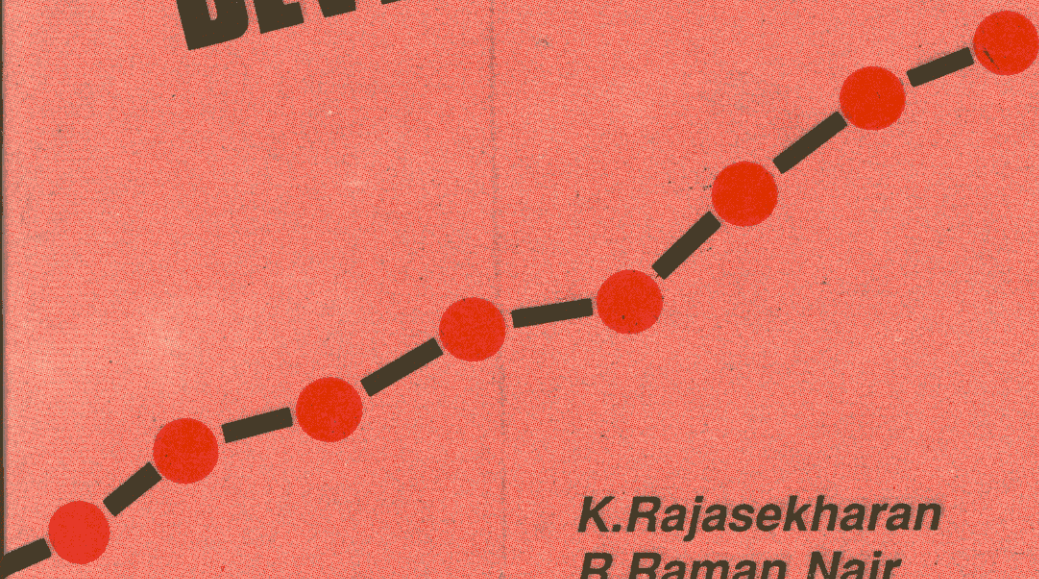


ACADEMIC LIBRARY DEVELOPMENT



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THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA LIBRARY AS THE NATIONAL REFERENCE LIBRARY OF ZAMBIA

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1. Introduction

The establishment of Northern Rhodesia Library Service in 1962 heralded the era of national library development in pre independence Zambia (formerly known as Northern Rhodesia). Although this library was established with several grandiose "terms of reference" characteristic of a national library, the establishment of post-independence institutions such as the University in 1965, and the National Council for Scientific Research in 1965, with their imposing collections and rapidly developing services very quickly overtook and overshadowed the significance of the Zambia Library Service (the offshoot of the Northern Rhodesia Library Service) as a national institution. This was largely owing to the pedestrian pace of development of the Z.L.S. Thus there is no single institution in the country that currently performs all the functions of a monolithic national library. Instead what has emerged in post-independence Zambia is a proliferation of institutions performing selected functions of national libraries.

For all intents and purposes, there is a loose form of a national library system which by default rather than by design has emerged in the country. However, going by for instance, the example of the emergence of the British Library system in 1973, the limited material, financial and human resources in Zambia, and the professional pressure for the establishment of a National Information policy it is reasonably safe to expect the eventual co-ordination of the Zambian institutions into a legalized national library system.

There are currently four institutions in Zambia which are performing identifiable national library functions. The Zambia Library Service is the de facto National Lending Library because of its country-wide public and school library networks. The National Archives is the Legal Deposit centre because it is the only institution named under the printed

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Publications Act. The National Council for Scientific Research Documentation and Scientific Information Centre, as the name suggests, is the National Documentation Centre for Scientific Information. Lastly, the University of Zambia Library is the National Reference Library. This library has assumed this status not only because it has developed the largest collection of general reading materials, but has also developed unique collection such as the Zambiana collection of published, manuscript and oral literature. Its Zambian government collection is rivalled only by that at the National Archives, and it also collects government publications from other foreign governments such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. It is also the national depository for publications from international organizations such as the United Nations and some of its specialized agencies, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization and the International Labour Organization. Apart from developing these unique collections the University Library provides an interlibrary lending service to other libraries in the country, and is open to the general public for reference purpose only. Consequently when all these functions are considered together with those from the other three institutions, one gets the total picture of the potential national library system in Zambia.

2. The Designation and Significance of the National Reference Library Status.

The University of Zambia Library is a national institution by designation of the Ministry of Education. The following quotation from the permanent Secretary in July 1967 illustrates the point :-

“ I am directed to inform you that the Minister of Education has decided that the University Library should be designated as a national public library” (Bowa, 1967).

This letter was addressed to the Vice Chancellor of the university and the quotation constitutes the entire designation. However, it was two years later when this designation assumed its complete meaning. At the official opening of the main library building at Lusaka campus in August 1969 His Excellency the President Dr K.D. Kaunda referred to the national status thus.

“This library, I understand, has been designated as National Refer-

ence Library. It is therefore, like all institutions of the nation a people's Library. The seats and tables and shelves of this library are for the people of Zambia who have made the dream, the reality that we see today, the reality of the most beautiful library in the whole of Africa. Tribute must be paid to the University for having decided to nominate the most important building on campus as the identifiable monument to the efforts of the people of Zambia in collecting funds for the University. Future generations of Zambians who will pass through this University will justly be proud of the spirit which moved the poorest among their ancestors to give, however little towards this great project" (Kaunda, 1969). It is necessary to examine these designations critically in order to understand and appreciate their true significance.

First of all, the designations of "national public library" and national reference library in the context of the "people's library" are fundamentally different from the conventional meaning of the National Reference Library in professional circles. Secondly, it will be observed that there were no guidelines given as to what would be expected of the University library after such designations. Since the University Librarian had earlier made a case for the National Reference Library status, it was generally assumed, even by subsequent library managements, that the designation (especially by the president) was the long-awaited response to the librarian's representations. While the president's designation couldn't have been more precise as a dedication of the building to the people of Zambia for their sacrifices in raising the necessary funds for building the institutions, the functional meaning ascribed to it has been that it was *de facto* legislation for the institution to perform specific national functions. This misunderstanding has been the motivating fact in the development of this library to this day.

What has happened in practice is that partly due to the novelty of the idea of having an indigenous institution of higher education, and partly due to the favourable economic climate that prevailed at one time, the National Reference Library identity of the University library, thrived on a lot of goodwill. This resulted in donations of financial support from several local and international sources. A lot of materials were also solicited from various local publishers, free of charge, simply by making repeated authoritative references to this national status. But as time went by, certain realities increasingly came into perspective. Some local publishers for instance, started questioning the legality of the University's claim for free publications under the pretext of this national status. Besides, the annual book budget became increasingly strained with the

growth in acquisitions coupled with the progressive devaluation of the local currency. The truth of matter is that none of the national designations ascribed to the University library so far carried with it either the authority for legal deposit, or a guarantee for adequate funding of foreign exchange.

With the worsening drop in free publications, the library has had to resort to direct purchase to maintain its supply of local publications. The problem with this development has been that funds intended for overseas purchase of reading materials have been reduced in order to facilitate a share for the purchase of locally published materials. Although the actual amounts involved have never been calculated, the principle of sharing the budget between overseas and local purchase has had a retarding effect particularly on the overseas acquisitions already crippled by the spiralling foreign exchange rate.

The National Reference Library could have survived better and developed faster if it had separate budget provided and preferably superintended by the state. Alternatively, it would have been safer if the University itself maintain a strict policy on the collection development for the National Reference Library.

Since 1978 this national reference library status has faced another test with the introduction of a federal structure of the University. With the mushrooming of specialized collections at the Medical Campus, Ndola Campus and the Samora Machel School of Veterinary Medicine the question has been how to maintain the physical location and identity of the National Reference Library. This problem has been discussed at various forums within the University, with an interim solution that the Lusaka Main Campus Library would remain the National Reference Library. However, it has remained intrinsically pointless to quarrel over the location of this status because both the Lusaka Campus Library (which includes the medical collection as well as the Samora Medical School of Veterinary Medicine) and the Ndola Campus Library have independent budgets out of which each is free to purchase whatever materials it wants. The interim solution is therefore of little consequences to the actual collection development programme of these campuses.

3. The Need for Legislation

The major problem with national designation accorded to the University library, as mentioned earlier, is that it has virtually no legal significance. It has not given the library management any specific guidelines

as to how it is expected to function. This is because there is no legal document to substantively identify the institution with the claimed status. National library development in Zambia in general, and the University library development in particular have both reached their crossroads. Neither can develop further without either legal protection or extra guidance.

Basically the establishment and development of the NRL should have been done through an Act of Parliament to equip the country's laws with all the necessary legal requirements pertaining to the existence and operations of the institution. Such a designation should not be misconstrued to be an honour, it is actually a responsibility. It is, therefore, important than any institution charged with a national responsibility is not only protected by law but also given some legal guidelines as to how it should go about fulfilling its designated responsibilities.

In general terms such legislation would have to provide for the identification of the institution, the specification of its functions the management structure as well as its sources of finding. In areas more specific to the University of Zambia, such legislation would have to provide for the extension of Legal Deposit rights to the University Library. It is curious point to note that although the University of Zambia Library has developed a local collection comparable to those at Universities in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania it has done so without the legal compulsion on local publishers to submit copies of all their publications. In the three East African countries mentioned, the University Libraries became de facto national reference libraries because they were covered in their respective legal deposit laws. Although it is true that legal deposit does not guarantee 100% response from publishers, at least it is a means which encourages or motivates the library managements to be persistent and confident when pursuing local publishers, as well as a means by which to prosecute those publishers who may default.

In Zambia the only beneficiary of the legal deposit law is the National Archives of Zambia. The logic of extending this privilege to the University Library as the National Reference Library is that if it is expected to develop a comprehensive collection of local literature, it must have easy access to it in the first place. Lack of funds could become a very serious and embarrassing limiting factor in collection development of local literature. Legal deposit ensures voluntary effort from publishers to lodge their publications with such a national depository and therefore helps to eliminate stunted growth of the collection, which is possible when collections development is dependent only on availability of funds.

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Legislation for the national reference library status of the University of Zambia would also have to recognize two unique features of this institution. These are the dual-function nature of the library as well as the multicampus location of its collections. In the former instance, it would need to be clarified that the library had both an institutional function to fulfill as well as a national one. Such clarification would be necessary in order to streamline operations of this institution especially in areas of collection development and distribution of services. In the latter instance of diffused collections, legislation would have to provide for specificity in the location of specific collections that directly emanate from the legal deposit privilege such as government publications and Zambians. Such specificity would reduce unnecessary duplication of collections on the various campuses, as well as possible in-fighting between campuses for the privilege of housing the collections.

Finally, such legislation would have to recognize the role of the National Reference Library in the total national information system. As pointed out earlier, there is no monolithic institution in Zambia capable of performing all the functions of a national library. Consequently, the Zambian legislation for either the entire national information system, or the individual institutions comprising the system would have to recognize the dispersed nature of national library development in Zambia. Such legislation would therefore ultimately have to provide for the necessary means for co-ordinating these scattered services.

4. Justification for National Reference Library Legislation

Whether by designation or by legislation the University of Zambia Library indeed does deserve the status of being the National Reference Library. To begin with, the present collection in the university library exceeds 300000 volumes. This makes it by far the largest single collection in the country. These collections (based in the Lusaka, Medical, Samora Machel School of Veterinary Medicine and Ndola Campus) cover a wide variety of subjects, and are fairly extensive within the established subject areas. Such collections are therefore not only sophisticated enough to support academic research within the university but can adequately supplement research programmes conducted at all the major national research organizations such as the National Council for Scientific Research the Mount Makulu Agricultural Research Station, the National Archives, the Mining Industry as well as the National Parliament.

Apart from the large collection of materials, the University Library has the largest concentration of professionally qualified librarians. Such a team is ideal for maintaining professional service in the various aspects of librarianship, documentation and bibliographical control.

"Utilizing such a team of specialists for the wider national needs would result in effective optimization of the skilled technical manpower. The presence of the large number of academic experts, whose assistance in building up collections and dealing with inquiries in the various fields of literature could be called upon makes the University a true centre of bibliographic research". (Loveday, 1967 : 2).

One other factor about the University Library is that it has developed a very comprehensive collection of literature on Zambia. Although this is basically the responsibility of the National Archives, the University's *Zambiana Collection* is large enough to be considered a duplication of the National Archives in certain areas. As evidenced through the complementarity of the "*UNZA Zambiana Gazette and the National Bibliography of Zambia*" (published by the National Archives) the collections of the two institutions do indeed supplement each other.

Another encouraging feature for Zambia is that it has now become common practice both in Europe and Africa for university libraries too also assume the role of the national library. As Bandara observed :

"the University libraries of Oslo (for Norway), Helsinki (for Finland), Göttingen (which became the state library of lower Saxony with the creation of that state), Strasbourg (National and University Library of Strasbourg), Zagreb and Ljubljana (in Yugoslavia), are some of the European institutions which function in addition to being the libraries of their respective universities also as national or regional libraries" (Bandara, 1979: 132).

To this list I may add Oxford and Cambridge in the U.K., nearer home the university libraries of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. This is not only because they make special effort to accumulate research materials, but because they have had legal deposit rights for a long time.

Within the emergent national library system in Zambia the University of Zambia library already has a special significance as it provides a national reference service to other libraries in the country as well as to members of the general public. It is this special significance that requires

legal recognition in order to formalize the provision of these nation-wide services.

5. Reflections on future developments

In conclusion, it must be appreciated that the University of Zambia Library is the de facto National Reference Library of Zambia. That it has attained this identity more by default than by design is immaterial. Credit must be given to successive library managements for not only being conscientized to the information needs of the nation at large, but for developing collections worthy of the designation even without the support of legislation.

There is very little that legislation would change in terms of the physical appearance of the collections accumulated in the past twenty years or so in this institution. However, there is a lot that legislation could do for the future of the institution, especially in terms of its relationship to the other national library services in the country. To begin with, there is need for streamlining and redistribution of functions among all the capable national institutions. This is necessary because the evolution of national library services in Zambia has this far been haphazard and accidental. Nobody has either controlled or co-ordinated these developments. Some institutions have simply assumed responsibility for one national function or the other out of a long menu of national library functions. This has given rise to the risk of duplication of effort. Legislation would provide for co-ordinated development of these institutions under the national information system (NATIS) concept. Legislation would also streamline the management of these services to provide for both intra and international resource sharing. Above all else, legislation would provide for guaranteed funding of these services. It is this guarantee on funding that would ensure progressive and strategic development of the co-ordinated national information system.

There is nothing that anybody can do about the history of national library development in Zambia this far. However, events in the past couple of years have shown signs of a definite course of development for the near future. Current developments in library professional circles derive their influence from the following events which I discussed in detail in a separate publication :

- i) September 1985 : National seminar on the "Need for Development Oriented National Information Policy in Zambia within the

context of SADIS", organized by the ZLA in Lusaka, Zambia.

- ii) December 1985 : Conference on "Information resource sharing in SADCC countries", sponsored by UNESCO and IDRC in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania.
- iii) May 1986 : "Southern African Regional workshop on Information for Development" organized by the ZCS, in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

The central theme at all these forums has been the optimization of information resources to facilitate its sharing and maximum utilization both at national and regional levels, and the consequent need for national policies and legislative machineries to provide for this optimization..

In February 1987, UNESCO sponsored the most recent seminar on the "National Information Policy for Zambia" in Lusaka (Zambia). The success of this seminar was underscored by the production of a draft proposal for the actual National Information policy for Zambia, and its eventual presentation to the party and its Government. This document *inter alia*, recognizes both the significance of the individual identity of the University library as the National Reference Library, as well as the need for co-ordinated development of information services in the country, and the need to provide for legislative machineries for the recognition. It is rumoured that yet another seminar is being planned for 1988 to examine the feed back from the state on the proposals. It therefore appears certain that the results of this professional impetus on legislative recognition will have an effect on the future of the University library as the National Reference Library. At administrative levels specific consultation have recently been made between the University Library and the National Archives to examine the possibilities of legislation for the NRL status for the University Library. The idea is strongly supported by the Director of the National Archives. Thus in the final analysis, legislation is being advocated for both at professional and administrative levels. It would appear that either as part of a package for the national information system, or in its individual capacity, legislation will come for the national status of the University Library.

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