

Libraries at the 6th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

With just a decade left to achieve the SDGs, regional meetings on reviewing progress and preparing reports prior to the High Level Political Forum on the SDGs started in Africa at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe with the 6th Session of the Africa Regional Forum on the Sustainable Development.

This gathering featured high-level reports and key messages on major focus areas on people, prosperity, planet, peace and partnership.

Libraries were present at the continental gathering to voice and participate with the aim to convey how libraries drive the SDGs and Agenda 2063 through equitable access to information for all.

On 26th February, 2020, at a side event co-hosted by **IFLA** and **Library Aid Africa**, participants learnt about libraries across various African communities are driving progress through innovative approaches towards achieving the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

The side-event saw the sharing of experience on practical-based result-oriented approaches from South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Uganda. Speakers from various spaces in library and information science space itemised major impacts, success stories and challenges in contributing to the decade of delivery through equitable access to information for all. Among these are technological approaches, outreaches, initiatives, policy reforms, service delivery to the marginalised and advocacy activities.

Participants were comprised of representatives from government agencies, international non-governmental organisations, academia, business, people living with disability, and youth groups. Bringing a cross cutting representation of all aspects of our society.

Questions raised by participants were focused on how libraries plan to be creative in providing access to information in the global space of information communication technology. In the same vein, questions on inclusive access to information for people living with disabilities were raised.

The curiosity of the participants to learn more about the roles libraries play in the SDGs and Agenda 2063 brought questions on access to information in local languages, development of African local contents, engagement with indigenous societies, collaborative efforts towards advocacy, provision of safe spaces for studying and research, library services to those living in remote localities through mobile libraries and access to resources, and most importantly the need to reconfigure the roles of libraries to address the major reasons why people choose not to visit libraries.

Responses from the speakers were based on existing efforts being coordinated by library stakeholders in their respective countries, sharing insights on collaborative efforts of inclusive process of providing equitable access to information for all.

The decade of delivery stresses the need for a pragmatic approach from all stakeholders to drive progress towards the SDGs. To achieve this, it is apparent that equitable access to information is essential. Libraries across Africa are at the forefront of achieving access to information for all through collaborative efforts on policies, initiatives, interventions, inclusive access and indigenous content development and dissemination.

A lot was learnt through the platform provided by the side-event on developments in other countries on how to engage governments and crucial stakeholders such as the producers of information, and how to disseminate this best. Libraries should be given the platform in future to lead some of the main activities.

The side event was moderated by Mr Damilare Oyedele Co-Founder & Chief Executive, Library Aid Africa, Nigeria, and speakers were: Mr Kepi Madumo National Librarian and CEO, National Library of South Africa, South Africa, Dr Victoria Okojie Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, University of Abuja, Nigeria, Ms Deborah Brown ECOSAT Focal Person, Mercy Corps, Nigeria, Ms Tinashe Kuzuwazuwa Senior Library Assistant at Great Zimbabwe University, Mr Shadreck Ndinge President, Zimbabwe Library Association, Zimbabwe and Ms Winny Nekesa Akullo Head, Library and Documentation Centre, Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Authority, Uganda.

With high hopes and aspirations, further local actions that will drive global impacts in providing equitable access to information towards achieving the SDGs and Agenda 2063 are expected in the foreseeable future as we enter the decade of delivery.