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Empowering Library Associations in Asia - south-south cooperation

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Libraries have always played a key role in the development of an information literate populace that can participate as informed citizens in society. Libraries also uphold and champion intellectual freedom and right to free access to information. The Library Associations (LA) support libraries and contribute to the goals of democratic societies through educational programming, legislation, and advocacy. The paper outlines IFLA guidelines for LAs, as an example it takes the guidelines and compare them with those of the Nepal Library Association (NLA), illustrates a few problems within the NLA, and proposes new ways for LAs.

INTRODUCTION (IFLA)

In order for a professional organization to run its operation, officers must staff the organization. These officers, office holders, and members of staff can be elected or appointed. They can be honorary and unpaid, they can be partially remunerated with a token payment in recognition of the value of the work they do, or they can be paid for the actual work done and/or the hours worked on a part-time basis. They can be salaried, full-time members of the staff. A clear distinction should be made here.

Elected Officers/Office Holders – People elected by the membership or nominated to hold offices in the association and to perform particular functions.
Members of Staff – People appointed to posts within the association and paid to fulfill specific duties.

NEPAL Library Association (NLA)

Members

The members of the Executive Committee (EC) are elected for a period of two year from the general members of the NLA. The EC has formed with 9 members committee.

President	1	
Vice President	1	
Member Secretary	1	
Treasurer	1	
Members	5	(including one ex-officio member represented by Nepal National Library)

FULL-TIME MEMBERS OF STAFF (IFLA)

It is strongly recommended that if, and when, an association has any money for investment in services, the association should hire either a part-time or full-time staff member. The benefits are very clear. The staff can provide continuity and ensure that the necessary statutory obligations are fulfilled and that the following responsibilities can be carried out:

Duties and Responsible of Key Position Members of EC (Nepal LA)

- **President:** The overall responsible person for the NLA is the President. President chair's the association's governing body as well as the monthly EC meetings.

- **Vice President:** In absence of President, Vice President chairs the governing body meeting and is also responsible for managing the library association.

- **Member Secretary:** The Member Secretary is the Executive Officer of the NLA /EC and responsible for calling meeting, production of records of meeting, management of the agendas, up date membership records and day to day works.

- **Treasurer:** Preparation of budget, ensuring the availability of funds for administration and operating expenses and other financial obligations of the NLA.

Advisory Board

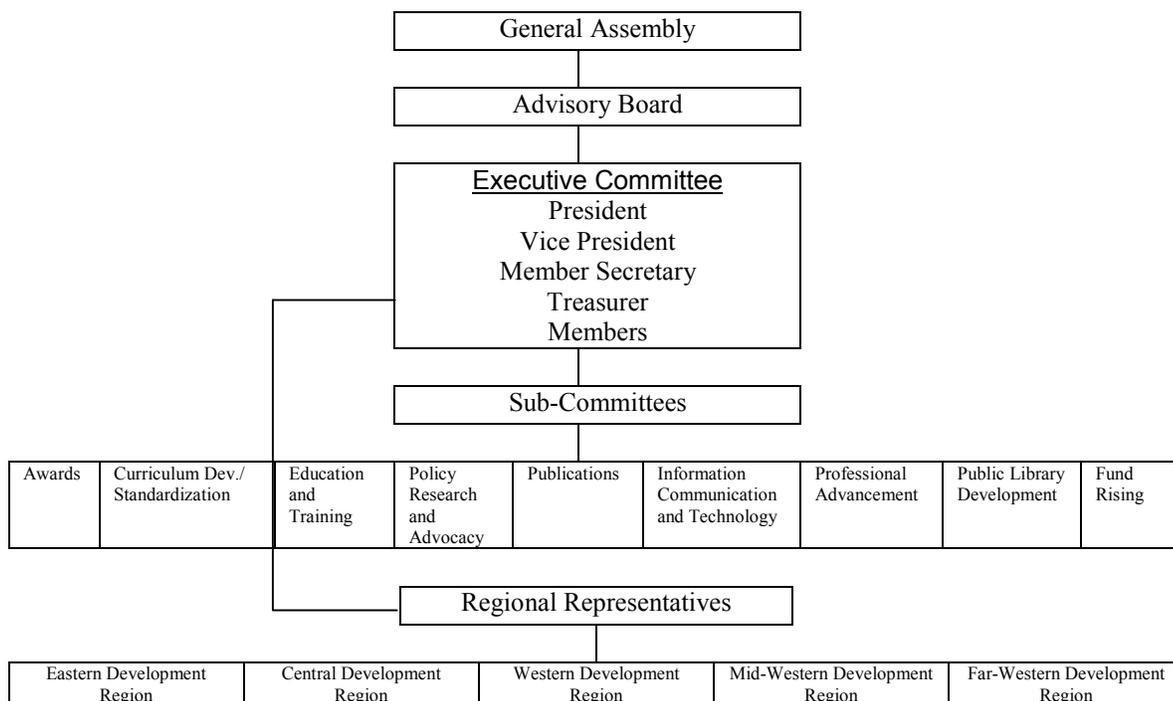The NLA has an Advisory Board to advise the EC in policy matters.

Sub-Committees

There are 9 Sub-Committees. These committees assist the EC in its regular functioning. The Sub-Committees of NLA are as follows:

- Awards
- Curriculum Development/ Standardization
- Education and Training
- Policy Research and Advocacy
- Publications
- Information Communication and Technology
- Professional Advancement
- Public Library Development
- Fund Raising

Each Committee is managed by the respective Coordinator. There are usually 3-5 members in each committee.

Nepal LA Organizational Chart

General Assembly

Advisory Board

Executive Committee
President
Vice President
Member Secretary
Treasurer
Members

Sub-Committees

Awards	Curriculum Dev./ Standardization	Education and Training	Policy Research and Advocacy	Publications	Information Communication and Technology	Professional Advancement	Public Library Development	Fund Rising

Regional Representatives

Eastern Development Region	Central Development Region	Western Development Region	Mid-Western Development Region	Far-Western Development Region

PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS IN ASIA

In the Introduction, I compared IFLA guidelines to that of the NLA. We saw not unexpectedly that the NLA is following the guidelines quite closely. What may be

of interest is to look at some other LAs in the region and try to get ideas for improvements from other countries.

When one approaches the website: Library Associations Around the World. A Project of the IFLA Management of Library Associations Section, coordinated by the American Library Association, International Relations Office (http://www.ala.org/ala/iro/intlassocorgconf/libraryassociations.htm#M) there is no entry for Nepal. When one tries to look for smaller countries (area vise) with similar geographical structure to Nepal like Bhutan and Sri Lanka one finds that the first country is non-existence in the list and the latter referred to a homepage for the National Science Foundation with no mention of a LA. The Indian LA website were not connected. There are other Asia examples like LAs in Malaysia and Indonesia. An example from Europe is Great Britain. Looking at the three websites one may get ideas for work improvement in the NLA.

However, before discussing any new ideas let us look at some common problems experienced by most LAs.

One of the significant problems which many LAs have experienced are the low level of vibrancy. This may be linked to the Associations' lack of financial viability and might be reflected in reduced levels of participation by members in the affairs of the Association. This member dormancy, which can be observed by the fact that the same few people continuously offer themselves for office, may lead to a perception that the Associations are monopolised by a few. This perception may result in a feeling of alienation in some members, as well as in very selective involvement by others in the affairs of some LAs.

A way to overcome this problem was suggested by librarians in Southeast Asia. In 1970 the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) was founded in Singapore in response to a growing sense of Southeast Asian identity, fostered particularly by the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The initiative in forming CONSAL was taken by the Library Associations of Singapore and Malaysia, due to their common origin and long history of close cooperation. Representatives from the LAs of Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and South Vietnam ratified its first constitution and the first CONSAL participants came from these seven countries. To date, CONSAL has 10 members which includes the LAs and librarians mentioned above and those of Brunei, Lao PDR, and Myanmar.

CONSAL holds a conference every three years in each member country by turn. It promotes cooperation in the fields of librarianship, bibliography, documentation and related activities. Membership is open to libraries, library schools, national library associations, national libraries and other related organizations in the region. The constitution of CONSAL provides for national membership confined to the above mentioned libraries in member countries and associate membership for libraries, related organizations and individuals outside member countries.

In April 2000, the CONSAL Executive Board agreed on the establishment of the CONSAL SECRETARIAT hosted by Singapore. The primary role of the Secretariat is to coordinate CONSAL approved projects. CONSAL receives financial support from international organizations, governments and firms within the region as well as organizations outside the region, including UNESCO, IFLA, the Commonwealth Foundation and the National Library of Australia. It also carries out various fund-raising activities.

PROPOSALS FOR THE WAY FORWARD: NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

The challenge for LAs in the way forward lies in finding innovative and creative ways of dealing with the issues which have been problematic for the organisation and which have worked against its effectiveness. Issues such as the development of memberships, quantitatively and qualitatively, transformation into financially viable entities, and engagement in public/outreach activities must be the major focus.

In order to develop the quality and quantity of memberships, LAs must aggressively market themselves to their internal public - all categories of the library and information personnel. This is to ensure that the mutual value of the Association and members' involvement are clearly understood and appreciated. A definitive marketing strategy is therefore required to enhance personal and professional development and the development of a sense of professional culture and community. Additionally, continuing professional development activities must be intensified and carried on in a consistent manner.

This would lead to a membership pool which is knowledgeable and consequently confident about the value of the profession and competent in the practice of all its traditional and developing trends. This rise in the level of professionalism among members should help in reducing the fear/reluctance on their part to publicly articulate their views, particularly when these differ from those of the political directorate or the administrative directorate of any library service. This should also lead to a reduction in the incidence of members displaying selective loyalty to the Association. A deep sense of commitment to the profession and the professional organisation is the factor which would guide actions. These measures coupled with maintenance of a register of library and information workers in the countries and engagement in a recruitment drive should contribute significantly to the development of LAs' membership.

In Nepal for example, a way of contributing to the development of the NLA's membership, is to maintain a constant dialogue with the Department of Library and Information Studies at the Tribhuvan University in Katmandu, Nepal that seeks to ensure that its curriculum, curriculum delivery methods and facilities are geared to producing the kind of professional that is relevant to the needs of the profession.

LAs should also seek to become legal authorities for the regulation of the profession in the countries. This would be a step forward in the development of an enhanced sense of professionalism in the practice of the profession. However, a lot of work needs to be done in the area of professional and personal development before this is attempted.

Some other activities in which the Association can engage to ensure that members perceive it as valuable to their professional lives are: becoming a pressure group for conditions of service for library workers, and being an advocate for the provision of adequate funding for development of acceptable levels of service in the libraries operating in the public sector. Advocacy must therefore become institutionalised within LAs constitutional arrangements.

Engaging in research is another way in which LAs can raise the professionalism of their members. This would provide the members with the theoretical base for informing the formulation of policy decisions. It would also empower the Associations in their advocacy programmes.

LAs must also market themselves to their external publics in order to transform themselves into a social force in the respective countries. They must therefore engage in programmes that go beyond the profession and which enhance learning and access to information in addition to the development of information literacy skills to assist the public to adequately deal with the information age. This may involve making strategic alliances with other organisations in the society that are involved in related activities. These could include organisations of teachers, or organisations that deal with literacy, reading, or information technology. The aim of these alliances should be to utilise the skills of the profession in areas where they can make an impact on the public good.

The marketing strategies should include playing a more active role in the society on issues relating to the public's rights to quality information. This must necessarily include fostering intellectual discourse on these matters and lobbying government for improved access to information on policies and operations.

Taking CONSAL as an example they work with their users nationally or regionally on a case-by-case basis to provide each client with the best possible solution. Some users are looking for simple solutions, others are looking for more extensive or customised relationships. More extensive relationships can include co-branding or treatment of custom search forms, vertical topic area searching, searching a partner's proprietary content, or any other combination of data.

South-South collaboration is a recent trend in corporation. This type of collaboration in libraries is important. Why? One may ask. This is caused by the similarity of problems and experiences faced within the same region or sub-region. South-South collaboration is important, but one must not forget that library information science (LIS) in Asia was somewhat copied from faculties in USA and Britain. Thus, it would be counterproductive to speak of a South-South collaboration in this area and entirely to exclude South-North collaboration

UNESCO did a study in 2003 about western universities and them having influenced the Asian LIS curriculum. The analysis concluded "Whether the contents and the delivery of education provided by the LI Schools today is enough to equip the LI Scientists to face the diversity of challenges is a moot question. Perhaps, modern (read western) pattern of education can prepare him/her to play well in the international market place. However, does this education help her/him to understand the specifics and peculiarities of the domestic market? Or, is some

reorientation to accommodate local needs required?" As can be seen the study agreed that the western countries had influenced/are influencing the Asia LIS. However, it also indicated that local knowledge is thoroughly needed. That leaves us with a conclusion favoring a combination of South-South and South-North collaboration

CONCLUSION

Library Association in Asia have developed differently but the common trend is that they have a solid foundation on which to build to ensure their relevance in the 21st century. Throughout their existence they have engaged in a number of useful programmes aimed at the fulfillment of their mission. However, although these have resulted in a certain measure of success, they have not really succeeded in transforming all LAs into a body which is poised to deal with the imperatives of the century. Some of the LAs therefore has to re-examine themselves, and the current participating members, individually and collectively, and they need to institute innovative ways to respond to the changing local and international environment. For this to be a reality in Asia as such, a high level of sacrifice and commitment will be necessary not only for the least developed LAs.