VISIBILITY ISSUES OF THE
LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION OF ZAMBIA

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Abstract:

Library associations are organisations where library and information workers come together to share knowledge and experiences and move the profession forward. They lay down standards for performance, provide a range of services to their users and are responsible for looking after their interests. This study investigated visibility of the Library and Information Association of Zambia with the view of ascertaining whether the association's activities were having any positive impact on the Zambian society. The survey targeted Library and Information Science professionals who had gathered for an Annual General Conference from 18 to 21July, 2017. Adopting a survey research design, the study used questionnaires and interviews to elicit data from a sample of 82 information science practitioners. The Statistical Package for Social Science was used to analyse quantitative data while qualitative data was analysed using content analysis. The study established that visibility of the Library and Information Association of Zambia was poor and that the association had a mammoth task to try and raise its visibility. A non-visible association like LIAZ cannot effectively engage in advocacy with key stakeholders regarding the role of libraries in national development. Therefore, the findings in this study are useful for the purpose of raising visibility of national library associations in Africa and reposition them for advocacy. To try and reverse the negative trend of poor visibility, the study suggests that Librarians and other information providers in Zambia need to proactively publicise the association and the profession as well. The paper provides opportunities for other associations grappling with similar challenges to learn and improve their own activities. Findings

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add to the limited body of knowledge on visibility of library associations and the imperative of having strong library associations in Africa.

Keywords: national library associations, professional associations, libraries, LIAZ, visibility, LIS professionals, Zambia

1. Introduction

A professional association is a body of persons engaged in the same profession, formed usually to control entry into the profession, maintain standards and represent the profession in discussions with other bodies (Noordegraaf, 2011). Professional library associations support and enrich society and the library and information profession. They unite a country's library fraternity around a common platform for advocacy and development of the profession (IFLA, 2012).

According to IFLA (2012), library associations are key institutions in the library and information sector around the world. Library associations are advocates for equitable access to information, and help to build strong, sustainable library communities by improving services for library users, and supporting development of the profession. Conversely, the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2017) indicates that the word visibility is a noun which means publicity. Accordingly, the term visibility may mean the degree to which something has attracted general attention or *d*egree of exposure to public notice (the quality or state of being known to the public).

Lor (2014) posits that to be relevant to society, libraries need to be visibly important. Clearly, being visible has considerable benefits for libraries: wider appreciation in their communities should in the normal course of events translate into the allocation of resources. The risks incurred by lack of visible relevance include ignorance on the part of the community and neglect. Lacking resources, these libraries risk stagnating and ultimately disappearing.

He further argues that libraries at different times and in different countries can vary widely in visibility. In poor countries with adverse circumstances, libraries may be almost absent, or at best few in number, unrecognized, poorly resourced, and playing a marginal role in society. In other countries, libraries are present in larger centres if not everywhere and they may be recognized as having value for society. A higher level of visibility is reached when a society has a well-established, widely distributed network of libraries, which are used by a significant proportion of the population. In these societies, libraries are seen as a normal and necessary amenity of every community (Lor, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to investigate visibility of the Library and Information Association of Zambia (LIAZ) to the public and among its key stakeholders from the perspective of LIS practitioners as well as identify approaches and opportunities that LIAZ can leverage to increase its visibility in the country.

2. The Library and Information Association of Zambia: Background

Formerly the Zambia Library Association (ZLA), Library and Information Association of Zambia (LIAZ) is a professional non-profit organization that unites all institutions and people working in libraries and information services in Zambia. Prior to changing its name to the Library Association of Zambia (Cheelo, 1972) in 2013, it was first established as the Zambia Library Association in 1963. The name change was necessitated to include other categories of information professionals such as the Archivists, Records Managers, and documentalists among many others.

LIAZ draws its membership from libraries, record centres, registries and documentation centres. Membership is divided into the following categories: full members (professionals), associate members (non-professional workers), and institutional members, affiliate associations, honorary members, affiliate members and students. Its main objective is to actively work to increase public awareness of the crucial value of libraries and information services; to promote national legislation favourable to libraries and library users, promotion of professional development through seminars, workshops, training and networking. Since its inception, the association has worked to hold annual national conferences, meetings and other activities of a professional nature.

3. Statement of the problem

Despite the long history of its existence, this researcher has observed that majority Zambians are still ignorant about the activities of LIAZ in the Zambia. Besides, since its inception in 1967, not a single study has been conducted to explore visibility of LIAZ among its key stakeholders. This study is therefore relevant and timely. The research investigated visibility of LIAZ in Zambia from the standpoint of the Library and Information Science (LIS) fraternity.

4. Research objectives

The main objective of the study was to determine whether LIAZ was visible to majority Zambians and to recommend strategies of raising its visibility. Specific objectives were:

- To ascertain the visibility of LIAZ
- To discover the challenges facing LIAZ
- To propose strategies of how to enhance visibility of LIAZ

5. Review of related literature

Results of an exploratory study by Uzuebgu and Onyekweodiri (2011) on the professional visibility of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) showed that visibility of the NLA was very poor and that the NLA was not playing its role in the development of the profession.

A study by Thomas, Satpathi, and Satpathi (2010) on the emerging challenges in academic librarianship and the role of library associations in keeping library professionals up to date found that the majority of librarians need continuing education support. It concludes that library associations all over the world need to play a dynamic role in keeping librarians abreast of current trends.

In 2008, Madden reviewed the current library and information services in UK and the challenges confronted by those associations. Results showed that the major challenges for library associations included training members with information technologies, marketing and promoting information services, securing sufficient funding, and developing information policies and strategies.

Adomi and Nwalo (2003) recommended that professional associations should devote their efforts in continuing professional education for their members. Muswazi (2002) observed that financial and leadership constraints and lack of commitment are major problems faced by the Swaziland Library Association. This view is supported by Karisiddappa (2002) who noted that library associations were suffering from financial assistance and that there are very few associations with funding to expand their activities.

The IFLA Building Strong Library Associations Programme Report (2012) emphasises the need for training and mentoring which helps associations to form partnerships, strengthen governance and member services, and to become better advocates for their library community.

6. Research methodology

6.1 Research design
This study used a mixed survey research strategy. The nature of this study was quantitative, with some qualitative elements.

6.2 Data collection methods

The study used self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods. Ngulube (2007) observed that although no single method is perfect, if different methods lead to the same answer, then greater confidence can be placed in the validity of the conclusion. The interview guide targeted the current LIAZ President and the immediate past LIAZ President.

6.3 Population of the study

The population of the study consisted of all LIS professionals (Librarians, Registry Officers, Records Officers and Documentalists) that are affiliated to LIAZ in Zambia. The target population of the research however comprised all the eighty five (85) Library and Information Science (LIS) Professionals namely; Librarians, Registry Officers, Records Officers and Documentalists drawn from across Zambia who attended the LIAZ Annual General Meeting in July, 2017.

6.4 Sampling method and sample size

According to Leedy (1997), there is little point in sampling a population that is less than 100. Consequently, no sampling was involved in this study.

6.5 Data analysis

The analysis of quantitative data from questionnaires was done through the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), while qualitative data sets were analysed using content analysis.

6.6 Limitations of the study

This study focused on LIS professionals that had gone for the LIAZ Annual General Meeting at the time of the study. Other LIS professionals were therefore not part of this study.

7. Findings and discussion

The key respondents were 80 library and information science (LIS) providers working in different types of libraries, registries, documentation centres and many other related institutions. The main attributes of concern under profile include gender, institutional type and professional qualifications.

7.1 Demographics of respondents

Key informant face-to-face interviews were conducted with the immediate past LIAZ President and the current LIAZ President. In addition, a total of 85 questionnaires were distributed to librarians and other information providers at the 2016 LIAZ Annual General Conference. Out of that number, 80 were correctly filled and returned for data analysis. This gave the researcher a response rate of 94.1 percent.

Out of 80 respondents that answered and returned their questionnaires, 27 (33.8%) were male and 53 (66.3%) were female. The reason for more men being in the minority as research participants may be attributed to low staffing levels of men as compared to their female counterparts in the Library and Information Science profession.

In terms of age of respondents, those aged 30 and below were 43 (47.8%) followed by 41 (45.6%) for those aged between 31-40 years. The age group 41-50 years had one respondent (1.1%) while those above 51years were two (2.2%).

With regard to institutional type of respondents, majority were drawn from libraries (57) followed by registries (20) while records centres had (3). The explanation for the above can be attributed to the fact that the Association is dominated by librarians.

With regard to qualifications, majority of the respondents (N=36, 45%) have a Diploma in Library and Information Science. This category was followed by first degree (BALIS) holders (N=27, 33.8%) while (N=13, 16.3%) were Certificate holders and four (5%) were master's degree holders.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
1. Gender of respondents		
Male	27	33.8%
Female	53	66.3%
2. Respondents' institutional type		
Libraries	57	71.3
Registries	20	25.0
Records Office/Centre	3	3.8
3. Qualifications (LIS)		
Diploma	36	45%
BA LIS	27	33.8%
Certificate	13	16.3%
Masters degree	4	5%

Table 1: Demographics of respondents

7.2 Visibility of LIAZ

In an attempt to ascertain the visibility of LIAZ in the community, respondents were asked to indicate their view regarding the visibility status of LIAZ outside the library fraternity. Table 2 below shows that majority of the respondents 53 (56.3%) indicated that LIAZ was not visible, 19 (23.8%) observed that it was visible while 8 (10%) stated that they were not sure of LIAZ's visibility status. The interviews revealed that LIAZ was not visible outside the library fraternity. One key informant remarked that:

LIAZ was not visible to the non-library fraternity owing to the fact that the association operates without an act of parliament. LIAZ needs government recognition because as things stand it operates as a club. This finding collaborate those of Uzuebgu & Onyekweodiri (2011) who reported that the Nigerian Library Association was not visible outside the library profession. This finding is confirmed by the results of a similar study done by Uzuebgu and Onyekweodiri (2011) who opines that the visibility of the Nigerian Library Association was very poor and that the NLA was not playing its vigorous and effective role in the development of the profession.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	LIAZ is visible	19	23.8
	LIAZ is not visible	53	66.3
	Not sure of LIAZ's visibility status	8	10.0
	Total	80	100.0

Table 2: Visibility of LIAZ

Another test was sought to ascertain the influence of gender of respondents on how of LIS professionals view themselves. The two variables (sex of respondents and low self esteem were cross-tabulated and the results are shown in table 3.

		Low self-esteem of LIS professionals		Total
		Yes	**No**	
Sex of respondents	Male	15	12	27
	Female	33	20	53
Total		48	32	80

Table 3: Sex of respondents and low self-esteem of LIS professionals Cross tabulation

A second statistical analysis was done using Chi-square test to prove whether there was a relationship between sex of respondents and inferiority complex of LIAZ members. The null hypothesis was that 'there is no relationship between sex and the low self esteem of LIS professionals. The second hypothesis, H_2 was that there is a relationship between sex and the low self esteem of LIS professionals. This means that if the test

statistic probability (P-value) is less than the significance level, the null hypothesis will be rejected, while if the P-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be accepted. The chi-square test results are depicted in table 4 below. The chi-square test results are shown in table 4 below.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.335[a]	1	.562		
Continuity Correction[b]	.114	1	.735		
Likelihood Ratio	.334	1	.563		
Fisher's Exact Test				.633	.366
Linear-by-Linear Association	.331	1	.565		
N of Valid Cases	80				
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.80.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					

Table 4: Chi-Square Tests

In this case, the test statistical probability (.00) is less than the formulated significance level (0.05) hence the null hypothesis is rejected. This shows that there is a strong relationship between sex and low self-esteem of LIS professionals.
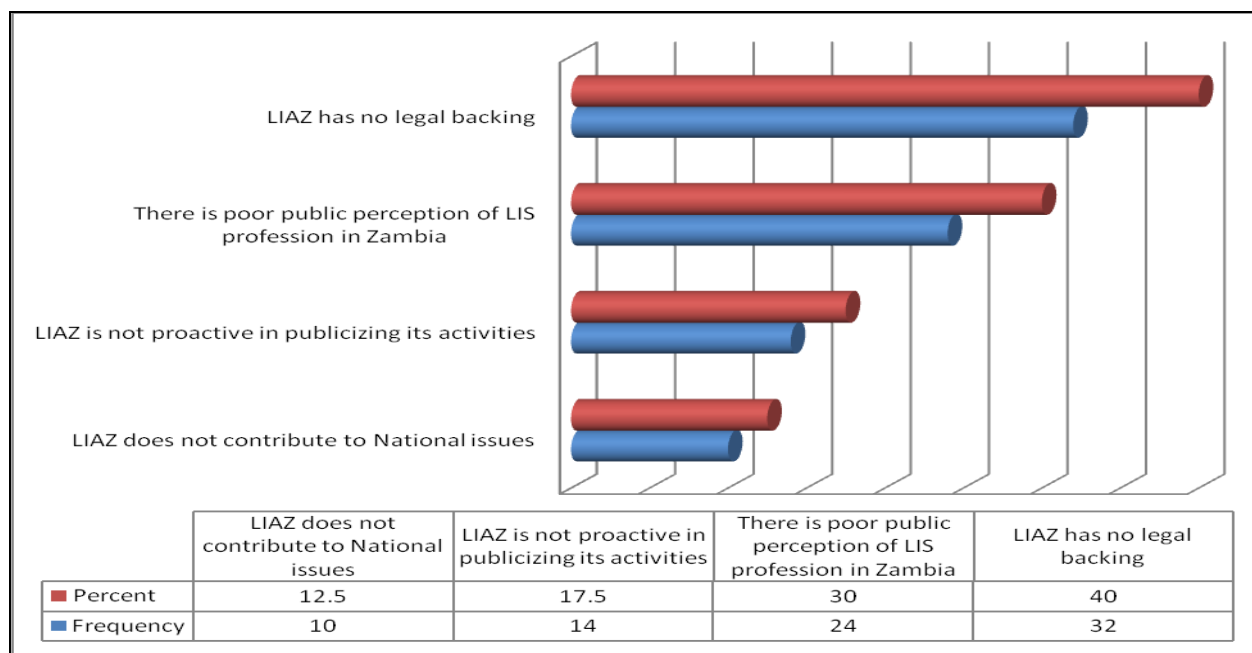
Figure 1: Reasons for non-visibility of LIAZ

Figure 2 above shows that the 32 (40%) respondents who stated that LIAZ was not visible were of the view that LIAZ was operating illegally owing to the lack of legal backing. Twenty four (30%) noted that there was poor public perception of LIS

profession in Zambia. Fourteen (17.5%) stated that LIAZ was not proactive in publicizing its activities while 10 (12.5%) observed that LIAZ does not contribute to national issues.

The key informants revealed that LIAZ was not visible outside the library profession because the association was suffering from various challenges such as lack of political will for legislation, lack of a solid financial base, inertia from LIS professionals especially the old guard to name but a few.

All the above observations are a pointer to the bad state of affairs in LIAZ and hence the need to address them urgently because they were negatively impacting not only on the visibility of the Association, but on library and information services as well.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
LIAZ should regularly publicize its activities on TV, radio & National Dailies	25	31.3	31.3	31.3
LIAZ should make registration compulsory before one can practice	19	23.8	23.8	55.0
LIAZ should lobby Government for Legislation	36	45.0	45.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Measures taken to enhance visibility of LIAZ

7.3 Measures to enhance visibility of LIAZ

Table 4 above presents suggestions on ways of enhancing visibility of LIAZ to the non-library fraternity. Majority of the respondents agreed that the future of the association was at stake, hence the need to urgently strategise on making LIAZ more visible by adopting some of the following suggestions: LIAZ should prioritize lobbying Government for library legislation (36, 45%), LIAZ should vigorously and regularly publicise its activities on television stations, radio and National Dailies (26, 32.5%), LIAZ should make registration compulsory before one can practice (18, 22.5%),

Key informants alluded to the need for LIAZ to enhance its image, reach out to all stakeholders, improve its membership drive and enhance its financial base. Consequently, it is fundamental for the Association to promote close working relationships with key stakeholders such the Government and media houses if its visibility is to be enhanced. Equally, the lack of an act of parliament has rendered LIAZ to be a toothless association.

An open-ended question was asked to learn about the respondents' views concerning challenges facing LIAZ. All the respondents recognized that LIAZ faces many challenges in its quest to promote development of the library and information

profession in Zambia. The salient comments arising from both questionnaire respondents and interviewees were that;

a) LIAZ does not receive adequate financing to enable it address the numerous challenges affecting the association;

b) LIAZ has not effectively lobbied in the corridors of power to get political recognition; neither has it explored opportunities in its environment to its advantage;

c) Senior and highly qualified LIS professionals shun the association;

d) Lack of a library bill has impacted negatively on library and information services in general and the Association in particular;

e) LIS professionals suffer from low self-esteem.

One key informant bemoaned the lack of political will with regard to library legislation, poor funding for library and information services from parent organizations and inertia from senior LIS professionals toward LIAZ activities. The findings of this study authenticate earlier findings by Karisiddappa (2002) who found that library associations are suffering from financial assistance and there are very few associations with funding to expand their activities. It should therefore be stated that the above findings are all serious issues that require an effective strategy to mitigate their impact on LIAZ's existence.

8. Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby made in order to build a strong library association in Zambia:

1. The LIAZ leadership should decisively consider the suggestions of LIS professionals in this paper towards attaining a visible and vibrant association for LIS professionals in Zambia.

2. As a matter of necessity, LIAZ Executive should create a strategy that would encourage new professionals to join the association, and to grow new leaders.

3. LIAZ Executive should vigorously advocate for recognition of the LIS profession in Zambia

9. Conclusion

The study has established that visibility of LIAZ at large is very poor owing to a number of challenges. Problems such as lack of members and especially active ones are common to all, but as everywhere, dedication and leadership can make an enormous difference. Majority of the LIS professionals agreed that LIAZ was not visible in

Zambia; hence, the urgent need to increase its visibility. Results indicated that the association has a huge task to try and change the mind set of not only the non-library fraternity, but that of LIS professionals as well. To reverse this negative trend obtaining in Zambia, LIAZ Executive together with all LIS professionals concerned with the plight of the association needed to be proactive in making the association vibrant and visible.

Acknowledgements

About the author

Pailet Chewe is the current acting Head of Collection Development and acquisitions in the University of Zambia Library. His research interests include; online information Literacy and bibliographic instruction, application of social media tools in libraries and EGovernment to name but a few.

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