

NETWORKING THE AFRICA REGIONAL GROUP OF IAMSLIC – THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT: The Africa Regional Group of International Association of Aquatic and Marine Science Libraries (IAMSLIC) need to be properly networked to enable members share their limited information resources. This paper has examined some of the networking projects in Africa. The problems hindering networking of Library Information Centres (LIC) In Africa were also identified and discussed. Strategic areas where Afriamslic group could network were discussed with the benefits of networking.

Finally, recommendations on the way forward for the development of the Association are also given.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in information generation at an estimated rate of 13 percent per annum has made the task of collection, organisation and retrieval of information very difficult. This has influenced Library and Information Centres (LIC) to automate their services and share resources through networking.

Networking can be defined in various ways depending on what one is looking at. Technically, networking can be defined as a chain of interconnected computers, machines or operations. But in general terms, networking refers to a group of people who exchange information, contacts and experience for professional or social purpose. Networking also involves communication with other people as members of the group to exchange information, establish new links etc.

At the just ended Afriamslic conference, networking was defined as linking together.

Networking of Africa Regional Group of IAMSLIC therefore refers to the establishment of communication links or contacts among members of the Group, links for the purpose of exchanging information, experiences and ideas.

WHAT IS THE PRESENT SITUATION OF NETWORKING IN AFRICA?

Although more information is available worldwide today than any other era of human history, most of it is inaccessible to the African countries. This is as a result of the poor technical infrastructure and lack of cooperation among libraries and information centres.

One way of making information accessible to the various parts of Africa is to maximise resource sharing among libraries. Although this concept has been in existence for some time now, Africa Libraries and Information Centres are still lagging behind in networking.

It is however important to mention a few successful library and information centres networking projects in Africa.

South Africa

SABINET - South African Bibliographic and Information Network

SABINET was established in 1983 as a non-profit organisation to provide a bibliographic utility for South Africa. It has since developed into a full-fledged online information network.

GAELIC - Guanteng and Environs Library Consortium

GAELIC is a major project of the umbrella consortium (FOTIM) Foundation of Tertiary Institutions in the Northern Metropolis. It was established in February 1996. It is a network of Tertiary libraries in Guanteng area in South Africa.

CALICO

Cape Library Cooperative is also a South African Project, which was established in 1993. It consists of three Universities and two Technikons of the Western Cape province of South Africa.

CATNIP – Cataloguing Network in Pietermaritzburg

CATNIP is a group of libraries in the Pietermaritzburg area council building up joint library catalogue on the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) Library to enable them share their limited resources.

SEALS

South Eastern Academic Library Systems is also in South Africa. Its a library grouping called SEALS and has it existed since 1988 in the Eastern Cape province.

Ghana

GILLDDNET (GHANA)

IFLA/DANIDA SPONSORED INTER LIBRARY LENDING/DOCUMENT DELIVERY PROJECT

IFLA section on document delivery and Inter-library lending has electronically linked up the main University and Research Libraries in Ghana. The objective is also to promote resource sharing.

GAINS

GAINS-CSIR, Ghana Agricultural Information Network System established as a component of the erstwhile Government of Ghana World Bank supported National Agricultural Research Project (NARP) in 1991, had also linked 18 agriculture base research and university libraries in Ghana together for the purpose of resource sharing.

Namibia

In Namibia, a grant from UNESCO has enabled the National Library, National Archives and Ministry of Education head office to set up a network for Mutual direct access to their computer databases and to the Internet.

ODINAFRICA

Oceanography Data and Information Network of Africa. This project which involves 20 African countries has the mission to build oceanographic data and information management capacity in Africa to enable the development of relevant products and services contributing to the sustainable use and management of oceans and coastal areas.

PROBLEMS HINDERING NETWORKING OF AFRICAN LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES

- Communication

A common problem of Networking is that of communication. The poor communication networks in Africa do not facilitate easy links between members.

- Lack of Adequate Funding of Libraries and Information Centres

Networking is an expensive undertaking and needs some financial backing by the institutional authorities to make it work effectively. This may be difficult to obtain, especially as the institutions are underfunded because of the economic situations in Africa.

- Paucity of Collections

The Paucity of collections in Africa Research and University libraries also poses a problem to effective networking. None of the University or Research libraries has a comprehensive collection adequate enough to share with other libraries.

- Lack of Expertise

Another problem hindering networking in Africa is inadequate staffing, especially at the professional level. Networking in LIC can be quite a demanding venture in terms of staff strength and capabilities. There is thus the need for an adequate number of librarians who are committed and ready to render service beyond their local confines.

- Lack of Technical Infrastructure

The absence of technical infrastructure is also another factor hindering networking in Africa.

- Lack of legal framework

Lack of legal framework for networking or sharing of resources is also a major setback in networking of libraries and information centres.

- Management Issues

Lack of proper coordination is another setback that hinders networking of Library and Information Centres (LIC) in Africa. There are no proper management structures in place to coordinate networking projects.

- Lack of Training

Another factor set of networking of libraries and Information Centres is lack of adequate training for the stakeholders in a particular network.

- Lack of Tools and System of Cooperation

Finally lack of tools and system of cooperation is also a factor hindering networking of libraries and Information Centres in Africa. Networking of Libraries and Information Centres can only be effective if tools like union catalogues, translation services, etc. are put in place.

STRATEGIC AREAS FOR NETWORKING THE AFRICA REGIONAL GROUP OF IAMSLIC

There are a large number of activities at the international level in which members of African's Regional Group can network. Such activities include the following:

- Translation services
- Abstracting work
- Copying services
- Inter-library lending services
- Gift and exchange of library materials
- Holding of seminars and international conference
- Sharing of databases
- Exchange of staff
- Compilation of union catalogues and preparation of bibliographies
- Sharing of expertise in answering reference questions.

In all these the emphasis is on sharing for the benefit of all.

FACTORS THAT WILL DETERMINE SUCCESSFUL NETWORKING

The following facilities have to be put in place to facilitate successful networking;

- appropriate legal framework, relevant and clearly defined common objectives, policies, procedures of the network.
- adequate staffing of libraries and information centres
- adequate funding of libraries and information centres
- commitment on the part of stakeholders
- improve state of information and communication technology
- Institutional support
- Effective coordination

BENEFIT OF NETWORKING

Networking in library and Information systems provides a wider access to collections, improves public and technical services and enhances operations by sharing resources, reducing duplications and offering more cost effective services.

BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

- Sharing of experiences
- Creating sources for library resources
- Developing strategic alliances
- Facilitating and promoting collaboration and cooperation so that libraries can improve and expand access and distribution of information resources.
- Training and development of professional librarians

THE WAY FORWARD

I wish to suggest the following as the way forward for the Africa Regional Group of IAMSLIC to have successful networking.

1. MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

Identification of the present and potential members of IAMSLIC in Africa.
Registration of members
Creation of a Database of members

2. DOCUMENT ON AFRIAMSLIC

There is the need for a well-structured document explaining IAMSLIC-Africa, the status, rules and regulations, aims and objectives of the group. This document would be used as a working document for the group to raise awareness of the group, and in securing funding for the Group activities. The Africa Regional Group must set up a committee to draft this document.

3. PROMOTE ELECTRONIC NETWORKING

The Group must establish an Africa Group mailing list.

E-mail contacts
Create a web site for the Group which must be link to IAMSLIC website.
Members must be supported to create websites for their organisations.
Purchase common library management software

4. PROMOTE SUB NETWORKING

Sub-networking must be encouraged, that is there should be country networking, which means, there would be country representatives for the Association.

5. PROMOTE DOCUMENT DELIVERY

Afriamslic members should promote regional network in resource sharing. Members should be able to exchange information resources through a well established lending service.

6. TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING

Afriamslic members should share their experiences from training workshops, seminars and conferences through the mailing list and discussion groups. Members should also be supported to attend international workshops/training programmes.

7. ESTABLISHMENT OF A CENTRAL COORDINATING TEAM

Coordination is an important management function. Coordination is also important in networking situation since each participating institution depends on each other to meet common specific objectives. However, I have to caution that coordinating the activities of so many organisations can be difficult. Mechanisms that will ensure effective coordination have to be put in place.

8. PUBLICITY

Africa Regional Group of IAMSLIC must publicise their activities in the sub region.

9. DATABASES

There should be cooperation in the acquisition of databases.

There should be joint negotiations between Afriamslic members for common databases to attain favourable agreements.

10. PROVISION OF SUPPORT

There is the need to support Africa libraries, by way of supporting the automation of these libraries and also providing Internet connectivity to the libraries.

11. DONOR SUPPORT

Donor Agencies should also be encouraged to support the development of Africa libraries and Information Centres (LIC).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Africa Regional Group of IAMSLIC, (AFRIAMSLIC) has come to stay, despite the numerous problems that hinder the growth of changes to the Africa wing of IAMSLIC, there is a bright future for the Association.

This paper has identified some of the major problems; it is hoped that the suggestions given as the way forward be given the necessary consideration would. By this we can be assured of a stronger Afriamslic.

Thank you and God bless you.