

INASP infobrief 8: July 2008

African Libraries of the Future: Interfacing with the Millennium Development Goals

On August 16 and 17 2007, the IFLA Africa Section held a two day seminar on African Libraries of the future: interfacing with the Millennium Development Goals. Funded by DfID and facilitated by INASP, the aim of the seminar was bring together library leaders in Africa to deliberate on ways that African libraries could contribute towards the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This Infobrief describes the key outcomes and recommendations of that meeting.

Introduction

The 2007 IFLA Africa Section meeting was the first of its kind on the African continent and borne out of the commitment of the Section to address how the library and information sector can meet the information needs which are central to Africa's efforts towards the realization of the MDGs. The seminar particularly focused on finding ways of contributing towards development, generally, and eradication of poverty in particular.

The meeting was attended by sixty-six library leaders including University Library Directors, Presidents of Library Associations and Directors of National Libraries. These stakeholders worked together to develop the outcomes of the seminar and their participation will be central to the implementation of those outcomes. Group work and feedback was, therefore, central to the process of the seminar, along with presentations from key actors in the field.

The seminar was generously sponsored by DfID and was facilitated by Sara Gwynn of INASP. It is the hope of the Section that this seminar represents Phase 1 of an ongoing collaboration, and that the partnership between INASP, DfID and IFLA Africa Section will continue into a second implementation phase.

Outcomes of meeting

After two days of intense discussions, the meeting arrived at a number of strategies that the library sector could adopt to contribute to the alleviation of poverty and the realisation of other Millennium Development Goals. The outcomes are arranged around the questions addressed.

Challenges and status review

The challenges facing the library and information services in Africa (lack of: funding; infrastructure; capitalisation on technological developments; skills and appropriate training; flexible service delivery models; engagement with the oral cultures in which they are set; engagement on national priorities; and a lack of national government support and investment) are apparent and well known. The participants' general status review of the state of African librarianship also identified that:

- Access to relevant information reduces poverty and enhances lives;
- Libraries have an existing legal mandate and role to provide information to all;
- Libraries provide egalitarian service at no charge to the end user;
- Libraries have existing collaborative networks that enable them to share skills, resources and achieve economies of scale;
- Libraries are involved in creation of repositories for local content;
- Knowledge, library and information services have potentially viable products that can help to generate financial resources; and
- There is a clear need for knowledge, library and information services' practitioners to provide information products and services that are relevant to government and other service users, including towards the realisation of the MDGs.

Where do we want to be?

The seminar participants reaffirmed their faith in IFLA Africa Section and its main priorities and objectives of: human resource development, training, capacity building, and incorporation of information technology in all programmes. They created a declaration of their vision that :

Our dynamic African libraries inspire and empower the communities they serve by providing egalitarian access to global and indigenous information and knowledge.

By working in partnership towards this vision, they committed to playing their part in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

How are we going to get there?

The table below summarises the threats, opportunities, and strategies for the realisation of the MDGs, as identified by the seminar.

MDGs	Threats	Opportunities	Services/strategies
Poverty eradication	Information/libraries not involved in most countries	Poverty Eradication Plans (PEP) exist in most countries	Creating awareness of PEP Libraries and community in each country to work out intervention strategy
Health	Libraries not currently heavily involved in health information systems	Growth of evidence based medicine requires access to evidence for research	Set up health information corners Get involved in public health campaigns and activities
Education	Non existence of school libraries in most countries Poor funding of all categories of libraries	Most governments are signatory and/or participated in the World Summit on the Information Society process	Libraries to engage in advocacy and policy change to information by governments Seek more investment in libraries Legal framework for establishing and funding of school libraries
Partnership		Networking Best practices	IFLA Africa Section to create framework for collaboration with like minded institutions and for sharing of experiences between libraries

Suggested Actions

The services and strategies set out above begin to introduce how the sector can begin to move towards realisation of its vision.

1. Capacity building

It is evident from the last section that there is need for capacity building. One could group the required actions under:

- Training in appropriate skills
- Advocacy for libraries

- Technology knowledge and skills
- Building library leadership.

It seems evident that the training of librarians does not currently prepare them to respond to information needs of the 21st century.

IFLA Africa Section will contribute to this work through working to skill librarians as advocates and fundraisers for information services. There is need for a set of interventions to build the capacity of library leaders to lead, to advocate, and to be activists.

While librarians are not content builders, there is need to train in repackaging information as a communication and advocacy tool. This would enable libraries and their users to take information generated elsewhere and make it relevant, accessible and tailored for policy formulation.

User needs change over time. Training in needs assessment and monitoring and evaluation is needed so that services can be realigned, restructured or repositioned and new services or products developed.

2. Network building

- Collaboration and network building

IFLA Africa Section will contact institutions and organisations involved in the realisation of the MDGs to ensure that African libraries are appropriately involved in their activities.

IFLA Africa Section will encourage libraries to share their experiences in meeting MDGs, so that successes can be built on and further developed.

3. Financial investment

- Seek financial support from government
- Attract funding for libraries
- Set up community health centres

IFLA Africa Section will write proposals for funding for continuous education of library personnel and to support activities that will make information that supports the realisation of the MDGs easily available.

Recommendations

IFLA Africa Section will develop

- A database of libraries in Africa: to ensure effective communication between libraries and maximum awareness and benefit of the Section's activities;
- Build working relationships with institutions and organisations whose experience and support can benefit African libraries.

About IFLA Africa Section

IFLA-Africa Section is one of the three Sections—Africa, Asia Oceania and Latin America and the Caribbean—under the Division for Regional Activities of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).

Each of the Sections takes responsibility for developing libraries and librarianship in each Region. The Africa Section focuses on developing libraries and librarianship in Africa. It partners in this endeavour with the like minded institutions to improve the quality of libraries, to ensure equitable access to information, enhance the quality of curriculum in library schools and build viable library associations.



Mission: IFLA-Africa Section's mission is to promote and support the advancement of the library and information profession and services in Africa in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the IFLA.

Objectives: The Africa Section exists to: promote and strengthen Library Associations, the profession and library, and information services in Africa; and create and maintain links with other Sections of IFLA as well as related Bodies/institutions/organizations for the benefit of the profession and services in Africa.

Goals: the Section has identified 6 Goals to help in realizing the above stated mission and objectives between 2005 - 2015.

1. To promote and support the development of the profession in the region through the strengthening of Library Associations.
2. To promote and support development programmes for information, reading and oral literacy in Africa.
3. To support efforts of closing the digital divide through promotion and support of ICT applications in libraries in Africa
4. To promote competent education and training for self renewing library and information profession in Africa
5. To promote documentation and preservation of indigenous knowledge and to advocate for moral rights, intellectual property and copyright for indigenous knowledge
6. To promote the IFLA/UNESCO Internet Manifesto and the role of libraries in information through the WSIS process.

For further information please contact Dr Buhle Mbambo-Thata (Chairperson, IFLA Africa) or Lindy Nhlapho (Regional Manager) at UNISA Library Services, P.O. Box 392, Pretoria 0003, South Africa

About INASP

Enabling worldwide access to information and knowledge

The mission of INASP is to enable worldwide access to information and knowledge with particular emphasis on the needs of developing and transitional countries. Established in 1992, we work with partners around the world to encourage the creation and production of information, to promote sustainable and equitable access to information, to foster collaboration and networking and to strengthen local capacities to manage and use information and knowledge.

We act as an enabler, connecting worldwide information and expertise. Working through networks of partners, we aim to strengthen the ability of people in developing and transitional countries to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge. In particular we seek to:

- improve access to scientific and scholarly information
- catalyse and support local publication and information exchange
- strengthen local capacities to manage and use information and knowledge
- foster in-country, regional and international cooperation and networking
- advise local organisations and agencies on ways to utilise information and publishing to achieve development goals.

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