

# Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium: a profile

**Towards becoming a leading consortium in empowering teaching, learning and research in southern Africa**

The Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC), has seen much change since it was established in 2001. Representatives of the consortium reflect on the consortium's growth and impact, and the role that INASP has played in its development.

## Development of a consortium: changes and challenges

"Zimbabwe is one of the few INASP partner countries where the consortium has been self-funded from the start," says Agnes Chikonzo, University of Zimbabwe Librarian and country coordinator



ZULC members with Mai Skovgaard from INASP's Research Access and Higher Education team

for INASP and ZULC. Since forming in 2001, ZULC has worked with INASP and other international organizations to advocate for funding for e-resources to

support national research, build organizational capacity and build human capacity among member institutions.

## About ZULC

The Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC) was established in 2001 with an initial membership of six university libraries. It was formed to provide leadership in access to knowledge and to promote information resource sharing and networking in support of 'human capital development'.

The current membership now includes 15 full members, all universities, in addition to a number of affiliate members, including colleges and polytechnics. The consortium has a formal constitution and clearly specified vision, mission and goals which are contained in its 2014-2018 strategic plan (see page 3).

The consortium is keen to expand membership beyond the traditional university and college members to include NGOs, research institutions and government departments. It is working on a recruitment strategy in order to grow over the coming years.





INASP staff spent time with the ZULC executive in early 2016

### ZULC strategy

To be a leading consortium in empowering teaching, learning and research in southern Africa

### Mission

To provide leadership in access to knowledge, information and resource-sharing through collaboration, capacity building, advocacy and networking in support of national development.

### Key strategic priorities

are to build, develop and respond to:

- Governance
- Sustainable funding
- Capacity building
- Technological development
- Changing user needs
- Collaboration and partnerships
- Social, economic and political environment

### Early days

In the early days of the consortium, a major challenge was that of securing commitment from members. The duties that come with membership are voluntary and getting busy people to assist with consortium tasks is difficult. However Jasper Maenzanise, ZULC Chairman, reports that commitment developed organically as members started to appreciate ZULC's role and wanted to participate. He reports still having to be firm with members when it comes to doing their part.

This challenge of a lack of commitment also affected intra-consortium communication. Says Jasper: "Though we pride ourselves...on the capabilities [brought by the internet, which has created] a global village in terms of communicating - it's easy and it's fast - this wasn't so with the consortium at first ... People were reluctant to give commitment, so they wouldn't answer email. I'm happy to say

that it's changing now ... members belong to work groups where they are actually required to do things."

### 'Adapting the model'

As ZULC has grown, the profile of its membership has changed. Nyarai Chibanda, Librarian at the Midlands State University and Secretary of ZULC, describes some of the differences in member institutions: "We have institutions that have different levels of funding, and different levels of development as well. We have young institutions with only about 500 students [all the way up to] universities with 22,000 students. Their resource base is different ... one of our key challenges is funding, especially for subscriptions to e-resources."

These differences in institutional size and capacity mean that the current model of cost and resource sharing isn't working for everyone. Sarlome Mbasera, Librarian at the Catholic University of Zimbabwe, while recognizing associated benefits of ZULC membership, also feels that the current model " 'appears' to benefit founder members of ZULC", those of a certain size and possessed of a certain amount of resources. She suggests that a proportional cost-sharing model for subscriptions might be a fairer system.

ZULC Chairman, Jasper Maenzanise, describes the current strategy to recruit further members such as research institutions and teachers colleges. He is mindful of the need to create a larger membership base so as to make subscription to resources more affordable to smaller, developing institutions. He has also referred to plans for



A view over Chimanimani National Park, Zimbabwe

**“ [ZULC is]  
a formidable  
organization  
whose  
mandate is to  
bring together  
university  
librarians ...  
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common  
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spirit of  
collaboration.”**

**Jasper  
Maenzanise,  
ZULC  
Chairman**

needs assessments and situational analyses for new members so as to be more responsive to individual institutional requirements.

### **ZULC: strengths and benefits**

ZULC is a consortium existing to serve its members to the best of its ability. Its Chairman describes it as a “formidable organization

whose mandate is to bring together university librarians ... [to achieve common objectives] in the binding spirit of collaboration.”

ZULC provides and facilitates a variety of benefits to members through collaboration with support from organizations such as INASP. These benefits include the provision of access to affordable e-resource subscriptions to support quality research.

### **The ZULC strategic plan - 2014-2018**

“It’s good to have a document, it’s good to have plans, but it’s bad if they stay like that,” says Jasper of ZULC’s strategic plan. Both he and Nyarai Chibanda, Secretary of ZULC describe the process of “mapping the way forward” and the production of a concrete document to work from as one of ZULC’s “key successes”. However they both also acknowledge that the tasks and priorities included in the plan will have little meaning unless the consortium takes action towards completing them.

How are they doing this? Nyarai identifies the ZULC working groups as key to forging ahead with the strategic plan; “We’ve...rebranded and revitalized our work groups to make sure that they are active and make sure that they are up-to-date with that is happening around the environment, around issues to do with ICT, e-resources, marketing and advocacy.” Jasper also cites the working groups as a major driver in the success of the strategic plan; they have been rebranded, reconfigured and given a new direction. Groups have been mandated with putting together practical plans of action within their own priorities, all of which feed into the over-arching plan.



## “ZULC has been instrumental in helping us move towards the goal of being a 21st century library.” Sarlomie Mbasera, Librarian, The Catholic University of Zimbabwe

Another benefit of ZULC is the provision of training to build capacity within member institutions in a wide range of topics necessary for libraries to support quality research: Information Literacy, Library Marketing and Advocacy, Negotiation and Licensing, to name but a few.

The consortium also provides a network for sharing knowledge and experiences – more established organizations are able to offer advice to those still growing. “The main strength of ZULC as a consortium is the base of knowledgeable librarians. We have vast experience ... and we could really solve some of the challenges” [faced by the research system in Zimbabwe], says Nyarai.

This network extends to cost sharing the subscriptions which provide vital access to resources to Zimbabwe’s research institutions. Although ZULC is still ironing out issues, it is able to offer huge savings to its members through economies of scale. In 2015, it was able to offer 6,000 online books and 50,000 online journals to members.

Ms Madzivadondo of the Reformed Church University highly values the ZULC network as a source of guidance and advice. She hopes to be able to share learning and gain assistance in the future from larger and more established institutions in

the consortium in the management of e-resources. Support from ZULC has enabled the university to develop the library in line with industry standards. As a result of this, it is now able to operate as a university having been recognized by regulators.

Sarlomie Mbasera, Librarian at the Catholic University of Zimbabwe, reports a “marked increase in use

of e-resources” since joining the consortium, attending trainings and being able to advocate for the library. She admits that the university library “had a lot of work to undertake to be reckoned a useful resource for teaching and learning” upon joining the consortium in 2013. She credits ZULC as being “instrumental in helping us move towards the goal of being a 21st century library”.

### INASP and library consortia strengthening

An important aspect of developing strong research information and knowledge systems is developing the local organizational capacity of libraries to provide sustainable access information services and resources. INASP works with library consortia (and similar bodies) to help build their organizational skills and capacity to cooperate in sharing resources, skills and services, so that they can become independent of INASP in these areas. Strengthened consortia enhance their members’ ability to deliver effective research information services.

As consortia are inevitably at different stages of development, INASP customizes support to suit each situation, focusing on such areas as

- Strategic development of consortia
- Access to e-resources and services to members
- Negotiations handover
- Demonstrating value, advocacy and influencing
- M&E and developing an evidence base

To achieve this, INASP works with the consortium executive to offer a combined package of support – mentoring, peer support, inclusion in online communities of practice, and where, relevant, face-to-face workshops.

ZULC is one of the strongest consortia, so will be taking full responsibility in the areas mentioned above from 2018.

