

Ghana Library Association and Networking: The Challenges

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By Valentina J.A Bannerman (Mrs.)

Overview

On behalf of the Ghana Library Association, I wish to thank you very much for the opportunity to join hands with Goethe Institute, Accra in organizing this workshop under the theme “Strengthening the network among Ghanaian libraries and information professionals.” I am also grateful for the opportunity to make this presentation which will take the following course:

- Ghana Library Association
- Networking
- Challenges
- The way forward

Ghana Library Association

History

The Ghana Library Association (GLA) was founded in 1962. It was an offshoot of the West African Library Association, (WALA) as were other national library Associations in West Africa. It was the dawn of a new era and it was considered vital for library development to have national associations. Since then, the GLA has been the body representing libraries and information services formally in Ghana since 1963. This occurred in an announcement on page 228 of the Ghana Gazette No. 17 Friday 29th March 1963(Oddoye, 1989). It was registered under the Professional Bodies Decree NRCDC 143 of 1973 with Registration No. PB 21 dated 2nd August 1986 (GLA, August 2006).

GLA has had 16 presidents since its inception. Oddoye (1989), lists the names of Presidents and their tenure up to 1988 as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Mr. G.M Pitcher | 1962-1963 |
| 2. Mr. E.K Koranteng | 1963-1964 |
| 3. Mr. A G.T Ofori | 1964-1965 |
| 4. Mr. E.K Amedeker | 1965-1967 |
| 5. Mr. D.E.M Odoi | 1967-1969 |
| 6. Mr. David Cornelius | 1969-1971 |
| 7. Mr. A.N.De Heer | 1971-1977 |
| 8. Mr. G.C.O Lamptey | 1977-1983 |
| 9. Mr. G.A Villars | 1983-1988 |
| 10. Mr. S Afre | 1988- |

An observation of the tenure indicates that the 7th and 8th Presidents had 6 years each while the 9th President had 5 years. These were extraordinary circumstances. It marked a period of inactivity and constraints such as finance and inadequate commitment of the leadership and also members. The revival in 1983 put the Association back on its feet (Oddoye 1989).

Since then, Presidents have had normal tenures of 2 years and 4 years when re elected as indicated below:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 11. Mr. D.B Addo | 1990-1992 |
| 12. Nana Asiedu | 1992-1996 |
| 13. Mrs. M. Amissah-Arthur | 1996-1998 |
| 14. Mr. C Entsua-Mensah | 1998-2002 |
| 15. Mrs. H R Asamoah-Hassan | 2002-2006 |
| 16. Mrs. V.J.A Bannerman | 2006- |

The 16th President was elected unanimously in December 2006. Each President, starting from the first, has drawn plans for the realisation of the objectives of the Association as enshrined in its Constitution.

Objectives

The objectives of the Constitution are

- To ensure the maintenance of a high standard of professional practice and conduct
- To promote and safeguard the professional interest of librarians
- To encourage personal development and research into librarianship
- To be instrumental in promoting the establishment and development of library and information services, bibliographical work and library cooperation
- To unite all librarians and institutions in Ghana interested in libraries and librarianship (GLA, August 2006).

Networking is involved in the pursuance of each of objective of the Association. In other words you cannot achieve them without interacting and exchanging ideas. The constitution says it all with the structures in place.

Structure

Council

According to the Constitution, Council is the Governing board of the Association. It has the power to act on behalf of the Association, in all matters except those reserved in the constitution to members at an Annual General Meeting (AGM) or Special Meeting. Members hold office for 2 years and are eligible for immediate re-election for another 2 year term. Membership consist of the following:

- The President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Immediate Past President
- 7 non office bearing members, of which at least 2 shall be non professionals.
- A recent addition is 1 retired member.

The retired member on Council would in addition to the expertise offered represent retired colleagues and also pool their knowledge and skills for the benefit of the Association. The justification for this addition is that retirees are considered experienced and their contribution to the Association needed to be sustained.

An attempt is usually made to ensure that membership of Council is representative of a cross section of librarians but this has not always been possible as portrayed by the current membership which consists of 7 from university libraries, 2 from special libraries 1 from a public library and a retiree from an international organization. The predominance of librarians from the universities is quite glaring.

Regional Branches

The existence of Regional branches with their representatives is supposed to offset any imbalance. In other words structures are in place to ensure the involvement of all members of the Association and those who live or work in the region are automatically members of the branch.

The following regions have representatives:

- Ashanti Region
- Brong Ahafo Region
- Central Region
- Eastern Region
- Greater Accra
- Volta Region
- Western Region
- Northern Region
- Upper East Region
- Upper West Region

The Regional representatives are nominated on the basis of their residence in the region, their interest and participation in the Association's activities. They are responsible for the structures in the branches for the effective organization of their activities. Reports on such activities are submitted to Council on a regular basis.

Sections of GLA

The Ghana Library Association has committees and special interest sections. They are:

- Education and Research Committee
- Accreditation and Certification Committee
- Cataloguing Section
- Special Libraries Section
- Public Libraries Section
- University Libraries Section

The Education and Research Committee

The Education and Research Committee organize training programmes for members in order to assist librarians and other information specialists to maintain competence in the rapidly changing environment and also disseminate their experiences for the benefit of other members. A recent workshop on Document Imaging empowered librarians to use their scanners more effectively. The outcome of the workshop on how to get published was an increase in the number of articles submitted for publication. Another series of workshops have been planned for the year starting in May 2008.

Accreditation and Certification Committee

Accreditation and Certification Committee took off in 2006 after membership was categorized by Council into Fellows, Chartered members and Associate members:

At the 2006 Congress and Annual General Meeting the following were given certificates at an Awards night:

- Twenty five Fellows made up of 7 serving librarians, 4 honorary members, and 14 retired members.
- 116 Chartered Librarians and 87 Associate Librarians

A committee chaired by the Immediate Past President continues the task of accreditation making it a continuous programme.

Special Interest Sections

The Cataloguing, Public and Special Libraries have not operated for the last 10 years. The Public and University Libraries section were thought to be redundant and consequently never operated effectively. They have since been scrapped.

NETWORKING

From the above it is clear from the history of the Association, its constitution and the structures in place, that there are prospects for networking. Communication which is a key ingredient has been given prominence with the establishment of the following:

- Newsletter
- Ghana Library Journal
- Annual General Meetings
- Biennial Congresses
- Website

Newsletter

In the past the Newsletter was quite regular until its demise with the exit of the Editor due to lack of funds. It has been re introduced twice, first in 1983 with the revival of the Association. The new series was revived again in 2002, with kind sponsorship and generous support from The International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) (Insaidoo, 2004). The final edition, Vol.3 No. 3 September 2004 signalled the end of the Newsletter when funds dried up.

Ghana Library Journal

The first issue of the Ghana Library Journal, Volume 1 No. 1, was published in October 1963. In his maiden editorial the first Editor Mr. R.C Benge as quoted by Oddoye, 1989 stated the following as the policy of the Ghana Library Journal:

- It should mirror the progress and setbacks of the profession in Ghana
- It should serve as a link between all those concerned with libraries in any capacity both within Ghana and through the world.
- It should appeal to and serve the interests of as many people as possible.

Initially, the journal was published 3 times a year. However from 1963 to 1973, five volumes were published, this meant one volume per every 2 years. Then followed 14 years of hibernation due to financial constraints and this coincided with the fortunes of the Association which by then was also inactive. Volume 6 was published in 1988 and volume 7 the following year. Six years of coma was followed in 1996 by volume 8. It has been published annually since then. Despite the hiccups, the Ghana Library Journal has over the years kept faith with its objectives (Antwi, 2006)

It has been a bi-annual publication since 2007 in accordance with the policy of Council, the first of the year devoted to the proceedings of Congresses and the second issue of the year to items of eminent and topical interest.

Annual General Meetings (AGM)

Members of GLA meet every year to discuss issues affecting the Association. A theme is selected and a resource person contacted to make a presentation prior to the AGM which then takes place in the afternoons. At the meeting, The President makes a statement on the affairs of the Association, The Secretary reports on proceedings of Council and the Treasurer gives a Financial Report. This is the day that the Regional Representatives, Committees and the Sectional Heads present their reports to the membership at large. Resolutions are normally passed at the end of these sessions.

Biennial Congresses

Every second year GLA organises congresses where topical issues are and elections for offices conducted. In essence this means members meet for 2 days every second year. The first day is for the Congress and the second day for the AGM. In the evening a dinner dance is organized to crown the activities.

These meetings serve to bring together members of the profession to share ideas and learn about the direction the Association is taking them. It provides an opportunity to

interact with others as they present their own view point on issues affecting the Association generally and members in particular.

Website

One very powerful way of networking is having a website. It has been on the drawing board for years and now is the opportunity to build a website. The huge expense normally associated with such projects has now become affordable. As such the Association has contracted 2 members to design the website which would be launched by the end of the year.

In the meantime information is passed to members through e-mail and snail mail.

CHALLENGES

1. No permanent position

The Association has come a long way from its beginnings and looking back it is plagued by the same challenges faced by its pioneers. Members of Council are elected for a 2 year term which is renewable. The positions are therefore not permanent and members have to fit in activities of the Association into their own very busy schedule. In other words there is no single person totally dedicated to the Association.

2. There is no single legislation for libraries.

Ghana has 5 categories of libraries: School, Public, Special, and Academic and Research Libraries and each has a different parent organization in charge of it. Public libraries are under the Ministry of Education through the Ghana Library Board and now we have some public libraries being established by the District Assemblies under the Ministry of Local Government. School libraries are under the Ministry of Education under a different legislation and are being taken care of in the Education Bill under the Educational Reform Programme. Libraries in Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), hospitals, prisons belong to their parent organizations as do libraries in universities and research institutions. In such circumstances it is difficult for the Association to coordinate

issues that affect the different libraries. One category missing is a National Library and attempts to initiate the process for the necessary legislation to be passed are still ongoing.

3. Absence of an umbrella body for the development of libraries

After all these years of development, there is no single body responsible for libraries and librarians. Consequently, there is no mouth piece articulating national and international issues that have a bearing on libraries. Examples of such issues are Copyright, Information Bill and WSIS Plan of Action. This leaves libraries out of touch with developments in the national and international domain to the detriment of libraries, librarians their users (GLA, 2007).

4. Issue of independence for Regional representative to operate

Some of the Regional Representatives prefer to operate independently of the Association whilst others were virtually inactive. According to them they require funds to operate and therefore do not see the need to account to Council. A concession was made some years ago for them to retain a percentage of dues collected at their level, but this has not solved the problem of funds. Consequently the only region working very well until recently is the Central Region. It had been involved with meetings and training programmes for library staff in secondary and training colleges in the region.

5. Loss of membership

Majority of members in the regions ceased to be members of GLA with the new requirements for accreditation under the categories of membership created. Personnel in school and college libraries who formed the majority in the regional branches could no longer be considered as members of the Association as they did not fit into any category due to their lack of qualification in librarianship. The decision to cut them off arose from the desire to distinguish between librarians and personnel employed to man our libraries and thus raise the image of the profession. This action reduced the membership at the regional level since most of their members were untrained and this further contributed to the inaction in the regions.

6. The Issue of Para professionals who do not want to be referred as such.

The breakaway group of para-professionals had to be dealt with. The members of the group could not accept or comprehend the category they belonged to. According to them, they were professionals regardless of the fact that they did not have Masters Degrees. The argument used was that trained teachers were professional teachers whether they were Certificate, Diploma, Degree or PHD holders etc. Council made several efforts to reason with them to no avail. A decision was taken to have at least 2 para-professionals members on Council to assuage the situation and get other concerns addressed. The Associate membership category conferred on them does not appear to satisfy them.

The Way Forward

Council has the situation under control and the paper will be incomplete if the way forward for the Association is not indicated.

1. The Association needs support of government so that resolutions passed on issues in the national and international domain that affects libraries and their users can be implemented. The best way of obtaining the support would be through the establishment of an umbrella body with legal backing to manage, oversee, coordinate library issues and position libraries as the country's information gateway and to steer library development towards national goals (GLA, 2007). A proposal for the establishment of a National Commission on Libraries awaits the action of the Minister of Education, Science and Sports. The proposal describes the existing situation in the country and justifies the need for a National Commission on Libraries. It has been accepted in principle. (Bannerman, 2007). Proactive ways would be sought to fast track the process.
2. The Association recognises that for it to be able to reach out to librarians all over the country the regional representatives would have to be active. It would therefore empower the regional representatives and also monitor their activities in order to address the constraints facing them. Council would be

visible in all their activities as far as practicable.

3. Membership drive will be intensified and the list of members monitored and regularly updated to ensure that communication from the Secretariat reaches all members.
4. Council will liaise closely with the Chairperson of the Education and Research Committee in the selection of topics and resource persons for the training programmes. The aim will be to ensure that the focus will be on training programmes that address the needs of members.
5. Additional sections will be added to the existing sections of GLA eg reading, copyright etc to enable the Association to reach out to related bodies.
6. Fund raising activities will be strengthened so that members can be supported to attend the Associations activities and possibly IFLA at reduced cost.
7. Council will seek ways of making libraries visible to government and in society in general and consequently raise the image of libraries and ensure their development.

CONCLUSION

The Ghana Library Association symbol, the spirit of cooperation is quite representative of what the Association stands for. By bringing together all librarians and institutions in support of the development of libraries in the country, the Association continues brave the odds. However the challenges that stand in the way of collaboration, teamwork and support of each other are surmountable. The need to keep the communication lines open at all times cannot be over emphasised. For where there is life there is hope.

Thank you for your attention

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