quality leadership and strategic directions; and the fact that most of the associations are run on voluntary basis by their leaders. To a large extent, this latter reason has caused a lot of difficulties in terms of time and resources management and investment. Naturally, such leaders struggle and grapple with how to manage and share their limited time between the professional library association and official duties. The lack of adequate funding of Libraries generally in the sub-region is another major reason for the lack of library services and consequently, library associations. Poor national infrastructure across several West African countries accounts for poor leadership also in various ways. For example it affects communication and travels, ability to meet, discuss and take vital decisions that affect the association and the profession itself. The lack of Internet access or slow and poor limited bandwidth or dial up equipment where available. Similarly, with the inadequate ICT skills within the countries, and worse still, among the leaders of the profession, it is impossible to go beyond certain expectations as you cannot give what you don't have.

Nigeria and Ghana Library Functional Associations

Notwithstanding all the above practical and real difficulties, Nigeria and Ghana have very functional national Library associations that are robust enough to affect others, if we had the funds for workshops to exchange experiences and best practices. The fact and believe that since Nigeria and Ghana have very vibrant Library Associations, confirms that it can be done in other WALA countries, but what was lacking was information and experience on how to do it which we could share effectively during WALA workshops, if we had funding. This is what led to a three -day IFLA-ALP sponsored workshop for Presidents of National Associations in the Anglophone WALA States covering Library advocacy,

standards and best practices, strategic planning, ICT skill acquisition, education and training, collaboration and partnerships.

Participatory Management Principles

Participatory management principles were employed to ensure that the workshop was effective and successful. The target groups were involved and carried along from the planning stage. The involvement of everyone concerned gave credence, integrity and value to the workshop. It also boosted attendance and brought about the necessary spirit of collaboration and belonging. These attributes were found to be good useful and transferable best practices for library associations from Africa. This is because peer judgement, as we know can be both destructive and complimentary, but wherein you are able to bring in dignity, integrity, respect and mutual understanding into it, it usually pays off.

The strategic Objectives of the Conference

While the general objective was to equip the leaders of library associations of West Africa, we had specific, realistic and measurable objectives to share information and use existing knowledge to run our library associations namely:

- to share knowledge on how other library associations run their Library Associations world wide
- to create awareness that solutions to our problems could be solved by emulating best practices and experiences from within and outside the region
- to equip leaders of library associations with leadership skills that would assist them to run their associations effectively and professionally.
- to provide participants with modern skills that would make the associations overcome financial and professional hardships. The specific topics addressed were:
  - Advocacy
  - Fundraising & Proposal Writing

- Standards and Best practices

- Strategic planning

- ICT Skill acquisition

- Education and training

- Collaboration and partnerships

WALA GUIDELINES

Given the participatory management principles adopted for this workshop, it was easy for the target group to draw- up an action plan for the revitalization of those non functional associations and monitor their developments/performance over a period of two years from the WALA Secretariat. The Secretariat would report progress and make observations to IFLA/ALP Africa section for further actions. WALA President will visit, if need be countries which may desire further advocacy in support of their LIS.

Global Village Syndrome

Although in recent years, there has been a remarkable expansion at all the educational levels across the West African countries, but little attention has been paid to the development of effective library systems. Libraries and the Library Profession in this sub-region are increasingly confronted with the enormous challenges posed by the global information technology, paucity of funds, and inadequate qualified professionals, among others. While higher institutions, corporate bodies and multinational enterprises have better libraries, public libraries run by the governments are non existent, poorly funded and often neglected beyond anybody's imagination.

Nigerian and Ghana Library Associations

The workshop commended the leadership of the Nigeria and Ghana Library Associations, as well as the laudable efforts in managing their national associations well. This is not to say that they are perfect or close to what obtains in the developed world, they too still

need a lot of improvement and funding to meet the necessary and required standards, especially in the ICT development and applications within the sub region. In this regard, the other Library Associations in the sub-region were advised to emulate the good leadership qualities and also learn from the experiences of these leading and active sister associations. It is of paramount importance that they emulate these countries for professional competence and improved performance in the current information age. The acquisition of IT skills through continuous education and regular interactions was a constant theme across the discussions in that workshop.

From the comparative analysis of the library developments and experiences from Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Liberia with that of the advanced countries of the world generally, it is apparent that the West African Library Associations and the libraries in the region still have a long way to go because of the formidable challenges confronting them, especially those pertaining to the poor reading culture, inadequate funding, poor advocacy and strategic plans, the lack of the political will as well as the absence of current and accurate statistical data for proper planning of library development and services.

GUIDELINES AND RESOLUTIONS FOR MAKING WEST AFRICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS (WALA) FUNCTIONAL

In the light of the foregoing, the workshop after a three - day brainstorming resolved to adopt the following as guidelines for making West African Libraries functional:
The West African Library Associations should embark on a wide advocacy campaign and ensure the formulation of appropriate library legislation in their individual countries. To this end every country was to see to it that they had an act of parliament recognising them and the profession. Nigeria already has an Act of the National Assembly that authorises it to function as a professional body. The law is called Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) Act N0. 12 of 1995. This body is made up of 29 members all of whom by law must be Librarians. The LRCN regulates the practice, disciplines, determines who

is a Librarian and registers such a person to practice in Nigeria. This body has in several ways given support to the growth of the Nigerian Library Association, so much so, that the NLA has a number of full time staff and plays a major role in regulating practice and the development of Education in the country. Copies of this edict were to be made available to any of the WALA countries interested in using it as sample.

It was agreed that concerted efforts should be made to revitalize those Associations that were either weak or dormant. In particular, WALA should reach out to the Library Associations and establish closer contacts because of their continuous absence and non participation at meetings and other professional activities. Everyone needed to be involved

In view of the emerging challenges posed to libraries, the profession and the real need to respond to such global ICT challenges, individual countries should strive to elect leaders with excellent leadership qualities, to conduct the affairs of the Associations in a more positive and purposeful direction. To this end, we adopted the submissions by the various speakers on how to transform Library Associations. The methods to be adopted as recommended include:

- Advocacy
- Fundraising & Proposal Writing
- Minimum Standards
- Adoption of Best practices
- Strategic planning
- ICT Skill Acquisition
- Continuous Education and training
- Collaboration, Exchanges and partnerships
- Review and standardisation of LIS Curricula

In order to facilitate proper library development plans, each country was to embark upon current and accurate statistical records collection and maintenance by all types of libraries in the sub-region. To ensure uniformity in this regard, the IFLA standard for statistical

compilation should be adopted by all the libraries. This should be coordinated by the National Library Associations through their National Libraries, and then regional levels. To this end, individual libraries were charged and encouraged to develop and maintain their statistics database.

West African Library Associations should devise ways and means of attracting and retaining members, especially through various educational programmes, certification, awards, and other motivation. It is necessary to bring on board all stakeholders in the information society through interaction and exchange with other associations.

It was resolved that Library Associations that did not have other information professionals like the Archivists and Documentalists as members should reach out to such related groups and collaborate with them.

Within the shortest time possible, individual national Library Associations should ensure the development of a strategic plan which should be responsive to the contemporary changes and realities at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Funding is critical to the development and sustenance of any Library Association. Associations should adopt various creative options not only in generating funds, but also proper management of such funds. The leadership of the Associations should ensure prudence, transparency and accountability.

To achieve this goal, the acquisition of some management and entrepreneurial skills is necessary. Hence, the urgent need for a review of the Curricula of Library and Information Science Schools and Departments so as to integrate this and other essential requirements. This situation, therefore, calls for a strong collaboration between the Library Associations and the Library Schools in West Africa.

All members of the Associations should be trained in proposal writing skills to source funds locally and internationally. They should as well not only be able to identify potential donors but also know the actual requirements for obtaining their funds/support.

In order to keep members abreast of the current developments and also enhance exchange of knowledge and professional ideas, it was resolved that members should hold regular meetings as well as other library professional activities and in collaboration/partnerships at local, national, regional and international levels.

Adequate and effective means of communication should be developed by all Library Associations. This could be achieved through: publication and exchanges of professional journals and news bulletins; networking with other professionals, such as publishers, authors, book-sellers and other related agencies; media discussion programmes; creation of a website, e-groups and wide publicity campaigns/advocacy that would make the Associations and the profession not only attractive but also competitive.

The workshop emphasized the need for proper orientation for the leaders of the Associations, especially the President, Secretary and the Treasurer especially at the assumption of office.

It was also resolved that National Associations should endeavour to keep proper and adequate records and there must be proper handing over of all instruments of office - official records - from the outgoing Executives to the incoming ones. More importantly, ex-officials of the Associations should be readily available for consultations.

The Associations should elect leaders who are well positioned in their organisations/institutions so as to be able to command respect and direct the affairs of the Associations properly.

NOTE: IFLA Africa/ALP/ SIDA IMPACT

It is imperative to acknowledge that **IFLA Africa/ALP/ SIDA** support has assisted Library Development in West Africa. In various ways the impact of the National Associations are felt by the different types of Libraries within the countries that comprise WALA. Following these guidelines for National Associations, many Libraries have improved their services and reached their professional colleagues in ways they had never in years past. The support given by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) through IFLA Africa ALP to various National and Regional Library groups has yielded immeasurable benefits which cannot be quantified easily as the ramifications go beyond figure quantifications. It is simply invaluable. Capacity building workshops and Seminars, publications of regional and national journals, inter and intra regional meetings and support to IFLA World Congresses have helped to a large extend the development of West African Library Association, and I know it is same for our sister countries and regions in other parts of Africa.

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