

An Appraisal of the Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries

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Abstract

This study investigated factors constraining effective growth of the Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries (COTUL). A mixed research design was employed to gain a deeper insight into the subject matter. Data was collected using interviews, questionnaires and observations. Fifty-eight (58) purposively selected professional librarians participated in this study. The study investigated, among other things: the librarians' level of awareness of COTUL, its organizational structures, strengths and challenges. The findings revealed that librarians' awareness of COTUL is minimal, hence constraining its growth and that the existing organization structures are not conducive for COTUL to function satisfactorily. A number of challenges were identified including weak sustainable financial base, researchers' low level of awareness of e-resources, lack of e-resource searching skills and lack of office space. Based on these findings, it is recommended that COTUL should look for permanent and reliable funding sources, sensitize all library staff and top administrators, form an Advisory Board and set up a full-time secretariat and a permanent office premises.

INTRODUCTION

The Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries (COTUL) is an association of university and research libraries in the country. The main objective of this consortium is to share electronic resources in terms of subscription, access and usage. The consortium trains librarians and researchers in information search skills to access and use the resources to support teaching, learning and research. To date, COTUL has 56 registered member libraries. COTUL subscribes to e-resources through a grant by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) grant. This support however, ended in June 2013. The second source of funding is through COTUL membership fees. This is based on the number of full-time researchers and students in an institution. After SIDA ended its support, COTUL now has to look for new sources of funding. The sustainability of COTUL will therefore largely depend on either government support or increased subscription from member institutions. Negotiations are underway for both options.

Towards the end of each year, COTUL selects a number of e-resources from publishers for the following year. International Network for Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), a non-profit making organization based in Oxford, United Kingdom, negotiates the prices and coordinates the acquisition of the resources on behalf of COTUL. SIDA pays the bills and member institutions access the resources using passwords or IP addresses. So far, collective acquisition of e-resources through the consortium has proved to be the cheapest and most convenient for many developing countries, and Tanzania in particular. Nevertheless, COTUL has not been growing satisfactorily as in other East African countries.

Contextualizing the Problem

COTUL was formed in 2002, at the time when Kenya and Uganda were also establishing their consortia. The original idea was that each country (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) would build its own consortium, and when they become fully fledged, they would unite to form a bigger and more powerful consortium of East African universities and research libraries. This means resource sharing would be at regional level, implying a more vibrant and cost-effective consortium. By comparison, Kenya and Uganda have made significant progress. For example, these countries started subscribing to e-resources much earlier, using their own resources, unlike the Tanzanian consortium which has lagged behind and largely depends on donor grants.

Although the East African countries are characterized by the same socio-economic and political conditions, the gap between Tanzania and its counterparts in terms of consortium development is huge. The question becomes why this stagnation and what should be done to improve the situation? Therefore, this study appraises COTUL in order to determine the factors that hinder its growth and the challenges it faces with a view to proposing ways that can enhance its performance.

CONSORTIUM BUILDING IN AFRICA

Consortium of Tanzania University and Research Libraries (COTUL): An Overview

COTUL is a voluntary, non-profit making association formed in Tanzania, that brings together university and research libraries for the purpose of sharing electronic resources. The idea of establishing the consortium started in 2002 and COTUL started realizing its objectives in 2009. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides guidelines on how the consortium should

be managed. The Executive Committee meets at least four times a year. This committee has four sub-committees namely, Resource Mobilization, Public Relations, ICT and Capacity Building. There is also the Annual General Assembly, which is the main decision making body. Until July 2013, COTUL had 56 active, fully paid members. These include: 12 Public Universities; 14 Private Universities; 6 Research Institutes; 2 Public Libraries; 3 Ministry libraries and 19 other higher learning institutions.

Consortium Building in Africa

In the last ten years, many libraries in Africa have created their associations popularly known as consortia. Consortium building is designed to enable libraries to cooperate and share electronic resources. Unlike the traditional library cooperation where libraries shared physical books, this one involves joint subscription to e - resources, access, usage and training.

Darch (1999) observes that no library on its own, however rich, can purchase all resources it wants. As such, sharing resources can be the only solution. He points out that:

There is no academic library that can have the financial resources to purchase all it needs, let alone what it wants. Library consortium is therefore an attempt to rationalize the building and use of information resources collections through sharing and granting access more than ownership.

Library Consortium has many advantages, not only for developing countries, but also for developed countries which include, bringing related libraries together for a common goal; reducing prices through common bargain. Unit cost is relatively small with shared subscription; increases the power of the libraries against the suppliers; promotes coalition through the involvement of negotiators; facilitates shared training and skills development and work load is reduced as the consortium works for all member institutions. Consortium building is therefore an important initiative that all libraries should embark on. In this electronic age, resource sharing is facilitated through the application of ICTs, unlike in the past where it operated through postage of hard copies by mail.

Establishment and Objectives

The establishment of Consortia in Africa is a post 2000 creation. In Kenya for example, the Kenya Library and Information Services Consortium (KLISC) was established in 2003, with the objective of collective subscription to electronic resources in order to cope with the increasing cost of information resources (KLISC Website). The Consortium of Uganda University Libraries (CUUL) was established in December 2001, the purpose being to improve the availability and delivery of library and information services to the higher education community in Uganda and other research communities. South African library consortia have come together under an umbrella known as South Africa National Libraries Information Consortia (SANLIC), whose objective is to facilitate a cost-effective access to electronic information in support of research, teaching and learning. In Ghana, the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries (CARLIGHT) was established in August 2004, with a focus on bringing together member institutions to have maximum use of resources and other facilities. Basically, all these consortia have the same objective, and that is to facilitate electronic resource sharing.

Membership

So far, all consortia in Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Ghana, draw their members from academic and research institutions. Information obtained from their respective websites indicate a similar pattern of membership. In Kenya for example, as of March 2012, KLISC had a membership of 7 university libraries, 10 constituent colleges, 20 private universities and 48 non-university institutions. In Uganda, the consortium consists of public and private academic libraries in licensed and accredited institutions of higher education. Some research institutions are also affiliated members of the Consortium (<http://www.cuul.or.ug>).

In South Africa, SANLIC is made up of various consortia that include: Gauteng and Environs Library Consortium (GAELIC) (the largest consortia in the country); Cape Higher Education Consortium (CALICO); Eastern Seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions (ESATI); Free State Library Consortium (FRELICO); and South African National Research Information Consortium (SANRIC). Just like in other countries, members for each consortium are institutions of higher learning. SANLIC facilitates access to electronic information in support of teaching, learning and research activities of its members on a non-profit basis. This is achieved through collective negotiations with publishers. It also promotes the use of high-quality, open access electronic information resources. In Ghana, CARLIGHT has 23 member institutions that comprise university libraries, polytechnics, special and other libraries (www.carlight.org).

Activities

The main function of the consortium is cooperative acquisition and usage of e-resources for cost-effective access. Other consortium activities include capacity building in terms of training on the usage of electronic resources and marketing. SANLIC for example, has a wide range of activities aimed at providing its members with electronic information resources site licensing, monitoring and evaluation, marketing and promotion of electronic information resources, training, advice, general assistance and support, communication, liaison and lobbying (www.sanlic.org.za). Other benefits include joint training programmers through workshops, seminars and Annual Conferences.

Shachaf (2003) observed that library consortia growth follows five systematic development stages. These include, embryonic, early development, development, maturation and disbandment or meta-consortium stages.

The embryonic stage: In this stage, libraries recognize the need to establish a consortium and they collaborate informally in some activities such as inter-library loans. This stage has been reached by some consortia in countries such as Italy, Spain, etc.

The early development stage: This consists of consortia struggling to fulfill their goals and objectives in the early stages of their development.

The development stage: In this stage, consortia perform according to their original goals of their establishment but plagued with diminishing of their original funding hence need to devise new sources of funding for their viability.

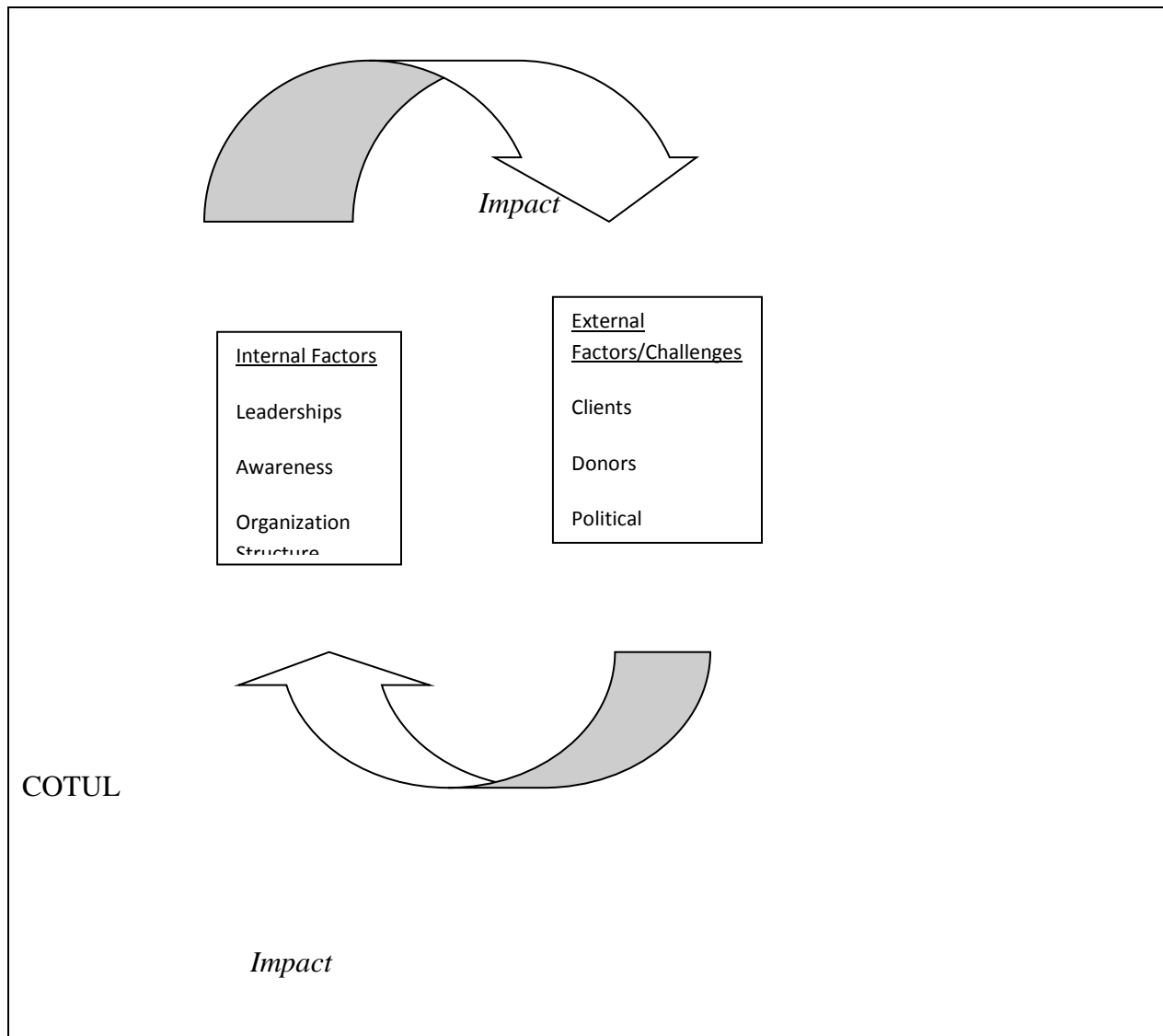
The maturation stage: A stage at which a consortium serves as a nation’s platform for electronic resources licensing with expanded nation-wide membership, and at which membership fees and service fees constitute a significant part of the budget.

The disbandment or meta-consortium stage: At this stage, a consortium either dissolves itself or grows beyond the national boundaries and may change into something else. Apparently, from the development stages and characteristics shown, COTUL is yet to reach the middle of the consortium’s development stages.

Conceptual Framework

In order to carry out this research effectively, a Library Consortium Contract and Expansion Model was developed so as to delimit the study and identify competing explanations for the current state of COTUL as illustrated in Figure 1.

Fig. 1 Library Consortium Contract and Expansion Model



Source: Developed by Researchers (2012)

From this model, presence or absence of internal factors such as strong leadership, membership, organizational structures, commitment etc., tend to produce either functional or dysfunctional results. In so doing, they may stimulate further development of a consortium positively or hinder its growth, a state referred to as contraction. The same is true with the external factors, whereby donors, clients, political, social, cultural and legal policies may also affect growth of consortia positively or negatively. Positive effects enable a consortium to expand. This expansion and contract model was used to guide aspects of inquiry in this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in six regions namely, Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, Zanzibar, Iringa, Dodoma and Mwanza. These regions were purposively selected because they have relatively many universities and research institutions which are COTUL members. Owing to the fundamental research question, this study employed mixed research design and survey method in particular. The units of analysis were mainly librarians. Primary data was collected through use of questionnaires, interviews and observations while secondary data was collected through documentary reviews. Data collected from the field was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Interviews provided qualitative data on the rationale for the establishment of the consortium, its objectives, current state and suggestions for the future. These were analyzed using content analysis. Responses from the questionnaire were coded and assigned numerical values for each variable. A statistical package known as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for frequency distribution, calculations of percentages and cross-tabulation.

Sampling was done in three stages. The first stage focused on picking study regions. The second was to obtain institutions to be involved in each selected region. In both stages, purposive sampling was used. The method was considered appropriate in picking regions and institutions which are COTUL members and use e-resources. In this case, 25 institutions were involved. The third stage was to obtain librarians who would be interviewed and who would complete the questionnaire. Again, purposive sampling was necessary in order to get respondents who were conversant with COTUL issues. A total of 58 respondents were picked for the study. In this case, randomization was not appropriate as it would have drawn individuals who were not information-rich.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study. It shows the number of institutions and respondents involved in the study, librarians' level of COTUL awareness, organization structure and SWOC analysis.

Institutions and Respondents Involved in the Study

The institutions and respondents involved the studies are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Institutions and Respondents by Region

Region	Institutions/ Libraries		Respondents	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Dar es Salaam	10	40	18	31.0
Morogoro	4	16	10	17.2
Zanzibar	3	12	8	13.8
Iringa	3	12	10	17.2
Dodoma	3	12	6	10.4
Mwanza	2	8	6	10.4
Total	25	100	58	100

Table 1 shows that Dar es Salaam has the highest number of higher learning institutions, that is 10 (40%), which participated in this study. Dar es Salaam is the commercial city of Tanzania and many institutions are located there. The second is Morogoro 4 (16%) followed by Zanzibar 3 (12%), Iringa 3 (12%) and Dodoma 3 (12%), which have the same number of institutions. Mwanza has the lowest number 2 (8%) in the list. The number of the respondents almost follows the same pattern. Twenty-five (25) heads of libraries were involved in this study, one from each library. These were interviewed, while 33 library staff completed the questionnaire.

Level of Awareness of COTUL among the Library Staff

Library professional staff were asked to indicate the extent to which they are aware of COTUL. Only library professional staff were involved in the interview because they are expected to be conversant with matters related to professional associations.

Table 2 presents librarians' level of COTUL awareness as follows:

Table 2: Level of COTUL Awareness among the Professional Library Staff

Level of Awareness of COTUL	Professional Library Staff	
	Frequency	Percentage
Very much aware of COTUL	13	22.4
Aware of COTUL	11	19.0
Moderately aware of COTUL	16	27.6
Not aware of COTUL at all	18	31.0
Total	58	100

Table 2 indicates that a total of 13 (22.4%) respondents said they were very much aware of COTUL. Another 11 (19%) simply said they were aware. The two different levels of awareness show that less than half 24 (41%) of the respondents are aware of COTUL and its activities. This is an indication that more is needed to market COTUL to library professional staff. Awareness of the existence of COTUL is important and a means of gaining support. A cross-tabulation between the ranks of the librarians and levels of awareness indicates that those holding higher positions such as Senior Librarians and above are very much aware of COTUL. These have served for many years, and are likely to have attended COTUL meetings and workshops. The remaining 18 (31%) respondents said they were not aware. This is about one third of the librarians, and therefore they should not be ignored. They are a cause for marketing COTUL.

COTUL's Organizational Structure

The COTUL's organizational structure was examined in order to understand its functions. This was done by reviewing the Memorandum of Understanding which is its constitution. It was noted that COTUL has an Executive Committee comprising the Chairperson who is the Chief Executive, assisted by the Deputy Chairperson. The Secretary General is the main functionary officer who is assisted by his/her deputy and the Treasurer who deals with financial matters. In addition, four Executive Committee members are responsible for resource mobilization, ICT, publicity, and capacity building. This team of eight people constitutes COTUL's Executive Committee. These officials are full-time employees in various university libraries. The Chairperson of the Consortium was of the opinion that some committee members should be employed on full-time basis to pursue consortium activities. Essential activities such as preparation of meetings and workshops, follow-up of payments and resource mobilization need someone who is a full-time employee. This is why there is need for COTUL to have a permanent office and its own core staff. The CALICO of South Africa for example, is a case in point where the Chief Executive is employed by the Consortium and not tied to any institution. This arrangement gives the Chief Executive sufficient time to handle the consortium's activities.

The organizational structure provides for a General Assembly, the Board and the Secretariat. The General Assembly (GA) is the supreme body that makes final decisions on all matters pertaining to the consortium and has powers to amend the constitution. The GA meets once a year, normally in the last week of September and comprises two representatives from each participating institution, one of whom must be the Head of the Library.

It was observed that Annual General Meetings (AGM) are attached to the workshops to alleviate costs and after the workshop participants reconstitute the AGM members and conduct the meeting. This is vital in view of scarce resources as it is justifiable to pay staff to attend a workshop rather than a meeting. As such, the decision that only two representatives from each institution should attend the AGM is not observed because only those who can afford to pay for workshops attend it. This is very dangerous especially when there is an agenda item that needs voting, such as amendment of the constitution or general elections. An institution which has sent many members to the workshop, and thereafter to the AGM may conspire and vote as a team to influence decisions.

Article eight (8) of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) stipulates that there shall be a Board of not more than 10 people. This study observed that this Board is not yet in place. In any organization, a Board is an essential advisory body. Therefore, it must be put in place and become functional as stipulated in the MoU.

Article 27 Section (i) of the MoU states that the *Consortium Treasurer shall open and run the bank accounts of the consortium*. Section (iii) points out further that *the signatories of COTUL account shall be the Chairperson, the Executive Secretary and the Treasurer*. The study however, noted with concern some anomalies in this area. The Account was opened with a bank located at the Chairperson’s institution. The Director of the Library and his deputy were Group A signatories and Group B signatories were the University Bursar and his deputy. Here, COTUL’s Treasurer and Executive Secretaries were not involved as stipulated in the MoU because they are not answerable to the university that manages COTUL’s Bank account.

At the end of the triennium, the Bank account is transferred to the next Chairperson’s institution and signatories change. The chances are that different accounting procedure shall apply as determined by the new hosting institution. This is an area that needs to be revisited by COTUL, and can only be streamlined when COTUL stands on its own without leaning on any institution.

COTUL’s SWOC Analysis

COTUL’s Strengths

In this research, the library staff were asked to indicate what they considered as Strengths of COTUL. The findings have been summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: COTUL’s Strengths (N=58)

Total Sample	Category	Number	Percentage
	E- resources are now available and accessible	42	72.4
	Well trained professional staff	38	65.5
	Contribution formula has been developed and is operational	25	43.1
	Functional organizational structure	16	27.5
	Committed leadership	12	20.7

Table 3 indicates that 42 (72.4%) respondents mentioned access to e-resources as COTUL's main strength because it is its main objective. Sharing e-resources is what binds COTUL members. Thirty-eight (38) (65.6%) respondents mentioned trained professional staff as another major strength. This is particularly so with the universities which recruit the best staff, including staff in the Library Schools. This is vivid during COTUL workshops and training programmes, where local staff act as resource persons. These are highly trained, some hold doctoral degrees from various universities within and outside the country.

COTUL has a formula for e-resource contributions which is now operational. It also has a financial base accrued from membership contributions. This was acknowledged by 25 (43.1%) respondents who considered this as a significant pillar for COTUL's financial sustainability. The functional Organization Structure was also considered COTUL's major strength. For example, in this study, 16 (27.9%) respondents indicated that COTUL has an MoU, which clearly shows how the consortium is structured and managed.

In addition, 12 (20.7%) respondents indicated that COTUL has committed leadership. This was qualified by some of the achievements made within the past three years such as: the availability of e-resources, COTUL's communication tools (website and e-mail systems), COTUL's bank account, conducting regular meetings, training workshops and coalition with other related organizations e.g. INASP, EiFL, KIT, etc. All these are attributed to committed leadership.

COTUL's Weaknesses

Respondents were also asked to mention the weaknesses of COTUL. This question was asked to determine areas that need improvements. Unfortunately, little was said on this area except that it took too long for COTUL to become functional. There were a lot of preparatory meetings which did not bear immediate results. For example, one respondent commented: *"This thing took too long to become operational. We are glad it has finally taken off"*. It was also pointed out that COTUL has limited powers over its member institutions because it is a voluntary association and relies on the willingness of its members. For example, if a member institution does not pay its dues, the only thing COTUL can do is to de-register it.

COTUL's Opportunities

As mentioned earlier, funds for subscription to e-resources were provided by SIDA until June 2013. There is also INASP which is supporting it with negotiations and coordination of e-resources. The 2011 and 2012 Annual General Meetings were sponsored by INASP and COSTECH respectively. EiFL is also supporting COTUL in the area of Open Access. All these initiatives indicate the willingness of development partners to support COTUL. A cross section of the Heads of Libraries indicated the collaboration with development partners as an opportunity for COTUL to aim higher. The large number of universities and research institutions is also an opportunity that COTUL can capitalize upon. Initially, COTUL started with a few public university libraries and later private universities and research institutions joined the consortium. As the saying goes, *Unity is Strength*. The more libraries join COTUL, the greater the strength. There is also prospect for support from the government. COSTECH for example, has demonstrated its willingness to support COTUL. COTUL undertook a survey on Electronic Library System and how libraries can be supported under World Bank support (ESRF, 2012). In this initiative, all e-resources shall be subscribed centrally for all universities and research institutions. It is therefore, an opportunity for COTUL to explore further.

COTUL's Challenges

In this study, the respondents were also required to mention challenges that COTUL is facing in implementing its activities. These are summarized in Table 4:

Table 4: COTUL's Challenges

Sample Size	Category	Frequency	Percentage
N=58	Lack of sustainable financial base	46	79.3
	Problem of awareness of e-resources among researchers	25	43.1
	Lack of e-resource searching skills to its members	23	39.6
	Lack of independent offices	6	10.3
	Low commitment among its member institutions	6	10.3
	Lack of an independent secretariat.	5	8.6

One of the challenges facing COTUL is lack of sustainable financial base to undertake its planned activities. This was mentioned by 46 (79.3%) respondents in the survey. Financially, COTUL depends on donor support and annual contributions from its members. Subscription to e-resources for example, is highly dependent on donor funding. Member contributions are small and sometimes not forthcoming. Another challenge is lack of awareness on the e-resources that are available. A total of 25 (43.1%) librarians mentioned this challenge. One librarian commented as follows:

E-resources awareness is a big challenge because of constant changes of faculty members and admission of new students every year. You have to keep on training new members every year.

There is also lack of e-resource searching skills among the researchers. Twenty-three librarians (39.6%) indicated that their library users were not conversant with e-resource-searching skills. COTUL held a national workshop in Tanga in September 2010, where registration of e-resources and searching skills were taught. Also, a Task Force was formed in 2011, which visited 55 libraries to assist them with registration and searching skills. The problem however,

is that new members keep on joining the consortium. It may also be a reflection of non-dissemination of the skills to new library staff.

Other challenges mentioned were lack of COTUL's offices (10.3%), lack of the secretariat that is full-time devoted to COTUL's matters (8.6%), and also low commitment among its members (10.3%).

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Basing on the data presented in the previous section, the research came out with the following key findings:

There is no satisfactory awareness about COTUL and its activities among the professional librarians. COTUL has a functional Executive Committee and a Memorandum of Understanding. However, COTUL does not have a Governing Board and full-time employed secretariat. All Executive Committee members are university employees and carry out COTUL's activities as extra duties. This mode of operation was adopted as a strategy to minimize operational costs when COTUL was started.

Heads of libraries and professional librarians appreciate that COTUL is now operational, and e-resources are accessed. The cost sharing formula has been developed and is functional. A lot of opportunities exist, including extended support from development partners and the government.

In terms of challenges, it was found that COTUL does not have a firm financial base and sustainability strategies. It only relies on meager grants from development partners and contributions from its members. It was also observed that there is low level of awareness on the e-resources and lack of searching skills among the researchers and students. This may be attributed to inadequate marketing. It should also be noted that in institutions of higher learning, new students are admitted every year. This situation calls for continuous Information Literacy Training.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, one can conclusively say that COTUL has successfully managed to build its foundation. It is now operational, and members pay and access e-resources collectively, which is essentially the main objective of the consortium. COTUL is however, faced with a number of challenges that need to be addressed. These include lack of sustainable financial base, unawareness of researchers about e-resources and lack of searching skills, among others. There are also a number of opportunities that can be explored.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made to improve the situation and hasten growth of COTUL: First, it should look for permanent and reliable funding sources from the government and development partners. Increased support from development partners need to be explored for activities such as staff training and e-resources subscription. Second, awareness of COTUL needs to be extended to all library staff as well as institutional top leadership. This cadre is involved in the approval of funds for e-resource subscription, hence, should be acquainted with COTUL and its objectives in order support it. Third, COTUL should form its Advisory Board as outlined in Article 8 of the Memorandum of Understanding and full-time secretariat

which will ensure that it performs its duties. Fourth, the consortium should have a permanent office. It can start by requesting for an office from a university or any other institution. Thereafter, it can rent an office elsewhere until such a time when it can have its own building. Finally, deliberate efforts should be made to increase awareness on the existing resources and developing searching skills among the researchers.

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