

THE WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY: WHAT IS IT?

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is acknowledged worldwide that information is power. It is also pertinent to note that information itself does not confer power but rather it is the possibility of the control of the flow and processing of Information that affords one the opportunity to have the preserve of power.

As people are becoming more information conscious, more information is being generated, acquired and stored. Developed societies are moving from post- industrial age to an information age where information plays a predominant role in governance, economics, business and every day life. It is interesting to note that in the developed societies availability of information is taken for granted, where required information is packaged and granted fast to persons and organizations. The opposite is the case in the developing countries, where information is the preserve of the elite while necessary information is hoarded and jealously guarded. However, both developed and developing countries are bound to be richer and more developed as people utilize information for everyday living.

1.1 The Concept of Global Village

The concept of the global village came about as resources of the super-powers were combined electronically and networked through the use of the Internet in a Worldwide Web (WWW). This has consequently gotten rid of the hitherto problem of time and space.

It is the joy of most developing countries to make needed information graciously available. This is being done trough networking and resource sharing, and to overcome the exorbitant cost of acquisition nowadays, many libraries are coming together as a Consortium. The fact that time and space is no longer a problem, has therefore turned the world into a global village.

2.0 HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS)

I wish to digress here to state that when IFLA graciously invited me to attend the 3rd Preparatory Conference (on the IFLA/WSIS sponsorship) little did I know what the concept of WSIS was all about. I began to download information on the internet and I was able to dispel my ignorance on the concept of WSIS within a short time. I found out that a Literature Review

was done by Steve Cisler (both on-line and in books) He found out that in San Jose Library, there was a book titled "The Information Society: Issues and Answers" and it was dated as far back as 1978. The Book was a Compilation on the report of The American Library Association's discussion by some invited Scholars on the hot topic of "Information Society: Issues and Answers",

The implication is that the Library profession made a forecast of the impact that Technology would have on librarianship, society and our nations long before now. However, only a few outside the profession knew this fact. We expect, as Librarians, that the final product of the World Summit on Information Society will result in a huge number of resources flowing into libraries all over the World. We thus can save others their time and energy by what we knew 27 years ago.

There are two major events that could be seen as the basic foundation that led to the commencement of the WSIS plan. These are -:

A conference of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) held in Minneapolis in 1998, which came up with "Resolution 73 asking this pertinent question :-

"Is an agenda of holding a World Summit on the Information Society on the agenda of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Co- ordination, with a view to meeting the necessary conditions for holding such a summit before the next Conference?"

The Civil Society held a Conference in Bamako in year 2000 and came up with a Bamako Declaration 2000, proposing the organization of a world summit on information society in the year 2003 in Geneva.

2.1 The United Nations Resolution

The United Nations adopted a resolution (Resolution 56/183) at the United Nations General Assembly on the World Summit on Information in 2001. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) headquarters in Geneva was asked to implement the formation of the WSIS Executive Secretariat and to assume leadership role in the preparations for the summit.

A second Resolution was passed (Resolution 57/238) in December, 2002 to confirm the 2001 resolution. This Resolution invited Countries to get represented at the highest political level of the Summit.

3.0 WHAT THEN IS THE WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY AND WHAT DOES IT STAND FOR?

WSIS is a World Summit on Information Society organized by the International community to take place in two phases.

Phase I: held 8th -12th December, 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Phase II: scheduled to come up 16th -18th November, 2005 in Tunis.

Generally speaking, the Information Society is at the heart of political, social, cultural and economic questions facing the entire world in the 21st Century. The focus of the Information Society Summit is not technical in nature. It is rather looking at the global society in which the emancipation of the human being is in part related to the possibility of communicating and exchanging information.

On the other hand, being inter-connected cannot solve the entire problems of the world today. There are thus a number of pertinent posers which the International Community needs answers to:-

- v What values do we embrace to ensure that the information society becomes a vehicle for democracy, justice, equity and equality?
- v What about the respect for the right of individuals and different cultures?
- v How can the information society help social development, the emancipation of the individual and collective prosperity?
- v What is the role of communication in shaping the future of the society we want to build?
- v How do we value the differences between cultures and build a united global society?
- v How do we give culture the space and vision necessary in order to be involved in collective dynamics of change?

These and many more questions are what the World Summit on Information Society launched out to address. The important thing we should all note is that every individual is relevant to the summit. And all persons are free to express themselves and contribute their ideas during the summit.

4.0 HOW DOES IT WORK?

Going by the Resolution (Resolution 56/183) the summit aims at adopting two framework documents. These are:

i) ***The Declaration of Principles***

A declaration using ethical principles and Codes of Conduct that different actors from different sectors want to use to put the Information Society in Place.

ii) The Plan of Action

The action plan will formulate the operational priorities and concrete steps to be taken by the Countries of the South just as the Countries in the North so that all can benefit in an equal manner from the new opportunities linked to the Information society. Worthy of note is the fact that the Geneva Phase of the summit was expected to have approved the two documents mentioned above. So for us as Librarians, it is worthy to note that only passing and unsatisfactory references were made to Libraries and Librarians (We will consider this issue later). It is very necessary to convince and persuade the decision-makers of the relevance of libraries.

iii) Evaluation

It is expected that the final phase of the summit coming up in Tunis in 2005 will measure the progress made on the action plans agreed in Geneva, during the December 2003 summit.

5.0 WHO IS THIS SUMMIT MEANT FOR?

As mentioned earlier, every human being, no matter which country he/she comes from, is relevant in the process. It goes without saying, therefore, that this includes you and I. The following are however penciled down as participants:

- All relevant UN Bodies
- ICT Task force
- Inter-governmental organizations
- International and Regional Institutions
- None Governmental Organizations (NGOs), including IFLA and other library associations
- Civil Society
- The Private Sector
- Etc.

6.0 THE PREPARATORY PROCESS FOR THE SUMMIT

To ensure that all people hear and get involved, the preparatory process involved two mechanisms.

On one hand, there were regional conferences as follows:

Bamako, Mali	-	May 2002
Bucharest, Romania	-	November 2002
Tokyo, Japan	-	January 2003
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic	-	January 2003

At another level a process was put in place to allow for the largest participation possible from the local level to the global level, hence three

preparatory Committee (Pre-com) meetings were held before the Geneva Summit.

The first Pre-Com meeting was concerned with procedural matters, while the second concentrated on the declaration of principles and plan of draft proposals.

Because the degree of involvement of Civil Society was only allowed through NGOs like IFLA, the degree of participation by the Civil Society was not adequate enough to address that problem. As a result of this the Civil Society had to create an International Civil Society Bureau during the 2nd meeting.

7.0 ROLE AND POSITION OF LIBRARIES IN THE WORLD SUMMIT

Ross Shimon the former Secretary General of IFLA wrote an article on the "Role and position of Libraries: World Summit on the Information Society". The article is posted on the Internet.

http://www.ifla.org/sa/iii/wsis_a.html

The article was conclusive that Libraries have a definite role to play in the World Summit on Information Society. She quoted Ted Hughes (1997) who wrote that:-

"Even the most misfit child who's chanced upon the Library's worth, sits with the genius of the earth and turns the key to the whole world"

A cursory look at a compilation by IFLA also reveals that there were only eight (8) references made to (the role of) Libraries in the WSIS Draft Plan of Action, version 22 of August 2003.

This document can be accessed on: -

http://www.itu.int/wsis/document/doc_single.asp?lang=en&id=944

Since these references equally affect us, it is suggested that we consider them.

SECTION REFERENCES

- 9e) All public libraries should be connected (to the Internet) by 2006 and all Cultural Centers, Museums and Archives by 2010.
- 11c) To improve connectivity for institutions that are accessible to the public, such as Schools, Universities, Libraries, Post Offices, Community Centers, Museums etc.
- 16 All Stakeholders should support the diverse networks of existing Libraries and Archives and should support those countries that plan to develop their own information and

- records management is a necessary condition for good governance. A modest level of investment in new technology, training and, above all, content provision, could kick-start the information revolution in many regions by broadening access and developing skills.
- 16 a) Government should establish Multi-Purpose Community Public Access Points, providing affordable or free of charge access for their citizens to the Internet, and possessing sufficient capacity to provide assistance to users, in libraries, educational Institutions, public administrations and other public places.
 - 16c) Creation and development of Public Library Service, adapted to the digital era should be supported.
 - 20b) Design specific training programmes in the use of ICTs and revise [Library schools and other training programmes] curricula for content, [for] Workers [Stakeholders and other professionals] such as Archivists, librarians, scientists, teachers, journalists and other media workers.
 - 41d) Develop national policies and laws to ensure that libraries, archives, museums and other cultural institutions can play their full role of [providing the needed] content. [This] includes [the roles played by] traditional knowledge-providers in the information society, more particularly by providing continued access to recorded information.
 - 41e) Develop an international framework for the preservation of digital heritage, including developing systems for ensuring continued access to archival digital information and multi-media content and support archives and libraries as the memory of human kind.

IFLA STAND:

IFLA is of the view that the 2015 deadline for meeting targets is too far away. She also notes that funding mechanisms are yet to be identified. We thus need to have a sense of urgency and set closer and realizable deadlines. A rapid and high return on a modest investment will be beneficiary if we build on the existing global Library Network. Both big and small Libraries are found in most Communities throughout the World. The following roles are penciled down:-

- v Providing community access points where knowledgeable staff assist and train users throughout the world in their own languages.
- v They (community access points) need to be re-enforced by providing affordable Internet bandwidth.

- v Providing low cost or free access to high quality information, resources for training and development, and mechanisms for stimulating the creation of local, cultural and linguistic content.
- v Kay Raseroka (President of IFLA) drawing on her life experiences in Botswana in South Africa is well aware of the need for children and young adults in the developing world to have access to knowledge just as their counterparts in the developed countries.
- v Kay is also aware of the health challenges faced throughout the world especially HIV/AIDS epidemic in Sub-Saharan African. She said that we see our young ones die prematurely without access to information.
- v Again, if we wait for the 2015 dead-line to ensure worldwide access to information then another generation will be dead, hence we need to give the required information to the communities now and whenever they need it.

We therefore need a five-year programme to strengthen Libraries, such that they can show considerable progress by the time that the Tunis 2005 phase of the summit comes up. IFLA had no choice thus, it had to act fast to remedy the situation.

8.0 WHAT HAS IFLA CONTRIBUTED TO WSIS SO FAR?

- (a) IFLA was not even represented at the procedural Prep-Com 1. She was however present in both Prep Com 2 and 3. There, 8 members operated on a shift basis throughout the duration of the two-weeks meeting.
- (b) To ensure that the voices of Librarians are heard IFLA formed alliances and partnerships with other organizations e.g.
 - International Council on Archives (ICA)
 - International Publishers Association (IPA)
- (c) IFLA produced a series of position documents to aid anyone who is participating in the World Summit on Information Society either at local, regional or even international levels. (The documents are copyright free but their usage needs to be acknowledge. They are available on <http://www.ifla.org/III/wsis.html>).
- (d) IFLA participated actively in five (5) consultative meetings held by UNESCO. IFLA invited Mr. Adama Sammasekou, President of the WSIS Preparatory Committee to address IFLA members at IFLA 2003 Conference in Berlin, Germany. UNESCO Open forum at the IFLA 2003 Conference also held an open session devoted to the World Summit.

- (e) IFLA also developed a Tool kit for Librarians to use in advocating the role of libraries in the Information Society available on <http://www.ifla.org/III/wsis/toolkit.html>
- (f) IFLA contributed proposals for inclusion in the Draft Declaration of Principles and draft Action Plans.
- (g) IFLA played an active role in Planning for the involvement of Librarian's in Prep Com 3 and the actual summit itself.
- (h) IFLA participated in the Planning of publicity events during the summit, to highlight the importance of libraries and librarians in the WSIS.
- (i) IFLA also contributed to the WSIS by preparing a beautiful leaflet on the "Role of libraries in the Information Society".

8.1.1 IFLA/WSIS PREPARATORY CONFERENCE TAGGED "LIBRARIES AT THE HEART OF INFORMATION SOCIETY: PRELUDE TO THE WORLD SUMMIT"

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) organized its own preparatory conference which took place at the Meeting Hall of the General Assembly at the United Nations Headquarters in Geneva, 3rd -4th November, 2003.

IFLA is of a strong conviction that libraries and librarians have a key role to play in delivering equitable and global information to the society, based on the fact that most countries already have a network of many types of Libraries. (There is an estimate of 90,000 libraries in all the current member states of the European Union. On that basis, there must be well over 250,000 libraries around the world).

IFLA took pains to compile an 18-Page document titled "Draft Global statistics" dated September, 2003. A cursory look at some statistics reveals that there are 440,000 library service points in Europe; 5,000 in South America and only 11,200 in Africa.

Another statistics revealed that there are 1.1 trillion loan transactions in Europe, 48 million in South America and 485 million in Africa, etc. The long and short of it is that IFLA came up with a communiqué which stated that:-

The Nations of the world should support and extend the existing global network of library and information services to make available and preserve knowledge and cultural heritage, to provide information access points and to develop the 21st century libraries which are essential to the realization of the

information society. High quality library and information services provide access to the information required by the communities they serve: a modest investment in them would quickly return significant dividends.

The Geneva forum provided a chance for knowledgeable librarians who are powerful advocates of the potential for libraries in the rapidly developing information society to meet. Librarians were given an opportunity to brief their country delegates on practical steps that libraries and librarians can take to put in place ideas behind the concept of Information Society. This forum was necessary, because IFLA noted with dismay that much of the Preparatory Conferences concentrated on protocols and procedures. As a delegate put it, "the Conferences were concerned with the pipe that carries the information rather than the information that those pipes could deliver".

Despite strenuous efforts of librarians, libraries received little or no attention at all. There is a clear danger that dazzled by the lure of new technologies, delegates will only be concentrating on re-inventing the wheel.

9.0 HOW DOES THIS WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY CONCERN LIBRARIANS?

This is indeed a one million-dollar question. It is crystal clear librarians in the developing countries cannot afford to be sitting on the fence. We can carve out a position for ourselves, by taking a cue from the moon.

The moon has no illumination on its own but positions itself at a correct angle to the sun, receives the sun's rays, which subsequently illuminates it and it receives all the glory.

Kay was very passionate about this point at the Geneva Preparatory Conference. She decried how librarians remain passive to events happening around them: many sit in their offices and wait for events to come and meet them or for someone to invite them. She suggested that librarians go out and make sure they get themselves noticed and involved in all the current events, especially as it concerns the library profession.

At this juncture, it is suggested that we review the summit's declaration of principles, as pencilled down by the African group which met in Paris, composed of members of the Bureau of Bamako 2002 and other participants. They adopted a list of 21 priorities for Africa. These priorities in their majority represent the African pre-occupation. They are as follows:

- (a) Provision and maintenance of infrastructure and equipment.
- (b) Human Resources development and capacity building.
- (c) Gender issues and women empowerment in the use of ICT.
- (d) Partnership between public and private sectors.
- (e) Debt conversion (to back up ICT development).
- (f) Environmental protection.
- (g) Open and free software.
- (h) National Information and Communication Strategies with special support to the African Information Society Initiative (AISII)
- (i) Sectorised Applications
- (j) Support to NEPAD
- (k) Digital solidarity fund
- (l) Technology transfer, particularly South-to-South transfer
- (m) Research and Development.
- (n) Investment Strategies
- (o) Content Development
- (p) Internet governance
- (q) Relations between the traditional media and the new ICT
- (r) Legislative and regulatory framework (s) Intellectual property rights
- (t) Security
- (u) Regional Co-operation

9.1 WHAT CAN WE DO AS LIBRARIANS IN NIGERIA?

Having looked at the priority areas, a definite line of action based on the tool kit developed by IFLA is hereby suggested.

a) THE ROLE OF WEST AFRICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (WALA) AND NIGERIAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (NLA)

So many regional and national associations held their own preparatory conferences in order to sensitize their members on how to participate in the World Summit. Much as Phase 1 of the summit has come and gone it is high time we woke up and organized activities to sensitize our members in preparation for the Tunis Phase of the summit as 2005 is already here with us. IFLA/WSIS headquarters should be informed of such activities.

b) NIGERIA'S ICT POLICY AND OTHER HOME-BASED WSIS ACTIVITIES

To prepare for Geneva Prep conference "Libraries @ the Heart of Information Society" it was necessary to download Nigeria's ICT policy. A close examination of the policy revealed that both

Libraries and Librarians were not mentioned in the entire document.

This observation was made in addition to other contributions at the Geneva Prep Conference meeting. Librarians should find a way of addressing this anomaly.

Also worthy of note was the WSIS Prep Com organized and hosted by Nigerian Information Technology Development (NITDA). The conference tagged "E-Nigeria" was hosted here in Abuja, right at our doorsteps. It was surprising that some librarians with whom the matter was discussed, knew next to nothing about it.

c) COUNTRY DELEGATES TO THE WSIS 2003

It is also unfortunate to note that there were no librarians among Nigerian delegates to the Summit. It is now up to librarians to lobby and ensure that Librarians are included among the subsequent Country Delegates to attend the Tunis 2005 phase of the Summit. It is also important that we identify the country delegates and encourage them to attend the Summit and also educate them about the role of the libraries/librarians in providing both content and human resources.

d) PUBLICITY

It is within our power as librarians to write articles about the Summit and IFLA's position in newspapers, television, magazines and newsletters. This will go a long way towards informing our government and legislators that libraries and librarians cannot be left out of the World Summit activities.

e) FEED BACK

Every activity planned should be covered by the press and relayed to IFLA/WSIS Headquarters.

f) TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES

We are to be on the look out for opportunities, visit the IFLA and WSIS websites, get involved and take advantage of every opportunity that is available to us. When sponsorship opportunities are advertised for the Tunis 2005 phase we should be on the alert so as to apply. Kay Raseroka was very passionate about this point. She observed that librarians wait for activities

to meet them rather than going out to ensure that they get involved.

- g) Develop for presentation at Tunis 2005, a frame-work document for the information society particularly to be used for measurements and analysis.
- h) Being proposed in 2004 is a stakeholders meeting on the digital solidarity agenda. We are expected to illustrate how stakeholders (especially in Nigeria), can contribute to the implementation of this Agenda.

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