

Conference on African Research and Education Networking Infrastructure

The Logic of Library- driven NRENs

OR

The NREN that did not know it was one!

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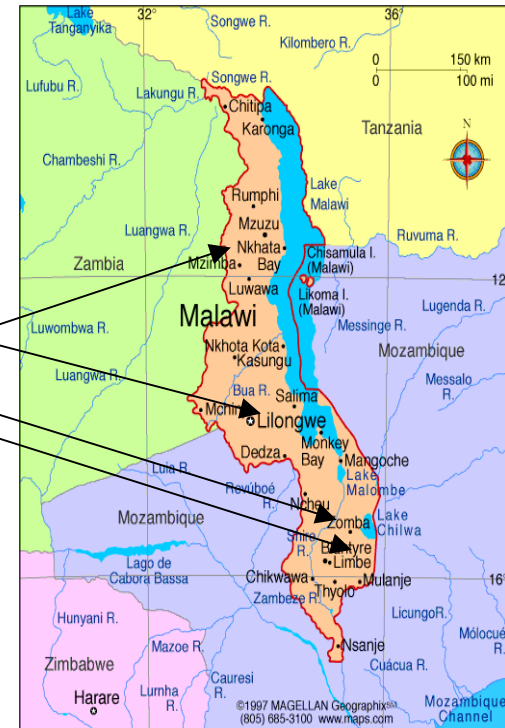
- What is your first impression when you see the word “Library” or “Librarian”?
- In our professional journal we have a “mediawatch” section. Ouch – not good!
- Marketing may be the worst attribute of Librarians for we get very negative press
- And yet.....

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- If we discuss in detail with National Research and Education Networks on the ground, we may find that Libraries and Librarians were among the ICT innovators in the Universities in Africa
- If they were not the innovators, they are certainly among the greedy consumers of bandwidth.
- Many of the reasons why improved bandwidth is vital in our Universities, as listed in the PAREN study, are library linked.
- The emerging area of institutional digital repositories usually are part of the Library service

The University Situation in Malawi:

- **University of Malawi *founded in 1965* and located on 5 campuses over a distance of 350 km**
- **Mzuzu University *founded in 1999***
- **Several private universities being established but have not yet produced graduates**



How was academic connectivity in Malawi in 2002?

- **Each campus had dial up or leased line connections to several ISPs**
- **College of Medicine had a Radio link to SDNP VSAT**
- **Mzuzu University was about 400km from the nearest VSAT**
- **The huge constraints in accessing e-contnet limited its use**

Where was the problem?

- **Our National University is federal with 5 colleges geographically separated in 6 locations, some out of town**
- **There is no national planning for academic connectivity and ICT, no career structure for ICT personnel although currently we are trying to address this**
- **There was limited university financial commitment for ICT and connectivity – what funding there was, was not core, but within donor-supported projects.**

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Why did the Library Community need adequate bandwidth?


- We had resourced excellent heavily subsidized initiatives to bring top quality Internet-based e-content to the Region through INASP PERI and eIFL (Malawi had then access to US\$3million worth of electronic content and now has more!)
- We had a vigorous training programme in e-content access for Faculty, Students and Research groups
- We were beginning to consider issues of Institutional Repositories / Digital Libraries
- We had launched our Library On-line Public Access catalogue (OPAC)
- BUT Internet speed was the major constraint

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Enter **MALICO**:



Malawi Library and Information Consortium

- Established after intensive consultation within the eIFL family of Library Consortia in 2003 to unite the purchasing power of libraries
- Assisted by an OSISA start up grant
- MALICO  A registered Trust with Board and Management Committee and Corporate Bank Account
- With ambitious Mission and Vision

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- **MALICO**  The Malawi Library and Information Consortium will be a sustainable organization that will unite the information custodians of Malawi.
- MALICO will assemble and preserve indigenous information and provide *access to the most appropriate information technologies* and formats for all Malawians. .
- *MALICO will change the landscape of information services in Malawi.*
- MALICO will develop an informed society through *far-reaching programmes and services for teaching, learning and research, significantly contributing to the advancement of the social, political and economic environment in the continent.*
- MALICO places a high value on resource sharing, cooperation and networking. By virtue of these values, MALICO will advocate and represent the strength of Malawian information services.

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- We were serious about these objectives:
Change the information landscape
- There was no one else to look to to help on the bandwidth issues
- So we started the process of trying to improve Connectivity and therefore access for all our clients - not only to Library Resources
- Without knowing it, MALICO was beginning to serve as an NREN!

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- Through assistance from a variety of partners, initially OSISA, we were able to procure 4 VSATs for our two public universities
- Our Regulator, MACRA, a great source of support, granted us maximum concessions in the registration and licensing of the VSATS
- Our Ministry of Finance gave us duty free status
- The VSAT network has now been serving our academic community for one academic year. Outreach is planned to other MALICO members of the Research and Development Community

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WSIS Tunis 14 Nov 2005

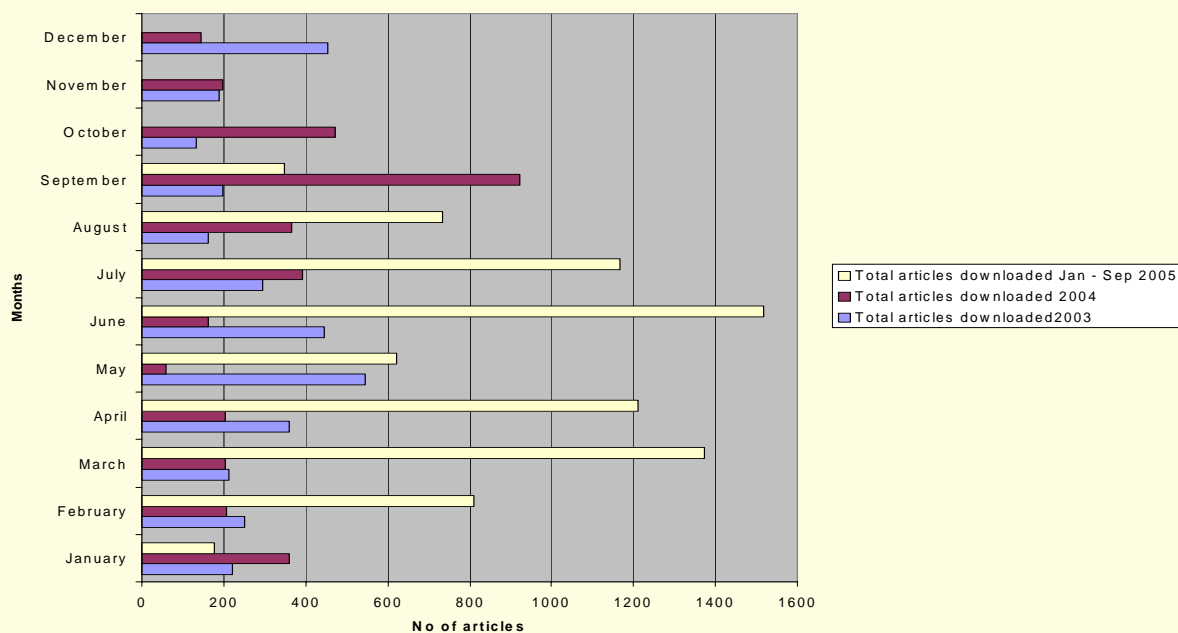
Logic of Library- driven NREs

**Exploiting the potential of
NREs in Africa**

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Growth in e-content access- especially since bandwidth improvement from VSATs

Growth in access: VSATs installed in mid February 2005



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Where now?

- We have realised only very recently, that MALICO is , by default, an NREN!
- MALICO does not see its core function as providing connectivity!
- Currently MALICO is assisting in establishing up MAREN :Malawi Academic and Research Network, our Malawi NREN
- We will be happy when our professional ICT colleagues are able to deliver the bandwidth required by the academic community

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- We are also working with our ICT colleagues now in tracing available fibre to harness it for academic networking
- We have been successful in being given 3 year access to two fibre strands from ESCOM, our electricity commission, for academic networking

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- So MALICO was the NREN that did not know it was one!
Was it logical? In the context, we think so.
- For the future, we will be delighted to watch the strengthening of Academic ICT professionals
- They will give leadership to MAREN
- But we hope that there will always be a voice for the University Libraries in MAREN
- Issues of bandwidth concern us daily
- We are the constant link among the three : users, technology and content.
- We have a voice at Policy level
- We communicate.

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Thank you