

Trust and transparency are key to a successful consortium

Agnes Chikonzo, 2014



Agnes Chikonzo is the University of Zimbabwe Librarian. Since 2007, Agnes has acted as INASP'S Country Coordinator for the Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC). In this role, Agnes acts as the liaison between INASP and the consortium. She is responsible for coordinating the members of the consortium, negotiating contractual agreements between INASP and the consortium, managing workshops, compiling information on planning and budgets, and reporting on all consortium activities. We asked Agnes about her role as a Country Coordinator and what it takes to develop a successful library consortium.

"The Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC) has 15 full members, all of which are universities, and six affiliate members, which include colleges and polytechnics. I am responsible for coordinating the activities of the consortium, and acting as the communicator between ZULC and INASP. It takes commitment and hard work – but the benefits of working together as a self-funded consortium are worth all of the effort we have to put in.

Zimbabwe is one of the few INASP partner countries where the consortium has been self-funded from the start and we are very proud of this achievement. In my opinion, we were able to make this happen because of good communication between all members and consistent transparency.

The consortium has always been completely transparent when it comes to money. We hold an annual ZULC meeting every September where all members come together to discuss our electronic resources (e-resources) budget and what it should be spent on. We work collaboratively to select what we want to invest in from the list of training, e-resources and opportunities offered by INASP. We have always done this and it has created a strong sense of trust and ownership. It meant that ZULC members were ready and willing to invest in the consortium because they could see clearly where their money was going and the resulting benefits.

For ZULC, the access to e-resources is a key benefit of working together with INASP - providing our library

users with access to e-resources is essential if we are to support Zimbabwean researchers to excel in the academic community. As a result of our work with INASP, ZULC is making up-to-date information available to users 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Whereas published books need to be bound, stored and replaced when old – e-resources just don't have those same maintenance costs. Researchers now have access to a vast selection of electronic resources and having this current information readily accessible has made research exciting. This has been a great motivation for the consortium members and was one of the factors that made it relatively easy to move to being self-funded.

As a consortium, we share best practices and also drive each other to further improve the access to resources in each of our institutions. At the University of Zimbabwe, support from INASP has inspired us to boost our Institutional Repository (IR) by offering incentives to researchers; for example, in 2013 we ran a competition that offered a prize to the researcher that had the most cited articles on the IR. This all started when we won some INASP funding for Open Access promotion and recognised that awareness raising activities resulted in increased usage of resources – and also motivated researchers to submit articles to our IR.

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I'm very happy with how the Zimbabwean consortium is working – and look forward to many more successful years. If I could think of one area that we'd like to see some further development in then it would be the availability of more online textbooks. Currently what we subscribe to benefits researchers and graduate students because they use journal articles in their work. For undergraduates who are often studying from textbooks, the current e-resource offering doesn't benefit them too much.

If I had to say what the most challenging aspect of my role as Country Coordinator was, I would say it was finding the time for all members to come together. The representatives that attend consortium meetings are Library Directors and are very busy people – at times, finding a time we can all meet is very difficult. However, the reason we can make it happen

is because all of the members believe in the consortium – they see the benefits, such as consortium workshops and professional development opportunities, and so they make a real effort to find the time in their busy schedules. Each member wants to continue the success that we have had so far.”



The Zimbabwe University Library Consortium members at a consortium development workshop held in Harare, Zimbabwe on 18-20 February, 2014. The event was facilitated by Dr Helena Asamoah-Hassan, Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries Ghana (CARLIGH), and Jacinta Were, Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC).

Working with library consortia

Librarians have always been amongst INASP's key partners. Working together in national coordinating teams or library consortia, they play a vital role in securing access to online journals and books and ensuring that researchers and students have access to easy to use interfaces, and develop the skills to make full use of them.

The key to sustainability is for our partner countries to have a strong national consortium or equivalent body to manage access and to provide continued training to librarians and other information professionals. Working with experienced library leaders we are developing a new strand of work to help consortia to identify priorities for their own future development, and to put in place practical steps to address these needs.

To this end, we provide training workshops aimed at helping consortia to develop strong consortia. You can download our training materials free-of-charge at:

www.inasp.info/training

Zimbabwe University Library Consortium (ZULC)

Members

Name of institution	Director
Africa University	Mr G Ogunleye
Bindura University of Science & Education	Mrs A Mhlanga
Catholic University	Miss S Mbasera
Chinhoyi University of Technology	Mr B Nyagwaya (Acting)
Great Zimbabwe University	Mr L Chikwanha
Harare Institute of Technology	Mr L Maenzanise
Lupane State University	Miss S Ndhlovu
Midlands State University	Ms N Chibanda
National University of Science & Technology	Ms K Matsika
Reformed Church University	Ms M Madzivadondo
Solusi University	Mrs. R Maturure
University of Zimbabwe	Mrs A Chikonzo
Women's University in Africa	Miss P Chaitezvi
Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University	Ms M Gwangu
Zimbabwe Open University	Mr A Makurumure

Affiliate members

Name of institution	Librarian
Africa Capacity Building	Mr A Gumbwa
Bulawayo Polytechnic	Mr G Mashayeni
Kwekwe Polytechnic	M Matamba
Mutare Polytechnic	Miss P Dube