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Margaret Baffour-Awuah, Principal Librarian, Gaborone, Botswana: A Day in Her Life

Margaret Baffour-Awuah is principal librarian at the National Library of Botswana. She is head of the division in charge of educational libraries in the National Library. Her work involves professional responsibility for libraries in colleges of education (with responsibility for training teachers for both secondary and primary school teaching diplomas) in senior secondary schools, community junior secondary schools, and primary schools, which means supervising the coordination of 260 book box service points. Primary schools do not officially have libraries yet. Instead, some remote ones are served through the public library network with boxes of library books, which are color-coded for ease of access. The Revised National Policy in Education has made primary school libraries standard. Its implementation is still being worked out.

I live in a suburb called the Village. It is a suburb of Gaborone, the capital of Botswana. I get up at 5:30 a.m., wakened up by the alarm clock. I pull the curtains. It looks like a fine day. October is usually fine, but yesterday was quiet cold. I gather it was raining in South Africa. The cold from there usually blows this way. I make a mental note I will take a jacket—just in case.

I rouse my two children still living at home: Habibah and Nana Yaa. It takes all of five minutes to wake each up. The bigger of the two, Nana Yaa, final-year student at the University of Botswana, goes out to feed the dogs. They are T, Chubby, and Floopy. T is actually Timothy Ranger, but everybody calls him T for short.

Habibah and I head for the bathroom. My husband is still sleeping. Then it's a whirl of morning activities. By 6:45 Habibah and I are in the vehicle on our way to her school, about eight kilometers away. She is a form 5 student at Legae Academy, a private secondary school. Habibah is preparing for her school-leaving exams. She does not want to get her name written down today for lateness. She was late yesterday. We discuss the exams ahead and listen to the radio. Rush hour is just building up.

I arrive at my office at 7:15 a.m. It is the 8th of October, 1999. How the year has flown. I have 15 minutes before work officially starts at 7.30. The National Library is newly computerized, and it is with joy that I check my e-mail. I have not quite got over the miracle of e-mail. I also check manual files brought over yesterday evening. Correspondence has to be cleared out of the way. The calendar tells me I have to attend the Senior Management meeting at 9:00 a.m. I have to clear as much off my table as possible. These meetings take forever. Today's agenda is not so long, but it has some touchy issues. I

have just finished serving my term as secretary to the Senior Management Team. The secretarial duties rotate.

At 8:00 a.m. I am still at the files; the phone rings. It is Lesego, the library officer at Kgari Sechele Senior secondary school (KSSS), in Molepolole, about 50 kilometers away. Her school head wants a copy of the program for the symposium for the heads of senior secondary schools in the southern region. The one-day symposium has been postponed due the general elections. Most school heads have been co-opted as returning and presiding officers. They have been involved in meetings, and rather than have a low turnout, I opted for postponement of the symposium. I fax the program to her.

Her headmaster is very supportive of the library and the librarian. Although the idea of integration is far from being realized in most of our secondary schools, the KSSS school head is one of those I know I can count on. Last year Lesego was able to attend IASL in Israel, and SCECSAL (Standing Conference of East Central and Southern African Librarians).

It is 8:20 a.m. There is a knock. The training officer comes in. She needs a copy of the program for next week's library attendants' workshop. She needs to know the exact time her paper will be presented. She wants to finish her paper. In the middle of the various files, we find a rough copy of the program. She checks the exact title and then leaves for the clinic. The phone rings again: it is Morwadi. Morwadi Pilane coordinates the development of community junior secondary school (QSS) libraries. She works with me and has the office adjoining mine. She can't come in to work. She has an asthma attack.

The abrupt change in weather yesterday is responsible for Morwadi's condition. This means I have to start preparing our divisional annual training plan by myself. Morwadi and I had planned to sit down today and put our proposed training schedule for next year together. We have to submit it to the Ministry of Education, which puts it into its annual training plan. It makes it easier for us to get conference space at the education centers. Morwadi's absence also means I have to answer all queries to do with the community junior secondary school libraries today. It promises to be a hectic day.

I get back to my files. The first file needs just a recommendation. The library assistant at the Molepolole College of Education is going on maternity leave. Her leave form has to be signed. The thorny question of a replacement is nicely taken care of. Mweetwe, who has been temporary, can continue for another three months as relief. This is good, as Mweetwe works well, and it will be a drawback for the library when he leaves, but he is temporary and the temporary budget is running out.

The next file is Kenilwe's. A letter from her has been marked to me. She is querying why she has not been paid acting allowance. She is right! She has been in a position of responsibility. She should get the benefits. I write a brief memo supporting the rightness of her cause. Two more files just need sign-

ing to approve librarians' leave applications. Final approval lies with the Director but heads of divisions have to approve before it gets to the Director.

Five minutes to nine; I pick up my file and head for the conference room where the SMT meeting is being held. We used to meet in the Director's office, but it got too small and also there were too many phone calls. There are eight members of SMT. We are all principal or senior librarians except the chief administration officer. Most SMT members are divisional heads. We wait a few minutes. Everybody who is at work and should be there is in place by 9:05. We start with a prayer, asking the Lord's blessing on the meeting.

The first item is about the computerization project. We learn that the accounting module is so slow. It is hampering the efficiency of the technical section. We are informed that the project manager is looking into it. Other items are cleared. The Director reports on her attendance at IFLA. She promises a half-day seminar to share ideas. Usually, we report on conferences attended at our Annual General Meetings, which allows everybody to benefit. But if the conference is too close to AGM, we sometimes make arrangements to have a special session to report back and get feedback on our observations.

There is update on the organization structure. Our work flow has to change direction due to computerization. I am on the subcommittee discussing and looking into this. We report on our recommendations. There is heated discussion. We are trying to merge some services, and some suggestions are not going down well. Finally, it is given back to us. The Deputy Director is one of the committee members. Her extra-busy schedule and my repeated trips to visit schools and colleges or to attend workshops make it difficult to meet as regularly as we should. Finally, we get down to the last item on the agenda: a look-back at our AGM, which was held just a few weeks ago. Our AGM is very big: this year it attracted over 100 librarians from all libraries within the National Library.

Our National Library is one of the most centralized in the world. It has responsibility for the professional development of all types of libraries, including school and college ones. The AGM usually addresses professional and administrative issues. This year, it made history by allowing the BLA (Botswana Library Association) to piggyback on its AGM. BLA has had such problems getting committed members that it saw the AGM as a chance to reach the unreached.

SMT revisited the issue of BLA involvement and the fact that it brought on board professional issues. A decision to continue this arrangement was not finalized. It was agreed that the incoming AGM committee should take it up. A few more discussions and we come to the end of the meeting I rush to my office. It is one o'clock and well past the lunch break. We have a short break today. I dash home for lunch. Only Ben, my husband, and I are home for lunch today. Habibah has an afternoon activity and Nana Yaa has a one-o'clock lecture. I have a hurried lunch and rush back. I have to go to

Lesedi primary school library this afternoon. I promised to advise on how they could process their stock in the simplest way possible. I walk to Lesedi primary. The word Lesedi means light. I muse on the word as I walk past the Assemblies of God church. I then walk pass the Lesedi Christian bookshop. It is a favorite haunt of mine, but today I don't stop. I head past a few houses and get to the school through the football field. A few boys are playing football. I have to dodge here and there to avoid being hit.

I head toward the standard 7 classroom where the teacher Ms. Maphakwane is teaching. She sets some work and takes me into the library. The library is one of the few primary school libraries in government schools in Botswana. It was built through self-help programs. The parent-teacher association was a key factor in the project. The school is near the National Library, and so whenever we have visitors who want to see a public school library, we take them there. We have some very good school libraries in the private primary schools. I think the best is Broadhurst primary where my daughter went to school. Last week, I took two Zambian librarians visiting our Village reading rooms to visit Broadhurst library. They were impressed. It has such a wonderful atmosphere. Even to grown-ups like me, its large beanbags say to me, "Come and lie down, snuggle and travel the world." I try not to go to Broadhurst on a hot afternoon after a full meal. I might become too comfortable.

I spend about an hour at Lesedi primary. I thank God that it does not have any comfortable beanbags. This is one afternoon when I might not have been able to resist the lure. We draw up a things-to-do list. She promises to take it to her staff meeting and bring me feedback on a time frame for getting everything done. I come back to my office via the Gaborone Senior Secondary School. The library is being extended and the phone lines to the school have been affected by the construction work. The librarian, Ms. Elizabeth Tijenda, is one of my favorite people. She has promised to write about a day in her life for the IASL One Day Web site project. The only way I can check on its progress is by actually going there.

Gaborone Secondary is one of the biggest senior schools in the country. It has over 1,500 pupils and over 100 teachers. Its library is being extended. The books are all in boxes. Unfortunately, they were moved out of the library in something of a hurry-the contractors were on-site shouting that every hour cost a fortune. The school administration helped her pack, but her stock is currently not accessible. We stand in the empty main hall of the library discussing how she can use the few shelves she has, because there will be no money for new shelves for a while. The few still-usable old shelves looked so pitiful in the center of the newly refurbished library. Unfortunately, the adjacent AV room disappeared in the extension. We discuss how she could use an alcove for the same purpose.

I get back to my office. It is getting to 40' clock. I continue on the files. I try to finish the annual training plan. On paper it is done, but the typing is slow.

I don't finish typing. It is almost 4:30. I ring to say that it will be submitted the following day. I have to attend a BLA meeting at 5.00 p.m. BLA will also be doing a look-back at how the piggybacking of the National Library staff AGM went. As the only National Library member of the BLA executive, I try to attend as many meetings of the BLA as I can.

With homework for Habibah to look forward to, I make my way to the Faculty of Science Library where Mr. Apem Darko, the librarian, will host the BLA meeting today. As I drive there through the rush hour traffic, I see a V flight formation made by some white birds on the skyline. I wonder, do they also crowd so much into their day? It has been hectic, but in a nice sort of way.

I enjoy working with school and teacher librarians. Unfortunately, although computerization is in our schools, it not yet in our libraries. Let me correct that: one public senior school, Swaneng High School in Serowe, even has Internet access in the library. Most private English medium primary and secondary schools also boast the same. We are looking forward to the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Forces involved in the implementation of the recommendations of the Revised National Policy on Education.