



ASSOCIATION OF PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARIES IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFIRCA

Historical and background information

By

Simon Joseph ENGITU

Assistant Director, Library Services; Parliament of Uganda

Out Going APLESA Secretary

The origin of APLESA dates back to 1986 when a suggestion was made for an interim committee to be constituted to create an interest group of parliamentary librarians as an organ of the Standing Conference of Eastern and Southern Africa Librarians (SCECSAL), who were able to attend SCECSAL conferences to avail themselves and meet as distinct group in order to share experiences and compare notes as it were. This noble idea did not take off soon after due to a variety of reason among which was the inability of the people concerned to attend SCECSAL conferences as they were not funded by the parent institution (parliaments). In March 1990, Mr. Winford Gurure- a librarian to Parliament of Zimbabwe revived the idea and sent circulars inviting colleagues in the eastern and southern Africa region about it. The idea was given support in August 1990 when it was introduced at the Satellite meeting of the IFLA section on Libraries and Research services for parliaments and at the main meetings of IFLA in Oslo and Stockholm respectively.

Hence, in 1990 and 1991 IFLA conferences, Mr. Gurure got a lot of encouragement to spearhead the formation of a regional organ of parliamentary librarians from members of other regional associations in Canada, Australia, Asia and the Pacific where similar association exist namely;

- Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Canada (APLIC)
- Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Australasia (APLA)
- Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Asia and the Pacific (APLAP)

This was done with a strong conviction that in every profession, practitioners do have tendencies to network and always be in contact with each other whether nationally, trans-border or internationally. It is against this background that the Eastern and southern Africa regional librarians took credence to this practice by a visit to some countries within the region including Kenya in 1991 by the late Jario G, then the Parliament Librarian of Namibia. In July 1991, a proposal for financial assistance was written to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) regional office in Nairobi to help in the feasibility study into a possibility of the formation of a network of Parliamentary librarians in the region. This study was hence carried out in March 1992 when Mr.

Gurure visited the parliament of Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia where therefore it was agreed that;

- A steering committee be immediately established to plan the establishment of the network of parliamentary librarians in eastern and southern Africa. The committee members that were eventually put in place included:
 1. R.R Mwale of Zambia- Chairman
 2. P.A Ntomola of Tanzania Vice Chairman
 3. W.H.C Gurure- Co-ordinator
 4. B.B Liyawo of Malawi- Vice Co-ordinator.
- The name of the grouping be called the Association of Parliamentary Librarians in Eastern and Southern Africa (APLESA). Later, the name was changed to include the word Libraries instead of Librarians because there are other professional providing information services in Parliamentary libraries other than Librarians.
- Bilateral exchange of newspapers be arranged as soon as is practicable and that inaugural meeting of APLESA should be convened after all the necessary ground work had been completed and the funds secured for the meeting.

Page | 2

APLESA Inaugural Meeting

Between October 11th to 13th 1994, Parliament of Zimbabwe hosted the APLESA inaugural meeting that was attended by the following eleven countries; Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This 3-day meeting managed to come up with a draft APLESA constitution. However, a number of challenges were identified. All the challenges identified were related to inadequate funding and poor resource allocation for parliamentary libraries, roles of librarians, qualifications of librarians and staffing levels in libraries of parliament. Hence members came up with a number of recommendations among which included a need to provide sufficient funds to enable parliamentary libraries to function effectively in terms of collection development and on capacity development activities like attachments, study visits and training, all of which were lacking in most of the parliamentary libraries then. It was also suggested that APLESA should maintain a regular newsletter.

During the inaugural meeting in Harare, elections were held to fill the vacant positions of the APLESA Executive. The following were elected;

1. Ms Tembi Chalabase Mtine (Zambia)- Chairperson
2. Mr. Ntoloma P.A (Tanzania)- Vice Chairperson
3. Mr. Liyawo B.B (Malawi)- Secretary
4. Ms Molebatsi (Botswana)- Vice Secretary
5. Mr. Songoro (Kenya)- Committee Member
6. Mr. Masawi (Zimbabwe) Committee Member.

Members were strongly urged to implement what had been discussed and that was resolved at the inaugural meeting. Members were called to cooperate fully. These words

were echoed by the Deputy Chairman of committees Ode G.W. Marange on behalf of Parliament of Zimbabwe.

Since its inauguration in 1994 in Harare, Zimbabwe, APLESA has had the following Chairperson namely;

Page | 3

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1. Ms Tembi Mtine | 1994/98 |
| 2. Ms Ellen Ndeshi Namhila | 1998/2000 |
| 3. Mr. Raliile Donovan T | 2000/02 |
| 4. Ms. Butale Florence | 2002/03 |
| 5. Ms Mwakio Grace | 2003/--- |

Current state of APLESA

To date APLESA membership has reached 14 countries including; Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Namibia, Swaziland, and Angola, Mozambique and Ethiopia. We have also received a communication from the Pan African Parliament (PAP) indicating an intention to join APLESA. We are processing an invoice for them to pay membership fees. The East African Legislative Assembly also communicated that they are sending two participants to join us in this conference.

The eligible member countries are those within the SADC¹ region, the East African Community and those in the Horn of Africa including Egypt, Djibouti, Eritrea, etc. In addition, the islands of Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and Reunion are also eligible. However, quite a number of these have not yet joined the Association yet.

APLESA Vision and Mission

These are the APLESA vision and mission respectively;

- The vision of APLESA is “*to be an Association of excellence, advancing inter-parliamentary library co-operation within Eastern and Southern Africa.*”
- APLESA exists “*to enable Parliaments, through networking and information resource sharing, to make informed decisions.*”

APLESA Strategic areas of Vision and Action

It was planned that in the five- year period ending 2005/06, the following would have been the APLESA strategic areas of focus:

- (i) Promote cooperation and resource sharing among member countries (APLESA)
- (ii) Review the constitution, develop and implement other operational mechanisms to attain the highest level of service delivery focusing on clients.
- (iii) Promote communication and networking among APLESA members.
- (iv) Establish an effective and efficient information delivery service for APLESA stakeholders.

¹ SADC is abbreviation for Southern Africa Development Cooperation.

- (v) Obtain support for APLESA.

APLESA achievements since its inception

APLESA has since grown from a small association to what it is now. To enable it achieve its objectives the following have been done;

Page | 4

The association held two training workshops on Strategic Planning; one in Namibia in 1999 funded by the House of Commons, UK through the British Department for International Development (DfID) and the Finnish Parliament held in Windhoek, and the other funded by CIDA through Parliamentary Centre, Canada held in Kampala in July/August 2001 worth US\$ 20,765.50. However, individual parliaments have met the bigger part of the assistance to APLESA. They have been funding the APLESA Annual Conferences by hosting or facilitating members to attend conferences on a yearly basis for which we are very grateful to all.

In addition to the APLESA Strategic Planning Workshop 30th July to 3rd August 2001 worth US \$ 20,756.5 that the Parliamentary Centre, Canada provided the funding for, the following activities were also funded by Parliamentary Centre Canada;

- The APLESA Logo Design worth US \$550
- APLESA Web site Design and Hosting worth US \$ 3,122.77. Unfortunately, due to funding challenges, the website had to close down.
- APLESA Directory

The main aim of the Strategic workshop was to enable the participants to draw up realistic strategic plans for APLESA and for their respective libraries, so as to enhance the proper management and development of the Association and the libraries.

It was in this workshop that members realized a need to amend the APLESA constitution to accommodate and take care of some missing gaps. Eventually, the constitutional amendment was done in 2002 during the APLESA conference in Kampala. For example, it was realized that the sustainability of APLESA was still unclear. Hitherto most of the activities of the Association had been donor-funded. For how long can this continue? Can member parliaments adequately finance the Association? So, the amendments had to take care of Membership fees as a source of funding where from, so far we have collected UD\$ 1500 in only one APLESA conference in Mombasa, Kenya in 2003. It also led to the creation of Article VII, Section 1 to take care of the Parliamentary Researchers in addition to the creation of the APLESA Secretariat.

The APLESA website (www.aplesa.org) was designed with the initial plan by the Communication, Information Sharing & Database Committee which did a commendable job to collect information together that formed the site but because of funding problems; it has gone offline. Funding was initially obtained from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) through the Parliamentary Centre, Canada which hosted it up to March 31, 2002.

Training needs analyses were also done by some individual member parliaments in which skills on communication among members clearly became evident as lacking. This activity was coordinated by the Training Committee where Zambia was chair. To address this, issues on lack of communication have always been discussed in APLESA Conferences. This later led to exchange of parliamentary documents between members as a gesture towards information sharing. To this effect, the Parliamentary Centre, Canada had also accepted to provide funds for attachment; however, it later could not be carried out due to the coming to an end of the Centre's Parliamentary Capacity Development Program (1999-2002) that financial contributions / support stopped. However, funding of other programmes was received where, 14 librarians from 13 member parliaments in Eastern and Southern Africa attended and participated in the APLESA Strategic Planning Workshop held in Kampala- Uganda, July 30 – August 3, 2001.

Earlier in 1998/1999, APLESA received funding from the House of Commons, SABINET² and the Finish Parliament for APLESA Management Workshop and Conference 19- 23 July 1999 at Safari Court Hotel, Windhoek, Namibia. A total of 23 participants from 12 member countries benefited from this funding.

Individual parliaments have met the bigger part of the assistance to APLESA. They have been funding the APLESA Annual Conferences by hosting or facilitating members to attend on a yearly basis for which we are very grateful. In so doing, they usually contribute the largest amounts of funds every year, as each member parliament sends members to the APLESA annual conferences and any other related workshops. For APLESA related activities like conferences, workshops, Member Parliaments spend about US \$2375 to US \$3000 per person and may send up to 4 participants though most send 1 or 2 participants. Secondly, hosting of APLESA annual conferences costs about US \$ 2732.

Since its inception in 1994, APLESA has held its annual conferences as indicated below. Those who are expected to host the APLESA conferences in near future are also indicated in their order.

Zimbabwe	1994 (launching)
Tanzania	1995
South Africa	1996
Malawi	1997
Zambia	1998
Namibia	1999
Lesotho	2000
Botswana	2001
Uganda	2002
Kenya	2003

² SABINET is abbreviation for the Southern African Bibliographic Information Network based in South Africa

Swaziland	?
Angola	?
Mozambique	?
Ethiopia	?

The last time Elections for a new APLESA Executive were held was in 2003 after the resignation of Florence Butale of Botswana who was then Chairperson. The full list of the executive then came to be as follows;

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| i. Ms. Grace Mwakio (Kenya): | Chairperson |
| ii. Mr. Sebastiao Muzumbi (Angola): | Vice Chairperson |
| iii. Mr. Simon J. Engitu (Uganda) | Secretary |
| iv. Mr. Innocent Rugambwa (Uganda): | Treasurer |
| v. Ms. Tembi Mtine (Zambia) | Member |

The following resolutions to guide in the achievement of the APLESA Objectives have been passed since 1994 namely;

- a) To rigorously market APLESA by coming up with a directory of each member library which would be placed on the APLESA Web site before the year 2000 conference and to promote networking within APLESA member countries.
- b) To facilitate capacity building through attachments and study visits and to promote exchange arrangements between member countries.
- c) To ensure that all the knowledge produced in the country is made accessible to parliamentarians, *each Parliamentary Library should have a legal deposit status.*
- d) To follow- up all the strategies that had been set up to implement the resolutions of APLESA conference 2000, namely;
 - i.To organize the Strategic Planning Workshop
 - ii.Organize attachments for members
 - iii.To produce APLESA Newsletter
 - iv.To monitor and evaluate APLESA activities
 - v.To organize APLESA Executive Consultative meetings
- e) To identify aspects of the constitution that require amendments together with members, for consideration in the APLESA Conference 2002
- f) APLESA members to come up with their respective Collection Development Policies before the next APLESA conference
- g) APLESA Conference proceedings to be made ready and distributed to members before the next conference.
- h) Setting-up of APLESA Secretariat in Kampala, Uganda
- i) APLESA Executive members to be facilitated to meet at the Conference host country two days before the date of the Conference

Challenges:

The Association has faced a number of challenges in its pursuit to implement its resolutions passed at annual conferences in spite of the above positive progress that has since been recorded. The following are the challenges affecting APLESA performance:

a) Inadequate Funding

Page | 7 Apart from membership fees that we pay, there are no other sources of funds for the Association. There are many instances where the Executive would like to meet to discuss the way forward for APLESA but this has not been possible due to lack of funds.

b) Poor Communication:

In the course of communicating with members and through observation, it appears there is a marked lack of commitment for members to share information among themselves through letter writing, e-mail, Web based discussion groups and others like phones etc. This could be attributed to the divergences in information technologies existing in the member parliaments and lack of appropriate communication infrastructure therein. So, while some members may have Internet connection, others may have only e-mail connection, fax while others have nothing at all. The speed of data transmission are also not quite good making it difficult to download attachments from e-mails for example. This could be attributed to lack of the Internet connection in most libraries. Last but not least, members seem to lack the skills necessary to use computers connected in their libraries for Internet, database development, etc.

c) Attitudes of managers of Libraries:

There seem to be a problem with varied attitudes of managers of various parliamentary libraries in the region. While some of the managers may look at APLESA as a small institution not worthy taking ones time, other managers may actually be those that do not attach much importance to library as source of information. This is observed from the way the libraries are managed. Meager resources are allocated to libraries for the various activities. There's also lack of staff development programmes designed for library staff, and this makes it hard for librarians to urge their case to management. In so doing the staff of the library is hardly ambitious and hence does not show any vigilance in what they do. This slows down the development of the parliamentary libraries in the region.

d) Capacity Building:

Arising from (c) above, staff working in parliamentary libraries lack certain skills and knowledge necessary for this Information Age. Many seem not to be familiar with the use of Internet, opening e-mails, electronic data processing, etc. Subsequently, they are not able to design new models in information management. This sends wrong signals to the administration of parliament and may explain the marginalized position facing libraries therein.

e) Formalized Information Network/ Resource Sharing Mechanism

Whereas it is an objective of the Association to establish an information exchange network in the region for efficient, effective and rapid information retrieval, there has not been any formalized mechanism adopted. Conversely, information exchange has been left to personal initiative. Many seem not to understand it and hence have stayed away from

the idea and yet this arrangement may range from a simple documents exchange to database accessibility, etc. The Executive has to sit and design one.

f) Conferences and Meetings

Page | 8

The most serious challenge faced by APLESA currently is its inability to convene its annual conference where from many issues affecting the Association could be addressed. The history of this started in 1999/2000 when Kenya's bid to host the APLESA conference was discussed in the conference. Subsequently in Lesotho, Botswana and Kampala, Uganda it continued to be an issue. Lesotho had come in to host when Kenya failed to do so in 2000, then Uganda, having realized that Swaziland was unable to host came in to bail it out in 2002, then eventually Kenya confirmed that they would host in 2003. In the years that followed, the tendency had become infectious where those who had been scheduled to host have defaulted. For example, at the same venue, Members had confirmed that Angola hosts the 10th APLESA Conference in 2004 through Mr. Sebastiao Muzumbi the Director, Documentation and Information Services of Angola National Assembly who had just been elected the Vice Chair of APLESA. Angola still failed to host the conference, expecting Swaziland which had been expected to host the conference earlier to do so. Swaziland was on standby if Angola failed and indeed each of them expected the other to host.

g) Reluctance of Committees

There was also reluctance by the selected committees to do the work mandated to them. Whenever information is sought from the APLESA Secretariat, it was always a struggle to get reports from them. The Committees were there in name but were not active.

h) Election of new APLESA Executive Committee

Another major challenge facing APLESA is the issue of the term of office for the current APLESA Executive that ended in 2004, the same year when either Angola or Swaziland was to host the APLESA conference according to the schedule. Follow-up communication was made and the subsequent e-mails exchanged between the APLESA Secretariat and the respective Librarians. Letters were then written to the Clerks of the Swaziland and Angola Parliaments to host the 10th APLESA meeting, but nothing substantial has been realised. Since members had been lined up to host, nobody came up to volunteer to host APLESA meeting, thereby in a way causing a constitutional crisis in the Association, and yet new office bearers must be elected before the end of the two-year term to ensure its continuity. This conference should elect the executive that is willing to address this issue. The chair should always lead in trying to get solutions related to these challenges. The rejuvenation of the APLESA Committees should also be considered during this APLESA meeting.

Way Forward

In view of the above challenges and in our pursuit to meet our objectives as outlined in our constitution, I hereby urge members present here today to address the following most pressing problems currently faced by APLESA;

- Rejuvenation of the APLESA Committees
- Elect a new executive committee that is willing to address the above issue
- On members' inability to convene APLESA annual conferences where from many issues affecting the Association could be addressed, the Kampala conference today should resolve and come up with a new but clear schedule for members to host APLESA meetings.
- To organize attachment for members within the APLESA region to enable us share experience and be able to understand each other on areas where challenges are persistent
- The Executive Committee members should always endeavour to communicate among themselves and to meet before APLESA conferences and workshops
- Since the constitutional provision (article X) came into force in 2002, some member parliaments have not honoured payments of the Membership dues. I urge members to consider this issue seriously so that when the new Executive that is due to be put in place during this conference takes up office, it will be able to process the opening of a foreign account that requires a minimum deposit of U.S. \$2000 since only U.S. \$1500 has been collected. Identification of other sources of funding should also be a priority for all the members since we need money for hosting of APLESA Website, production of the APLESA Newsletter and to carry out attachment programmes among members.