

LIASA 1997–2007: BACKGROUND AND RECENT HISTORY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The continuous, sometimes controversial, line of successive “national” associations of librarians in South Africa was established in 1930 as one of the major outcomes of the extensive Southern African Carnegie Corporation visit in 1928 and the South African Library Conference that followed in the same year.

The founding of the South African Library Association (SALA) as a national body was the first step on a journey towards the creation of a strong, viable entity to serve the library and information services (LIS) profession. LIS practitioners have for more than 75 years been striving in a variety of arenas, both nationally and internationally, for recognition as the voice and advocate of LIS in South Africa.

The latest in this line of associations, the now ten-year-old democratic and fully representative Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), came into existence in 1997, three years after the first post-apartheid South African government took office under Nelson Mandela in 1994. In August 2007, ten years after the founding Constituent Conference and admission of LIASA to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the World Library and Information Congress of IFLA, the WLIC, is being hosted for the first time in South Africa.

LIASA did not, however, come into existence as a *tabula rasa* or empty slate but, typically in South Africa, with considerable historical “baggage” that both divided and unified the profession and continues to affect its future direction. This chapter describes some of the historical milestones and major players on a journey that continues, and documents both obstacles and achievements before and after 1997, picking up threads from earlier years that have been woven into the fabric of LIASA.

Many of the resource documents are unpublished, held either in the archive of LIASA papers at the library of the University of South Africa (Unisa) or in personal files. I have used and referred to these in a sequence of publications from 1994 onwards, during which time perspectives have changed. Much of the core material on LIASA was originally researched, collected and presented as part of a commissioned article on library associations in South Africa, published in the Emerald online and print journal *Library Management* (Walker, 2006). It has been modified, expanded and updated for this chapter commemorating LIASA’s first ten years.

2. EARLY HISTORY: 1930–1990

In 1928, at the request of Mathew Stirling, the influential Town Librarian of Germiston, a then small town near Johannesburg best known as a railway junction, the Carnegie Corporation of New York sent S.A. Pitt, the City Librarian of Glasgow, and Milton J. Ferguson, the State Librarian of California, to investigate and report on library conditions in South Africa and adjacent territories to the north.

The first South African library conference was held in November 1928 (SALC, 1929) to discuss their findings and recommendations, subsequently published in a famous two-part *Memorandum* (Pitt, 1929; Ferguson, 1929). One of these recommendations was implemented in the founding of SALA in 1930.⁽¹⁾ Another was the publication of the first issue of the Association journal, *South African Libraries*, in 1933. This was the direct predecessor of the current *Journal of South African Libraries and Information Science*, which is the official research publication of LIASA and has maintained continuous numbering of issues since 1933, reaching volume 73 in 2007.

Following the Carnegie report and the Library Conference of 1929, two major but ultimately unsatisfactory attempts were made by and through the SALA to bring the needs of library services to the attention of the South African government of the day.

In 1936 an “Interdepartmental Committee on the Libraries of the Union of South Africa” was appointed “to enquire into and report upon the general organisation of libraries in the Union”, which it did in 1937 (Walker, 1994:118). The involvement of South Africa in World War II (1939–1945), however, diverted attention from any recommendations for the anticipated “radical change in library policy” (Union of South Africa, 1937:10) that might have been implemented.

Twenty years later, in 1959, the annual SALA Conference passed a resolution to promote closer cooperation among libraries in South Africa. A National Conference of Library Authorities was held in 1962 and an ambitious “Programme for future development” was published (*South African Libraries*, 1963). Nonetheless, in the retrospective opinion of one of the leading figures of the time, R.F. Kennedy (1970:604), “there were no direct results of the National Conference and all the preliminary work that went into in it”, with the exception of a proposal to establish a Library Advisory Council. The first National Library Advisory Council was appointed in 1967 to address the implementation of the Programme’s recommendations (Walker, 1993:67–71; 2004:2).

By 1962, however, associations in South Africa, including professional bodies with mixed racial membership, were feeling the tightening grip of apartheid on all aspects of life and SALA took a fatal step that was to haunt the white mainstream profession down the decades and stamp it pro-apartheid and pro-South African Nationalist Government. Anticipating government action, SALA at its 1962 annual conference appointed a consultative committee to report back at the next conference, and in 1963 the conference passed a resolution that the Association would no longer accept new members of races other than white, but would instead assist members of other race groups to establish and run their own associations (Musiker, 1986:167–170).

¹ Among the signatures of delegates on the attendance list of that first conference in 1928 is that of Sol Plaatje, the famous Black South African author, founding member and sometime Secretary of the African National Congress (ANC).

While this may have been seen at the time as bowing to the inevitable – the honourable alternative might have been to disband altogether, as some bodies did – many members protested. Decades later, one member admitted privately that there should have been a far louder outcry and many more resignations. Conservatives carried the day, however, and SALA became a “whites only” organisation. Its successor, the “professional” South African Institute for Library and Information Science (SAILIS), carried this stigma to the day of its disbanding in favour of LIASA in 1998.

The African Library Association of South Africa (ALASA) had its origins in the 1962 resolution. This independent organisation, committed to the development of black South African librarians, was a major role player in the establishment of LIASA in the 1990s. It functioned robustly as a completely separate organisation, seeking no contact with SAILIS when this Institute, with a new constitution, replaced SALA in 1980. Few of the relatively small number of black graduate librarians⁽²⁾ ever joined SAILIS despite its “non-racial” constitution, and only one, Professor Seth Manaka of the University of the North, was active in its council and executive and as president in 1990–1992. The remainder of black librarians saw their home remaining in ALASA (Kalley, 2000; Manaka, 1981).

By the late 1970s, computerised systems for the storage and retrieval of information in libraries and the theoretical field of “information science” were radically changing the profile of the qualified librarian. Seeing these changes as an opportunity to strengthen the professional image of the librarian as “information scientist”, or at least as “information professional”, SALA developed the concept of a new professional, all graduate (and incidentally non-racial) institute.

SAILIS was established as the successor to SALA in 1980, and *South African Libraries* was transformed into an internationally indexed research journal, the *Journal of South African Library and Information Science*. In 1982, as a further development, a second National Advisory Council for Librarianship and Information Science (NACLI) was formed (SAILIS, 1982). Its members to some extent acted as a “think-tank”, but the Council was disestablished in the late 1980s without ever having had a major effect on the development of the library and information profession and services in South Africa (SAILIS, 1988).

NACLI’s final report, published in 1988 and translated into English in 1991 (South Africa, 1991), was critiqued in some detail by the LIS Research Group of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), whose opinion was that “its promotion of reliance on market forces to determine information flow speaks against any notion of redress” (NEPI, 1992:49–50; Walker, 2004:2).

SAILIS was not a statutory body and no national register of professional librarians or a national professional curriculum was ever established. Nevertheless, SAILIS membership was often an explicit requirement for posts in some larger academic and public library services. This contributed further to the perception of SAILIS as a “government” and thus “apartheid” organisation, and reinforced the racial divide in the profession during the 1980s.

² Indicated in 1988 as slightly over 300 by the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI, 1992:35) and the Report of the IFLA Mission (IFLA, 1993:14).



The Library Week 2007 poster reminding South Africans that libraries contribute to nation-building and to improving the quality of life of all who use them.

(Courtesy of LIASA)

Although it had no statutory authority to do so, the “establishment” influence of SAILIS and its senior members led to the appointment of a SAILIS “Accreditation Committee”, which visited universities that taught library science during the 1980s and made recommendations on the implementation of SAILIS “standards” or guidelines for professional LIS education (IFLA, 1993:13). Some small LIS departments did close under the implied threat that their graduates might not be admitted to professional membership of SAILIS; other universities indicated their intention to disregard these non-statutory recommendations, and continued teaching.

Despite this history, and successive resolutions condemning South Africa, IFLA never took the final step of banning institutions or individuals from membership, though applications were carefully scrutinised. A few South African professionals, among them most notably John Willemse of Unisa, became active on standing committees and governing structures. Robert Wedgeworth, after he became President of IFLA, visited South Africa in September 1992 and held crucial one-to-one discussions with key individuals both at the SAILIS conference that month and outside it.

This visit led directly to Wedgeworth’s appointment in 1993 of a five-person IFLA delegation to conduct a two-week fact-finding mission. After visiting Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, the group held a large seminar at the offices of the British Council in Johannesburg, where their statement that their report would be presented to IFLA and not in South Africa was received with criticism. Revisiting the conclusion and recommendations of the mission (IFLA, 1993: 19–21), two statements stand out:

“As the largest professional organisation in South Africa, SAILIS has a special responsibility for forging unity among existing organisations ...”

“In view of the major constitutional changes which are expected to take place after the first multiracial election in 1994 and their effects on library and information services, a comprehensive review of the situation is recommended in three years’ time. This should probably take the form of another fact-finding mission ...”

Wedgeworth continued to keep communication channels open with all role-players. Memorably, at a lively meeting at the 1993 IFLA conference in Barcelona held with the large South African IFLA group of delegates of all affiliations, he rejected the “democratic” delegates’ protest at sharing this table. Neither SAILIS nor any other South African LIS body was ever accepted as a national association before the founding of LIASA in 1997. At the 1997 IFLA conference in Copenhagen, where LIASA was welcomed as a new member, the author, as the last president of SAILIS, was present for the only time in its history at the session for chairs of national library associations.

3. TRANSITION 1992–1997 – THE ACRONYM YEARS

By 1990 it was clear that major changes in South Africa were imminent. The ban on the ANC was lifted, Nelson Mandela was released from 27 years in prison and, although the country was politically unstable in many ways, organisations and professional bodies in

civil society and the political arena were beginning to plan, debate and articulate new policies for implementation in a post-apartheid South Africa.

3.1 NEPI and TransLis

Spearheaded by a small group of radical white and Indian librarians in the province of Natal, mostly but not exclusively in university libraries, an organisation was formed within the framework of the democratic movement. Its specific intention was to form an opposition to SAILIS, presenting itself as a body that might be the “alternative” national library association in a post-apartheid South Africa. The establishment of the Library and Information Workers Organisation (LIWO) in Natal was soon followed by other LIWO groups in the Western Cape and the then Transvaal. Similarly democratically aligned groupings of resource centres within non-governmental organisations (NGOs), termed “Resource Centre Forums” in various provinces, held their first national meeting in 1991 (NEPI, 1992; Karlsson, 1993).

A National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) had been established in the 1980s, while the ANC was still a banned organisation. After 1990, the NECC became the National Education *Coordinating* Committee and embarked on a wide-reaching project, the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), “to explore policy options in all areas of education within a value framework derived from the ideals of the broad democratic movement” (NEPI, 1992:vii). Libraries were not initially included in this vast policy exercise, but a research group for LIS policy was established in late 1991 on the initiative of the ANC-aligned LIWO, and its findings and recommendations were published as one of the 13 NEPI volumes in 1992.

The intention of this research was to explore policy options for a national library and information service and provide a background for debate around the highlighted issues. The National Committee of the LIS Research Group included representatives from ALASA, LIWO, the READ Organisation, the Resource Centre Forums and SAILIS. The LIS Research Group suggested in the report that “library associations and/or organisations have an important role to play in developing and regulating LI systems, preferably in association with the government” (NEPI, 1992:59).

Although there is still no nationally coordinated library system, LIASA is an active participant in related areas of the debate and has a seat on the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS). The role of this Council in advising the Minister of Arts and Culture on library matters has recently become apparent in the allocation of R1 billion (R1 000 000 000) to public library development and the drafting of a Library Transformation Charter to focus this expenditure. The Council, due to be appointed for its second term, may be expected to take a more prominent part in national policy development and governance in the years ahead, thus fulfilling the hopes of many decades (Walker, 2004).

The influence of NEPI was twofold: first, the published volume of the research report provided an outline and a springboard for future South African LIS systems and infrastructures; and, second, the research group became the first forum at which mandated representatives of four major bodies in the divided LIS sector met openly and interacted to discuss the future of library infrastructure and governance in South Africa,

thanks to experienced facilitators and initial funding from READ. This process has been described in detail elsewhere (Walker, 1993:75–82).

The unexpected outcome once the report had been published and NEPI itself dissolved in 1992, was the unanimous formation by the NEPI group of a continuation body, funded and administered by READ, calling itself TransLis (“Transforming our Library and Information Services”) (TransLis Coalition, 1993a). ALASA, LIWO, SAILIS, the Resource Centres Forums and other school library bodies under the umbrella of the work of the READ Organisation, continued to meet and discuss future library structures and policy initiatives for several years parallel to other transitional and transformational developments in the sector. Paradoxically, the disbanding in 1998 of ALASA and SAILIS, and their withdrawal from TransLis in favour of LIASA, was not a popular move.

3.2 CEPD and COLIS

By 1994, the year of the first national democratic elections and a new government of national unity headed by President Nelson Mandela, many parallel activities were under way in the still divided South African LIS sector. TransLis policy development was slow despite the enthusiasm of its initial formation. As a volunteer group, unlike NEPI, it had no official mandate as a policy-making body and conflicting agendas started to emerge. A policy document outlining in some detail a future centralist LIS infrastructure was presented by a small group from TransLis at a NECC conference in December 1993, without having first been more widely circulated for discussion or input (TransLis Coalition, 1993b; NECC, 1993).

The status of TransLis was further affected by the withdrawal of a key figure who accepted the invitation to work with a new LIS policy task team established within the donor-funded, government-commissioned Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD). This task team, comprising senior and influential role-players, was soon under fire in the broader LIS sector for appearing to be a closed clique whose members were not consulting with the profession as it was felt they should. A protest document with 102 signatures was presented to the CEPD and the groundswell of criticism was such that a statement addressing these critical perceptions appeared over the name of the convenor, Trevor Coombe (CEPD, 1994b).

The public library sector felt that public and community library interests were not sufficiently represented by the CEPD LIS task team. A Transvaal Public Library Strategy Group was formed and moved rapidly to develop a new forum for Community Library and Information Services (COLIS), which drew up a mirror policy and structural framework specifically focused on public library services to communities (Hansen, 1995; Transvaal Public Library Strategy Group, 1994). The CEPD in the meantime presented its report in May 1994, incorporating recommendations for LIS. A hiatus then ensued. (CEPD, 1994a; ANC, 1994a).

3.3 LISDESA

Parallel to these developments in 1993–1994, and often involving the same individual participants, an unprecedented joint workshop of the ALASA and SAILIS councils agreed to the creation of a joint ALASA-SAILIS steering committee to plan a national

conference that would address issues of importance to the profession. Participants were invited from LIWO and TransLis, but were not entirely comfortable with the process.

The joint initiative took the title “Libraries and Information Services in Developing South Africa” (LISDESA), echoing CODESA, the national conventions at which constitutional negotiations had taken place in South Africa prior to 1994. It was in 1994 also that the then seminal Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was published by the ANC (1994b) as a guiding policy document for the new South Africa. To the great disappointment of the LIS sector, however, despite intensive input since the NEPI project, the RDP proved to have nothing of significance to say about the role of libraries in development, and they are mentioned only twice throughout the document (Lor, 1994).

The LISDESA conference, which proved to be a historic watershed for the organised profession, finally took place, after various postponements, on 23–26 January 1995 on the campus of the University of Natal in Durban. Although LIWO and some of the TransLis constituencies had ultimately rejected the joint ALASA-SAILIS initiative, some members of these groups were nevertheless present and contributed to the debate in their personal capacities. The conference was planned around structured workshops whose outputs were processed into a series of reports on various themes relating to the role of libraries in economic and social development, but LISDESA has always been remembered primarily by its enthusiastic participants as the “one voice” conference. In her closing plenary address, Kay Raseroka (then chair of the IFLA Africa Region and ten years later the first African President of IFLA), for the first time used her famous metaphor of the “train” of unification that was about to leave the station with all on board (LISDESA Part 1, 1995:98).

Two events that directly set the future context for the establishment of LIASA marked the closing session of LISDESA. One was the announcement of a LIS subcommittee to address national library policy development, which had been relocated from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, within a new national Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG). The other was a lively debate followed immediately by a call for, and nomination and appointment of, a small steering committee tasked with working towards a “unification conference” for the sector within 18 months. This was the high note on which the conference ended. The appointed committee comprised three “non-aligned” members of the profession and one representative each from ALASA, LIWO and SAILIS. The group gave the project the title “Unification of Library and Information Stakeholders” (ULIS), and set to work.

The executive summary of the proceedings of the conference was addressed to the government and signed by the co-chairs, who were the current presidents of ALASA and SAILIS. It stated (LISDESA Part 1, 1995:1):

With a view to harnessing library and information services in the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Plan, the Conference recommended that short, medium and long-term plans should be established with achievable and measurable objectives for providing adequate library and information services throughout South Africa.

For most delegates, however, LISDESA was the “one voice” conference that reflected simply and memorably the first steps towards meeting without barriers or the baggage of the divided past, and this proved above all to be its legacy.

3.4 ULIS and ULIS2

Kay Raseroka’s train indeed steamed out of the station with a very large constituency on board. ULIS not only succeeded in its undertaking to convene a conference within 18 months of LISDESA, but also obtained private sector sponsorship to complete a wide ranging survey of the sector. More than 7000 people in South Africa working in the most broadly defined areas of “information services” were identified (Walker 1997:408; Lor, 1998a:4). They were sent a short questionnaire that asked simply whether they were in favour of forming a new LIS association and, if so, what kind of association they would prefer to have. The substantial majority stated that they were indeed in favour of forming a new comprehensive association that offered the same level of membership to anyone who wished to join.

The ULIS Constituent Conference took place at the Johannesburg College of Education in July 1996, during the coldest midwinter in 30 years. A photograph of a very cold welcoming party commemorates the delayed arrival of then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, who delivered the keynote address and stayed on through teatime to hear more and give encouragement to the new association. This participation from a remarkably high level of government was the result of energetic networking by, among others, Patience Maisela, president of ALASA. The chief facilitator was Connie Price from the British Council, and Christina Stenberg represented IFLA.

At the close of this energetic two-day conference a new committee, ULIS2, was nominated by the enthusiastic participants and was immediately brought up to the stage. The committee was headed by Peter Lor, who enjoyed great popular support as a leader despite his “government” position as Director of the State Library. ULIS2 was given the mandate to bring into existence a new association with a new constitution and an operational structure. By mutual agreement, to ensure these were indeed new beginnings, neither the president of ALASA nor the president of SAILIS accepted membership of the committee (Thomas, 1996; Walker, 1996).

By April 1997, sufficient progress had been achieved for a two-day consultative workshop on a draft constitution to be held in Johannesburg, hosted by the oil company Sasol’s corporate library at its offices in Rosebank. There were approximately 55 participants, including members of the ULIS2 “Broad Support Group” and representatives from some library associations and groups. (ALASA and SAILIS participated; LIWO and TransLis did not.)

A draft constitution with a covering letter had been circulated in January 1997 to all major interested parties and, at the April workshop, the content was debated and “panel-beaten” clause by clause. External facilitation and later assistance with editing was provided by Eileen Brannigan, whose input from her experiences of the newly formed Democratic Nursing Association of South Africa contributed substantially to the successful outcome of the workshop.

The issues most hotly debated included whether or not the new association should take on the role of a trade union, the categories of membership and what its relationship

should be with other smaller but well-established special interest groups, some of which were formerly SAILIS-affiliated and others completely independent (Thomas, 1997).

4. NEW BEGINNINGS: 10 JULY 1997

Exactly one year after the July 1996 Constituent Conference, the ULIS2 Steering Committee fulfilled its brief and engineered the launch of the new body. The conference, chaired by Kay Raseroka, was held at the University of Pretoria on 8–10 July 1997, with over 400 participants and honoured guests. Guest speaker on the opening day was the Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Mrs Brigitte Mabandla and, at the festive lunch on the closing day, the Minister of Education, Professor Sibusiso Bengu. The IFLA president, Robert Wedgeworth, who had been closely involved in South African LIS developments since 1992, gave the keynote address.

Conference facilitators were Eileen Brannigan and Ross Shimmon, then chief executive of the Library Association and later the IFLA Secretary-General. Ross Shimmon, Bob Wedgeworth and Leo Voogt, the IFLA Secretary-General, were present as observers and served as scrutineers on the two paper ballots that were called for.

The name of the new association and the members of the Transitional Executive Committee were chosen by ballot in this manner. All other decisions were, however, reached by consensus as “burning issues”, and the clauses of the constitution were vigorously debated through the facilitation process to the point of acceptance. In this way the constitution and other issues were agreed upon and after marathon work by the facilita-



Counting the votes at ULIS2 in 1997 – Bob Wedgeworth, Ros Shimmon and Leo Voogt crouching in the half dark on the stage, sorting voting papers.

(Courtesy of LIASA)

tors through most of the night, the constitution was adopted at the plenary on the final day of the conference.

At the “festive launch lunch”, Robert Wedgeworth announced the name of the association, chosen by ballot from the 35 suggestions submitted. The new association would be known as the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA – pronounced “LEE-asa”), an abbreviation that fortuitously has the connotation, in two major African language groups, of “rising” or “dawning”.

At the IFLA conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in August 1997, the LIASA delegation was officially and enthusiastically welcomed as a new member. Membership of the Standing Conference of East, Central and Southern Africa (SCECSAL) and of the Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA) followed; none of these had been open to any previous South African LIS associations.

Article XX of the new LIASA constitution empowered the new Transitional Executive Committee (TEC) to take all steps necessary to guide the new association from its birth on 10 July 1997 to its first annual conference and AGM by 1 December 1998. The task of this 18-member TEC, chaired once again by Peter Lor, included the recruitment of members, setting of membership fees for the first year, controlling finances, establishing branches and interest groups, and conducting elections for the first Representative Council. At its first meeting the TEC decided it would aim to hand over LIASA by the first annual conference as a “going concern” (Lor, 1998a).

At the lunchtime ceremony, the contributory roles of both ALASA and SAILIS were formally acknowledged and both presidents were invited to deliver their formal messages of support. Both subsequently put their signatures to letters sent to all members, encouraging them to become members of the new association (Walker, 1997).

The influential role of Patience Maisela, the first woman president of ALASA, as a dedicated leader in the sector, was cut short by her premature death later in 1997. A resolution to establish a trust fund in her name was taken by LIASA at its first annual conference in 1998 in recognition of her contribution to the profession during these years. The fund was launched in March 2001 as the Patience Maisela Library Staff Development Fund (LIASA, 2001b). At the closing conference of ALASA in 1998, the author received an award for “special contribution” in working with Maisela in this joint process.

ALASA had taken a decision similar to that of SAILIS in 1997 to disband after the formation of a new association, provided it felt certain concerns of its members were satisfactorily addressed. This decision was reaffirmed at ALASA’s annual conference in 1997 and put into effect at the special final conference in June 1998 (SAILIS, 1998). SAILIS, at its annual conference in 1997, had passed a resolution agreeing to dissolve within a year of a new association being established. The resolution took effect in July 1998 at a final Administrative Council meeting (Louw, 1997). SAILIS further decided to transfer a substantial portion of its financial assets to LIASA in three stages, as “seed money” (Walker, 1998). ALASA agreed to transfer its assets to LIASA in the same spirit.

In a paper delivered in June 1998 to the final ALASA conference, under the title “From ALASA to LIASA”, Rachel More, then a prominent member of ALASA and in 2007 president-elect of LIASA, pointed out that “negative attitudes, intolerance, resistance to change, etc. are still a problem” (More, 1998). She argued for the establishment

of a Black caucus interest group within LIASA to accommodate the concerns of ALASA members. The LIASA TEC noted this concern and recognised the need to be aware of these expressed needs, but a Black caucus has never been formed within LIASA.

5. LIASA, 1998–2007

The LIASA Constitution states that it is a voluntary association that “strives to unite, develop and empower all workers in the library and information field, in an organisation that provides dynamic leadership in transforming, developing and sustaining library and information services for all the people in South Africa” (LIASA, 2000).

The first LIASA president, Ellen Tise, and members of the first Representative Council were elected at the AGM held at the first conference in November 1998 in Bloemfontein – the city where the South African Library Conference had been held to address the recommendations of the Carnegie Memorandum almost 70 years before, in 1928. By 10 December 1998 the new association had 1068 paid-up members and branch structures in eight of the nine provinces of South Africa.

Following this first annual conference held in November 1998, LIASA has held an annual conference and AGM in September each year, in a different provincial capital under a different general theme. It has elected three successive presidents. Ellen Tise served two terms of office (1997–2002), Robert Moropa (2002–2004) and Tommy Matthee (2004–2006) who, as current president, is serving a second term of office (2006–2008).

LIASA publishes a newsletter that started out as a modest A5 black-and-white text publication, *The LIASA Letter*, and is now a glossy A4 colour publication, *LIASA-in-Touch*, with news articles and photographs reflecting library activities around the country. LIASA soon established a website³ and a list, *Liasaonline* [sic]. In 2003, LIASA took over responsibility for the *Journal of South African Library and Information science* from the South African Library and Information Trust and renamed it the *Journal of South African Libraries and Information Science*.

LIASA needed administrative infrastructure and strategic support to build capacity. A successful grant proposal was submitted in 2000 to the Carnegie Corporation of New York for funding to establish an office and manage the development of the Association. In June 2000, the Corporation approved a substantial three-year project award to assist with the expansion of LIASA activities and its membership recruiting drive. An executive director, Gwenda Thomas, was appointed on contract as to oversee this process from December 2000 to December 2003 (LIASA, 2001a).

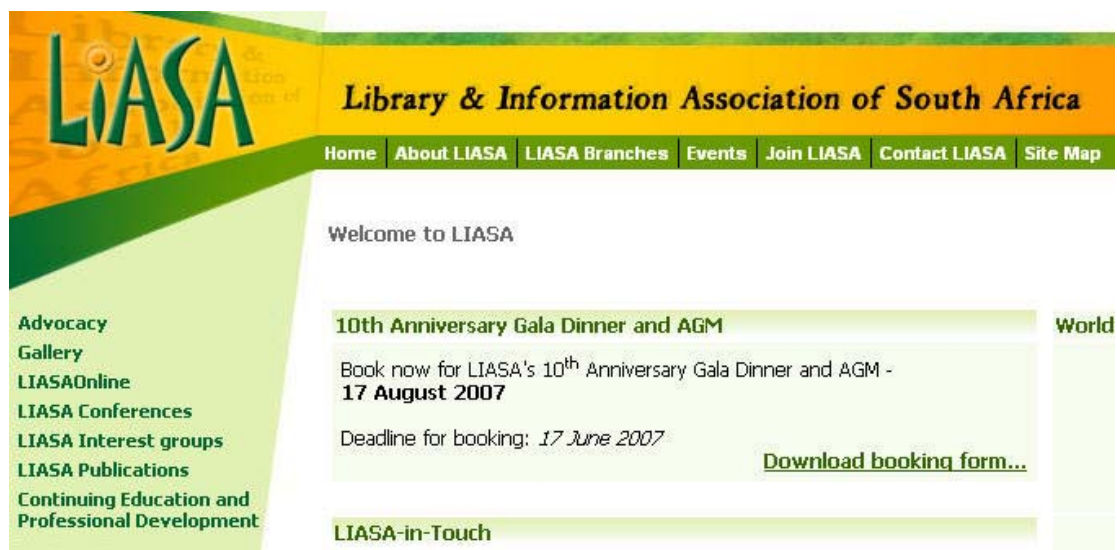
6. SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

A number of special interest groups had been established in the LIS sector from the 1940s to the 1980s, mostly within the umbrella framework of SALA/SAILIS. When it became clear that SAILIS would disband in favour of a new association, members of the largest and oldest interest groups, particularly special libraries (SLIS), law libraries (OSALL) and health sciences (MEDLIG), decided as an initial step to establish them-

³ Currently at www.liasa.org.za.

selves as independent associations rather than disband and form new interest groups within LIASA.

In the interests of consolidating membership of the new Association, Rules 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 attached to the LIASA Constitution had been drawn up after considerable debate at the April 1997 stakeholders' conference, explicitly to *exclude* extending institutional or affiliate membership to associations such as these. LIASA Council records nevertheless reflect a wish to find ways to accommodate external interest groups – representatives were, for example, invited to attend a meeting of the LIASA Executive Committee on 7 May 1999. A coordinator of interest groups was also appointed.



Detail from the LIASA website, www.liasa.org.za.
(Courtesy of LIASA)

Executive Committee Minutes of 7 August 1999 indicate that a subsequent guideline document, *How to form an interest group*, was drafted by Peter Lor for comment. These guidelines outline a procedure requiring interested LIS groups outside LIASA to submit their constitutions to the Association “for approval” and, over a three-year period, to phase out all their non-LIASA members. For long-standing autonomous interest groups this presented a proposition much less attractive than a provision for affiliation, and they perceived too few advantages for their members (who remained free to join LIASA as individuals) to merit taking this step. The record in the LIASA Executive Committee and Council Minutes reflects many discussions from 1999 to 2002, all of which tended to indicate that the gap between the independent interest groups and LIASA was not likely to narrow. Negotiations therefore fell into abeyance as more interest groups were established within LIASA.

LIASA currently has ten interest groups. These include: Public and Community Libraries (PACLIG); Higher Education Libraries (HELIG); Research, Education and Training (RETIG); Bibliographic Standards (IGBIS); Library Acquisitions (LACIG); Interlending; Special Libraries (LiSLIG); School Libraries; Information and Communica-

tions Technology in Libraries (ICTLIG); and Support Services Staff (SSIG). All have constitutions accepted by the AGM of LIASA and all meet at least once a year at the LIASA conference. Free membership of two interest groups is included in LIASA membership fees. LIASA also operates through a number of specialised standing committees.

7. CONCLUSION: INTO THE FUTURE

7.1 Success stories

In 2006, the *Liasa-in-Touch* columns “From the President...” listed a number of international and national achievements since 1997 (LIASA, 2006a:3; 2006b:3). These and other achievements include:

- active participation in IFLA, SCECSAL and COMLA, including the hosting of SCECSAL in 2002;
- the successful bid to host the IFLA WLIC in 2007;
- continued active participation in the World Summit on the Information Society;
- successful grant proposals to the Carnegie Corporation of New York at different times, to establish the LIASA national office and the Centre for Information Career Development (CICD);
- successful proposals to the South African National Lottery Fund for funding to sustain publications and administrative infrastructure;
- LIASA seats on the South African Library Trust, formed after the disbanding of SAILIS to administer former SAILIS assets and fund research and development projects;
- formation of the commemorative trust known as the Patience Maisela Library Staff Development Fund;
- the South African Library Leadership Programme (SALLP), funded by Mellon in conjunction with the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign;
- the implementation of a national Library Week launched and held under a different slogan each year;
- continued management of, and sponsorship for, the accredited research journal *South African Journal for Libraries and Information Science*;
- a LIASA seat on NCLIS and input into the original NCLIS draft legislation;
- a permanent position on the Print Industries Cluster Council (PICC); and
- establishment and administration of several sponsored awards and travel grants, including the prestigious Sabinet Librarian of the Year award.

The SALLP, by its nature, had a particularly high profile and wide-reaching impact on LIASA members. Over three successive years, three groups of rigorously selected LIASA members who held middle management positions in their home institutions, participated in a six-week library leadership programme and working experience in libraries in the USA. The stringent requirements of the programme committed these successful candidates to returning to their home institutions and to active participation and leadership roles in LIASA. Both the current LIASA president Tommy Matthee and the president-elect Rachel More are successful SALLP “fellows”.



A mobile library bus used during the national Library Week in March.
(Courtesy of LIASA)

The pages of *LIASA-in-Touch* reflect actively engaged membership throughout the country and LIASA has maintained its profile nationally and internationally. From the time of an early presentation on the inadequate state of support for libraries made by Peter Lor to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee in 1998 (Lor, 1998b), and encouraged through a programme of advocacy workshops conducted by Mary Somerville of the American Library Association in 2001, LIASA members have engaged in national and regional advocacy for library services wherever the opportunity arises, although not always with visible effect. More recent advocacy meetings with the government at the national and local levels are described in the president's column of December 2005 (LIASA, 2005:3).

Through consultative meetings with the Subdirector of Meta-Information in the then Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology during 1997–2000, a LIASA working group made substantial input on the development and drafting of legislation for a new National Council for Library and Information Services (South Africa, 1997a; 1997b). The National Advisory Council for Library and Information Services Act was promulgated in 2001 (South Africa, 2001). The appointed members of the Council, which included LIASA representation, served their first three-year term of office during 2004–2006, chaired by Professor Seth Manaka.

LIASA also facilitated the formation of a Standards Generating Body (SGB) for LIS within the National Qualifications Framework infrastructure of the South African Quali-

fications Authority.⁽⁴⁾ The SGB is currently developing much-needed qualifications for LIS support services workers. LIASA members in their individual capacities are prominent on both these national bodies.

7.2 Challenges

In December 2006, the LIASA president identified some of the challenges facing the incoming Council and Executive (LIASA, 2006c.3). These include:

- Recruitment and retention of members and management of the membership database continue to be major concerns, reflected regularly in the Representative Council and Executive Minutes and at the AGM. Ambitious targets, considered essential for future financial security and organisational growth, constantly have had to be revised downwards, and retention of members beyond initial recruiting remains a challenge, resulting in a membership base that fluctuates between 1000 and 1500 at present;
- successful hosting of WLIC 2007 and celebration of the tenth anniversary of LIASA;
- active support for the finalisation of the Library Transformation Charter through NCLIS and the Department of Arts and Culture;
- building a strong LIASA *beyond 2007*; and
- achieving statutory status for the profession.

LIASA, like its peers internationally, faces the problem of a senior cohort of leaders that is ageing and is not strongly underpinned by an upcoming generation of young professionals. Discussions in the Executive and Representative Council are addressing these strategic issues in a variety of ways. One such approach, in response to a 2005 Conference resolution, has been the commissioning and publication of a research article (Raju, 2006) on the advantages and disadvantages, and possible variant forms, of statutory status for the profession.

This has been initiated in an effort, on the one hand, to strengthen the profile of professional practitioners as perceived by employers and the client base and, on the other hand, to protect and enhance the image of the profession for its own members. The debate around the issue of statutory status must both take into consideration the practical aspects and be sensitive to the historical context of a formerly exclusive “professional” membership association, and its divisive effect on a small total sector base of only a few thousand. At the time of writing, the debate is still unresolved.

Recruitment for professional graduate education LIS programmes is under pressure as employment opportunities for LIS graduates, particularly in public and community library services, have not developed in recent years. During 2005–2006, RETIG organised “indabas” (consultative meetings) of representatives of the country’s small and threatened library schools to gauge the extent of the situation and to debate changes in the length and structure of the first professional qualification.

The announcement early in 2006 by the Ministers of Arts and Culture and of Finance, that R1 billion would be made available from the National Treasury for the transformation of public and community libraries over the next three years, has brought new

⁴ www.saqqa.co.za

hope for rehabilitation of this vital sector,(5) as LIASA moves into its second decade. Members of LIASA who serve on NCLIS and in PACLIG are now focusing on the implementation of a Library Transformation Charter that will guide this process.

Simultaneously with its hosting of WLIC in Durban in August 2007, LIASA will celebrate its ten years of existence with a gala dinner and move confidently into its second decade. This chapter intended to show that many “burning issues” from the past 80 years are still unresolved and that LIASA, from its unique historic beginnings, has picked up the challenge to address these in the context of an ever-evolving new South African democracy.

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5 Since May 2007 advertisements for large numbers of public library posts have been appearing in national newspapers.

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