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IKEJA ILORIN JOS KADUNA KANO LAGOS ISLAND MAIDUGURI MAKURDI
ONITSHA OWERRI WARRI YABA ZARIA

NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION,

National Library of Nigeria
Sanusi Dantata House
Central Building District
PMB 1, Garki

Abuja

E-mail: unfo@nla-ng.org

Website: <http://www.nla-ng.org>

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Gone So Far, Yet on the Threshold: Nigerian Library Association at Fifty

Abiola Abioye

Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies,

University of Ibadan,

Ibadan, Nigeria.

biolaabioye@yahoo.com

Yetunde Zaid and Olubukola Olatise

Main Library,

University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria.

yzaid@unilag.edu.ng

buktam@yahoo.com

Abstract

In commemoration of the fifty years of the existence of Nigerian Library Association (NLA), this paper goes down the memory lane and takes a critical look at the founding and activities of the NLA as a professional association in the last fifty years. Relying on published literature and documentary evidence, it examines the efforts of her founding fathers and successive leadership in putting the Association on a firm footing as a reputable professional association in Nigeria. It notes, in particular, the role of the Association, not only in promoting the welfare and professional development of her members, but also in uplifting the library and information profession and engendering access to information which is a critical resource for national development. It also examines the efforts of the Association in reaching out to other professional bodies in the task of national development in Nigeria as well as fostering co-operation and collaboration with sister associations outside the country for the development of library and information science (LIS) profession at the international level. The paper assesses the performance of the Association over the years based on local minimum standard for professional associations and scores her moderately high. However, applying the benchmark of international best practices, the paper

notes some shortcomings in the Association's performance and concludes that she is still on the threshold. Suggestions on how to move the NLA forward and make her the arrow-head of rapid development in LIS profession in Nigeria are provided.

Keywords: Nigerian Library Association, professional association, library development

Introduction

All over the world, professional associations play a significant role in the development of their profession. They not only take care of the well-being of their members but also set the standard for the practice of the profession. According to Fisher (1997), professional associations in the library and information science fields are viewed from the perspective of the value they bring to the field. The International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) described library and information studies association as a body representing the interests of library and information services and their users (www.Ifla.org). Studies have shown that library associations offer key services that support professional development, professional practices, knowledge generation, and research. Outcomes from these services include:

- Promoting quality and excellence in the profession
- Fostering leadership and direction
- Encouraging career development and professional growth
- Developing and maintaining an ongoing relationship with other stakeholders
- Nurturing partnerships within educational communities
- Promoting a spirit of fellowship
- Recognizing professional members for outstanding contributions (Fisher, <http://fisher/> 1997; Khomo, 2007; Borges and Romanelli, 2011)

It was against this background that the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) was formed. The formation of the NLA cannot be discussed in isolation of the West African Library Association (WALA). This is because the dramatis personae that organized and were in attendance at the birth of WALA were also

present to play the role of experienced midwives at the birth of the Nigerian NLA (Ogunseye, 1984). Among the distinguished founding fathers of the NLA was Professor John Harris, the pioneer Librarian of the University of Ibadan and the doyen of librarianship in Nigeria. The WALA National Division transformed into the NLA in 1962 following the dissolution of WALA. Factors responsible for the dissolution of WALA, according to Ojo-Igbinoba (1995) include forces of nationalism, problem of funding, distance between member countries (Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone, the last not being very active), personality clash and jealousy from Ghana over the funding by Carnegie Corporation and the siting of Institute of Librarianship at the then University College, Ibadan.

In December 1962, the NLA held its inaugural conference in Ibadan and Kalu Chima Okorie was elected as the first President of the Association. The aims and objectives of the Association at the inception were said to be similar to those of the defunct WALA and in accord with those of "similar associations such as the British Library Association" (Ojo-Igbinoba, 1995). These aims, as stated by Aguolu, cited in Ojo-Igbinoba (1995) are to:

- (a) unite all persons interested in libraries and librarianship by holding conferences and meetings, by issuing publications and by any other means;
- (b) safeguard and protect the professional interests of librarians and promote the establishment and development of libraries;
- (c) establish and maintain standards in the education and certification of librarians;
- (d) watch any legislation affecting libraries and assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the management and development of libraries within Nigeria; and
- (e) promote and encourage bibliographical study and research and library cooperation.

The year 2012 marks the 50th anniversary of the Association's existence. How has the Association fared in the last 50 years? This is the focus of this paper.

Activities of the Nigerian Library Association 1962 – 2012

There are about 5000 individual LIS professionals in Nigeria, working in a big country that has a population of about 149, 595 499 inhabitants (following

National Population Census of 2006). Memberships are drawn from various types of libraries throughout the country. The annual general meeting of the Association which holds in July of every year provides a forum for discussion and dissemination of useful knowledge on the best practices on the Management of Library and Information Science and is open to LIS professionals in Nigeria and other countries. NLA has become one of the leading library associations in Africa. The Association welcomes as members any persons or institutions engaged or interested in library and information services and/or science that subscribe to its Constitution.

Although the amount payable as membership fee and annual dues is not written in its constitution, the association, at one of its annual general meetings had agreed and fixed what each member should pay. At the moment, the membership dues vary from three thousand naira (N3,000) to ten thousand naira (N10,000). In other words, new entrants pay three thousand naira while highest earning members pay ten thousand naira. International members pay according to their earnings in their organization. The payment of annual dues attracts some privileges such as eligibility to vote and be voted for position in the Executive Committee of the Association. In the case of voting right, members are expected to have paid annual dues for three consecutive years. To be eligible to contest for position, members are required to have met their financial obligation to the Association for five consecutive years in order to be voted for. Members nominated for the Fellowship of Nigerian Library Association (FNLA) must have paid their membership dues for the last 10 consecutive years.

Every professional librarian would normally, belong in the first instance to one of the 36 State and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Chapters and one or more of the eleven interest groups. The special interest sections currently in existence are as follows:

1. Academic and Research Libraries (ARL)
2. Association of Government Libraries (AGOL)
3. Association of News media Librarians of Nigeria (ANLON)
4. Association of Women Librarians of Nigeria (AWLIN)
5. Cataloguing, Classification and Indexing
6. Nigeria Association of Law Libraries (NALL)
7. Library and Information Science Teachers (LIST)

8. Public Libraries (PL)
9. Information Technology (IT)
10. Nigerian School Library Association (NSLA)
11. Association of Libraries for Visually Handicapped (ALVH)
12. Preservation and Conservation (PC). (www.nla.org)

The supreme organ of the NLA is the Council which has the responsibility for the formulation and execution of the policies and programme of the Association. It consists of the elected national officers of the Association, eight elected councilors and all chairmen of state chapters and Federal Capital Territory as well as special subject interest section chairmen. From 1962 to date, the Association has had eighteen Presidents, each with a great measure of achievement during his/her tenure of office. These Presidents are: K.C. Okorie (1962-64); W.J. Plumbe (1964-65); E.B. Bankole (1965-66); S.C. Nwoye (1966-67); Mrs. F.A. Ogunsheye (1967-70); S.B. Aje (1971-73); J.O. Dipeolu (1973-75); A. Mohammed (1976-78); O.O. Ogundipe (1978-80); A.A. Ningi (1980-83); J.A. Maigari (1983-85); J.A. Dosunmu (1985-88); J.O. Fasanya (1989-93); Gboyega Banjo (1993-98); Alhaji Mu'azu H. Wali (1998-2000); Dr. J.O. Daniel (2000-2005); Ms. Victoria Okojie (2005-2010) and Prof. L.O. Aina 2010 to present. These professionals worked with a continuous plan, a strategy which brought success to NLA.

The achievements recorded during the half century period include the following:

1. The Nigeria Division of WALA successfully made a proposal for a National Library Policy, which became the blueprint for early library development and led to the inauguration of the Library Advisory Committee in 1958. This committee became the forum for the discussion of library development at the national level and advice on library matters and conditions of service for librarians in the Federal Civil Service.
2. The Association made representation to government for the establishment of the National Library of Nigeria and the enactment of the National Library Act of 1962.
3. The Association was also instrumental in securing government support for the professional education and training of library personnel leading to the establishment of the Institute of Librarianship at the University of Ibadan.

4. The promulgation of the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) Decree in June 1995 and the subsequent inauguration of the Council by the Honorable Minister of Education, Professor Borishade on 28th May, 2002.
5. The Association successfully influenced the government in inaugurating the LRCN in May 2002 to enable it perform its statutory functions of regulating the practice of the Library and Information profession in the country.
6. The launching of NLA Online Forum in year 2004 has provided a forum for librarians in Nigeria to interact and discuss issues relating to the Association, members in professional respect and the general development of LIS profession in the country. It has greatly increased communication among members and bridged the gap among members in Nigeria and in the Diaspora.
7. The NLA has successfully mobilized its members to be aware of the wind of change blowing around the world of information by encouraging training and re-training on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and members, their organizations and the profession are better for it.
8. The acquisition in Abuja, the nation's capital city of a befitting and edifying NLA House is one of the most visible achievements of the Association in the last fifty years of its existence. The property which compares favourably with that of any professional association in Nigeria has gone a long way in shoring up the image of the Association as a well-organized professional association.
9. Induction of professional librarians undertaken in year 2005 and 2011 in which the Association played a key role has greatly advanced the image of the Association and the profession and brought its practice in Nigeria close to international standard.
10. The Association has made tremendous impact on the development of library and information profession in Africa. At the individual level, the positive impact of Nigeria is felt in Africa. Members of the Association, particularly executive committee members (past and present) have played and are still playing significant role in the organization and activities of IFLA (Africa Section).

11. The Nigerian Libraries, the official journal of the Association is as old as the Association. The journal succeeded the WALA News which died a natural death when the West African Library Association was wound up. This journal has helped to disseminate research findings and scholarly papers on library and information science and to integrate library and information professionals in Nigeria and the Diaspora

Despite the great leap made by the Association as itemized in the above achievements, there is still much room for improvement. Compared with library associations across the world, particularly those in the developed world, the Association still has a long way to go. One way of building professional networks, finding career advice and uncovering new resources is through becoming a member of one's professional association. Michael Gorman, President of American Library Association (ALA) from 2005 to 2006 described joining the ALA as easy as A, B, C; A for Altruism, B for Benefits and C for Communication. (www.ala.org). Joining the ALA, is indeed a delight and with the top ten reasons listed on its website and to which lip service is not just paid, one will enjoy being a member of ALA. The NLA still needs to improve by getting involved in some activities. These include what the ALA is already noted for. These are:

1. **Policy Analysis:** ALA analyses government policy in areas such as copyright and supports legislation promoting access to information. ALA member committees represent library interests in state and federal contexts.
2. **Public Awareness and Media Relations:** ALA works to increase visibility of libraries, library workers and library issues. It includes an ongoing public awareness campaigns that communicate the value of libraries and library staff and provides tools and materials needed to promote the libraries image on a national basis and in the local community.
3. **Divisions and Roundtables:** ALA's eleven divisions and seventeen roundtables focus on specific types of libraries and library activities. It provides members with information and services tailored to their needs.
4. **Networking:** ALA provides opportunities to interact with professional colleagues electronically or face-to-face so they can share knowledge and best practices to advance the profession.

5. Website Resources: ALA's websites provides ready access to ALA news, information, tools and services. Over 150 blogs, wikis and social media/outreach pages are built by members for members and the public.
6. Standards: ALA develops standards and guidelines designed to improve library services
7. Intellectual Freedom: ALA promotes and defends intellectual freedom in libraries at the local, state and federal levels. In the United States of America, Librarians have always been defenders of these rights. All members are active in the fight for these freedoms.
8. Continuing Education: ALA provides continuing education in a variety of formats and venues, including conferences, workshops, institutes, teleconferences and web courses.
9. Accreditation: In ensuring quality, innovation and value in library and information studies, ALA offers an accreditation programme that provides assurance that graduate programmes in library and information studies meet approved standards. For instance, it is the association that accredits master's programmes in library and information studies across the USA, Canada and Puerto Rico.
10. Legislative Advocacy: ALA works to increase federal funding for libraries and promotes state and federal legislation of benefits to libraries and library users. The association makes the difference in the government by telling members of Congress about the value of libraries to the society.

Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) is another example of association that NLA could strive to be at par with. In a survey on the membership of the Khomo (2007) established the reasons for satisfaction with and motivation for joining LIASA. These include proper administration of fee paid, regular update about the activities of the association and other similar professional associations, periodic workshops and training programme with excellent speakers in attendance, meeting and interacting with professional colleagues on a regular basis, online interaction forum and regular publication and wider circulation of the association's journal and newsletter among members.

Compared with these two library associations, Nigerian Library Association still has a long way to go. There is an urgent need to address those short comings.

The following areas of weakness have been identified:

Absence of a Code of Ethics: A professional association is expected to have code of ethics that will outline the rules of standard practice and behavior, particularly in professional respect, for its members. As observed by CILIP, the essence of an ethical code is to 'provide a framework to help library and information professionals ... to manage the responsibilities and sensitivities which figure prominently in their work'. It is necessary for an association, especially one with members from disparate places and backgrounds, to have a clear code of ethics and responsibilities which will show its members what the association stands for and what its role is. It is also necessary and expected that an association will follow through with their code of ethics by acting in accordance with them and advocating for causes that are in line with their ethics and mission. We should expect that an organization that represents Nigerian libraries and library workers take these ethical principles and translates them into actions, with appropriate sanctions for unethical conduct by any of its members. The existence of an ethical code seems to be one of the hallmarks of all regulated professions. Even in Nigeria, professionals like legal and medical practitioners are subjected to this code, a breach of which is tried and sanctioned by the appropriate disciplinary body of the profession. In Europe and America, library associations like CILIP and ALA have the ethical code fashioned out to guide their members. It is hoped that the NLA, without further delay, will give this issue the serious attention it deserves. The leadership of the Association is enjoined to critically consider formulating and observing ethical principles and code of professional practice to take care and balance conflicting interests. The code is to define the various responsibilities of members and the general conduct

NLA Mission turns into Plans: A library association must assume that accompanying the mission statements should be written goals that more specifically describe the actions that the associations are planning to take, to accomplish its mission. These goals are expected to be measurable and with a timetable to guide their realization. A library association's goals must include actions for three broad areas: individual members' development, collective association programme and inclusion in the environment in which

the LIS association operates. These goals must direct the action plan and be part of every meeting, to avoid dispersive projects and money expending with no returns. The question is, Is NLA fulfilling its vision statement? or better still, does it have a vision statement?

Visibility: The NLA has a website (www.nla.org) but the question is how visible is the association. Nigerian Library Association has been less visible, particularly in relation to national issues affecting the country. Hardly would any government policy or programme be implemented in Nigeria without a critical comment articulating the position of the Nigerian Bar Association or the Nigerian Union of Journalists. These two associations, for instance, have constituted themselves into indispensable pressure groups to the extent that civil societies and the general public in Nigeria now look up to them as invaluable partners in the bid to ensure an egalitarian society where the rule of law reigns supreme. Perhaps, the NLA has not been as vocal simply because information professionals are silent workers acting in strict consonance with Berninghausen's argument that library associations are established "to promote library service and librarianship". Libraries are, however, part of the society and, as argued by Schuman (1978), societal "sickness" interferes with the free flow of information. It is, therefore, important that the Association be involved in national discussions as part of its social responsibilities. The statement issued by the President of the Association, Prof. Lenrie Aina in 2011 on the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill presented the Association in a very good light and was in tune with the thinking of Nigerian public on the issue of right of access to information in the country. It was also in tandem with one of the aims of the Association at the inception "to watch any legislation affecting libraries and assist in the promotion of such legislation as may be considered necessary for the management of libraries within Nigeria".

The Black Herald magazine (2007) posted some of the names and website addresses of professional associations in Nigeria on the web. The list recorded only eighty nine (89) professional bodies in Nigeria that cut across disciplines like accounting, engineering, agriculture, health, government, economics, business, environment, information and technology, et cetera. The list however, did not include the Nigerian Library Association (NLA). Hence, the question

to ask at this juncture is if NLA is also a professional association (Uzuegbe and Onyekweodiri, 2011). This paper, however, recommends that NLA should make her impact felt in the Nigerian community. The leadership should also regularly organize seminars and symposia to sensitize the public on the importance of the profession to all sectors of life. It should embark on advocacy programmes to attract goodwill to the profession and ensure better funding for libraries

Quality Assurance: Working towards international best practices in professionalism should be given a priority. Necessary machinery must be put in place to ensure compliance. The Association should set up standards which are to be periodically reviewed and ensure that standards established are adhered to by the members.

Social Responsibility: The Association should take a cue from the American Library Association (ALA) (and even IFLA) and set up the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT). The ALA's SRRT has representation on the ALA Council and is involved in several activities including the sponsorship of programmes during ALA annual meetings (Kagan, 2005). The core values of the profession demand that the members take seriously their role in furthering social justice in the communities. We live in volatile times where inequality, violence and prejudice of all kinds threaten the human community. A library association can help facilitate this role by educating and organizing librarians to advocate for justice. When we as librarians do their job well, libraries serve as a resource for the entire community, a resource that can provide access to information and cultural materials to all, without distinction to class, gender, ethnic group, country of origin, citizenship status, or sexual orientation. Betty-Carol Sellen (as cited by Openo, 2010). explained: "If librarians decide that the issues vital to society are irrelevant to librarians as librarians, then society may find that librarians are irrelevant to it" Materials and services can make a meaningful contribution to the people in communities by promoting literacy, equalizing access to materials in all formats, advocating for human rights, preserving and promoting cultures, and by promoting intellectual freedom.

Image of LIS profession: The point here was to recognize how much the profession's image impacts the environment in which the members operate and if the opposite is true: did the environment impact the LIS professionals and LIS Associations goals? To date, the leadership of NLA has not conducted survey to find out reasons of low status, reputation and image of the professionals in Nigeria. No doubt, the relevance of public libraries in Nigeria is an issue the Association should address. This is because the public libraries are supposed to be the most accessible and visible to the people.

Education and training of librarian: The quality of any profession depends largely on how well educated the members are. The Institute of Librarianship now the Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies, University of Ibadan pioneered the education of librarians in Nigeria. Other institutions have joined in the education and training of LIS professionals in Nigeria. What then is the role of the Association in the training and education of librarians in Nigeria? For instance, in the United States of America, American Library Association (ALA) plays a vital role in the education and training of its members. Some other associations such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) are involved in training and re-training of their members. The national body of the Nigerian Library Association has not been actively involved in the training and re-training of LIS professionals in Nigeria. It is suggested that there should be structures for training and re-training of members.

Leadership: A great emphasis is on the character of the leadership of LIS Associations: they are expected to be positive and strongly determined to bring success, financial support, visibility and to reach maturity. They are expected to know how to grow in competence and understanding not only among their peers. If the leadership of NLA requires understanding best practices in the management of Associations, they should not hesitate to learn from other Library associations around the world. A good idea is to learn from "UNESCO Guidelines for the Management of Professional Associations or IFLA Resolutions on the Management of Library Associations".

Proposal for Action

The following proposals are in line with the items/ issues identified. Actions are expected to be taken after the NLA 50th Anniversary celebration. The following are suggestions on how to move the NLA forward.:

- NLA must work towards continuing professional development, updating and re-training of members. Generally, the universities are the best partners for such trainings. But is it useful for NLA to work with the support of trade and business organizations, with non-profit organizations of education and culture, science and technology, etc.? This is a food for thought.
- NLA needs to connect with the general public needs to be more relevant and visible.
- NLA must offer a new vision of the LIS profession. But is it useful to work with the emerging organism like knowledge management professionals?
- The NLA could further improve the status, reputation and image of the profession and of the professionals. It includes ways of living to be good citizens. But is it useful to integrate NLA with social and cultural movements and to work with cultural programs dedicated to improve literacy, computer access, environment protection, and others?
- NLA needs to improve on communication and visibility of the profession and of the professionals. But what are the best practices to work to increase the value, status, reputation and image of the LIS profession and professionals now?

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the NLA has come of age and has strived to have a strong association but there is still a long way to go in meeting the aspirations of the founders. It is hoped that in the next fifty years NLA will be competing favourably with other established library associations. . We wish to therefore conclude that NLA, after this 50th Anniversary Celebration will enhance the power and prestige of all members dedicated to LIS profession in Nigeria and Diaspora.

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