DOING IT TOGETHER FOR COST EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO SCHOLARLY INFORMATION: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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DOING IT TOGETHER FOR COST EFFECTIVE ACCESS TO SCHOLARLY INFORMATION: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

The South African National Library and information Consortium (SANLiC) is a consortium of 30 public universities and government supported research councils. It was established in 1999 with envisaged outcomes of substantially increasing the quantity, quality and depth of research literature available to the entire South African academic and research community on an equitable basis and to foster innovation, increase research output and support the competitiveness of the South African science and technology research community.

This paper will give an overview of SANLiC’s history, growth, achievements and current products and services to its members.

Keywords: Consortia; Collaboration; Academic Libraries; Research Libraries; SANLiC; Electronic Information Resources;

Introduction:

University and research libraries play a key role in the higher education systems of all countries. Without access to academic and scholarly information resources no institution of higher learning can fulfill its mandate to teach and generate new knowledge through high quality research.

The South African Department of Higher Education and Training, in the *Green Paper on Post School Education and Training* launched by the South African Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande in January 2012, stated that central to the DHET’s strategy is “the objective of ensuring that the country is committed to sustaining and strengthening long-term research that is transformational, generates new knowledge and can work towards strengthening society and the economy”.¹

To better understand the current higher education environment in South Africa, we need to have a brief look at the country, its recent history and demographics.

This beautiful land of approximately 1.2 million square kilometres, divided into 9 provinces and with a population of approximately 50 million people has 11 official languages and many different cultures giving rise to the name the “Rainbow Nation”.

The modern cities, sophisticated industries, large mining sector and awe inspiring tourist attractions all contribute to making it the country with the highest GDP in Africa.

Before 1994 when South Africa became a democracy, higher education was for the most part, segregated with the largest and best-funded universities catering for white South Africans. Separate and less well-funded universities for people of colour did exist, most notably the University of Fort Hare whose most famous graduate, Nelson Mandela, became one of the icons of our age.
The importance and value of education have long been recognised as is evident in the *Freedom Charter*, as adopted at the Congress of the People in Kliptown on 26 June 1955, which has as one of its basic tenets that “the doors of learning and culture shall be opened.”  

Nelson Mandela in his book *Long Walk to Freedom*, declared: “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.”

After the elections of 1994 the education system was due for a major overhaul to reflect the new democratic ideals. Tertiary education had to become equally accessible to all South Africans especially to the previously disadvantaged people. The new funding framework (NFF) for higher education institutions which was to address previous inequalities was published on 9 December 2003 in terms of the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, in the Government Gazette (No. 1791). The new funding framework was implemented in the 2004/05 financial year.

In 2003 South Africa began restructuring its higher education system. Smaller universities and technikons (polytechnics) were incorporated into larger institutions to form the so-called comprehensive universities offering a combination of academic and vocational diplomas and degrees. Six universities of technology offering vocationally oriented training were established while the eleven traditional universities (including the University of Fort Hare and the University of the North) offer theoretical academic degrees.

Well before the restructuring of the academic institutions, universities in different regions of the country were already forming regional library consortia to collaborate on specific goals e.g. to ensure optimal access to information for members through regional and national cooperation, to promote collection building and resource sharing, provide support for the implementation and management of common library systems, improve information literacy skills and share training resources.

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### South African National Library and information Consortium [SANLiC]

**Historical background:**

The Coalition of South African Library Consortia (COSALC) was established on 2 July 1999 by representatives of several regional academic library bodies who were all at the time sub-committees of the regional academic consortia. A decision was taken at that meeting to establish COSALC as a national umbrella organisation with the vision “to enhance access to information and the sharing of resources to benefit the clients of library consortia in South Africa through national co-operation.” COSALC membership was subsequently also opened to the public research councils libraries consortium.

COSALC’s main operational and strategic focus was collaboration at national level. The urgent need to work together to enhance access to online scholarly information was addressed through the establishment of a national site licensing project within its structures which became widely known as the South African Site Licensing Initiative (SASLI). SASLI’s role was to establish needs, negotiate prices as well as terms and conditions of licenses with publishers, co-ordinate access and training and deal with any other issues related to the cost-effective use of electronic information.

In 2003 COSALC was registered as a Section 21 (non-profit organisation) company in terms of the Companies Act. The South African Revenue Service (SARS) approved its application for tax exempt status in March 2005, and in the same year it was also registered as a Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) in terms of the Non-Profit Organisations Act (Act 71 of 1997).

At the Annual General Meeting in November 2006 it was agreed to change the name of the organisation to South African National Library and information Consortium (SANLiC). The reasons for, and effect of, the name change was to ensure that the name of the company more
accurately reflects the relationship between the company and its members and the intended legal structure thereof. The name change became official in June 2011. Another major change occurred at the end of 2011 when SANLiC’s membership structure changed from consortium membership to institutional membership. From 2012 each institution became a direct member with voting rights enabling it to give direct input into the affairs and strategic direction of the consortium.

SANLiC’s current Vision and Mission:

SANLiC’s current Vision is to be the “leading facilitator of cost effective access to high-quality scholarly electronic information in support of research, teaching and learning in Public Higher Education and Research Institutions”.

Its Mission statement declares that SANLiC facilitates, on a non-profit basis, affordable access to scholarly electronic information in support of the learning, teaching and research activities of its members. This is achieved mainly through collective negotiations with publishers and aggregators. It also promotes the use of high-quality, open access electronic information resources. In addition, SANLiC carries out a wide range of activities aimed at providing its members with services related to its mission e.g. training, marketing and general support and advice.

SANLiC as an instrument of collaboration:

Consortia world-wide are group efforts of individual libraries to achieve more than they could if they operated on their own. There are many collaborative projects ranging from resource sharing, shared library systems, storage of archived materials, staff training and, of course, negotiations for and licensing of online information resources.

For many of the academic libraries in South Africa at the end of the twentieth century, entering the digital era was fraught with difficulties: human resource capacity, skills and funding to implement a broad e-resources programme were often lacking. Although some of the universities had already travelled far along the digital highway, they too had need for greater negotiating power for more reasonable pricing and terms and conditions for access to high-quality peer-reviewed electronic information resources from major international publishers. SANLiC would become the instrument through which all member institutions would be able to benefit from centralised skills and expertise.

Collaboration through SANLiC takes place on many levels. Outlined here are the most prominent areas of collaboration where the consortium plays a leading role:

i. Collaborative funding of expertise and services.

SANLiC is a non-profit company, funded by membership fees and service fees. While membership fees are low and determined on a yearly basis by the SANLiC Board, the major part of its funding comes from service fees charged on each SANLiC-negotiated publisher deal in which an institution participates. This business model has placed SANLiC on a sound financial footing and does not place undue financial strain on any member institution. In return members have a dedicated professional working on their behalf in dealing with publishers, vendors and other suppliers of online information products.

Collaborative funding is used for:

- Professional services:

SANLiC employs a professional person with negotiation skills and expertise in licensing and the legal issues involved, has a good understanding of the library environment in South Africa and is able to network with all consortium members on needs and various
other issues relating to online information provision. One of the earliest collaborative projects of SANLiC (then still SASLI), was conducting an information audit of electronic information resources in use in South African universities at the time. This was useful for establishing what were already available, determining existing shortcomings and it also served as a tool for a collection development policy that assisted in identifying the first core databases which were to be offered through SANLiC. In addition it was helpful in determining the strategic direction of the consortium.

The SANLiC manager evaluates offers on new products and renewal terms for existing deals and negotiates content, discounted pricing, access conditions and cancellation terms with international publishers, aggregators and other vendors of online academic information resources. Publisher licenses are scrutinised to ensure fair licensing conditions for its members. SANLiC makes use of a model publisher contract and institutional license where possible and agreed to by the publishers.

SANLiC currently offers over a hundred online products to its members many of which include a range of different package deals. New products are added continuously and cover electronic journals packages, e-books, abstracting and indexing databases as well as newer types of products like online video and image resources. SANLiC is also able to facilitate other collaborative projects by serving as a coordinating body and champion. SANLiC recently became involved in the SCOAP3 Open Access initiative and is acting as the national contact point for South Africa.

- **Legal services:**
  SANLiC has access to contract lawyers who advise from time to time on difficult legal issues associated with the publisher agreements and licenses.

- **Administrative services:**
  The administration and management of the legal processes associated with contracts and agreements are done by SANLiC staff. This includes finalisation of negotiated terms and conditions in the agreements and institutional licenses, signing of consortium contracts and central storing of the original documents. Full documentation on products on offer and other consortium related information are made available to members online on the SANLiC web site which is updated as soon as offers are finalised.
  SANLiC staff also manages the logistics of events like the SANLiC workshops/conferences and “Road Shows” as well as coordinating publisher training sessions. (See Collaborative Training below.)

ii. **Shared expertise:**
The thirty SANLiC member institutions employ a wide variety of professional staff, some highly skilled and experienced in electronic information delivery from sourcing and evaluating relevant content right through to making it discoverable and available to their students and researchers. SANLiC draws from this pool of expertise through the following structures:

- **SANLiC e-Resources Advisory (SEA) Group:**
  The SANLiC manager has responsibility for negotiating for electronic information resources on behalf of all SANLiC members, which includes the public universities and most of the research councils in South Africa. These institutions vary greatly as far as mandates, academic disciplines and research areas, users and usage patterns, budgets, infrastructure etc are concerned. In order to complement the SANLiC manager’s subject knowledge and to give additional insight to enable wise and intelligent assessment of the content and value of all electronic resources which may be relevant to its members, the SANLiC E-resources Advisory (SEA) Group was established in 2009. The SEA Group comprises a panel of five electronic resources librarians who are nominated by member institutions and appointed by the SANLiC Board on recommendation by the SANLiC manager. The SEA Group consists of three experienced members with at least five years experience in all aspects of e-resources management and a good understanding of and insight into the various electronic products available, as well as the licensing and negotiations process. They are able to give specific and valuable input to ensure that relevant content, and fair and affordable
deals are offered to SANLiC members. They also give input on the latest trends in the electronic information provision environment.

In addition two new or less experienced e-resources librarians, who have shown a keen interest in e-resources management and eager to learn from their knowledgeable fellow members, also participate as members of the SEA Group. This aspect of the SEA Group will be dealt with in more detail under “Collaborative Training”.

Meetings of the SEA Group take place either via telephone conferences or other online meeting software (e.g. Skype) or face to face discussions at the SANLiC Offices. Regular further communication takes place via e-mail.

The members of the SEA Group serve for three year terms after which a new team is appointed from other member institutions thus giving affording other member institutions the opportunity to collaborate in the work of SANLiC.

- Special ad hoc renewal committees for negotiations with large and influential publishers:
  Although the SEA Group serves as a general advisory panel on negotiations and licensing, there are certain renewal negotiations that require authoritative input at a higher level. Board Directors or other qualified individuals with special knowledge or skills are used to form ad hoc committees to work with the SANLiC manager in negotiations for these high value deals to ensure reasonable pricing and terms and conditions.

- SANLiC Forum:
  E-Resource librarians at member institutions are consulted from time to time on specific issues and they willingly work with the SANLiC staff. A new instrument to facilitate this process was recently implemented on the SANLiC web site in the form of a Forum facility accessible by any registered member to give input, comment or make suggestions on a variety of topics initiated by either the SANLiC manager or registered person at any of the member institutions. It is envisaged that this will become an active instrument of collaboration in future.

iii. Collaborative training:

In the rapidly changing world of electronic information provision the training of library personnel is crucial in equipping staff to operate effectively in an ever-changing information provision environment. Although many universities have excellent staff training programmes there remains a need for further training in electronic resources management at many institutions. A crop of new young librarians are entering the job market with little or no experience. They need mentoring and hands on training to ensure that they become accomplished information professionals. SANLiC plays an important role in bringing together expertise already present in the consortium member institutions and those who can benefit from their insight, experience and problem solving skills. SANLiC spearheads several collaborative training programmes:

- SANLiC Workshops:
  SANLiC staff together with the SEA Group, plan and host a bi-annual conference/workshop. These three day events focus on pertinent topics relating to all aspects of electronic resources management and content delivery. It not only brings expert international speakers to South Africa but, more importantly, draws presenters from a pool of experienced and skilled staff from SANLiC member institutions to share their knowledge with colleagues from other member universities and research councils through presentations and workshops. Topics covered at these events since 2009 include practical sessions on licensing and negotiating skills development, electronic resource management systems (ERMS) and the skills needed to market electronic information resources. The 2013 conference, scheduled for 13-16 May, and centred on the theme of electronic books, will approach the subject from many different angles.

- The SEA Group:
  Although the main reason for the existence of the SEA Group is to assist the SANLiC manager in realising enhanced access to electronic information resources, it also serves as a valuable training opportunity for the two less experienced members to learn
from the more senior and knowledgeable librarians not only about licensing and negotiating, but also about planning a conference.

- **SANLiC Road Shows:**
  A new initiative started in 2012, the SANLiC Road Shows were introduced to fill the "gap" year between the conferences. They are one day events in six different regions which are opportunities to update members on the latest SANLiC offers and services as well as to present two mini workshops. Again the presenters of the workshops are fellow librarians from the SANLiC member institutions sharing their knowledge and expertise and at the same time encouraging discussions on emerging trends and challenging colleagues to get out of their comfort zones and embrace new ideas and new technology in order to deliver streamlined and efficient up-to-date online information services.

- **Training as a new strategic priority:**
  At the 2012 strategic planning meeting in October 2012, further training was determined to be a priority project for the next few years. A training task team will be established from among the SANLiC members to work together to identify and implement more training opportunities to develop the skills of librarians. These could include negotiating participation in international training webinars.

iv. **Marketing and promotion of electronic information resources:**

As was mentioned previously, SANLiC makes available to its members over one hundred electronic information resources. Member institutions are kept informed of new SANLiC-negotiated deals via e-mail and the SANLiC web site which also gives access, through a secured portion of the web site, to all documentation pertaining to resource including offer details and legal documents. The SANLiC web site was created and is maintained centrally by SANLiC staff. It is updated regularly to ensure that the information is current and reliable. It also informs members of free trial access offers to new resources which could become consortium deals, includes a list of Open Access databases and provide links to useful articles and web sites related to access to electronic information.

**Future Strategy of SANLiC:**

The electronic information resources world is changing rapidly with new technology, new distribution channels and information in new and innovative formats, affecting the way research is conducted in profound ways. SANLiC endeavours to stay abreast of these developments and find ways to enable academic and research institutions in South Africa to have cost-effective access to critical scholarly information.

**Areas which will receive particular attention over the next few years include:**

- **Access to newer format electronic information resources:**
  With the e-journal market reaching saturation point, e-books have become a growing market. Scholarly volumes and electronic textbooks are being made available through many different business models to academic and research organisations. SANLiC is expanding its e-book publisher deals to support both teaching and research and working with publishers to develop pricing models that give cost-effective access to e-books for SANLiC members. Electronic text books and its impact on libraries will also be investigated.

- **Growing SANLiC membership:**
  The new membership structure which was implemented in 2012 will open up membership to other public entities and non-profit organisations such as museums, provincial and public libraries, legal deposit libraries and government departments extending to them the benefits of consortium pricing.

- **Greater involvement in Open Access initiatives:**
The Open Access movement is rapidly gaining momentum and SANLiC determined at its strategic planning meeting in October 2012 to give focussed attention to OA and support initiatives that will enhance access to scholarly information.

Conclusion:

SANLiC has proved itself as an organisation that represents a successful collaborative venture between thirty academic and research institutions which serves its members on many different levels even though they are scattered throughout South Africa. Modern electronic means of communication as well as face to face encounters ensure not only that all members benefit from as many of its services as they have a need for, but also encourages cooperation and the sharing of knowledge among all members.

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