

IFLA/FAIFE World Report: Libraries and Intellectual Freedom



Zambia

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The subject of intellectual freedom has dominated the Zambian scene for a long time now, though not as much lately. The fundamental point on intellectual freedom derives from the ground of the availability and access to information indiscriminately. This lies within the purview of social, economic, political and legal frameworks within a country. In Zambia, access to information as a fundamental right has been negatively influenced by these structures cited above. Since libraries operate in socio-economic, political and legal milieu, they have had to respond and at many a time conform to such a scenario at any material time.

Population:	8,275,000 (1996)
GNP per capita:	\$ 360 (1996)
Government / Constitution:	Republic
Main languages:	English, Bantu dialects
Main religions:	Christian, Animist
Literacy:	78% (1995)
Online:	0,16% (July 2000)

Library Services in Zambia

The existence of formal libraries can be stressed the colonial period and their development has been far by large influenced by the stages of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The information infrastructure with regard to library services has been one of being undervalued, marginalised and without grounded or meaningful resource base. The result has been constraints in information provision and consequently on access to timely, relevant, accurate and complete information. This coupled with stifled political culture has rendered library services more of policy pronouncements than concrete policy initiatives and programmes.

The Zambia Library Service continues to provide rural public library services and school libraries. It also serves as a centre for sourcing of library materials from donor agencies and distributing them to both public and private institutions.

However, with the exception of libraries supported by foreign missions and international agencies and some private schools, all libraries are poorly funded and supported, with the result that the generally obtaining situation is one of serious gaps in library services in Zambia. The inadequacies in library services are summarized below.

Constraints to Library Services in Zambia

Limited Access to information

Access to information is impeded by a number of factors such as limited and uneven distribution of libraries and information materials, restrictive library regulations and lack of awareness among members of the general public of their rights of access to information. These limitations inhibit citizens from effectively participating in national affairs.

Low Capacity of Libraries

The current library situation in the country cannot adequately meet the information needs of various users. This is due to lack of capacity precipitated by a dearth of training opportunities for librarians, a dilapidated infrastructure which is limited only to urban areas and provincial capitals, and inadequate allocation of resources to library services both in the public and private sectors. In addition, the low status of unfavorable conditions of service for librarians especially in the public sector compared to their colleagues with similar qualifications and experience, has brought about an exodus of library personnel to better paying jobs.

Uncoordinated Services

Currently, library services are uncoordinated such that the ability of libraries to share resources is impaired. Bibliographic control has also been hampered by various factors such as inadequate funding, staffing, facilities, etc. Furthermore, the effective and comprehensive application of information technology (IT) has been negatively affected by the absence of a coordinated library service, which should have ensured standardisation, and compatibility of library systems.

Poor Mobilization

Library collections in most libraries are far below the expected standards due to various reasons including low funding and high cost of library materials. Resource sharing is almost non-existent resulting in an inability to exploit documents in other libraries. Some libraries collect Zambian materials but this is neither timely nor comprehensive. There is no comprehensive indexing system for government publications leading to the under-utilisation of this resource.

Poor Library Services Delivery

Libraries in Zambia are few and far between. Whether it is in rural communities, peri-urban populations, school populations or even government ministries, libraries or collections of information materials are lacking, and where they exist, the materials are often inappropriate, outdated and not well organised. This is mainly due to inadequate funding, limited appreciation of the importance of reading and shortage of trained personnel.

Lack of Appreciation of the Value of Information and Libraries in Society

There is a general lack of appreciation of the value of information at all levels of society. The causes of this may be found in the teacher-centred curriculum that has existed in schools from the earliest times, where pupils regard the teacher as the only source of information, and learning is by rote. The general low level of literacy and the resulting failure to develop any form of reading culture may have exacerbated this. At the national or society level, these results in poorly founded decision-making, unnecessary repetition of research projects, and a high level of inefficiency.

Poor Regional and International Cooperation

Library services in the country lack linkages with other libraries in the sub-region and the rest of the world. This isolation has invariably denied the country the benefits, which accrue from such contacts as resource sharing and keeping abreast of trends in library and information services.

Lack of National Library Services

Currently, Zambia has no national library institution. The functions of a national library are performed, by default, by the following institutions:

- the Zambia Library Service: mainly provides rural public library services and support to the education (school) sector;
- University of Zambia Library: the designated national reference library of Zambia;
- National Institute of Scientific Research Information Services Unit: collects scientific and technological information;
- National Archives of Zambia: produces the National Bibliography of Zambia;
- National Museums Board: collects materials on indigenous knowledge.

Copyright laws

The copyright laws were enacted in 1997 with UNESCO providing the funding for the initiation and debate. The laws include aspect of copyright with regard to both printed and performed arts. Although this marked a significant step, the enforcement remains to be seen. The balance between right to information and ownership of intellectual property has not been achieved.

National Legal Framework

Although there have been political pronouncements with regard the issue of upholding the democratic ideals, the country still lags behind with regard to right to access to information. Several times independent newspapers edition have had to be banned or journalists locked up in jails for writing on certain aspects that the state would regard as sensitive. In April, 1999, Post newspapers journalists were rounded and locked up for writing on the weak military capabilities of the country in the face of a threat of an Angolan government attack after their allegations of gunrunning. They now face a charge of espionage. The local media that the government controls is highly censored and people have had to turn to foreign media to satisfy their quest for the right information at certain particular times. The legal framework is stifled with secrecy act that limits access to information to most citizens.