

IFLA WLIC 2010 REPORT

This year's IFLA conference was a fascinating and enriching event. As a second time to attend the IFLA Congress, this time I was not overawed by the magnitude of the event and diversity of participants. I also utilised some of the tips and hints that I had obtained from my first timer's session during IFLA 76th WLIC Milan, Italy (thanks to the late Bob Mckee from CILIP-God rest his soul and other equally passionate presenters in that session) The first timer's experience in Milan also assisted me much in going about the conference.

The major highlight for me this year was the new professionals interest group satellite meeting in Boras. I attended the sessions that mainly focused on training and global librarianship. Most of the presenters in the sessions that I participated in were quite knowledgeable, professional but what I liked a great deal was the relaxed and engaging style in which the sessions were done.

The use of "new media" technologies like social media and other technologies to reorient our services and pro-actively engage our users also struck a chord within me and to paraphrase one of the presentations regarding new media, he pointed out that "the note/tune is in the fingers." for example one could get the best designed Guitar, Piano or other superior instrument but if there is no talent or creativity within the individual then nothing much comes out but one can equally give Tiger Woods some old battered clubs but he could still beat a professional golfer using hi-tech clubs. In other words we can have all these web-based tools, applications and new technologies but as long as we are not innovative and pro-active then they will come to nought.

International/global librarianship was a foreign concept to me and I always thought going international or global was for other professions and not librarianship but the way this topic was presented changed my perception altogether and even left me aspiring to be one. Robin Kear did such wonderful presentation on this subject and she did so on skype – a practical experience of technology in use! Most of us were actually experiencing this for the first time.

I learnt that there is need to identify what our users are already using and experimenting with, it maybe twitter, facebook, or any of these web 2.0/library platforms then integrate these into our existing services.

Closely tied to use of new technologies to enrich library services was the dire need to regularly update library and information science curricula and particularly here in Africa this has been my biggest concern as both librarian and educationist. As long as our new professionals are oriented using outdated syllabi its a big problem. Its only the lucky ones who may be exposed to new technologies perhaps during internship but this is provided the old professionals have been exposed to these and usually it is not the case. This is why there's a need for even twinning library schools from transitional countries and those from the developed world. Such collaborations will at least mean that curriculum could be reviewed to match world standards.

I would have very much wanted to explore the fascinating small town of Boras but had limited time and the weather was not that friendly. The statue at the Satellite meeting venue (Swedish School of Information Science) was a refreshing cultural attraction.

I did enjoy the bus ride back to Gothenburg – this time with newly made friends from across the world. On the journey from Gothenburg to Boras, I was all alone and this made a big enjoyable difference.

The mainstream conference also had its upside. As a Parliament librarian (a somewhat dull role but I always try to make the most out of it and I end up enjoying myself), naturally I attended the standing committee meeting of the IFLA WLIC Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section.

I was happy to meet African colleagues who I had been with earlier in the year during the Association of Parliament Libraries for Southern, Central and Eastern Africa (APLESA) and this made the session even more enjoyable.

IFLA WLIC 2010 REPORT

This attendance has opened avenues for me and am now working with the Parliament libraries section in my capacity as the local coordinator of the Evidence-informed policy programme supported by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications in collaboration with the UK Parliamentary Office for Science & Technology (POST). I am also heavily involved in populating the African Parliaments Knowledge Network (APKN) social networking site and have started collaborations with this IFLA section to see how best the APKN site can be utilised to build capacity and support African Parliaments.

Following this meeting, I was also privileged to attend the Standing Committee for the IFLA African Section and managed to also build networks there, notably the avenue to help revive and revitalise our local Zimbabwe national library association that had been defunct for almost 10 years now. As a board member of the Zimbabwe National Libraries and Documentation Services Council, I had taken the initiative to revive it last year but it has not been easy so the IFLA programme to support and strengthen national library associations hopefully will give a major impetus to the development of our association.

Another session that I also immensely benefited from was the one on copyright. I obtained great insight into particularly copyright legislation and am already participating in a committee here in Zimbabwe that is assisting in the drafting of our national copyright law. I have met and presented similar papers with one of the co-chairs of this year's session from eIFL at this year's elearning Africa conference and the Euro-Africa Forum on ICT Research and it was a great experience also participating in her session.

The exhibition was also fantastic! I was exposed to a number of publishers, library software vendors including several other library technological utilities.

I am sure I would have done some great injustice not mention the scintillating IFLA nights. I attended two of them and these exposed me to diverse cultures and the rich cultural life of Sweden. The timing by IFLA for the conference to coincide with the festival running then was just perfect and this experience will always be etched in my memory.

Unfortunately I did not really get to engage with a significant number of exhibitors and also missed the rest of the sessions as I left on the 12th of August early in the morning due to circumstances at home that were above me.

It is against this backdrop that I would want to convey my commitment to support IFLA activities and do as much as I can here in Africa to promote and get library and information professionals involved in IFLA activities. I see myself preaching the IFLA gospel particularly to students and emerging professionals and would want to encourage even the corporate to adopt and sponsor them to attend IFLA.

I also look forward to continue to participate in the New Professionals Special Interest Group and am positive if I am offered the opportunity I will contribute to next year's sessions as a presenter in Puerto Rico. Considering our somewhat not very different circumstances, am sure the Puerto Ricans will derive some motivation from a presenter like me so am already considering working on something to this end.

Despite the short stay, I believe I benefited quite a lot and will always cherish this year's IFLA conference. My sincere gratitude to Josche and Sjoerd for their untiring support to enable us all grantees attend and ofcourse the whole of IFLA Secretariat.

Ronald Munatsi
Principal Librarian
Parliament of Zimbabwe