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# MALAWI LIBRARY ASSOCIATION



## NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, Issue 1

# SERVING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN MALAWI

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## MESSAGE FROM MALA PRESIDENT

Dear All,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this edition of our Newsletter. This newsletter serves as an important platform for sharing ideas, experiences, and developments within our library and information community. In an era marked by rapid technological change, evolving user needs, and growing demands for access to knowledge, libraries and information centres continue to play a vital role in supporting education, research, innovation, and lifelong learning.

In this issue, we highlight key activities, achievements, and reflections from our members, partners, and stakeholders. The contributions featured here demonstrate the commitment, resilience, and professionalism that define our association. They also reflect our shared vision of strengthening libraries and information centres as dynamic and inclusive spaces that respond to the needs of our communities.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all contributors who have taken time to share their insights and experiences. Your voices enrich this newsletter and help advance dialogue and collaboration within the profession.

As you read through this edition, we encourage you to reflect, engage, and be inspired to contribute to the continued growth and transformation of our library and Information sector.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to the Malawi Library Association.

**Felix Patrick Majawa**

President of the Malawi Library Association

# INTERVIEW WITH GLORIA MATEKENYA

## (Founder of Kuongola Library Initiative)



Gloria Matekenya-Founder, Kuongola Library Initiative

**Q1:** Can you tell us what inspired you to establish the Kuongola Library Initiative?

**Gloria Matekenya:** I founded the Kuongola Library Initiative in 2017 after reflecting on the state of library services in Malawi. When I thought about my childhood, I realized that I had no access to a library, especially after relocating to a rural primary school. Unfortunately, this is a common experience for many learners in rural areas. This motivated me to establish the initiative to help less privileged primary school children and others who value access to library resources.

**Q2:** What achievements has the Kuongola Library Initiative made since its establishment?

**Gloria Matekenya:** So far, I have helped set up ten primary school libraries in collaboration with school authorities. I have also worked with Malingunde School for the Blind in Lilongwe and Nkhotakota LEA to establish an inclusive library. Additionally, I secured a Braille book donor who regularly supplies books to these schools. In 2021, I organized a successful inclusive reading competition that involved visually impaired children, promoting equal learning opportunities for all.

**Q3:** What programmes are you currently running under the initiative?

**Gloria Matekenya:** I am currently running a community outreach programme that focuses on children's library services. This year, my major goal is to launch a campaign that highlights the importance of library services in schools,

particularly advocating for sponsorship of libraries in rural primary schools. I am also running a library mentorship programme with Library and Information Science (LIS) students from Mzuzu University. The programme aims to provide them with practical insights into the field and inspire innovative, problem-solving approaches. The first cohort was very successful and received positive feedback from participants.

**Q4:** What is your vision for the future of the Kuongola Library Initiative?

**Gloria Matekenya:** The initiative is still developing, but the future looks very promising. I have managed to build a strong professional network that will support the growth and sustainability of the initiative.

**Q5:** What challenges have you encountered while running the initiative?

**Gloria Matekenya:** Some of the major challenges include limited support and mindset issues regarding how people perceive libraries and reading. Changing perceptions and securing sustainable support remains an ongoing effort.

**Q6:** What message would you like to share with professionals in the Library and Information Science sector?

**Gloria Matekenya:** My message remains the same: to all professionals in the LIS field, let us work hard to ensure that library services reach everyone. Collaboration is key if we want to make a meaningful difference in our communities.

**“My goal was to support underprivileged primary school learners and others who value access to library resources..”**

# MALA FORUM WEBINAR SERIES



By Dr Aubrey Chaputula,  
Mzuzu University Librarian

MALA FORUM is a monthly webinar series established in 2024 by the Malawi Library Association (MALA). The aim is to present a platform for sharing information, knowledge and skills related to the Library and Information Science (LIS) Sector.

Presentations have taken the form of product displays by companies and organisations seeking to attract new customers, lectures on specific topics by subject experts and demonstrations of service offerings by LIS practitioners.

Organisers have drawn on the expertise of local and international presenters. Most notably, presenters have come from academic and special libraries from Malawi and abroad; specifically, South Africa and the United Kingdom. More than ten presentations have been delivered since the series was launched, covering topics ranging from artificial intelligence, marketing, service offering and evaluation. Similarly, the feedback has been positive, with participants expressing satisfaction with how the initiative has been run.

MALA forum webinar series has also met some challenges in the course of its implementation. Most notable ones include difficulties in getting presenters and moderators.

It seems a lot of people are not confident to present on the forum whilst others are not willing to sacrifice their time to make presentations. There are some people who have withdrawn at the last minute leaving organisers stunned. Network connectivity is another serious challenge.

The presentations are conducted online hence poor network connectivity disrupts the smooth flow of the presentations.

Going forward, the organisers plan to give more opportunities to fresh graduates who are more forthcoming unlike the veterans. There are also plans to get on board more presenters from abroad to ensure that we have a diversity of views and experiences shared on the forum.



A flier for one of the the webinars organised in 2025

# MALA LAUNCHES ITS WEBSITE

The Malawi Library Association (MALA) has officially launched its new website ([www.mala.mw](http://www.mala.mw)), marking a significant step in strengthening its digital presence and accessibility. The site serves as a central online hub for the association, designed to provide easy access to information about MALA's mission, services, and member resources. It includes key features such as an About Us section, contact information, details about MALA's programs, event updates, and a gallery showcasing association activities.

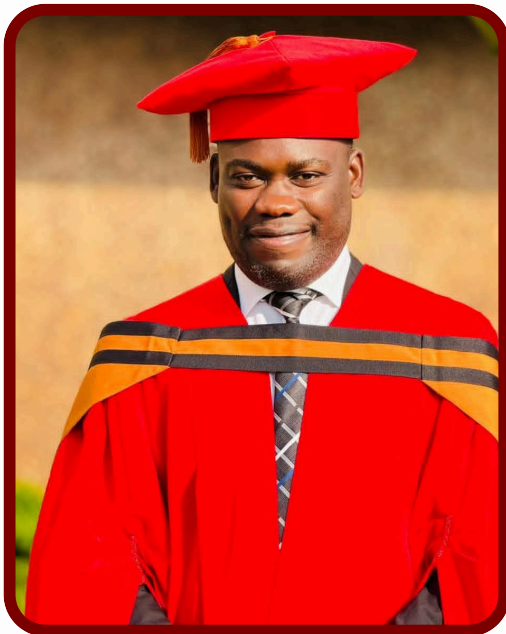


A screenshot of MALA new website

*"The platform aims to support communication with members, stakeholders, and the public by offering an informative and user-friendly resource that can be accessed from any device"*

# BEYOND BOOKS: THE HUMAN SIDE OF PHD

Resilience, selflessness, and unwavering quest for knowledge characterised both scholars' journeys. Dr. Austine Phiri and Dr. Apatsa Selemani represent the spirit of perseverance and transformational power of education, even though their routes to become PhD holders may have been different .



**Dr. Austin Phiri:** *There were moments of exhaustion, demotivation, and near resignation, but perseverance, hard work, and faith carried me through to completion."*



**Dr. Apatsa Selemani:** *Despite the challenges of the pandemic, family responsibilities, and remote supervision, my purpose to strengthen Africa's voice in global science kept me going."*

Dr. Austin Phiri began his PhD journey in March 2022 after being admitted into the Doctor of Philosophy in Information Science programme at the University of South Africa (UNISA), following receipt of his admission letter in December 2021 and institutional approval in February 2022 to study as a self-sponsored student. His doctoral research focused on records management, particularly the preservation of medical records.

His thesis, titled "A Framework for the Preservation of Medical Records in Selected Public Healthcare Facilities in Malawi," examined challenges affecting medical records preservation in public health facilities. The study found significant gaps, including lack of proper metadata, weak policies and legislation, limited technological infrastructure, and inadequate staff skills. To address these challenges, he proposed a framework aimed at improving the preservation of medical records in Malawi's healthcare system.

Throughout the journey, he faced several challenges, particularly financial constraints and the difficulty of balancing doctoral studies with his roles as Head of Department and Senior Lecturer at Mzuzu University, alongside family responsibilities. Despite these obstacles, perseverance, faith, and dedication enabled him to complete the programme successfully. He graduated on 26 November 2025 with a PhD in Information Science (Records Management), describing the journey as enriching, motivating, and deeply rewarding.

Dr. Apatsa Selemani began his PhD journey in 2020 after receiving the prestigious CARTA PhD Fellowship from the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa, which enabled him to pursue doctoral studies at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), South Africa. His research examined the barriers and enablers of Africa's public health research impact using a post-colonial perspective and applied multiple research methods, including scientometric analysis, cross-sectional study, qualitative interviews, and a Discrete Choice Experiment.

The journey was challenging, as much of his research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring remote supervision and adjustments to lockdown conditions. At the same time, he balanced doctoral work with new family responsibilities, including marriage and raising a young child, while also coordinating a supervisory team located in different regions.

Despite these challenges, he remained committed to strengthening Africa's contribution to global scientific knowledge. His research has already produced one published peer-reviewed article, with another under review and two additional papers in preparation. He acknowledges the support of CARTA, his supervisors, Wits University, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS), family, and colleagues, and hopes his work will enhance African research visibility and influence health policy and decision-making.

The doctoral journeys of Dr. Austin Phiri and Dr. Apatsa Selemani highlight the dedication, resilience, and scholarly rigor required to pursue advanced research in challenging contexts. Both scholars navigated significant personal, professional, and logistical challenges—ranging from financial constraints and heavy professional responsibilities to pandemic-related disruptions and complex supervisory arrangements—yet remained committed to advancing knowledge in their respective fields. Their research contributions address critical gaps: Dr. Phiri's work strengthens medical records preservation in Malawi's public healthcare system, while Dr. Selemani's study enhances understanding of Africa's public health research impact and seeks to amplify the continent's voice in global scientific discourse. Collectively, their experiences exemplify the transformative potential of doctoral studies, not only for individual academic and professional growth but also for addressing pressing societal challenges and fostering evidence-based solutions in Africa.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS



## MALA MEMBERSHIP

The Malawi Library Association (MALA) kindly reminds all members to pay their membership fees for 2026. Invoices will soon be distributed.

Timely payment of fees is essential for sustaining the operations of the Association and supporting its activities, including professional development, advocacy, networking, and improved service delivery to members.

Paid-up membership ensures continued access to MALA programs, events, communications, and representation at both national and international levels. Members are therefore urged to make their payments promptly and help strengthen the Association as it advances the library and information profession in Malawi.

Below are MALA account details;

**Account Name:** Malawi Library Association

**Bank:** National Bank of Malawi

**Account No.:** 1092413

**Branch:** Zomba

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### XXVII SCECSAL CONFERENCE

27<sup>th</sup> April-1<sup>st</sup> May, 2026 (Livingstonia, Zambia)

### MALA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

(DATES AND VENUE TO BE ANNOUNCED)

### MALA RESEARCH DISSEMINATION CONFERENCE

(DATES AND VENUE TO BE ANNOUNCED)